

Advanced Dungeons & Dragons<sup>®</sup>  
2nd Edition

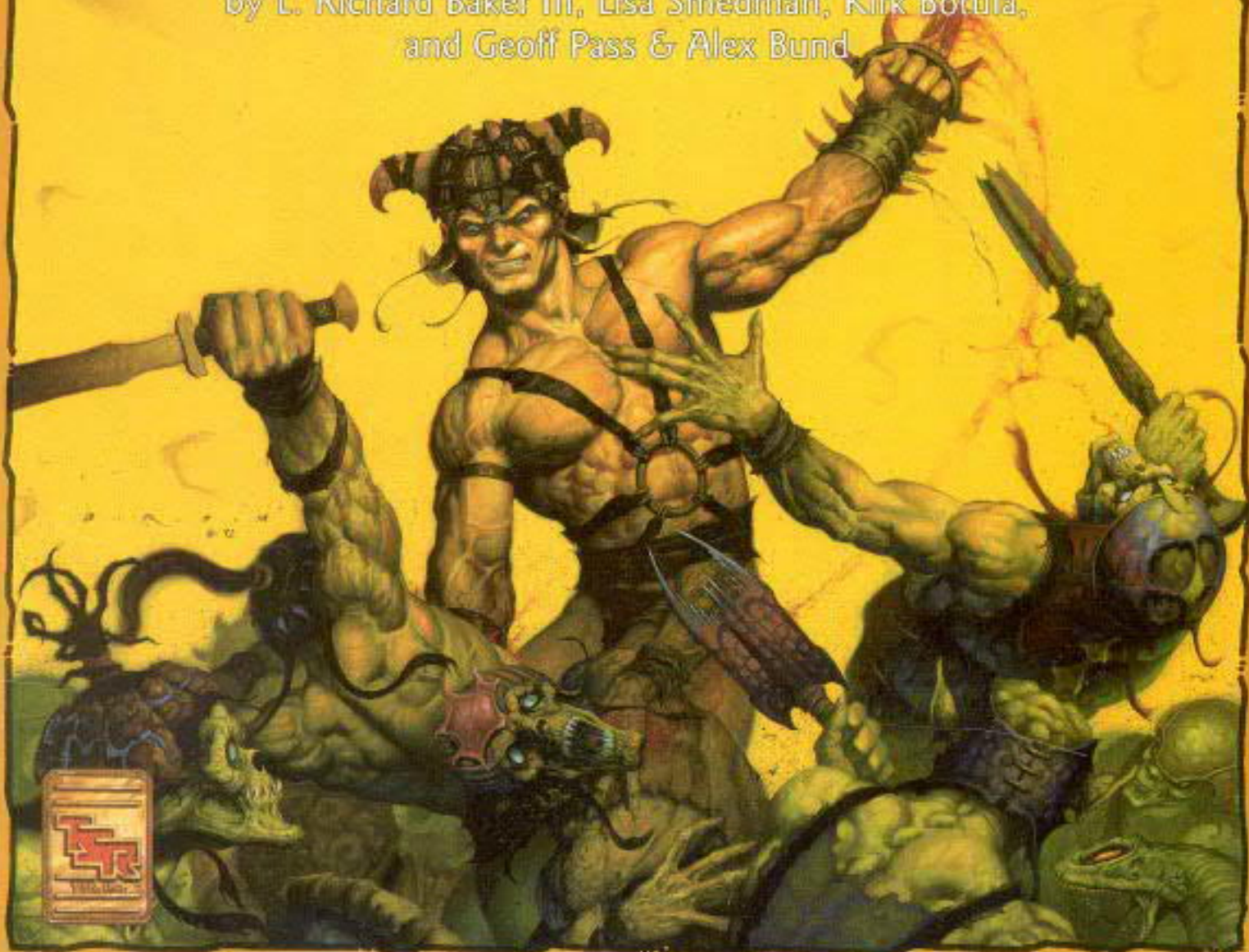
# DARK • SUN™

W O R L D

Official Game Adventure

## Dragon's Crown™

by L. Richard Baker III, Lisa Smedman, Kirk Botula,  
and Geoff Pass & Alex Bund

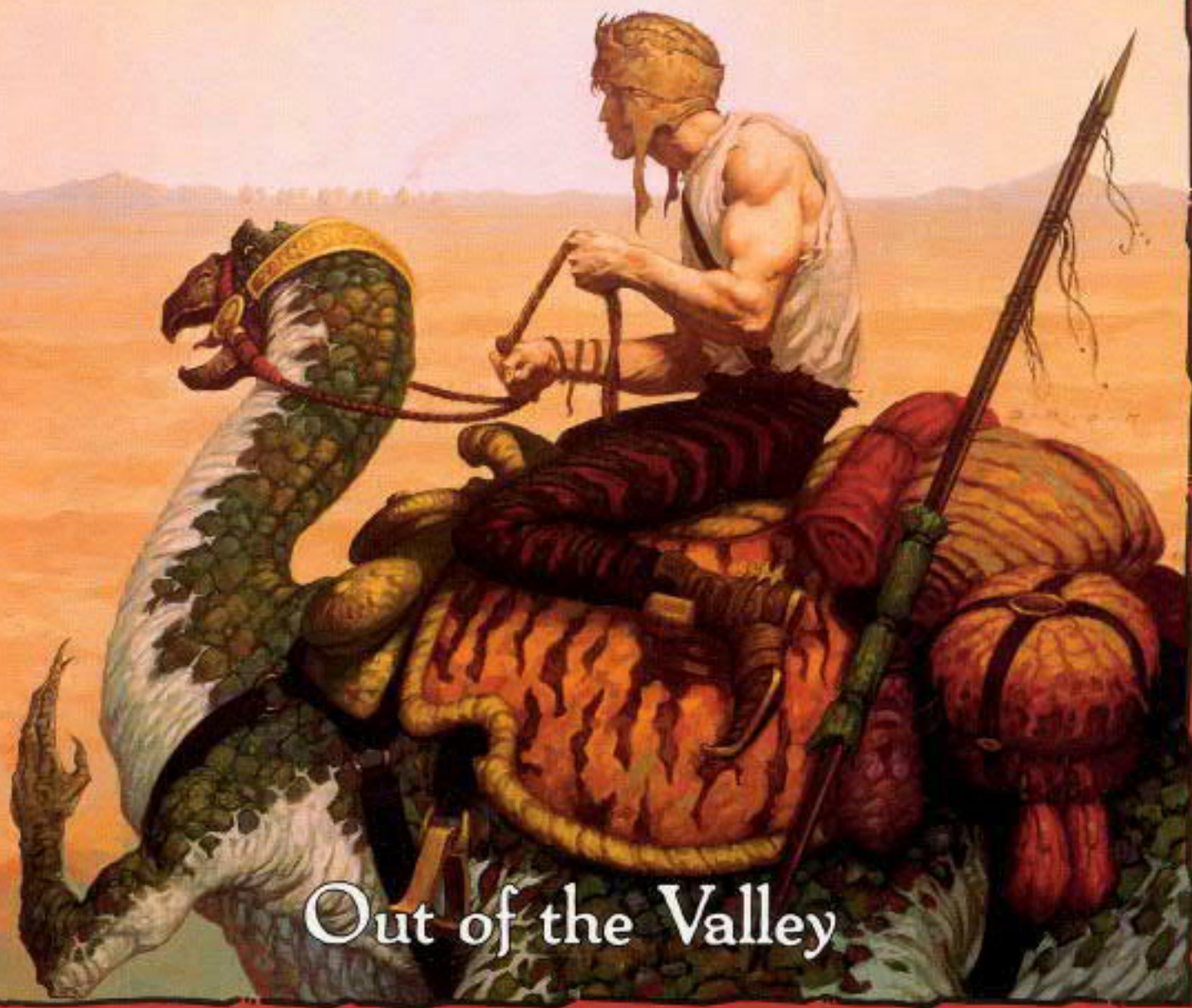


Advanced Dungeons & Dragons  
2nd Edition

# DARK • SUN

W O R L D

ADVENTURE



Out of the Valley

Advanced Dungeons & Dragons®  
2nd Edition



# Dragon's Crown™

## Book One: Out of the Valley

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# Book One: Out of the Valley

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# How to Run Dragon's Crown

Dragon's Crown is designed for four to six player characters of levels 10 to 13. If you have been playing through the DARK SUN™ flip book modules (*Freedom*, *Road to Urik*, *Arcane Shadows*, and *Astician Gambit*), you can use the same characters for *Dragon's Crown*. However, you will find that this module can be played as a stand-alone adventure and that it is not necessary to play the other modules in the series first. In addition to this module, you will need the AD&D™ *Second Edition rule books*, the DARK SUN boxed set, and *The Complete Psionics Handbook*. You may find *Dragon Kings* to be useful as well. The preceding modules in this series complement the DARK SUN novels, beginning with *The Verdant Passage*. Those world-shaking events set the stage for this adventure, and you may want to read them to get a better idea of the current state of affairs on the world of Athas.

## Components of Dragon's Crown

*Dragon's Crown* is organized into three adventure books and supplemented by a map book, two poster maps, and six Player Character Cards. In order, the adventure books are: *Out of the Valley*, *The Road of Fire*, and *Dragon's Crown Mountain*. The adventure books contain a total of eight distinct parts, each of which is a small adventure in and of itself. Seven of the parts are sequential sub-adventures that follow the plot line of the entire adventure. The last of the eight parts, *Desert Perils*, is a collection of random encounters and small adventures that you can use as red herrings or short adventures for your players.

### Preparing for Play

The first thing you should do is read the DM's *Overview of the Plot*, which begins on the next page. This sets the stage for the adventure that follows and also provides you with a good idea of the plot of the module. Then skim through the rest of

the adventure books. Before you begin play, read the first part of the adventure, *Out of the Valley*, in detail. This is the first adventure the player characters will be involved in. You may want to read *Desert Perils* for any encounters that you think appropriate for the first part of the module. As the PCs progress through each of the parts of the adventure, read the next section to prepare for play.

### Pregenerated Characters

Decide whether you will use the pregenerated characters provided on the Player Character Cards or have the players use their own characters. If you have played the previous modules in the series, you may remember some of the pregenerated characters. Make sure that each player understands all the information on the players' cards, particularly any special racial or class abilities. Answer any questions the players may have concerning their characters' abilities before you begin the adventure. Since psionics will play a very large part in this adventure, you may want to review *The Complete Psionics Handbook*, to refresh yourself on psionics rules.

### Dragon's Crown as an Independent Adventure

Some parts of *Dragon's Crown* refer to the allies and enemies the characters made in the previous modules. A brief summary of the events of the previous modules is included to allow you to pick up the story in progress. You should assume that the PCs took part in the previous adventures and treat the summary as background for the players.

## DM™ Overview of the Plot

### The Order

*Dragon Kings* reveals the existence of a secret society of powerful psionics known as the Order. These



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are beings of all races who have reached the 21st level of experience as psionics. When a psionist reaches such a high level, the Order begins to watch his or her actions and to evaluate the character's suitability for membership in their organization.

The Order is faceless and nameless; within its ranks, only one or two superiors are known to any given member. At the highest level, the circles of the Order consist of only six persons: the Masters of each psionic discipline. Each Master is served by six more psionists, specialists within his discipline.

### Pharistes and the Psionatrix

The Cerebral Master of Telepathy is the ancient human psionist known as Pharistes. He has recently ascended to his position and is recognized as one of the most powerful members of the Order. Pharistes has become disillusioned with the brutality of Athas. He believes that the principle reason that the world is in such a sorry state lies in the wanton abuse of psionic power for personal gain and gratification. Unfortunately for Athas, Pharistes is able to do something about it. Pharistes long ago discovered one of Athas' most powerful and ancient relics, the wondrous Psionatrix. A mystical gem with an infinite pattern of light within its facets, the Psionatrix is a perfect blending of psionic and magical power. Pharistes was tormented for decades by the knowledge that such power was within his grasp, but he abstained from wielding it. Pharistes finally found a use for the great gem that he believed would not violate his code of neutrality. He intended to use the Psionatrix to suppress psionic use on Athas for a thousand years—long enough for the Order to set things to rights, following a patient, secret agenda. The other Cerebral Masters violently objected to the plan, but as the Master Telepathist Pharistes was far stronger in the arts of mental combat than any one of them. With the power of the Psionatrix, he managed to defeat or suppress his peers and be

come the sole voice of authority within the Order. His plan for the Psionatrix was put into motion. The immense energies of the gem were harnessed. A field of psionic suppression was created and began to radiate out over Athas. The Psionatrix and its amplifying apparatus were hidden and guarded within the ancient palace at Dragon's Crown. Each member of the Order was given a small shard of the Psionatrix, which shielded the interference and allowed normal psionic use.

### The Adventure

The effects of the Psionatrix field have now reached the Tyr region. The sorcerer-kings are panicking, as they have lost access to their psionic enchantments and their potent psionic powers. Students of the Way are finding their powers to be nearly inaccessible. The player characters discover the extent of the disaster and investigate. They are summoned by their old ally, the avangion known as Korgunard. Korgunard is suffering the same difficulties as the sorcerer-kings and asks the PCs to help him. Korgunard needs the PCs to retrieve a scroll from the ruins of an ancient city, the camp of the Black Sand Raiders. The scroll is in the possession of the defiler Fevil. The PCs infiltrate the camp and capture the scroll, a scholarly work on psionics that the avangion needs to solve the puzzle of the psionic interference. Korgunard studies the scroll and decides that the source of the interference must be the legendary Psionatrix. He believes that Hamanu of Urik, a sorcerer-king, is to blame. Korgunard asks the PCs to spy on Hamanu, while he tries to locate the Psionatrix. The PCs go to Urik and are captured and brought before Hamanu. It turns out that Hamanu believes Korgunard is responsible and the PCs manage to arrange a magical conference between the two enemies. Both Hamanu and Korgunard realize that the only organization left that is capable of doing such a thing must be the

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legendary Order. At the end of Part Two, Korgunard agrees to seek out the Order. Hamanu volunteers to send a mission to Haakar, an ancient, undead preserver in the Sea of Silt. Haakar is one of the builders of the Dragon's Crown palace and possibly one of the makers of the Psionatrix. Hamanu provides a party of his chosen retainers to accompany the PCs as they head for the distant Sea of Silt. At the Bitter Well oasis, the PCs find a party of giants waiting for them. The giants 'invite' the PCs and Urikites back to Lake Island to discuss the psionic interference and possibly arrange an alliance. The giants are secretly under the control of a member of the Order who is trying to stop the PCs. While the PCs are imprisoned on Lake Island, the avangion Korgunard finds a member of the Order, a halfling elder. The halfling summons the Order and they kill the avangion, but the murder of Korgunard divides the ranks of the Order. On Lake Island, the Urikites manage to escape the giants but decline to help the PCs get out. The PCs manage to escape with some trouble, but the Urikites are now ahead of them. Book One, Part Three ends with the PCs setting off for the Road of Fire to find Haakar before the Urikites do. In Part Four, the Urikites attempt to defeat the ancient preserver and are rebuffed with heavy casualties. While they retire to lick their wounds, the PCs arrive and try to enter the fortress. After some difficulty, the PCs manage to get Haakar to help them and defeat the ancient spirit by laying him to rest. The PCs learn of the magical palace at Dragon's Crown Mountain, and start heading back. Meanwhile, the Urikites return to King Hamanu empty handed. Part Five begins with the PCs reaching the valley of Desverendi, but they find that Korgunard has not returned. They set off to find out what has become of the avangion. In the passes of the Ringing Mountains, the PCs come across a halfling tribe and win their trust. The halflings take the PCs to the elder psionicist that Korgunard had visited. The PCs find out that the

halfling psionicist killed Korgunard, then manage to defeat the elder. During Part Six, the PCs head toward Dragon's Crown. The scrub plains of the Hinterlands are now a battleground for thri-kreen hordes maddened by the Psionatrix field. The PCs are captured, and find that their old rivals, the Urikites, are also in the hands of the thri-kreen. The PCs are forced to ally with the Urikites to escape the thri-kreen frenzy. In Part Seven, the PCs finally reach Dragon's Crown and try to find the Psionatrix. They befriend several rogue members of the Order who are trying to end Pharistes' rule. When the PCs find the Psionatrix, the Urikites show up again. The PCs and their allies must take on the Urikites and the Order in an attempt to destroy the Psionatrix and free Athas of the psionic suppression.

### The Psionatrix Field

All of Athas is covered by the psionic interference in Part One of this book. The field quadruples the cost of psionic activity, and halves all power scores. Insect creatures, like thri-kreen, are not suppressed by the field—instead it drives them insane. Every day a thri-kreen is within the field, it must make a saving throw vs. spells or lose 1 point of Intelligence and 1 point of Wisdom. When their ability scores reach a total of 10 or less, thri-kreen automatically go berserk in combat. (Berserk thri-kreen never turn on their clutch, but they do kill and eat all foes they face.) When the two scores drop to a total of 7 or less, a thri-kreen can no longer be played as a PC, although it will still accompany its current clutch. Players with thri-kreen characters should activate another character from their tree to finish the adventure after this occurs.

# Part One: Out of the Valley

Dragon's Crown begins in the ancient city-state of Tyr, recently freed of the historic rule of the evil King Kalak. The story of Tyr's rebellion and first few months of freedom begins in the flip book module Freedom and continues through *Road to Urik*, *Arcane Shadows*, and *Asticlian Gambit*. If you have played the previous modules, your players will be familiar with the situation of Tyr and their characters are likely to have a widespread network of contacts and allies. If you have not, the PCs may not be familiar with the great events of the preceding months. The Background section is included to summarize the previous DARK SUN™ flip book modules. *Dragon's Crown* works best if you assume your PCs have participated in the previous adventures. The Overview section describes the various encounters and challenges the PCs must face. *Dragon's Crown* starts with *Beginning the Adventure*.

## Background

If the PCs have not played through the flip book modules that precede *Dragon's Crown*, you will need to summarize the events that have occurred since they arrived in the city of Tyr. All characters beginning this module should share this common background of events and contacts. Even if you have played the previous modules, it might be useful to review the characters' accomplishments to date. Read the following text to the players:

*It has been almost a year since you first came to the ancient city of Tyr to seek your fortunes. You were scarcely novices then, a ragged band of wanderers and rogues from all corners of Athas. A year ago, it would have seemed preposterous to imagine that King Kalak would be overthrown, or that the army of Urik would be defeated, or that a mystical avangion would arise to combat the evil defilers of this ruined world. Yet you have seen all this come to pass. When you arrived in Tyr, you found a city groaning under the heel of a tyrant. The terrible*





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sorcerer-king Kalak was obsessed with the building of a mighty ziggurat, and he had stripped all of Tyr of its slaves. The iron mines were idle and the crops in the fields surrounding the city were ignored for lack of slave labor. Faced with economic ruin and starvation, the people of Tyr were desperate. Kalak's only response was to confiscate more slaves. You discovered the extent of Kalak's hunger for slaves when you were taken by the king's templars. At first your only concern was survival under the brutal conditions of the slave pits. Kalek's templars set impossible work quotas; on the most meager of rations. Despite this, you soon made friends within the pits. Some of you trained as gladiators with the slave warriors Lissan and Kanla. Others secretly aided the Veiled Alliance, befriending the preservers Faldar and Etheros. You also made enemies within the pits. In spite of their efforts, you survived to see the completion of the ziggurat and the great games Kalak ordered for that day. Throughout the afternoon, gladiators fought and died in the arena, until the final melee. While you watched, the mul Rikus hurled the Heartwood Spear through Kalak's chest. Thus began the revolution. In the riots and panic that followed, you became heroes. While the great leaders of the rebellion—Rikus, Neeva, Agis, Sadira, and Tithian—fought to prevent Kalak from casting some spell of catastrophic proportions, you managed to lead the slaves and citizens of Tyr against the hated templars and half-giants of Kalak's guard. The end of the day saw the end of Kalak's thousand-year reign. Freedom had come to Tyr, and Tithian was declared king. While the leaders of the rebellion worked to create a new democracy in the ancient city, a new danger was already approaching. On hearing of Kalak's death, the sorcerer-king Hamanu, of the city of Urik, dispatched an army to conquer Tyr. The fragile freedom of Tyr now depended on the skill and determination of her army. You aided in mustering the army, threatening and cajoling the factions of Tyr into providing troops and weapons. Again, you

found yourself making both friends and enemies. Powerful noblemen like Senator Turax, Senator Tyrthani, and Verrasi Minthur all resented efforts to enlist their troops and support. Every ally you found brought you a new enemy in the factionalized city. Finally the day of the army's muster came, and you were appointed as officers in charge of the troops you had recruited. As the forces of Tyr marched, it fell to your troops to scout and patrol ahead of the army. It was a perilous task, but a vital one. Morale was low and you were forced to deal with deserters and incompetent commanders. You were given the task of luring off the Urikite vanguard to allow Commander Rikus to surprise the enemy army. In a long day of feints, raids, and one desperate stand, you succeeded. With your success, Rikus crushed the army of Urik. Returning to Tyr, you received an unusual message. Those of you with Veiled Alliance connections were invited to Urik to attend a special meeting of the Alliance there. When you arrived in Urik, you were introduced to several members of the Urikite Alliance, including the ancient wizard named Jaggo and the exslave called Elentha. You were also introduced to the legendary Korgunard, a preserver and psionist of extraordinary power. Korgunard began a mystic rite of life and light, casting a mighty spell of transformation. Before he could finish, the Urikite templars discovered the meeting place and attacked. Korgunard was absorbed in his spell and struck down without the chance to defend himself. In a desperate running battle underneath the streets, you escaped with the wounded preserver. Korgunard's wound was mortal, but the magical energy of the spell temporarily kept him from death. With his last conscious action, Korgunard whispered the words, "Toward Tyr." Escaping from Urik, you set off across the open desert, carrying Korgunard with you. Your steps were dogged by a powerful party of Urikite warriors led by the templar Malestic. The slave tribes known as the Black Sand Raiders and Werrik's Stalkers were also on your



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*track. Eventually you were captured. But you were soon rescued by the Free, and continued your journey with Korgunard. The preserver's dream messages led you to a small, green valley outside of Tyr. Together with the earth spirit Desverendi, you saved Korgunard's life while holding off the attack of Malestic and his forces. Korgunard completed his transformation to an avangion—a being of light, life, and goodness who represents a chance to save dying Athas. Returning to the city of Tyr, you found that things were much the same as when you left. King Tithian was still consolidating his power, but the people of Tyr had organized themselves into powerful factions. The nobles looked after their own interests, ensnaring their former slaves as tenant farmers. The people of the crafts and the merchants remained at odds, and the poor of the city cried out for fair treatment. No one was entirely content with the state of the city, but at least progress was made. You continued to work as the agents and envoys of the leaders of the rebellion, solving new crises each day. You had been in Tyr for several weeks when you were approached by the noblewoman Mingon of Asticles. She hired you to protect a caravan going from Tyr to the forest city of Gulg, and to carry a special package. It turned out that Mingon's fears were justified; the caravan was attacked by a fierce band of raiders. You managed to drive off the attackers, entering Gulg as heroes. You were sent for by the sorcerer-monarch Lalali-Puy, the Forest Queen. She thanked you for bringing her package to her, which was a necklace the sorcerer-monarch valued highly. She then invited you to stay in her palace. Unfortunately, you ran afoul of the monarch's subordinates—Mogadisho, warlord of Gulg, Habban-Puy, and Shala, Mistress of the Hunt—and found yourself imprisoned. In two days, you were freed to participate in the Red Moon Hunt—as quarry. With your wits and your courage, you survived the Red Moon Hunt and fled to the city of Nibenay. You were received by the Shadow King, the faceless sorcerer-king of that city. He revealed to*

*you that the necklace you had brought to Lalali-Puy was an artifact that would greatly increase her power, and sent you back to destroy it. You accomplished the Shadow King's task, and returned home. Revealing Mingon as a conspirator against Tyr, you earned the gratitude of Senator Agis. You and your companions have been in Tyr for a couple of months now, returning to your normal duties. The factions of the city continue to argue, and you are constantly going from one place to another to negotiate deals, carry messages, and occasionally threaten someone. King Tithian's rule grows stronger every day, and you take pride in the knowledge that you are in part responsible for Tyr's freedom and growing prosperity.*

At this point, you should allow the players to purchase reasonable equipment or follow up on any old loose ends, if they desire to do so. The PCs have had several weeks to rest and rearm themselves. This is a good time to answer any questions the players might have concerning their characters, the city of Tyr, or their adventures in the world of Athas. Characters needing time to do spell research, identify magic items, learn new proficiencies and train for levels, accumulate followers, or become involved in another long-term activity should be given a reasonable amount of attention at this point. As noted above, they have been in Tyr for a couple of months, and you may want to take this opportunity to get caught up on supporting play before embarking on another adventure.

## Overview of Part One

In Part One, the players learn of a grave new threat facing Tyr—the Psionatrix field. The player characters are summoned by the City Council. The leaders of Tyr have heard rumors of an approaching catastrophe. While the players are on their way to the Council meeting, the Psionatrix field reaches Tyr and sweeps over the city (*Mekillot Rampage*).



In *The Council of Tyr*, the PCs learn the extent of the disaster and are approached by Agis of Asticles. Before the adventurers get very far, they are magically contacted by the avangion Korgunard (*The Avangion's Call*). The preserver asks them to recover a scroll from the ruins of an ancient town occupied by the Black Sand Raiders. After leaving Tyr, the player characters must travel to the Black Sands in *A Desert Journey*. They may stop at the oasis of the Silver Spring Elves or go straight to the *Search for the Black Sands*. The camp is well-hidden, and the Black Sand Raiders fiercely patrol their territory (*The Raiders Attack*). In *Defiler's Shadow*, the PCs must infiltrate the Black Sand Raiders' camp and descend into the depths below in search of the scroll. After defeating the Black Sand Raiders and recovering the scroll, the characters must make their way to the *Valley of the Earth Spirit*. There they meet with Korgunard and evaluate the Psionatrix Acamedicia.

## The Adventure Begins

The characters are going about their routine business when they are suddenly summoned to an emergency meeting of the Council of Tyr. The PCs are often present during Council meetings, and several are the chief aides and assistants of their patrons—Tithian, Rikus, Agis, and Sadira. They have been summoned to the Council Chambers on short notice before, so they should not be too concerned.

*Your company of adventurers is enjoying a rare moment of relaxation in one of the finer taverns of the Merchant's Quarter. The fierce sun is setting, and your long day has come to an end. You spent most of the day negotiating between a group of tenant farmers and their particularly unscrupulous, noble overlord. While the negotiations were not completed, at least you successfully postponed bloodshed for another day. As you drain a flagon of cheap wine and enjoy the performance of a tavern*

*musician, there is a commotion at the door. A tall elf in a short tunic enters the tavern. He immediately heads toward your table. You recognize him as Thalid, a servant of the Council. The City Council sends you greetings and requests your presence at a meeting tonight, begins the elf without preamble. Please present yourselves at the Council Chambers one hour after sunset.*

Thalid is just a courier and cannot tell the party anything about the summons. If pressed, he shrugs and observes that, It must be important, or they wouldn't have convened an emergency session. Thalid eventually grows impatient if the PCs try to detain him for too long; he has several other messages to deliver before the meeting. If the PCs decide to ignore the summons for some reason, point out that the next summons is likely to be delivered by armed guards. If they still refuse to go, skip *Mekillot Rampage* and *The Council of Tyr* and proceed to *The Avangion's Call*.

## Mekillot Rampage

As the PCs proceed to the Council meeting, the effects of the Psionatrix sweep across the city, creating chaos and confusion. The PCs must deal with two berserk mekillots—then they discover that psionics have been affected in some strange way. The map for this scene is on page 3 of the Map Book. The streets of Tyr are quiet now, as most people are returning home for the evening meal. Here and there a few peddlers and storekeepers linger, hoping for a little more business before the day ends. The shadows are long and cool in the streets, and it is a pleasant walk to the Council Chambers.

*Along the streets of Caravan Way, you pass a small square where a number of people are working at unloading a massive armored wagon. Hulking half-giant and mul porters are removing great urns of grain and casks of southern wine, while agents of*



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*the merchant house direct the activity. At the wagon's front, several animal handlers are carefully freeing a pair of colossal mekillots from the yokes, a common sight in Tyr, and you move on. Suddenly, the scene explodes into chaos. The mekillots surge out of their traces with mindless roars, trampling all in their path. Oddly enough, you are also immediately aware of a low hum or vibration just below the threshold of detection. It feels as though a chord in your mind has just been plucked like the string of a lute. The sensation is distinctly unpleasant. All around you people are clutching at their heads or doubling over. Even as you watch, most recover, straightening with odd looks on their faces-but here and there people simply crumple to the ground. It takes you a moment to realize that the psionics of your party are among the latter. The vibration within your mind fades as you try to understand what has happened. An acute sense of disorientation hampers your mental processes, but in a moment you realize that whatever has just occurred is of secondary importance-right now you are in the path of two berserk mekillots!*

The PCs have just endured the passage of the psionic interference field of the Psionatrix, although they do not realize this just yet. The cost of all psionic activity is quadrupled within this field, and all power scores are halved. In addition, any psionics or multi-classed psionics will be incapacitated for a number of rounds equal to 21 minus their Wisdom score. This is a temporary disorientation that has the same effects as an ego whip: all actions are at a penalty of -5 or -25%. The PCs can, of course, simply flee the scene, but the heroic thing to do is to kill or subdue the mekillots so that no one else can be harmed. The gigantic lizards are completely berserk, as they were under the psionic control of an animal handler when the field swept over Tyr. There are four human animal handlers directly in front of the mekillots, trying in vain to reestablish control over the creatures. In addition, several people have

been rendered unconscious by the passage of the field and are in danger of being trampled. The battle map for this encounter shows the path of the angry mekillots and lists the damage they cause each round of their rampage.

**Mekillots (2):** AL N; AC 7 (9); MV 9; HD 11; hp: 51, 48; THAC0 9; #AT 1; Dmg 1-6; swallow on a 20, crush; Size G; ML 16 (berserk); XP 6,000

The mekillots kill any person they come in contact with (as marked on the map). They also wreck numerous market stalls, panic other nearby livestock, and generally cause mayhem. PCs take damage according to normal combat rules. Especially resourceful PCs should be able to control the mekillots with a hasty *charm monster* or *hold monster* spell. During the course of the animals' rampage, all kinds of people are fleeing the square in panic.

## The Council of Tyr

The characters arrive at the Council Chambers without further incident. In the Council session, the various patrons and enemies of the PCs argue about what has just occurred. The PCs are approached by Senator Agis of Asticles, who wants to send them to find out what has happened to the city.

*You hurry on toward the Council Chambers. All of you can feel that something is different in the city of Tyr, and the psionics of your party are still disoriented. In the streets you come across several scenes of destruction and carnage where mekillots, inix, and crodlus temporarily ran berserk or turned on their handlers. In most cases the animals were quickly subdued or killed. You come across one disturbing scene, a thri-kreen lying in a pool of its own ichor with half a dozen templars and citizens sprawled nearby. Witnesses tell you that the insect man simply ran amok at the same time that the ani-*

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*mals began their rampage. Despite the considerable damage to the city, it appears that things are returning to normal. The Council Chambers are crowded, with the various aides and retainers to the councilors engaged in a furious debate. Everyone large seems tense and edgy; you suspect that the grating vibration or hum you felt in your minds may have some lasting effect. You briefly consult with your various patrons, but before you get a chance to find out what is happening a sudden shout gets your attention. Make way for King Tithian of Tyr!*

The meeting settles as Tithian takes control of the proceedings. The king of Tyr is accompanied by half a dozen half-giant bodyguards, a similar number of templars, and several other officers of the palace and the army. He looks worried. The councilors demand to know what is happening, but Tithian has no ready answer. Instead, he presents several different officers and templars who have news to pass on to the Council. The PCs hear the following reports:

- A merchant reports encountering a battered tribe of elves who claim that the Dragon is coming to Tyr.
- An officer of the Army reports the presence of large numbers of halfling raiders in the passes of the Ringing Mountains. He believes a halfling horde is coming to sack Tyr.
- A bureaucrat in the king's service relays a report from Urik of a series of meetings between halfling chieftains and King Hamanu.
- A half-elven wanderer tells the Council that the great thri-kreen hordes of the Hinterlands have united under one leader and plan to invade Tyr.
- You can make up any other stories you wish. Obviously, something is wrong in Tyr. The passage of the field is still unexplained, but most of the councilors already have opinions:

**Rikus the Mul, commander of the army:** "It is plain to see! Tyr is under attack—Hamanu is seeking new allies to defeat us!"





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**Senator Turax, nobleman:** "If the king cannot protect us from these threats, we shall have to take steps to protect ourselves. I hereby withdraw my troops from the army of Tyr."

**Neeva, Rikus' lieutenant:** "We must stand together. Divide our army now, and Tyr will surely fall!"

**Master Sintha, leader of the merchants:** "We have heard nothing of a war brewing. A panic would be unwise—and expensive."

**Agis of Asticles, nobleman:** "The rumors of what occurs outside of Tyr are immaterial now. We are faced with a far worse threat. Since the rampage of the animals, it has been nearly impossible to make use of the Way. We must find out what is causing this interference with mental powers!"

*The debate rages for some time, but since no one appears to know what is happening to Tyr, no clear plans of action are put forth. Eventually King Xthian retires, promising not to rest until Tyr is safe again. The various Councilors begin to leave, most of them obviously unsatisfied with the meeting. As you turn to go, you find yourselves facing Agis of Asticles, one of the noted leaders of the city. He looks very tired and winces as though in pain. "A moment, my friends, he says quietly. I would like to have a word with you."*

Agis is a powerful psionist who instantly recognized the interference that has suppressed psionic use in Tyr. He is an old ally and patron of the PCs, most recently from the *Astician Gambit* adventure. If the PCs consent to speak with him, he draws them aside and asks them to begin a private investigation of the alteration in psionic use. Agis is convinced that some great threat looms over Tyr, and hopes the PCs will learn more than the king's men have so far been able to discover. Agis deals with the PC he is closest to, preferably a psionist. If asked, he says that he thinks the PCs will do well to head into the west, where there

are rumors of disturbances in the Forest Ridge and the Hinterlands. Agis believes that the rumored disasters are simply exaggerated reports of the passage of the psionic suppression field. If the PCs agree to undertake the mission, Agis provides them with any supplies, mounts, or equipment they think necessary—within reason. If the PCs ask about payment for their services, Agis agrees to pay them 100 sp each if they successfully determine the cause of the interference. He also points out that averting a threat to Tyr is its own reward. If the PCs accept Agis's offer, he tells them to meet him at his estate the next morning for outfitting. If they decline, he is disappointed but makes other arrangements. In either case, proceed with *The Avangion's Call*.

## The Avangion's Call

The PCs may pass the evening in whatever manner they choose. If they ignored the Council summons or declined Agis' offer, this event occurs as they are rising the next day. They are aware of rumors of an animal rampage and psionic distortion, but they do not have the information made available in the encounters they skipped. If the characters went to the Council meeting and accepted Agis' offer, this event occurs as they are meeting with the noble in his villa.

*The Asticles estate is one of the most prosperous and well-tended of the noble estates of Tyr. Agis is known as a great humanitarian, and the tenant farmers on his land enjoy good living conditions and reasonable rent. The noble greets you himself when you arrive at his luxurious palace. "Thank you for coming," he says. "I've taken the liberty of preparing some supplies and mounts. If there is anything else I can do, let me know."*

While the characters are conferring with Agis, or while they are preparing to go about their business if they are not at the Asticles estate, the avangion Korgunard magically contacts them. Korgunard is

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trying to unravel the mystery of the psionic interference, and he needs the PCs' aid.

*With no warning at all a doorway of shimmering blue light appears in the middle of the room. You leap to your feet, startled and alarmed. A tall, slender figure appears in the doorway. You instantly recognize the being as Korgunard, the magical avangion whose life you saved a few months back. A benevolent smile plays across his features.*

*"Greetings, my friends," he begins. "Do not be alarmed. It is I, Korgunard, and I need your help. By now you must be aware of the magical interference of psionic abilities. If I am correct, the field advanced through Tyr yesterday. I am trying to learn the cause of this interference. Unless it is stopped, thousands will eventually go insane or die. You may have seen some of these effects already. You must believe me that this is a thing that could destroy Athas as we know it. Will you aid me?"*

Korgunard's task coincides with the mission on which Agis intended to send them. The Senator

himself is fascinated; he has only heard distant rumors of such a being as Korgunard. There should be no difficulty in getting the PCs to agree to aid Korgunard.

*"I intend to investigate some sources of information I have access to," Korgunard explains. "I would like you to meet me at Desverendi's valley in 15 days. Until then, there is a task that I must ask you to undertake for me. I need to see an ancient scroll concerning the relationship of psionics and magic, and I know of only one copy that might still exist."*

*The avangion pauses, and then continues. "The avangion pauses, and then continues. "The scroll is referenced by another text I have, and is reported to lie in the library of Othand. If you could find the scroll and bring it to me at Desverendi's valley, it will save much precious time."*

If the PCs are reluctant, Korgunard attempts to talk them into helping. He points out that the distortion in psionics threatens all of Athas, and that the PCs' assistance may save hundreds of lives. If





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the PCs demand some kind of compensation for their assistance, Korgunard's opinion of them will drop a notch, but he points out that the library of Othand is reputed to hold a treasury of ancient texts and artifacts. In any event, he is willing to pay them almost anything (as much as 1,000 sp each) for an intact copy of the scroll.

*The avangion smiles and thanks you for helping. "The library of Othand is hidden within the ruins of an ancient town in the Tablelands," continues Korgunard. "It is located near the center of a stretch of sandy wastes that are as black as obsidian. You must be very careful, my friends—the ruins are used as a camp by the slave tribe known as the Black Sand Raiders and their foul defiler. I believe that the library has not been pillaged by the raiders, but it may be that the defiler has removed the scroll. You will find the library, and the camp of the Black Sand Raiders, about two days' walk east of the oasis of Silver Spring. I shall meet you in Desverendi's valley when the two moons are full. Good luck and safe journey, my friends." The magical portal shimmers and fades. The image of the avangion waves once, and is gone.*

### Setting Out

As promised, Agis of Asticles provides riding kanks for each member of the party, plus one additional pack kank for supplies and water. Each riding kank carries saddlebags containing 15 days' rations, and two 4-gallon waterskins. In addition, the pack kank carries 60 man-days' worth of rations and a 30-gallon cask of water. Other supplies include bed rolls, blankets, kindling, tinder kits, 200 feet of hemp rope, and torches.

*Agis and his household wish you a fair journey as you mount your kanks and turn your faces to the wastes of Athas. Behind you, the city of Tyr is oddly silent under the fear of what has occurred. "Good luck, champions of Tyr!" Agis calls in farewell.*

### A Desert Journey

The trip from Tyr to Silver Spring is not an easy one at any time. It is approximately 70 miles from Tyr to Silver Spring. The road is generally in good condition and is clear and flat for armored caravan wagons. Kanks have 15 MP per day for overland movement, but this can be doubled to 30 MP or tripled to 45 MP. (Refer to Mounted Overland Travel, page 123, in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.) Note that elves, thri-kreen, and half-giants do not ride kanks. Travel along the road costs x MP per mile under normal circumstances. Kanks moving at normal speed should cover about 30 miles a day. Characters who travel by night to conserve water may not be able to rest the next day (see Movement by Night, *DARK SUN™ Rules Book*, page 87). When the characters leave the road, the terrain they cross will be more rugged. Refer to the *DARK SUN Rules Book* for appropriate movement point costs. Keep track of how much water the PCs have; they begin their trek with plenty, but kanks require two gallons a day. The journey from Tyr to Silver Spring is an excellent time to stage a diversionary encounter from Part Eight, *Desert Perils*. You may want to make normal wilderness random encounter checks instead. Check three times per day with a base chance of 1 in 10 for an encounter. Refer to the random encounter charts in the *DARK SUN Rules Book* or *Monstrous Compendium* for the result. Take a little time to describe the PCs' travels in the wastes of Athas. Instead of saying, "You travel all day and nothing happens," try something like, "The sun hammers down on the barren wastes around you without mercy. The horizon is lost in shimmering heat mirages that leave you dizzy and light-headed. At last, the shadows begin to grow long and the sun sinks red and huge in the west. You managed to coax another day's travel out of your aching and worn bodies."





### Finding the Black Sand Camp

(See Map Book pg. 4)

The *Road to Silver Spring* map, shows the various oases and villages between Tyr and Silver Spring. Food, water, and mount prices are also noted for each village or fort. If the PCs do not visit the oasis of Silver Spring, proceed to *Search for the Black Sands*. If the PCs go to Silver Spring, continue with *The Silver Spring Elves*.

### The Silver Spring Elves

Silver Spring is a small oasis run by a band of swindling elves. In the *Arcane Shadows* adventure, the PCs may have stopped here. If you did not play that adventure, assume that the PCs are not familiar with Silver Spring. The elves of Silver Spring keep in touch with the Black Sand Raiders and will warn them if they recognize a dangerous party. The elves will avoid direct action against the PCs, but may try to poison their water if they think the PCs are a threat.

#### If the PCs are familiar with Silver Spring:

*Ahead of you, a small compound emerges from the dust and haze of the Athasian day. You recognize it as Silver Spring, a small and foul oasis monopolized by a band of ruthless elven rogues. On your last visit, you were cheated, swindled, stolen from, and sold out to the Black Sand Raiders. It is a miracle that your effort to save Korgunard's life did not come to an end within the elven camp. You halt a bowshot from the walls and wait. An elven sentry appears on the wall, a bow held at the ready. "A silver piece to water here, travelers!" he cries. You know only too well that the toll is only the beginning of your expenses in Silver Spring.*

#### If the PCs are not familiar with Silver Spring:

Ahead of you, a small compound emerges from the dust and haze of the Athasian day. It is surrounded

*by a low stone wall, and you can see the brown and muddy pool of water enclosed within. If this is Silver Spring, it is poorly named. Approaching closer, you see a slender figure appear on the wall, a bow at the ready. He watches you for a moment, and then shouts, "A silver piece to water here, travelers!"*

The adventurers will be required to pay 1 sp per person and per mount for the use of the oasis. The gates of the compound will not be opened until they have paid an elf who stands waiting outside. If the PCs have been here before, they will be remembered by some of the elves, but no one will speak of any unpleasant occurrences of previous visits. If pressed, a typical elf will shrug and mutter, "It was only business." The chief will be notified of the PCs' return. While the party waters their mounts and drinks, they are assailed by a swarm of elven women and children who try to sell them any number of things—elven rugs, blankets, or saddlebags, all with a few fancy stitches to justify a price three times normal. In the press of the crowd, an elven child may attempt to pick the pocket of a PC. The elves maintain a crude outdoor inn called the Traveler's Camp. For 1 sp each, travelers receive a tent, a rug, a place for their fire, and the unending attention of the elven peddlers and entertainers. If PCs do not pay to stay in the camp, they cannot stay in Silver Spring overnight. The Black Sand Raiders keep in touch with the elves of Silver Spring. If the PCs came to Silver Spring in *Arcane Shadows*, the elves will remember them and notify the raiders. Similarly, if the PCs ask a lot of questions about the Black Sand Raiders, the elves will decide it is in their interest to make sure the raiders are not surprised by any visitors. They will attempt to poison the PCs' water. Warning the Black Sand Raiders doubles the number of raiders on patrol when the PCs find the black sand in *The Raiders Attack*. Poisoning the water causes a delayed illness to fall over all PCs who drink from skins filled at Silver Spring. The day after they fill their skins, each char-



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acter must make a saving throw vs. poison or suffer

-2 penalty on attacks, damage, armor class, and Saving throws for 1d3 days. Unfortunately, the poison is lethal to kanks, who must save or die. The elves try to poison the waterskins during the night if the PCs stay at the traveler's camp. A 5th-level elven thief attempts to poison the waterbags of the party's mounts, and automatically succeeds unless the PCs are specifically posting a guard over their animals. He then attempts to poison the personal waterskins of the PCs while they sleep. If no PC is on guard, he succeeds on a 60 or less on d100. A roll of 95 or higher means that a PC catches him in the act. If a PC is on guard, the thief will be content to poison the water in the kanks' saddlebags and casks. If attacked, the thief receives the assistance of 2- 12 elven warriors.

**Elven Thief:** 5th-level; AL N; AC 8 (leather armor); MV 12; hp: 24; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8-1 (bone long sword); ML 10.

**Elven Warriors:** 3rd-level; AL N; AC 5 (studded leather armor, shields, Dexterity); MV 12; hp: 3d10 each; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8-1 (bone long sword); ML 11; XP 175.

There are a total of about 30 elven warriors in the village of Silver Spring. There are also several defilers, clerics, and psionicists, as well as fighters of higher levels. The chieftain is a fighter/defiler of level 8/10. Should the PCs become involved in a pitched battle against the elves, the women and children will abandon the camp, while the warriors fiercely attempt to drive the intruders away. If the PCs are not known to the elves and don't ask any obvious questions, nothing will happen in this encounter besides a lot of annoying minor fees, charges, and gratuities imposed by the elves.

## Search for the Black Sands

The Road to Silver Spring in the Map Book shows the area of the Black Sand Raiders' camp. When the PCs strike out into the Athasian wilds, you can track their progress on this map. The search for the black sands offers a good opportunity to insert a wilderness encounter from Part Eight: *Desert Perils*. Alternatively, you may want to use the random encounter charts from the DARK SUN™ *Monstrous Compendium* or *Rules Book*. Most of the terrain in the region surrounding Silver Spring and the Black Sand camp is stoney barrens. If you use this system, make three d10 checks per day (morning, evening, and night). An encounter occurs on a roll of 1. If the PCs' water was poisoned at Silver Spring, have all the PCs and their mounts make saving throws vs. poison at the beginning of the second day of travel in the wilderness. All of the movement rules described under *A Desert Journey* apply, but you should remember that the MP cost of stoney barrens is 2. The PCs will be slowed considerably, and if moving at normal speed on kanks, they will only make 7.5 miles per day. Human characters on foot can make 12 miles per day across the barrens.

Regardless of whether or not the PCs remain mounted or lose their water, keep careful track of their supplies. Simple survival in the deserts of Athas is a challenge even for experienced travelers, and you should take every opportunity to penalize PCs for abusing their mounts or being careless with their water and food supplies. This section ends when the player characters find the region of black sand. They encounter a patrol of the Black Sand Raiders (*The Raiders Attack*). If the party does not find the black sand, you may have Korgunard appear in a vision to give them some directions.

## Dealing with the Raiders

Clever players may decide to have their characters attempt to negotiate the scroll away from the Black Sand Raiders rather than steal it. If your players



pick this course of action, the PCs may try to contact the raiders through the Silver Spring elves or they may set off to deal with them directly. The raiders are vicious, arrogant, and extraordinarily greedy. If the player characters show any signs of weakness, the raiders will attack them outright. Characters who offer a large sum of money for the scroll and then do not follow it up with a show of strength are begging for an ambush. Despite this, it is possible that a deal could be brokered by the Silver Spring elves if the PCs approach it in the right way. First, they will have to strike a balance between catering to the raiders' leader's monomaniacal sense of ego and appearing too weak to defend themselves. Insults or threats are a direct slap in the face to the raiders, and they will respond appropriately. If the PCs succeed in making the raiders realize that they have something the adventurers want, the raiders are going to wonder why the scroll is so important. They will raise the price several times during the course of negotiation. The only way the raiders will part with the scroll peacefully is if they are offered 500 sp or more and shown that they will be unable to take the silver away from the PCs by force. The raiders show up 1-3 days after the PCs begin asking for them at Silver Spring, or 1-2 days after any raider is sent back to their camp with a request for a meeting. Adventurers who force a raider to guide them to the camp at sword's point will be taken for enemies and attacked when they arrive. Characters who endanger Silver Spring by killing raider emissaries there will wake up one morning to find all the elves gone. If the PCs give the Black Sand Raiders reason to prepare an all out assault, a number of unique characters will accompany the attack force. Fighters and gladiators with exceptional ability scores or weapon specialization will definitely be among the leaders, as well as defilers and psionists. Half-giants, muls, and dwarves will be present in small numbers as well. These characters are not covered in this adventure, but you should make the raiders as tough as necessary to convince the PCs

that trying to kill all of them is a foolish course of action.

### The Raiders Attack

When the player characters first reach any part of the black sand region, they come under attack by a patrol of the Black Sand Raiders. Remember to double these forces if the PCs advertised their mission in Silver Spring. When the PCs reach the area, read the following:

*A strong, searing wind has blasted you all day long with its relentless fury. Struggling on through the heat and dust, you suddenly find that the barren, rocky plains around you are giving way to a vast sandy waste. You squint in disbelief, but your eyes are not deceiving you the sand is as black as coal. Surveying the legendary black sands of the Tablelands, you prepare to strike out in search of the ancient ruins rumored to lie in the area's dark embrace. With the wind driving the dark sands, you almost do not notice the approaching dust plumes of a number of riders. Quickly you glance up at the sky above you and see that your own passage is also marked by a dark plume of dust.*

The riders are a patrol of the Black Sand Raiders, mounted on kanks. They spotted the PCs when they approached the black sand region, and are riding hard to meet them. The players have 10 rounds to take any action they want to, and then the riders will be within bowshot. The PCs have several options: flee, hide, parley, or stand and fight. If the party flees, the raiders spur their kanks to triple speed (45) and pursue. As long as the PCs remain within sight, the raiders will continue to pursue. If the PCs hide, the raiders ride to the spot of the dust plume and begin to search. PCs who stand their ground will find that the raiders break into a wild charge when they are about 200 yards from the front characters. In a charge, the riders can close the dis-



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tance and attack at the end of the round, receiving a +2 on their attack roll. The raiders are armed with medium lances, which inflict double damage in a charge. Note that all the raiders suffer an AC penalty of 1 during the charge, and PCs with pole weapons (like spears) can set them against the charge. The raider patrol consists of eight tribesmen, a defiler, and a leader, Aricho. The tribesmen fight until reduced to 10 hp: or less, and then seek to disengage. The defiler lags back during the initial charge, looking for targets for his spells, beginning in the second round of combat. Aricho leads the charge and melee until half of his men are down or he is reduced to 10 hp or less.

**Black Sand Raiders (8):** Human F4; AL CE; AC 5 (chitin hide armor, shield); MV 12 (15 mounted); hp: 25 each; THAC0 17 (+1 to hit unmounted opponents, -1 to hit with bone weapons); #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (medium lance, bone) or 1d8-1 (bone long sword); ML 16; XP 270.

**Defiler (1):** Elf De6; AL CE; AC 6 (exceptional Dexterity, robes); MV 12 (1.5 mounted); hp: 17; THAC0 13; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (staff); Defiler spells: 1) *color spray*, *magic missile* (×2), *wall of fog*; 2) *blur*, *web*; 3) *fireball*, *slow*; ML 16.

**Aricho:** Mu1 F8; AL CE; AC 3 (inix hide armor, shield +2); MV 12 (15 mounted); hp: 66; THAC0 13 (+1 to hit with lance, +3 to hit with steel long sword); #AT 1 (lance) or 2 (sword); Dmg 1d6+3 (bone lance, strength) or 1d8+6 (steel long sword, specialized); ML 16.

If the PCs are defeated by the raider patrol, they will be bound and dragged back to the black sand camp. If the PCs defeat the patrol, they may be able to coerce a tribesman into showing them where the camp is, or they may be able to track tribesmen who flee the fight back to the camp. If any tribesmen escape and make it back to the camp, double the number of sentries and guards in *Defiler's Shadow*.

### Defiler's Shadow

If the PCs were defeated by the Black Sand Raiders in *The Raiders Attack*, they will be left in the prisoner tent under guard (area 9 on *The Camp of the Black Sand Raiders* map in the Map Book). They will be disarmed, bound, and gagged. The raiders are not very kind to their prisoners: the PCs receive only one half their daily requirements of food and water. Their gear is stored in the treasure tent, also under guard (area 8). If the characters were too badly damaged in the previous encounter to continue, or if several have been killed, you may want to have the players introduce new characters from their character trees as fellow prisoners in the prisoner tent.

### Approaching the Camp

The black sand is about 10 miles in diameter, and the ruins of Othand are located in the center of the region. The adventurers will encounter no further patrols as they approach the camp, but may run into trouble once they are in sight of the ruins. The ruins lie in a shallow depression surrounded by high, rounded dunes of dark sand. The dune crests are about a half mile from the walls of the ancient town. By day, approaching characters are spotted if they cross the crest and continue toward the town. The Black Sand Raiders mistake any mounted party for one of their own patrols, especially if the PCs wear the black robes favored by the slave tribe. PCs wearing robes can enter the camp without incident, but once inside they will be approached by warriors who want to know why they have returned from their patrol. Undisguised PCs are immediately recognized as intruders at a range of 200 yards. If PCs attempt to approach at night, only one moon shines in the darkness. The PCs can move to within 200 yards of the camp without fear of detection. If they move any closer, they may be spotted by the sentries posted on the walls (see the map for sentry locations). The sentries can spot movement at a range of



100 yards, but they may be inattentive or asleep. No sentries are posted during daylight hours, but enough raiders wander around the outside walls to make sneaking up on the camp nearly impossible.

## Camp Defenses

There are approximately 80 raiders in the camp at any given time. There are about 70 miscellaneous tribe members, tribe leader Zeburon's personal guard of eight warriors, plus the defiler Fevil, Zeburon himself, and Aditio, Zeburon's mistress. The Black Sand Raiders maintain two 10 man patrols out in the Tablelands. Each patrol stays out for several days. Within the camp, two guards are posted around the clock at Zeburon's headquarters, the prisoner tent, and the treasure tent. By night these six guards are supplemented by three sentries who man the walls, and a four man patrol that polices the immediate area of the camp. The patrol follows a random pattern that takes it to each sentry and guard post as it sweeps the entire camp.

## The Raiders

During the day, the Black Sand Raiders pass their time in a number of ways. Most have assigned tasks, such as weapons maintenance or cooking duty. Every raider can count on pulling at least one shift of guard or sentry duty. In addition, each raider joins a desert patrol once every three to four days. When not standing guard or pursuing other assigned tasks, the raiders often practice with their weapons, torment captives, gamble, or get drunk.

**Human Raider Warrior:** F4; AL CE; AC 7 (studded leather, shield); MV 12; hp: 4d10; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon; ML 13. Armed with obsidian-tipped spear, bone short sword, and short bow with 12 obsidian-tipped arrows; XP 270.

**Elite Raider Warrior:** Human FS; AL CE; AC 5 (chitin hide armor, shield); MV 12; hp: 5d10; THAC0 16 (+2 to hit); #AT 1 or 3/2; Dmg by weapon +4; SA specialized with weapon, 17 Strength; ML 16. Armed with bone long sword or stone battle axe, light crossbow with 12 obsidian-tipped bolts, steel dagger.

## The Black Sand Camp

(See Map Book pg. 5)

The camp is shown in detail, and the following key describes the various points of interest. Any raiders on guard will attempt to call for assistance or raise the alarm if suddenly confronted by a well-armed band of intruders. Guards or sentries attempting to raise the alarm have a 50% chance of rousing any sleeping raiders within 50 feet. Check for each separate tent or sleeping area within range. When a tent is alerted, all raiders within awake and emerge, taking 1d4 rounds to arm themselves. One round after any given group of raiders is alerted, they try to spread the alarm, at which point a check is made for every tent within 50 feet of that group.

*The sand is fine and black beneath your feet, only now cooling from the heat of the day. You crest a high dune and find yourselves looking upon a large ruin of the ancients. The ruins cover the floor of a shallow valley. Most of the old buildings are nothing more than piles of wind sculpted rubble, but several structures in the center of the ruins are still intact. A number of tents are set up throughout the central area of the ruins. You can see a few cooking fires and some people moving about. In the center of the camp, a single ancient ruin draws your eye. It is a strong, ancient tower of dark stone. Its roof is largely collapsed, but the lower floors might be habitable. Returning your attention to the people who inhabit this ruin, you distinctly make out a couple of guards clad in black, hooded robes – the Black Sand Raiders?*



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### Sentries, Guards, and Patrols

The sentries posted on the walls as marked are normal warriors. The raiders tend to be lazy and arrogant. There is a 50% chance that any given sentry is not paying attention to his duties. If a sentry is attentive, he spots movement within 100 feet. If not, he only spots movement within 30 feet, and suffers a -1 penalty on surprise rolls. The sentries do not bother to conceal their location and usually can be found sitting on the ruined walls of the town. If a sentry is attacked, he will call out for help. There is a 25% chance a patrol hears and responds within 2-4 (d3 + 1) rounds. The guards posted as marked on the map are normal warriors. The guards in front of Area 5, Zeburon's headquarters, are elite warriors. Guards are frequently checked on, and generally remain alert. They detect any movement within 60 feet, provided their line of sight is not obstructed. Guards who see people moving around the camp will not be alarmed, but if the PCs approach within 30 feet, the guards realize that they are intruders and raise the alarm. A group of four warriors and an elite warrior constantly patrols the interior of the camp. They generally check on each of the guard and sentry posts during their circuit, and also swing through the camp at random intervals. Every turn, there is a 1 in 6 chance that the patrol comes by. Quick thinking PCs can pretend to be raiders, as long as the patrol remains more than 30 feet away. If the patrol gets close enough to recognize them as intruders, they attack and raise the alarm.

### Map Key

A number of structures on the map are ruins or raiders' tents. These are marked **R** or **T**. Areas of special interest are indicated by a number. Buildings marked **R** are ruins. Most are in very poor shape, littered with wreckage. Drifts of dark sand partially fill their interiors. Structures marked **T** are the tents of the Black Sand Raiders. Small tents contain 3-6 (d4+2) raiders and large tents contain 9-16

(d8 + 8) raiders. The tents are furnished with bed rolls, stools, and chests. Various weapons and armor pieces are scattered about. Personal items include 10-40 cp and 2-12 sp per raider.

**1. Well Building:** *A large ancient building of dark stone, this structure is about 20 feet high. Gaping archways lead into a dark interior. You hear the sound of water dripping on stone. A sentry post is located on the roof of this building.*

If the sentry is inattentive, sneaky PCs can get up to the walls or even enter without being detected. There is a large, circular well within the building, filled with cold water.

**2. Kank Pen:** *A chest-high fence of thorny brambles encircles an animal pen of some kind. You can hear the rustle and clicking of a large number of kanks. The insects are agitated by your presence. There are 30 kanks within this enclosure.*

They are docile, and can be taken if the PCs need them. Saddles are kept in Area 3, the temple.

**3. Ancient Temple:** *This impressive structure is partially buried by a large sand dune. Round minarets rise from its jagged corners, but time has shattered the slender towers. A door of leather bound mekillog ribs has been fitted across the original archway, and a rare copper lock rests over the latch. Much of the interior of this building has been filled with sand, but a space near the door has been cleared for use as storage.*

A number of saddles, blankets, reins, and bridles appropriate for kanks are kept here, about 20 sets altogether. Several dozen waterskins, water casks, and other miscellaneous gear are also here. Forcing the door is likely to wake up the raiders in Area 4. Treat this as an alarm check.

**4. Guard Tent:** *This extravagant tent is reserved for the use of Zeburon's personal guards.*

A total of 10 warriors live here, but two are always



on guard in front of Zeburon's headquarters. Of the remaining eight, consider 6 to be elite warriors. The other two are Hejaro and Reses, described below. The interior of this tent is far more luxurious than the tents of the other warriors, containing 335 cp, 110 sp, 18 gp, a magical shield +1, and a ruby worth 50 sp.

**Hejaro:** Mu1 G17; AL NE; AC 3 (*hide armor +1, shield*); MV 12; hp: 58; THAC0 14 (+5 to hit with steel *impaler +1*); #AT 2 with *impaler*; Dmg 1d8+10 (*impaler- +1, Strength 19, specialist*). Hejaro is the leader of Zeburon's personal guard and is utterly loyal to the insane tribe chieftain. He is a tall, powerful mul who was a slave gladiator in the city of Draj before winning his freedom on the point of his blade.

**Reses:** Elf F6; AL CE; AC 2 (*studded leather armor, Dexterity 21*); MV 12; hp: 49; THAC0 15 (+2 to hit with bone long sword); #AT 3/2 with sword; Dmg 1d8+2 (*specialist, Strength 17*).

Reses is second in command of Zeburon's body guards. A tall elf with unbelievable grace and agility, he plans to murder Hejaro and replace the mul as Zeburon's chief bodyguard.

## 5. Zeburon's Headquarters:

*This ancient edifice is crowned by figures of winged horrors. A few high, narrow windows are covered with rough curtains, but you can make out dim candlelight behind them. Obviously, this building is still inhabited.*

If the PCs are not cautious, they may attract the attention of the two guards standing outside the door. The guards are elite warriors and will instantly attack any intruders they spot while making as much noise as possible to raise the alarm. Zeburon himself emerges two rounds later, while Atasha, his mistress, peers out of a window to see what is happening. If the guards are involved in a battle, she

will climb stairs inside the building to the roof and begin shooting at PCs in the third round. She receives 50% cover. Zeburon happily joins the melee when he comes out, but if he is reduced to half his hit points, he begins to shout for his guards or Fevil to come to help him. When reduced to 10 hp or less, he will back out of the fight and slam the door of his building, barring it from inside.

Zeburon's headquarters are lavishly appointed, but also feature a number of grotesque trophies such as goblets made from human skulls, necklaces of teeth and mummified ears, etc. Several chests contain 670 sp, 1,210 cp, and a small cask of iron. The cask holds six emeralds worth 80 sp each. A number of ornate statues, lamps, exotic rugs, and other luxuries fill the building.

### Zeburon

Human Gladiator  
7th Level  
Chaotic Evil

Str 17      Int 14  
Dex 16      Wis 12  
Con 16      Cha 14  
**hp:** 67

**AC:** 7 (Dexterity)

**#AT:** 2/1 with sword

**THAC0:** 12 (+3 to hit with long sword)

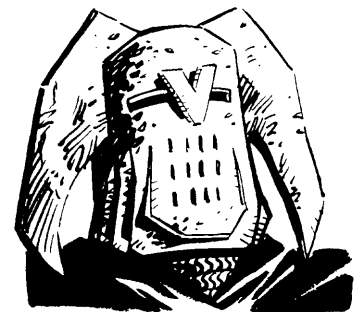
**Dmg:** 1d8+8 (bone long sword, specialized).

**Psionic Summary:** PSPs 52;

**Wild Talent:** Danger Sense (Wis-3; IC 4; MC 3/turn).

**Equipment:** Bone long sword, iron gauntlets (can be used as cesti), iron helm.

Zeburon is the leader of the Black Sand Raiders. He is a thoroughly insane ex-gladiator who views all of life as a deadly arena game. His rule is capricious and his discipline total—he simply kills with his own hands anyone who disobeys him. Zeburon hates all





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creatures that are not members of his tribe, and works to instill a fanatic bloodlust equal to his own in the ranks of the Black Sand Raiders. The Black Sand Raiders are terrified of Zeburon and leap to do his bidding. When he is fighting with them, their morale is raised to a score of 18.

### Atasha

Human Thief

8th Level

Chaotic Neutral

Str 12    Int 14  
Dex 13    Wis 10  
Con 15    Cha 14  
hp: 37



AC: 3 (*leather armor +1, Dexterity*)

#AT: 1

THAC0: 17 (+3 to hit with missiles)

Dmg: 1d4 (dagger) or 1d6-1 (bone-tipped arrows)

Psionic Summary: PSPs 40;

Wild Talent: Dimension Door (Con-1; IC 4; MC 2/round)

Thief Abilities: PP 65%; OL 57%; F/RT 55%; MS 62%; HS 47%; HN 25%; CW 76%; RL 40%

**Equipment:** *Leather armor +1, steel dagger, short bow with 12 bone-tipped arrows, 6 steel arrows +2.*

Atasha is a human rogue from the city of Nibeynay. She joined the Black Sand Raiders a year ago, and quickly found a place at Zeburon's side. She realizes that no one is safe around the lunatic, but she feels that she can use her skills to control him. Atasha can backstab for triple normal damage.

**6. Fevil's Tower:** *The wreckage of the ancient tower at the center of this camp rises above you. At one time it must have soared 80 or 90 feet into the air, but now the upper levels have collapsed. A few narrow windows can be seen on the second floor of the tower, and the only entrance appears to be a stout*

*door in the tower's northern side. The stone is cold and sweaty to the touch.*

The interior of Fevil's tower is shown as an inset on the Black Sand Camp map. Fevil lives alone, but he does employ a few basic traps and guardians. Fevil can be found in room F, but if he hears intruders in the lower floor he will try to destroy them with his spells. If the intruders look too tough for him, he flees to the top of the tower and use his *wings of flying* to escape.

### Fevil

Male Human Defiler

10th Level

Lawful Evil

Str 15    Int 22  
Dex 17    Wis 17  
Con 16    Cha 8

AC: 5 (*ring, Dexterity*)

hp: 42

#AT: 1

THAC0: 17

Dmg: 1d6+1 (quarterstaff).

Psionic Summary: PSPs 54;

Wild Talent: See Sound (Wis-3; IC 6; MC 3/round)

**Defiler Spells:** 1) *burning hands, charm person, phantasmal force, magic missile*; 2) *flaming sphere, invisibility, scare, wizard lock*; 3) *dispel magic, fireball, suggestion*; 4) *fear, solid fog, stonewalk\**; 5) *cone of cold, wall of stone.*

(Each asterisk (\*) raises power level by 1)

**Equipment:** *Robes, ring of protection +2, quarterstaff, wings of flying, fruit of extra healing*

Fevil is the power behind the throne in the Black Sand Raiders. He rules through Zeburon, allowing the exgladiator to think that he is the master. Fevil discovered the ruins of Othand many years ago and has been exploring them ever since, seeking knowledge and power.







**A. Hall.** This chamber features a number of ruined tapestries and banners. The remains of a large table and many chairs litter the floor, which is covered with a shallow layer of black sand.

Hidden behind the tapestries are six b'rohg zombies, who attack anyone not accompanied by Fevil.

**B'rohg Zombies (6):** AL N; AC 6; MV 9; HD 6; hp 26 each; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 4-16; SD standard undead immunities; ML 20; XP 650.

**B. Cloak Rooms.** These small antechambers contain nothing but a few rotting rags.

**C. Stairs.** A 5-foot-wide stairway leads down to the tower basement from here. The stairs descend about 20 feet and are heavily covered with dust. The dust has been disturbed recently.

**D. Fevil's Storeroom.** This room is guarded by a *fire trap* on the mekillot-rib door. The trap inflicts 1d4+10 hp of damage, or half if a saving throw vs. spells is made by the victim. Two trained huge scorpions live in this room and viciously attack any intruders except Fevil. The storeroom contains three locked trunks, plus several bed rolls, tents, blankets, and other miscellaneous goods. The chests are each protected by a *fire trap*, and contain 630 cp and 210 sp each. One chest also contains a bone *long sword* +2, a *fruit of flying*, and a sack with four opals worth 20 sp each.

**Huge Scorpions (2):** AL N; AC 4; MV 12; HD 4+4; hp 25, 23; THAC0 15; #AT 3; Dmg 1-8/ 1-8/ 1-3 + poison; SA seize in grip; ML 10; XP 420.

**E. Upper Hall.** This room is bare, with only a few rotten tapestries along the walls and a pile of moldering furniture heaped in one corner. If Fevil is pursued from the lower hall, he sets the door to his chambers ajar and then flees up the stairs leading to the ruined upper stories of the tower.

**F. Fevil's Chambers.** Maintained in far better condition than the rest of the ruined tower, the defiler's living quarters reveal Fevil's taste for comfort. Several ancient desks and chairs have been carefully restored, and the choice loot of many caravan raids has found its way here. Fine carpets and tapestries adorn the room. Two hulking half-giant skeletons stand at either side of the door, with orders to attack anyone except Fevil. The skeletons stand behind large tapestries beside the door and never move. They gain a -2 bonus on their chance to surprise opponents entering the door. Fevil's quarters contain a number of plush and expensive furnishings. Underneath the bed is a small trunk with an iron lock. It contains 180 sp, a *fruit of extra healing*, and a *scroll of protection from undead*. A shelf along one wall holds a number of scrolls in an ancient tongue, generally in tatters. They are accounts of the city of Othand in ancient days. Fevil's spellbook is hidden among the scrolls and is protected by an illusion that makes it appear identical to the others. It is trapped with *secret pages* and *sepia snake sigils*. Another scroll is trapped with an *explosive runes* spell (it has no value).

**Monster Skeletons (2):** AL N; AC 6; MV 12; HD 6; hp 40 each; THAC0 15 (-2 to hit with stone weapons); #AT 1; Dmg 2-16-1 (stone battle axe of double size); SD type P or S weapons do 1/2 damage, undead immunities; ML 20; XP 650.

**G. Library.** This room contains a number of scroll racks stuffed with various works salvaged from the ruins below. Most are of no interest, but it will take one reader six turns to thoroughly search the scrolls to determine this. One shelf holds a scroll with the spells *enervation*, *charm monster*, and *dig*, and another, a *scroll of protection from fire*. The treatise on psionics is not here, but a tattered journal in one corner documents the explorations Fevil has made beneath the tower. One of its entries is a partial listing of the contents of Er'Thork's hoard, and the Psionatrix Acamedicia appears on this list.



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**7. Cooking Tent.** Approaching this tent, you detect a barrage of aromas and odors. You can see several game animals quartered and drying on racks outside of the tent. This appears to be a kitchen.

This area is used for the preparation of daily meals, as well as the preservation and packing of rations for raids into the desert. A number of small kettles, knives, and other culinary tools can be found surrounding a pair of large tables. Several fire pits are just outside the tent. Six warriors sleep here, with a total of 165 cp and 30 sp between them.

**8. Treasure Tent.** Two guards vigilantly watch this tent's only door. The flap is kept closed and secured by a series of complex knots. You also notice that the tent appears to be floored with a platform of wood, and the sides are sewn to the flooring for extra security.

The guards are especially attentive, since it is Zeburon's habit to have other raiders try to slip past and remove loot from the tent. Most of the booty consists of trade goods such as bolts of silk, bales of cotton, sacks full of grain, amber, mekillot bone, hides, dyes, etc. One chest of wood contains 12 obsidian long swords, and another holds 10 heavy crossbows. A detailed search also uncovers a set of six steel daggers, 40 iron arrowheads, and an excellent, human-sized suit of raslinn hide armor (base AC 4 instead of AC 6).

**9. Prisoner Tent.** *Narrowly spaced slats made from mekillot ribs are securely sewn with sturdy, leather thongs to the sides of this heavy canvas tent. The door flap is tightly knotted down, and two alert guards lounge in front.*

Decide whether or not you want to place any prisoners in need of rescue inside the tent. If there are no prisoners, the tent will be open and unguarded. The prisoner tent is a fine place to introduce new or replacement PCs, or even a potential NPC ally for parties that are having a difficult time. If the PCs were defeated and captured by the Black Sand

Raiders, they are imprisoned here. They are kept under constant guard for 2-5 days, and then brought out, one at a time, to be tortured or hunted for sport by the raiders. Prisoners only receive half of their required food and water per day. The sturdy construction of the tent walls makes it impossible to escape by simply cutting a slit in the material or trying to wriggle out. Any number of other methods will prove effective, however.

### Below and Black Sand Camp

The crypts and chambers below Fevil's tower form the domain of Er'Thork, a raaig. The scroll that the PCs are searching for rests within his treasure hoard, in Area 16.

**1. Tower Basement.** *This is a large, low-ceilinged chamber of dark stone. Black sand scuffs beneath your feet, and small pieces of rubbish can be seen here and there on the floor. There are exits to the north, south, east, and west. You can hear scurrying and high pitched squeaking to the east. The door that leads from the stairwell is new, made from stout mekillot bone and bound with iron. It features a strong iron lock. The western and eastern doors are of ancient, rotted wood and are in bad shape. The door to the south is of wood sheathed in green 15 bronze and is quite strong for its age. The scurrying comes from a nest of normal rats in the northeast corner of the room.*

**2. Crypt Chamber.** *The stonework here is rough and crude, and the floor is uneven and pocked. A number of small crypts fill the room, their doors largely rotted away to expose the foul contents. The air is stale and unclean. As you enter, you hear the rustling of movement—the mindless dead of this place are rising to attack you!*

The crypts are made of dressed stone and fitted with doors of rotten old oak, bound with bronze. Each one contains 1d8 burial niches, most of which



are full. Each round, the skeletons of one crypt rise, leave their crypt, and move to attack the party. The × marked crypts each contain six skeletal, juju zombies. They appear as normal skeletons at first but move more swiftly, with a burning light in their eyeless sockets. A search of the various crypts uncovers a number of artifacts—bronze plates and goblets, small statuettes of bone or amber, and small pieces of clothing and jewelry on the skeletons. Most have decayed beyond any value, but there is a hidden compartment in southernmost of the juju zombies' crypts that contains a steel *long sword* +1, a wand of frost with 13 charges, and a pouch of six rubies valued at 120 sp, 50 sp, and 4 × 30 sp.

**Skeletons:** AL N; AC 7; MV 12; HD 1; hp 4 each; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1-6; SD ½ damage from S/P weapons, undead immunities; ML 20; XP 65.

**Juju Zombies (12):** AL N; AC 6; MV 9; HD 3+12; hp 28 each; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 3-12; SD special; ML 20; XP 975.

**3. Looted Crypts.** *This chamber resembles the other crypt chambers, but the vaults have been sacked long ago. Oddly enough, not a single ancient corpse can be found within this room.*

The door to Area 4 is made of stout iron bound, ancient wood. It is covered with ancient writing, now undecipherable. There is nothing of interest here.

**4. Passage Cavern.** *The stonework in this chamber is the crudest you have seen so far. It appears to have been excavated as an afterthought to the construction of the original complex. Three winding passageways exit this chamber, leading off into the gloom. To the west, a single door of iron bound wood stands ajar. It is covered with ancient glyphs.*

There is little debris in the room, and nothing of any interest. The northernmost passage leads to a cave-in that blocks all passage.

**5. Cellar.** This passage seems to have been burrowed rather than cut through the mixed sand and stone. An awful stench fouls the tunnel. Suddenly, the tunnel opens on a cluttered room of dressed stone, filled with a litter of tattered, ancient corpses and their burial vestments. Squatting among the dusty mummies are several dog-like humanoid creatures. With howls of hunger, they attack!

This room was a cellar to one of the ruins above. It now serves as the lair for a pack of ghosts that feed on the crypts. There is a trapdoor in the ceiling that leads to a rubble-choked ruin east of the treasure tent. The ghosts often hunt in the ruins above. They can hear the PCs approaching and will try to surprise them as they emerge from the tunnel. The cellar contains a number of rotting casks of vinegar, a few empty crates of rotten foodstuffs, and the debris of the ghosts. A careful search reveals one corpse that is only a few weeks old—the remains of a slave who failed Fevil's test of initiation. A suit of scratched up, leather armor rests beside the body.

**Ghast (5):** AL CE; AC 4; MV 15; HD 4; hp 22 each; THAC0 1.7; #AT 3; Dmg 1-4/1-4/1-8; SA special; SD undead immunities; ML 14; XP 650.

**6. Stronghold Basement.** *A large, well-built chamber of the ancients that appears to be a basement. A set of stairs airs lead up to the surface from one corner of the room. A few rotten and splintered racks along the walls may have once held arms and armor, but only dust remains. The stairway leads up to an ancient door of riveted, iron plate.*

The door's frame is very old and rotten, and any attempt to wrench the door open will pull it off its hinges. The PC who tries to force the door must make a saving throw vs. death or stumble back down the stairs with a heavy iron door on top of him, taking 3d6 damage. The way to the surface is blocked by rubble and sand. The western door is sturdy, made of rusty iron plate, riveted to a frame. It is stuck hard; treat it as locked for purposes of forcing it open.



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**7. Crypt Chamber.** This crudely-cut chamber contains even rows of stone crypts. The air is foul and stale with the smell of moldering bones. The scratching and chattering of rats is obscenely audible in this room. Suddenly, you hear the creaking of an opening door and a low moaning from the tombs

Eight of the nine crypts in this room contains 1d8 burial niches. Each niche is occupied by a zombie. Each melee round, one crypt empties as its occupants shamle out to attack the intruders. The X marked crypt contains eight juju zombies. The zombies will not leave this room. Various odd urns, plates, burial vestments, and ornaments can be found in the crypts, but nothing of any value remains here.

**Zombies:** AL N; AC 8; MV 6; HD 2; hp 9 each; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1-8; SD undead immunities; ML 20; XP 65.

**Juju Zombies (8):** AL N; AC 6; MV 9; HD 3+12; hp 28 each; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 3-12; SD special; ML 20; XP 975.

**8. Armory.** The two rusty iron plate doors to this room are both locked and stuck in place as though magically held. A sun burst symbol is em blazoned on each door, along with ancient glyphs.

Each of the doors has a glyph of warding on its face that shocks the first person to touch the door for 24 points of damage. A save vs. spells reduces the damage by half. The air in this room is exceedingly stale, but does not seem poisonous. Thick dust covers the floor. As you enter, you see several faded banners along the wall slowly dissolving with exposure to the fresh air. Several racks along the walls hold weapons of various sorts; it seems that this room was an armory. A thorough search of the room reveals a bundle of 40 steel-headed arrows whose shafts are no good, six bronze-headed spears with rotten shafts, a metal reinforced target shield, two steel open faced helms, more than one dozen

ruined crossbows, two steel-headed halberds with decayed shafts, and six rusty iron short swords. A steel *bastard sword* +1, flame tongue, and a *shield* +1 are here as well.

**9. Well Chamber.** *This small chamber features a dark well shaft about 10 feet in diameter. A few ancient murals linger on the walls, the paint peeling and undecipherable. You can barely see the reflection of your torches in the water 20 or 30 feet below. There is a large underground lake beneath this chamber. In Othand's prime, the water level was high enough to dip water from this room.*

The lake is about 150 feet in diameter, and its surface is 20 feet below the rim of the well. It is the home of a very old and hungry cistern fiend. The worm waits for characters to descend into the well, but will hurl itself up the shaft to attack if they delay. The fiend can only attack characters within 10 feet of the well mouth. It will not leave the well to pursue intruders. If reduced to 10 hp or less, the cistern fiend drops back into the well and hides in the lake.

**Cistern Fiend:** AL N; AC 0; MV 12; HD 10 + 10; hp 66; THAC0 9; #AT 12 tentacles plus bite; Dmg paralyze or drain fluids; SA special; SD regeneration; psionics; ML 15; XP 10,000.

**10. Bone Chamber.** *This rough hewn, rock chamber littered with bones of all descriptions. A number of them have been broken and gnawed on. The bones vary in age from ancient dust to new, shiny remains. Despite the alarming nature of the room, there is little of interest here.*

**11. Ancient Shrine.** A large bronze-sheathed door of ancient oak guards this chamber. Dire runes are emblazoned on the doorway. Within the room a number of stone benches face an evil altar, dedicated to some forgotten god. The walls are decorated with carvings of old, nightmarish creatures. Thick dust covers everything. The altar is a slab of



dark stone with a pair of ruined bronze braziers to either side. A close search of the altar reveals a secret compartment underneath that is trapped with a spring-loaded dagger. The dagger attacks with a THAC0 of 15 and inflicts 1-4 points of damage if it hits. It is smeared with a black oily substance, but the poison is so old that it is harmless. The compartment is empty.

**12. Fountain Room.** *An ancient wooden door hangs in ruins on its bronze hinges. Within the room, you can hear water splashing quietly. The water comes from a fountain against the western wall. The room is well made with stone dressing in good condition. The fountain is a stone basin 4 feet in diameter and about waist-high. A hideous statue stands above the basin, and dark water trickles from its mouth to the pool. The dust on the floor is marked with dragging tracks.*

The water of the fountain is poison; treat as type J. One round after drinking, a victim must make a saving throw vs. poison or die. Even if the save is made, the victim still suffers 20 points of damage. There is nothing else of interest in this room.

**13. Rubble-Strewn Room.** *All kinds of debris litters this room. Wrecked masonry, tattered banners and tapestries, and a few ancient corpses can all be found here. The room is of well-dressed stone, and the faded images of old murals can still be traced along the walls.*

An exhaustive search of the room turns up little of interest. One of the old bodies lies above a bone dagger +2, and another one clutches an iron short sword in its hand.

**14. Rubble-Strewn Room.** *A room of rough cut and undressed stone, this chamber is littered with debris, including heaps of dirt, a few old corpses, wrecked furniture, and broken weapons. A crude wall painting wraps around the room, showing an ancient procession of unknown purpose.*

Any character who scrutinizes the wall painting finds that it displays an ancient religious procession. A temple shown in the painting lies over the secret door to Area 16. The rubbish contains nothing of interest.

**15. Throne Room.** *A double row of pillars marches down this mighty hall, supporting a ceiling that is fully 20 feet overhead. The walls stretch far to each side. You immediately see an impressive throne across the chamber, flanked by dimly burning torches. A horrible spectral figure rises from the throne and points at you. "Destroy them!" it hisses. From the shadows of the pillars, eight gaunt figures in ancient bronze armor emerge. Their eyes burn with a cold flame as they advance on you.*

The spectral figure is the raag Er'Thork. He was once the high priest of the evil temple, and his belief in his dark gods has sustained him in unlife. Er'Thork is the master of these chambers and passages. If defeated, he will flee through the secret passage to Area 16. The armored figures are juju zombies who will fight to the death. Er'Thork can only be harmed by iron or steel weapons, regardless of enchantment. He can use a death gaze at will; the victim must make a saving throw vs. death or die. His touch permanently drains 1d4 points of Intelligence. A *heal*, *wish*, or *restoration* spell is the only way to restore lost Intelligence. Beings reduced to zero Intelligence are slain and rise as raag-controlled zombies. The throne room is decorated with a number of rotten old banners and faded tapestries. The throne itself is made of ancient carved oak, and is in poor condition. The zombies' armor is in very bad shape, but three of the eight sets are salvageable. In their present condition they are worth 30 sp each.

**Juju Zombies (8):** AL N; AC 4 (bronze plate mail); MV 9; HD 3 + 12; hp 28 each; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 3-12; SD special; ML 20; XP 975.



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**Raaig:** AL LE; AC 0; MV 6; HD 11; hp 64; THAC0 10; #AT 1; Dmg 1-10 plus drain 1-4 Int points; SA death gaze; SD special; ML 17; XP 9,000.

**16. Treasure Cavern.** *This rough chamber carved from the living rock is mostly unfinished. It is full of ancient artifacts—banners, coats of arms, weapons, furniture, and chests and coffers. A set of branching tunnels exit the room.*

If Er'Thork was not killed in Area 15, he will make his last stand here. If the PCs discover this room before they go to 15, Er'Thork will be here with four of his juju zombie guards. The southeast passage winds its way under the ruins for about 200 yards before exiting in a sand-choked cellar. The raiders do not know of this unguarded exit.

Er'Thork's hoard is large, but a lot of it is composed of worthless debris. The ancient furnishings and banners are without value. The following items of interest can be unearthed here: one chest, locked, containing 400 sp and a pouch with five emeralds worth 40 sp each; one chest, locked, containing 800 cp and a steel *short sword* +3; one coffer, locked, containing 20 gp, a *fruit of healing*, a *wand of magic missiles* with 22 charges, a *ring of feather falling*; one weapon case containing a *light crossbow of distance* and 12 steel *quarrels* +2 a *scroll of protection from petrification*; a scroll with *wall of force*, *teleport*, and *cloudkill*; and a bookshelf containing several academic scrolls. One of these is the Psionatrix Acamedicia. The scroll is in an ancient tongue. A *comprehend languages* allows it to be read. If a PC does read the scroll, show him *Excerpts from the Scroll* in the Map Book.

**17. Hidden Cave.** *This is a small chamber of natural rock, fitted with a door of mekillot ribs bound with giant hair. The floor is covered with black sand.*

If any PCs check the floor, they discover a few faint tracks in the sand that lead to the secret door in the west wall of this chamber. There is nothing else of note in this room.

**18. The Priest's Crypt.** *The secret door conceals a chamber of beautifully finished stone. It is bare, with four alcoves containing dark idols of the ancient world. A fifth alcove holds the body of an ancient priest upon a bier of dark stone. The air is still and dank in here. The body is all that is left of Er'Thork's mortal shell.*

Especially observant PCs may note that the body bears a resemblance to the spectral raaig. Anything that happens to the body happens to the raaig as well. Er'Thork cannot bear the sight of his own body and cannot stay within this room for more than one round before fleeing. The body wears a golden pectoral worth 130 sp, and two jeweled bracelets that are actually *bracers of defense* AC 4.

### Escaping the Catacombs

Once the characters have found the Psionatrix Acamedicia, they must escape with the scroll. If they have slain Fevil, they can safely exit through his tower. If they have not slain Fevil, the defiler commands his b'rohng zombies to attack anyone who emerges from the tower stairs, and will have Zeburon set a watch of eight normal warriors at the exit from Area 5 of the catacombs. If the Black Sand Raiders have reason to believe that the PCs are in the vicinity, they will muster a raiding party consisting of 20 kank-mounted raiders. This party will set out to track down and kill the PCs if at all possible. You should use your best judgment in deciding whether or not the raiders know an enemy crept into their camp, or where that enemy might have gone to.

### Pursuit and Evasion

It is likely that the PCs will be leaving a very angry slave tribe behind them when they leave Othand. If the raiders can organize pursuit, they try to track the PCs. The raiders push their mounts to double speed (but not triple speed) for three days as they try to chase down the PCs; after three days, enough kanks are exhausted or lamed that the raiders will



slow to normal speed. If they do not catch the PCs within five days, they give up and return to their camp. There is a 75% percent chance per day that they will be able to follow the PCs' tracks, unless the PCs attempt to cover their trail (then the chance drops to 50%). If the PCs did not survive their adventures within the camp of the Black Sand Raiders, you can have them activate new characters from their trees. Assume that Korgunard has obtained the scroll and has summoned the PCs to Desverendi's valley, where he will tell them what needs to be done next.

### The Homeward Journey

After recovering the scroll, the adventurers must retrace their steps almost all the way to Tyr; refer to *A Desert Journey*. You should apply the same rules and considerations in refereeing the PCs' trek to their meeting with Korgunard. Remember to keep track of time. It should take the characters three or four days to get to the Black Sand camp, one or two days to infiltrate the camp and explore the catacombs, and three or four days to return to Desverendi's valley. Also, continue to monitor their water and rations. If the characters wander about in the Athasian wilderness unprepared, they should have to pay the price. It is highly recommended that you introduce a few random encounters during the homeward journey to keep the PCs on their toes. Use one of the scenarios from Part Eight: *Desert Perils*, or roll up a couple of random encounters from the DARK SUN™. *Monstrous Compendium*. If you feel that the trip is not exciting enough, you can organize a tenacious pursuit party of the Black Sand Raiders to harry the characters.

### The Valley of the Earth Spirit

When the characters reach Desverendi's valley, they will recognize some of the signs of the powerful spirit. The small animals of the desert seem more friendly and often caper about the characters as

they approach the valley. Hidden springs can be found here and there, and the dangerous fauna and flora of the Athasian desert do not seem to be present.

*At last you have reached the valley of the earth spirit. The cool shadows of the trees and the sound of running water soothe your souls after your arduous trek across the deserts. The peace and harmony of the vale have grown since you were last here, and in the protection of the earth spirit you can almost forget the dire need that brought you here.*

*You follow the small stream up to its origin in a cool tarn beneath a mighty bluff of stone. Beside the pool a slender, golden figure sits in meditation. As you approach, he rises and turns to greet you.*

*"Welcome, friends. It is good to see you here," calls Korgunard with a smile.*

Korgunard asks the PCs about their mission and asks after any missing characters. If the PCs are severely injured, Korgunard will offer them 2-5 *fruits of extra healing*, 1-2 *fruits of health*, and 1-2 *fruits of vitality*. He explains the properties of each and does anything else he can to help the PCs. When the avangion feels that the PCs have been adequately tended to after their long journey, he addresses the issue of the scroll. If the PCs were unable to retrieve it, Korgunard will be disappointed, but he will still ask them to go to Urik. Korgunard will be unable to confirm the nature of the interference or its origin, but he still knows it is a psionic enchantment, and that it originates in the Hinterlands. He suspects Hamanu of Urik, and will ask the PCs to go to Urik to spy on Hamanu. If the PCs bring the scroll, read the following to the players:

*"My thanks, friends," says Korgunard as he gravely accepts the scroll. "You may have saved countless lives with your bravery and faithfulness. I must decipher the ancient text and see if the answer to our*



## Out of the Valley

dilemma lies within its pages. I suggest you rest from your journeys; it will take me several hours to get through this." Korgunard sits beside the pool, carefully spreading the scroll across a flat shelf of stone. The avangion is immediately engrossed in the contents, and begins to read silently.

If the PCs were expecting some kind of material reward, Korgunard has arranged for a suitable compensation to be brought here. Any large sum of money will be replaced with a pouch full of gems.

After several hours, Korgunard finishes reading and stands. His noble face is dark with concern. Calling you together, he relates what he has found. "The psionic interference that lies over us is the product of an ancient artifact," he begins. "Only one device was capable of creating a field like this – a mystical gem known as the Psionatrix. It was the perfect blending of psionic and magical power. The Psionatrix was forged by a vanished order of preservers known as the Wind Mages. I do not know what became of them, but I do know that one of their last strongholds was a magical palace in the forests of Dragon's Crown Mountain. Given the fact that the interference swept eastward from the Hinterlands, it stands to reason that the Psionatrix may still be in the palace of Dragon's Crown. The only question is, who is causing this, and why?" The avangion frowns in thought.

Show the PCs the Map Book page entitled *Excerpts from the Scroll*. Allow the players to role-play this council of war with Korgunard. The avangion is a very wise creature who values the opinions of others. He is willing to consider almost any theory. Korgunard brings out the following points:

- The psionic interference not only suppresses psionics, but also blocks access to the powerful realm of psionic enchantments.
- The sorcerer-kings are hunting for him and have already made several attempts to destroy him.







- Korgunard is at a severe disadvantage while the field is in effect, especially against the sorcerer-kings.

After some discussion, Korgunard comes to the conclusion that the field is the handiwork of King Hamanu of Urik. Of the seven cities, Urik is closest to Dragon's Crown and Hamanu is known to have interests in the Forest Ridge and the lands beyond. Hamanu also bears a special personal grudge against Korgunard, since the avangion escaped from Hamanu's clutches with the aid of the PCs. Korgunard decides to go to Dragon's Crown to investigate the palace. He asks the PCs to go to Urik and see if Hamanu is there, and to find out if the sorcerer-king is planning war or is in league with the other sorcerer-kings

*Korgunard sighs and rises, looking out over the desert. "Again, I need your help. I must go to Dragon's Crown to see if I can put an end to this field. But I know in my heart that Hamanu of Urik is involved' in this somehow, and I fear that Tyr may be in grave danger. Will you go to Urik to see what you can learn about Hamanu's plots? The fate of Athas may hang in the balance."*

When the player characters accept the mission, Korgunard tells them to rest a day in Desverendi's valley. He also gives any one single or multi-classed psionicist PC a rock crystal that will partially negate the psionic interference for that character only. The psionicist will only suffer a -4 to his power scores, and psionic costs will be inflated 150%. Korgunard only has one crystal to spare, and explains that he discovered that some rare crystals counteract the psionic suppression. After giving the PCs the crystal, Korgunard disappears in a sparkle of golden light.

### Concluding Part One

This concludes Part One of this adventure. The next section, *Urik by Nightfall*, covers the PCs' journey to the city of Urik and their espionage efforts in Hamanu's realm. At the end of this adventure, the PCs should be rested, recovered, and reprovisioned by the bounty of Desverendi's valley. If the PCs absolutely refuse to accept Korgunard's mission to Urik, he will not force them. However, you will need to get them back on track. You can arrange for an overpowering Urικite force to ambush and capture the PCs. King Hamanu might want to interrogate the characters concerning their involvement with Korgunard and the avangion's role in the disruption of psionics. Since the characters are so close to Tyr, they may want to go check in with Agis of Asticles and let him know what they have learned. If they want to take the extra day to make the stop, let them. It is a good idea to check in, and the short visit to Tyr by the PCs will serve to remind the players of what they are fighting for.



## Part Two: Urik by Nightfall

Urik, the realm of Hamanu, the city of black stone, waits to the northeast of Tyr, coiled like some terrible beast ready to pounce on the rest of the region with sudden swiftness. This beast is a beast of war, digging its many sharp obsidian claws through the flowing, endless sand. Few dare to challenge this great beast of a city or its sorcerer-king master, the mighty Hamanu. Fewer still willingly enter Hamanu's massive fortress palace, Destiny's Kingdom. In this portion of the adventure, the player characters must do both.

*Urik by Nightfall* requires extreme bravery, extreme patience, and extreme nerve on the parts of the PCs. In a very real sense, they will literally be walking into a dragon's lair—a very powerful, very dangerous dragon who calls himself Hamanu, King of the World. What they find in this lair, and what finds them, will determine the course of the rest of *Dragon's Crown*.

### Previous Events

In Part One, the PCs discovered a terrible threat to all of Athas—the Psionatrix field. At the urging of Agis of Asticles and the avangion Korgunard, the PCs agreed to help investigate the cause of the psionic dampening field. In particular, Korgunard asked them to recover a scroll from the Black Sand ruins.

This was not as easy as it sounded, for the PCs had to find this infamous patch of desert and then get past the slave tribe living there—the equally infamous Black Sand Raiders. Finally, the PCs had to descend into the ruins below the defiler Fevil's tower, get past a deadly assortment of undead creatures, and find the Psionatrix Acamedicia scroll among the items in Er'Thork the raaig's hoard.

Upon recovering the scroll, the PCs made their way to the valley of the earth spirit Desverendi to rendezvous with Korgunard. While the avangion studied the scroll, the PCs used the gifts of the peaceful valley to heal their wounds and recuperate.

After a time, Korgunard explained his findings, telling the PCs all about the ancient artifact capable of producing such psionic interference—the mystic gem known as the Psionatrix. They learned that the gem was created by a vanished order of preservers called the Wind Mages, and that one of their last strongholds was a magical palace in the forests of Dragon's Crown Mountain.

Korgunard passed on his conclusions to the PCs. It was the avangion's opinion that King Hamanu of Urik was responsible for the gem's awakening. While Korgunard seeks answers in Dragon's Crown, he asks the PCs to find out what Hamanu is plotting. This, of course, requires that they return to the city of Urik in order to accomplish their espionage mission. Before he departed for his own task, Korgunard gave one PC psionacist a rock crystal to partially negate the effects of the psionic interference (for that character only). See the end of Part One for details on the rock crystal.

### Overview

In Part Two, the player characters must travel to Urik to discover the extent of King Hamanu's involvement in the current threat to Athas. *The Journey to Urik* takes the PCs through a number of obstacles, including a crystal spider driven insane by the psionic interference, spider cacti hoping for a meal, a terrible scene of battle that leaves the PCs disturbed, and an unrelenting sand storm that buffets them with stinging sand and hot wind. Even the refuge they discover is dangerous, for instead of peaceful sleep, the PCs are treated to foul nightmares courtesy of the psionacist Arvego.

When the player characters finally reach *The City of Urik*, they must do their best not to become entangled with the templars or other city hazards as they search for a way into Hamanu's palace. They must deal with a shadowy figure who follows them through the crowded streets, sift through the rumors currently making the rounds, and they must find



help—or wait for it to find them—in the form of the Veiled Alliance. As the Alliance helps them plan an excursion into the palace, the PCs learn that a terrible killer is stalking Urik's streets—and so far, the city templars and guards have been unable to stop it. Unfortunately, the Alliance's secret way into the palace takes the PCs through the disused sewer the killer is using as a lair. To get into the palace, they must defeat a dark tanar'ri that was accidentally brought to Athas by an overeager (and now dead) defiler.

Destiny's Kingdom, the vast fortress-palace of King Hamanu, waits at the end of the disused sewer. The PCs, following the Alliance's directions, must make their way through an abandoned cellar, up a secret staircase to an abandoned wing, and down another secret staircase to Hamanu's guest area and favorite council chamber. Of course, they must get past all of the hazards that fill these areas and then find a way to snoop on Hamanu's meeting. No matter how well they do, at some point the PCs are discovered, captured, and brought before Hamanu.

Hamanu, who fancies himself a king of action and a powerful warlord, has little regard for common spies. He will turn a deaf ear to anything the PCs have to say—even about the psionic interference and Korgunard. The only way he will grant them an audience to air their claims is if they prove themselves worthy of such an audience. *The Arena* and *Death Ball* are Hamanu's tests. If the PCs survive these encounters, then Hamanu will provide them with a chance to tell their story. If this goes well, the PCs get to participate in a magical conference of power between Hamanu and Korgunard in which all sides discuss what they know, and future plans are drawn up.

## The Adventure Begins

The player characters begin *Urik by Nightfall* after spending some time resting and recuperating in Desverendi's hidden valley. The PCs have gathered supplies and prepared themselves for the journey ahead. The earth spirit has even called riding kanks to the valley in order to replace any mounts the PCs lost in their previous adventures. Now all they have to do is decide which route to take. If they want to go to Tyr first, to inform Agis of Asticles what has occurred, then they may want to take the road (provided, of course, they have no qualms about once more passing by Silver Spring). The road trip, including a stop at Tyr, should take about five days. If they want to strike out across the wastes, the trip should take about 10 days. Whichever path they decide to take, the encounters listed below can be used with a minimum of alteration. Note that they are currently written as if the PCs are traveling cross-country and not by the roads.

When everyone is ready and a course to Urik has been chosen, begin the adventure by reading the following text.

*You pause at the entrance to Desverendi's hidden valley, taking a moment for one last look at the beautiful, peaceful setting. You remember Korgunard's parting words to you, uttered with conviction and more than a little weariness. The avangion believed that the psionic interference was coming from a magical palace in the forests of Dragon's Crown Mountain. Further, because of past dealings with the sorcerer-king and the proximity of Urik to Dragon's Crown, Korgunard came to the conclusion that King Hamanu was responsible for the interference currently in place across the land.*

After you agreed to go to Urik to discover the extent of Hamanu's plots against Tyr and the rest of the region, Korgunard gave one of you a rock crystal to stave off the effects of the psionic interference.



## Urik by Nightfall

Then, after explaining that he was going to Dragon's Crown to try to turn off the inhibiting field, he wished you well on your mission and disappeared in a sparkle of light.

Now the desert wastes beyond Desverendi's valley beckon to you. The wastes, the badlands, and the stoney plains are the first obstacles to your mission, a mission that does not really begin until you reach the gates of Urik. With a last deep breath of the cool living smells of the valley, you urge your mounts forward toward the heat and the sand. A final breeze follows you out of the valley, bringing Desverendi's whispered farewell and good luck to your ears.

The journey to Urik is never easy, even if the roads are employed. Moving across the uninhabited, unforgiving dunes of the Great Alluvial Sand Wastes is far more difficult. If all goes well, the supplies the PCs gathered in the hidden valley should last their entire trip. If they are delayed or another disaster befalls them, they may find it necessary to resupply somewhere along the line.

The roads have their own dangers, besides those encounters that follow. Among these is the very real threat that the Black Sand Raiders could try to get revenge for all the trouble the PCs have caused them.

If the PCs decide to forego the roads, they must head northeast across labyrinths of rocky canyons, stretches of rocky plains, and finally over the endless desert itself to reach Urik.

On the way to Urik, the PCs pick up a shadow. Arvego, a psionicist loyal to the Order, has been assigned to keep an eye on them and hamper their efforts. During this portion of the adventure, Arvego encounters the PCs twice, in addition to any evidence they see of him tailing them. At this stage of Dragon's Crown, Arvego is meant only to cause trouble, so the DM should take great care that he is not killed or captured. The final encounter with Arvego takes place in a later part of Dragon's Crown.

## The Journey to Urik

This portion of the adventure is divided into three sets of encounters: *The Rocky Badlands*; *The Stony Plains*, and *The Desert*. If the PCs are moving along the road, descriptions will have to be altered slightly, but all encounters can be used. Additionally, this is a good place to drop an encounter or two from the *Desert Perils* section (in Book Three). You can also make normal wilderness random encounter checks. Check three times per day with a base chance of 10% of or an encounter. Refer to the random encounter charts in the DARK SUN™ *Rules Book* or *Monstrous Compendium* for results.

### The Rocky Badlands

Heading northeast from Desverendi's valley takes you into a vast network of canyons, gorges, and chasms carved out of the hard, sun-baked sand rock of Athas. You can find some respite from the harsh glare or the fiery sun in the shade of these canyons. An occasional rockfall echoes through the gorges from time to time, as do strange and fearsome roars of unknown creatures.

The rocky badlands make up the first part of the PCs' trek to Urik. They can follow the constantly twisting canyons in a generally northeastern direction, though they will sometimes be forced to go out of their way in order to find a better path. Water is reasonably plentiful in this area, as small oases can be found with little difficulty. Food is a little harder to come by, but small lizards and harmless albino snakes can be found among the crags and recesses of the tall, crumbling cliffs. A few clusters of dem bushes are scattered about. While these plants do not taste particularly good, they do provide nourishment. Sharp leaf bushes grow more plentiful, but provide as much hazard as nourishment. The serrated leaves are not easily digested, and they slice up the insides of whatever eats them. The PCs must take great care to keep their riding beasts from graz-



ing upon these hazardous bushes.

If the party sticks to the roads, it can still hear the calls of unseen beasts, but the other hazards and benefits of the badlands do not follow them. They must still deal with the crystal spider, however.

## The Purple Gorge

After traveling through the badlands for a time, the PCs enter a strange gorge. All the plant life in this gorge, from clusters of grass and brush to short, stunted trees, is colored the deepest purple. If the PCs actively search the gorge, they discover a few small animals half buried beneath new growth. These dead animals have purple stains on their mouths. If any of the plants are ingested by the PCs or riding animals, they taste like a delicious dry wine. However, the color and taste hide a deadly secret.

Anyone who eats the purple plants must make a saving throw vs. poison at -2. A successful save results in the character or animal taking 1d4 points of damage; its lips and teeth are dyed purple. The strange coloration wears off in 1d8 days. A failed save causes 4d10 points of damage. If an animal or character survives a failed saving throw and the resulting damage, the victim becomes intoxicated for 1d4 days unless a *neutralize poison* spell is cast or a PC with the herbalism proficiency can make them sober.

Intoxicated characters become reckless and silly and should be role-played accordingly. Intoxicated mounts behave irrationally, attempting to throw their riders and run away. If an intoxicated mount gets loose, it charges into the maze of canyons and is never seen again.

## The Crystal Spider

When the player characters enter a narrow canyon of steep cliffs and deep shadows, they spot something glinting in the sun. Whatever it is, sunlight dances upon it with wild abandon, alerting the PCs to its presence even from a distance. It appears to be

something shiny, perhaps a rare bit of metal or a priceless gem. As the party moves closer, the area falls into shadow and the object ceases to shine.

In truth, the sunlight was reflecting off a piece of the glass web of a crystal spider. Unless they are taking extreme precautions, the PCs should not discover this until they walk into it. As they approach the location of the web, the PCs must make surprise rolls to spot the glass web. Any characters who fail the roll walk into the sharp edges of the web, taking 4d6 points of cutting damage. Those cut by the web are considered caught in its sharp embrace. Each character must make a Dexterity roll to pull out safely. Failure means an additional 3d6 points of cutting damage pulling free.

If the PCs are on the road, the web is spun between boulders in the stony barrens alongside the road. The glint disappears as the angle of the sun changes and the PCs get closer to the location.

The crystal spider, like other insect creatures, is not hindered by the psionic field. It is, however, going insane. It attacks when the characters stumble into the web, rushing out of hiding to strike at someone caught in the strands of sharp glass. The building insanity gives this berserk crystal spider a few advantages over others of its kind. The insanity manifests as savage attacks, giving this creature a +2 bonus to hit while giving its armor class a -1 penalty (these have already been worked into the statistics provided below).

The crystal spider fights to the death, for the insanity that builds within its semi-intelligent mind makes it fearless and very angry. It seeks to vent its abnormal rage on the first creatures to wander into its web—in this case, the PCs. It starts by directing a light attack at one of the PCs in the web. An attack roll is necessary, but the spider gets a +4 bonus to this roll (THAC0 13). A character hit by this beam of light takes 3d6 points of heat damage and must save vs. wands or be blinded. When engaging in melee, the spider employs a poisonous bite (1d4 damage). Bitten characters must save vs. poi-



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son at a -2 penalty or suffer the effects of type E poison (save vs. poison or die, save equals 20 points of damage). For additional information on crystal spiders, see the DARK SUN™ Monstrous Compendium.

**Crystal Spider:** AL N; AC 3; MV 24; HD 4; hp 22; THAC0 15; #AT 3; Dmg 2-8/2-8/ 1-4; SA poison, grab, light beam; SD psionics; SZ L (8' body); ML 14; XP 1,400.

**Psionic Summary:** PSPs 33; score 16; psychokinesis devotions: control light, inertial barrier.

### The Stony Barrens

*After several days of travel, the rocky badlands give way to an arid, barren plain of broken stones. The yellow plains are littered with sun-baked boulders and cracked rocks, making travel difficult and unsteady. There is no hiding from the sun during this stretch of the journey, no bit of shade in which to take refuge.*

The PCs must travel across this inhospitable terrain to reach the open desert. Whether on the roads or trekking across the wastes, they must pass through at least one region of stony barrens. Water is scarce and what few oases exist in these areas are nearly dry. There is a 5% chance each day that a riding animal will go lame while traveling across the littered, cracked, and pothole-covered ground. Only mekillots are immune to this hazard.

Vegetation is scarce in this type of terrain, made up mostly of thorny cacti. While all cacti retain certain amounts of water, a few are poisonous. Each time a cactus is sampled, there is a base 20% chance that the plant is tainted with Type A poison.

During the day, very little animal life is in evidence. The one major exception to this are the ants. Ants abound in the stony barrens. These mostly harmless yet annoying insects thrive in the barrens. Food supplies targeted by these industrious creatures are in grave danger. Unless detected and dealt with, ants that find their way into food stores can consume a day's rations in 15 minutes.

### Spider Cactus Trap

At some point in their travels through the stony barrens, the PCs encounter a great cluster of growing cacti. These cacti are large, growing as tall as a tall man. They cluster around a tiny oasis, forming an idyllic scene in this otherwise barren setting.

Looks can be deceiving, however, for these harmless looking cacti are spider cacti, and the whole scene is nothing more than a deadly trap. When a party member or riding animal moves to the edge of the small pool, the spider cacti attack. They shoot barbed needles, attempting to hook their prey.

Of the cacti growing around the oasis pool, five are spider cacti. Each spider cactus bears 5-8 (1d4+4) sets of barbed, purple projectile needles, and 3-18 (3d6) larger green feeding needles. Each set of barbed needles consists of eight purple needles. These are targeted at one victim at a time. The projectile needles are attached to the spider cactus with powerful strands. It takes three rounds to pull back strands that miss their targets, and a full day is needed before the projectile can fire again.



The spider cacti each fire a single volley of purple projectile needles at their intended targets at the start of this encounter. A normal attack roll is required for each needle. Every needle that hits causes one point of damage. The target must make a save vs. poison at +2 or become paralyzed. The paralysis sets in in 2d4 rounds.

Those hit by the barbed needles are pulled toward the cactus at a rate of five feet per round. The cactus attempts to drag its victims onto its green feeding needles in order to make a meal. A character impaled on a green needle takes 2d4 plus his AC in damage until he is drained of liquid (dies) or breaks free.

Characters hit by barbs can attempt to break free only if they have Strength scores greater than 17. Even then, success is not guaranteed. One round must be spent doing nothing but making the break attempt. A successful open doors roll pulls a needle out, and a successful bend bars roll breaks a strand. Strands can also be cut. They are AC 5 and it takes 5 points of damage to cut each strand. The barbs cause an additional 1d4 points of damage when they are pulled free.

The spider cacti of this oasis are very competitive. Those that target the same victim pull their prey in different directions until one of the cacti wins the contest. The cactus with the most needles in the victim will eventually win, but not until a tug of war has been fought. The losing cacti have their barbed needles ripped out of the victim as the winner draws the prey closer—each rip inflicting another 1d4 points of damage in the victim.

For additional information on the spider cactus, see the DARK SUN™ *Monstrous Compendium*.

**Spider Cactus (5):** AL N; AC 7; MV 0; HD 3; hp 7,8, 15, 16, 18; THAC0 17; #AT 8; Dmg 1—(see above); SA needles cause paralysis; SZ M (6-7' tall); ML 7; XP 270.

## The Shadow

While traveling across the stony barrens, the PCs get a chance to notice the figure following a good distance behind them. Have all PCs make a Wisdom check at a -2 penalty. Read the following text to those who succeed.

*For the last several hours you have been feeling uncomfortable. Now, as you travel over the cracked yellow ground, the nameless dread evolves into the distinct impression that you are being watched. You scan the horizon in all directions, trying to find the cause of your discomfort in the shimmering haze. Then, when you are about to dismiss the feeling as a result of the heat and your own imagination, you see a figure standing at the edge of your vision. It waits, standing quite still under the sun, as though studying you. Then, without warning, it disappears behind the horizon, back in the direction toward Tyr.*

The figure trailing behind the PCs is Arvego, the psionicist the Order has sent to watch the PCs and hamper their efforts. This brief glimpse of Arvego, who appears as no more than a shadow on the horizon, is meant as a warning that the PCs are not operating in a vacuum, and as a simple tactic to put them on their guard and make them a bit fearful. No matter how long they wait or what kind of ambush they set up, Arvego remains at a distance. In fact, until the nightmare incident occurs, he will not make another appearance.

## The Lone Figure

After the PCs have had a chance to notice the psionicist following them, they spot another figure on the horizon. This one, however, is ahead of them, silhouetted against the darkening sky. Unlike the previous figure, this one does not disappear from view as they get closer. In fact, the figure stands stock still, as though it waits patiently for the party to reach it. No matter what the PCs do, they cannot



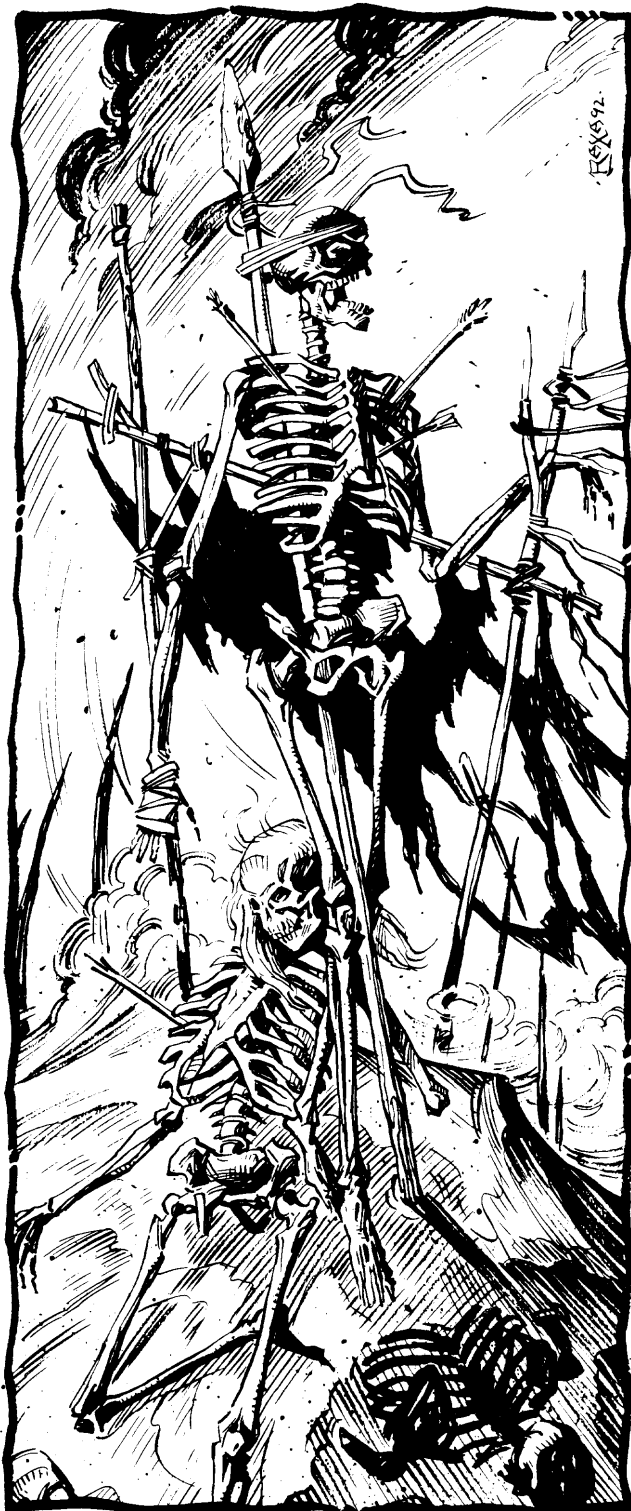
## Urik by Nightfall

get any response from the figure. It simply waits in place, obviously watching them as they draw closer and closer. If they continue to approach, they eventually get close enough to see the following.

*The lone figure who has been waiting for you appears to have been waiting for a very long time. The skeletal form stands propped upon a long spear shaft, its feet buried in the shifting sands and its tattered clothing billow as the hot wind washes over its bleached bones. As you get closer, you see that the skeleton is not alone. Another skeletal form clutches at its half-buried legs, itself partially covered by sand and broken rock. An arrow juts from this skeleton's side, and other evidence of battle mars this somber setting. You spot broken weapons jutting from the sand, and other skeletal bodies—some only seen as limbs—are captured in the drifting sand like some horrible piece of art.*

This scene of savage battle stands as a stark reminder of the danger of Athas's deserts, even though the conflict took place long ago. On closer inspection, the skeletal figure propped on its spear is the mortal remains of a male elf. The figure at his feet is also an elf, though the shape of the skeleton identifies it as a female. Both elves wear matching elven wedding rings. The dozens of skeletal remains around them are bandits of various races, identified by their manner of dress and the way they encircle the elves.

Whatever occurred here happened a long time ago. The PCs may either pass by this sad historic scene or investigate further. What they can discern is that the elven couple was attacked by bandits as they were traveling the barrens. Wounded and near death, the elves nevertheless gave as good as they received, taking a number of the bandits with them. Before the battle could reach its natural conclusion, a sudden disaster befell the area—a sudden sand storm that buried both victims and assailants, though the exact circumstances will probably never be known. Only the recent winds







that have been blowing through the area swept away enough sand to reveal this brief and violent look into Athas's past.

The bandits' weapons and decaying armor are useless. However, one of the elves possesses an item the PCs may want to recover. The male holds a magical spear from Athas's ancient days. The weapon is in need of a good cleaning, but is in otherwise perfect shape.

The long spear is an ancient, two-handed *long spear* +2. The spear can inflict 2d8+2 damage on medium-sized opponents, and 3d6+2 damage on large creatures.

The rings the elves wear are weathered, but a quick polish will reveal the beautiful gold of their manufacture. These ancient elven wedding rings are considered priceless to the families of the pair. Upon the conclusion of the wedding ceremony, the rings establish a constant telepathic link between husband and wife, similar to the Telepathic science, mindlink, as described in *The Complete Psionics Handbook*. In a bazaar, the rings can be sold for as much as 300 sp each.

### The Nightmare Man

At the end of another day of arduous travel, the PCs make camp in the shade of a small sand dune. Everyone is weary, hungry, and thirsty after the long day of travel, and all seek some respite from the heat. Even as the horizon engulfs the blazing sun, the waves of heat continue to batter the tired PCs. All hope to find comfort in the darkness, and perhaps the peace of a good night's sleep. On a night when the sky is clear and the stars shine overhead, travelers want nothing better than a filling meal, a thirst quenching drink, and a good dream to sleep by. For one character, however, sleep provides no refuge from the dangers of Athas. In fact, sleep reveals its own dangers to the chosen character. Select one of the PCs and read the following text to him after he has settled in for the night.

*You awaken from your restless slumber with a start. The night has not yet ended, and silence covers the land. Your companions are in their bedrolls, still deep in their own fitful rests. Even the current watch has succumbed to sleep, still sitting in his place with weapon in hand and eyes firmly shut. The desert beyond your camp is also still—no night sounds disturb the silence. Tonight, it appears the land has become a quiet, desolate place, devoid of life and noise. Only one person remains awake to witness this unnatural silence—only you.*

*After a few moments, something in the distance demands your attention. Perhaps this is what woke you, and you force your sleep heavy mind to focus on the night. On the horizon, perhaps the only other wakeful person in this sleeping world, stands a solitary figure. He stands beyond the dying fires of your camp, his dark frame silhouetted against the midnight hues of the starry sky. He looks at you across the hundred feet of sand that separate your camp and his dune. Atop that pile of sand, he looks like a hunter preparing to make a kill.*

*Glowing darkness surrounds the figure, sending waves of malevolence in your direction. You can make out no details or features, but you can see the figure's eyes. Like roaring pits of crimson flame, they burn across the distance to glare at you with evil intent. He is watching you, leering down upon you like an evil spirit.*

*Then, before you can push away the sleep and the fear enough to react, the figure is moving. It moves like no living thing should move, screaming like some tormented banshee across the desert sands. He moves, cutting through the night air toward your camp. He howls in evil delight as he charges toward you!*

This encounter is a nightmare twisted by Arvego's powers, but it should appear very real to the character experiencing it. Arvego uses this dream to give the PCs a sample of what he has in store for them if they continue in their quest to destroy the



## Urik by Nightfall

Psionatrix field. The psionist intends to kill his chosen target's dream form. The PC may "wake" his companions if he chooses, bringing them into the dream. Arvego has no objections to such an action—he enjoys spreading fear!

To heighten the terror in the dream of his chosen victim, Arvego uses his aging and ego whip psionic powers to traumatize the PC. Remember that this is a dream (actually, a nightmare), and all physical effects will disappear when the victim awakens. Psionic effects remain in force even when the dream ends unless the victim makes a successful Wisdom check at -2.

The nightmare battle continues until either the dreaming character or Arvego's dream form is slain. During the battle, Arvego uses his ranged psionic abilities to discomfort and annoy the characters. His aim is not to kill the companions, but to waste their energy and lower their morale. He intends to cause them grief and hardship as he carries out his mission for the Order. He will use disintegrate as much as possible on the group's equipment, especially any waterskins that are visible.

**DM's Note:** Even the thri-kreen will be rendered dormant by Arvego's dream.

No matter how the nightmare battle ends, the PC awakens in a cold sweat, though any physical wounds his dream form may have suffered do not follow him out of sleep. All other members of the party remain asleep, and the night appears as clear and peaceful as when the character drifted to sleep. As he recovers from the experience, the PC sees a startling sight—Arvego the psionist stands on a dune about one hundred feet from the camp, watching patiently and with undisguised malice. Then Arvego disappears in the blink of an eye, fading away like the last vestiges of a dark dream. But the night air carries a malicious laugh down to the camp, reawakening the fear of the nightmare battle.

### Arvego

Male Human Psionist

25th Level

Neutral Evil

Str 11 Int 18

Dex 15 Wis 19

Con 17 Cha 15

hp: 83

AC: 3 (equipment -Dexterity)

MV: 12

#AT: 1

THAC0: 11 (8)

**Damage/Attack:** 1d6+3/1d8+3 (steel short sword +3) or 1d4+2/1d4+2 (steel quarrels +2) or 1d4/1d4 (steel quarrels) or 1d4-1/1d3-1 (bone dagger).

**Psionic Summary:** PSPs 369

**Primary Disciplines:** See below

**Clairsentience— Sciences:** clairvoyance, precognition;

**Devotions:** danger sense, know direction, poison sense, see sound

**Metapsionics— Sciences:** empower, psychic surgery, ultrablast;

**Devotions:** enhancement, gird, magnify, martial trance, prolong, splice

**Psychokinesis— Sciences:** disintegrate, telekinesis;

**Devotions:** control body, create sound, levitation, molecular agitation, soften

**Psychometabolism— Sciences:** complete healing, ectoplasmic form, energy containment, shadow-form;

**Devotions:** aging, body control, catfall, cause decay, cell adjustment, displacement

**Psychoportation— Sciences:** teleport;

**Devotions:** dimension door, dimension walk, teleport trigger

**Telepathy— Sciences:** domination, ejection, mindlink, mindwipe, probe, psychic crush, superior invisibility;

**Devotions:** attraction, contact, ego whip, ESP, id insinuation, identity penetration, invisibility, mind





thrust, post-hypnotic suggestion, psionic blast, sight link, sound link.

**Defense Modes:** intellect fortress, mental barrier, mind blank, thought shield, tower of iron will.

**Equipment:** *Studded leather armor +2, ring of protection +3, cloak of displacement, steel short sword +3, light crossbow, 12 steel quarrels +2, 12 steel quarrels, bone dagger, fruit of flying, fruit of extra healing, boots of speed*

Arvego is a tall, lanky man in his mid 50s. He is in superior physical condition. A quiet man who likes to keep to himself, Arvego was selfish and uncaring. He used his great mental powers for his own gain and gratification. Then the Order contacted him. He grudgingly agreed to follow their agenda, and has since become a faithful member of the Order. Still, he watches for any opportunity to circumvent the Order's restrictions that govern his behavior.

In combat, Arvego usually attempts to dominate or ego whip his opponents from a safe distance. He detests physical combat. If the opportunity presents itself, he attempts to find or control allies to keep enemy warriors engaged. If Arvego finds himself in direct melee, he will do his best to retreat to a ranged distance before resuming his own attacks.

Arvego is one of the chief lieutenants of Pharistes, who is a Cerebral Master of Telepathy in the Order. Pharistes knows that Arvego is hungry for more power and for more freedom to pursue his own goals. The Cerebral Master uses Arvego's natural tendencies to disagree with the Order to further his own extensive plans. Arvego, on the other hand, hopes to one day rise to the rank of Cerebral Master himself, though he is intelligent and patient enough to realize he must become stronger before making such a play for power.

## The Sandy Wastes

*After many days of travel, you finally enter the last stretch of the Great Alluvial Sand Wastes that leads to Urik's massive gates. The arid barrens give way to a sea of sand—shifting dunes spread across the horizon in irregular patterns. The wind and the sun combine forces to slow your progress, but you know the end of your journey is just over horizon.*

The last leg of the journey could be the most dangerous, depending on how well the PCs' supplies have held out. Vegetation in the sandy wastes is almost nonexistent except around the rare oases. Water is in equally short supply. Even if the PCs find an oasis, chances are that it is already occupied by other travelers, bandits, tribes, or assorted creatures.

The hot, harsh winds blast sand across exposed skin. Every character suffers 1 point of damage each day he or she is exposed to these conditions. When night falls, deep darkness covers the land, temperatures drop, and strange sounds echo out of the dark.

## Sandstorm!

While traveling across the dunes, characters with the Weather Sense nonweapon proficiency should make four checks as the day progresses. Characters who succeed at least three times realize that a sandstorm is coming in time for the PCs to find shelter.

Characters who succeed only two of the checks know that a sandstorm is imminent, but must endure the storm as best they can with minimum preparations. In this case, they can simply stay where they are or try to keep moving. Moving through a sand storm, even when prepared, is a tricky proposition. The lead character must reduce the party's movement to one-quarter speed or risk getting lost. A Wisdom check must be made with a -5 penalty. Success means the party stays on course. Failure indicates they get lost. How badly the check fails de-



## Urik by Nightfall

termines the number of days that must be added to the PCs' trek. For example, if Vaerhirmana leads the way through the sandstorm with her Wisdom of 12 and rolls an 8, the party adds one day to its trek  $8+5-12 = 1$ ). Characters with the Direction Sense proficiency or know direction psionic talent suffer no penalties to their checks.

Characters who succeed at only one check or less are caught by surprise when the sandstorm hits. In addition to possibly getting lost, the party also suffers the effects listed on the table below (DM rolls 1d100).

### 1d100

Roll	Effect
01-40	Party manages to ride out the storm. Apart from exhaustion and possibly getting lost, no other effects.
41-65	Party loses two pieces of equipment.
66-80	Party loses two pieces of equipment plus 80% of its water.
81-95	Every character and riding animal takes 2d6 damage and items are lost on a roll of 1-3 on 1d6.
96-00	Every character and riding animal takes 4d6 damage and items are lost on a roll of 1-3 on 1d4. Every creature has a 4% chance of being buried alive.

### The Desert Refuge

*After surviving the rigors of the desert, you crest a dune and see a welcome sight—a small oasis settlement. Tents and sandstone huts huddle together around a tiny pond, and vague snatches of conversation drift toward you. After the sandstorm and the other hazards you have endured since leaving Desverendi's valley, this settlement can only be a miracle.*

*As you approach the settlement through herds of kanks and crodlu, you see faces peeking out of tents. None of the settlers make any hostile actions, but*

*you can feel their eyes watching your progress. No one emerges to greet you, though a few mumble to each other and point at you. Just when you are about to lose patience with these people, an old man approaches you. He wears a cloth eye patch over his left eye and walks with a pronounced limp.*

*"Welcome," he says gruffly and with a hint of frustration. "You may use that small tent for the night. We have little food to offer, but you may draw water from the oasis. Watch out for desert predators. They become active at night." With that, he limps back to his own tent and leaves you alone.*

This settlement is home to a community of 78 herders. They use the area surrounding the oasis to raise kanks and crodlu. They have few personal belongings and are very poor. They grudgingly allow the PCs to use a small tent near the water's edge, but they will not part with any food. The herders do not like strangers, because strangers bring trouble.

As the PCs settle down, the herders prepare their evening meal and gather at the meeting place to talk (see the map in the Map Book). After a while, a herder approaches the PCs. He introduces himself as Rakimra, sits down with a bottle of cheap, bitter wine, and starts a conversation.

Rakimra asks the party where they are headed and listens patiently for their answers. He knows little except for the usual tales of the desert, but he will gladly make up answers to any questions the PCs may have. He knows nothing of the PCs or their quest. He is simply being friendly and taking an opportunity to talk to someone new. After Rakimra departs and the settlement retires for the night, read the following to one of the PCs.

*A strange sound startles you, bringing you out of a deep sleep. You force yourself to wake up as sounds of movement greet you from outside the tent. As you listen, a cry breaks the stillness of the night. Before you can untangle yourself from your bedroll, Rakimra stumbles through the tent flap and falls to*



the ground. His throat has been torn open and death has claimed him. Outside, a terrible howl rises into the air, sending a chill up your spine. Something evil waits outside.

As the PC wakes his companions or prepares to take another action, six herders tear through the tent walls and attack. All of the herders are dressed for sleep and carry cruel looking barbed daggers carved from bone. They scream continuously, their features twisted in grimaces of pain. They attack with little regard for their own lives, slashing at those who fight back, those who try to calm them, and even those still sleeping.

**Herders:** AL N; AC 10; MV 12; HD 2; hp 10 each; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 -1; SZ M; ML 9; XP 35 each.

If the PCs decide to exit their tent, they see more herders emerging from their homes with pained expressions. Across the oasis stands the nightmare man the PCs fought in their dreams—Arvego. He has dominated the minds of the herders and is using them to harass the party. Any PCs who emerge from their tent will also be subjected to Arvego's other powers. He spends as many rounds as he feels confident attacking the PCs with ranged attacks, then teleports away. The herders will continue to fight and chase the PCs until the domination breaks.

When Arvego gets the chance to engage a PC in long range combat, he uses id insinuation to force him out of his mind. Then he employs ego whip to batter down the self-confidence of any warriors rushing toward him. Another favorite tactic is to use attraction to make one of the PCs become obsessed with the oasis. If successful, the PC wanders into the pond and begins to drown.

Arvego has instructions from the Order not to kill any of the PCs at this time. He is using the herders to cause them another restless night. In this way, he

hopes to reduce their chances of being an effective threat to him or the Order. Once he teleports away, the PCs will not see him again until after Part Two has ended.

The PCs should quickly come to the conclusion that fighting all of the herders is futile. Not only are they obviously not in their right minds, but their vast numbers could inflict significant damage upon the party. The herders will not relent until the PCs have fled. When the sun rises, they awaken from their mental slavery, oblivious to the night's events.

### The City of Urik

The party finally arrives in Urik, where they must devise a way to spy on the sorcerer-king Hamanu. When they reach the gate, read the following.

*Once again, you approach the dark walls of Urik. Behind the walls, reaching high into the sky, is the huge fortress-palace of King Hamanu, Destiny's Kingdom. You recall other times in this city as you join the throng of people waiting to pass through the city gates.*

*All of the races of Athas can be found among the milling crowds. You find a place in line, nestled between a human family and a rich merchant caravan. As you wait, the hot sun beats down upon you, and the stench of the crowd threatens to overpower your senses. "Welcome to Urik," someone mutters from the crowd, "wait in line for your chance to break one of Hamanu's million laws."*

The PCs may try to find the source of the angry comment, but the mutterer is swallowed up by the mass of people. What they do see are all kinds of people—rich and poor, free and slave—waiting for a chance to enter Urik's massive gates. While the PCs stand in line, a party of halfling warriors brushes past and walks straight for the gate. These small fighters are obviously from a distant Forest Ridge tribe, for they wear crude hides, carry cruel weap-



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ons, and are tattooed from head to foot. As they pass by, one of the halflings sniffs at one of the PCs and makes a rude sound. Then he and his fellows are allowed to pass through the gate—ahead of everyone who has been patiently waiting.

If the PCs start to complain or otherwise make a fuss, the merchant leans forward and warns, “Those are members of King Hamanu’s halfling company. They can go where they please, and complaining about it will only get you noticed by the templars.” To emphasize his point, the merchant directs the party’s attention to the templars standing on the walls.

When the PCs finally reach the gate, it is close to dusk. The family ahead of them, which consists of a husband and wife and four young children, is stopped by a bored guard. “Five pieces of ceramic each to enter the wonderful city of Hamanu, King of the World,” the guard informs them, repeating the oft used phrase for the hundredth time that day. “So much,” the weary husband responds. “We do not have enough.” The uncaring guard turns them away with a violent shove.

If the PCs decide to help out the family by paying the entry tax, the husband and wife smile gratefully and dart into the city with their young children in tow. Then it is the PCs’ turn. Not only does the guard demand 5 cp per character and 1 cp per mount, he also asks why they have come to splendid Urik. If they pay and offer any plausible reason for visiting Urik, the guard lets them enter. If they start trouble, more than enough guards and templars arrive to drive them off or capture them for the slave pits.

## Inside the City

*You pass through the gates into the city. Life teems in the streets—peddlers sell their wares, merchants haggle with passersby, beggars hold out nearly empty bowls, and people of all descriptions walk back and forth. Smells assault you with wonderful aromas and terrible scents—rich spices, sweet per-*

*fumes, the sweat of different races, mouth watering fruits, and rotting vegetables. Besides the normal crush of people, guards and templars are everywhere. Templars can easily be spotted, for they are the only people wearing pure, white cloaks. Indeed, they are the only people wearing any kind of cloaks, for that is the law in Urik.*

Once inside the city, the characters will probably want to eat and drink, replenish their supplies, and perhaps even rest and bathe before seeking a way to carry out their mission. As they walk through the narrow corridors of stalls, they overhear the current news and rumors circulating through the market. DMs should feel free to add more rumors to tailor the scene to their current campaign. Additionally, different people will relate the same bit of news in different ways—often twisting, adding, and omitting important facts as it makes the rounds. These rumors are as follows.

- A killer stalks the streets of Urik, and it struck again last night. A woman was found dead this morning, half eaten, her face etched with an expression of pure terror. There have been six reported deaths so far that have been attributed to the nighttime killer.
- King Hamanu’s most trusted generals all arrived in the city yesterday. War must be imminent.
- Hamanu’s arch defiler, Rankir, was found dead in his tower days ago (about the time the interference field swept across the land), and the streets are still alive with speculation about what killed him. Some believe it was the killer now stalking the nighttime streets, for Rankir’s death seems to have started the rash of murders that have occurred since. Others believe Hamanu himself killed the widely-feared defiler for some minor trespass.
- Even the templars are powerless to stop the nighttime killer. News of a special team of templars assigned to track down the murderer was met with cheers, but the team has mysteriously disappeared.
- No plans have been made to cancel the upcoming



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ing holiday, Hamanu's Day of Battle. A special slate of arena games will be held, including a death ball match for the still undefeated Bloody Claw gladiators. Entry into the arena during the holiday is free.

### City Encounters

Though time is essential to their mission for Korgunard, the PCs may still find some time to do a bit of wandering. For these occasions, the following city encounters may be used. DMs are free to use any or all of these encounters as the adventure in Urik continues, and can even add special encounters to the mix.

### The Persistent Templar

Laws are very important in Urik, and Hamanu's rules and regulations are vast and complex. This provides his templars with many opportunities for increasing the ranks of the city's slaves. When new slaves are needed, the templars simply keep watch for anyone breaking a law. If the PCs spend a lot of time in the streets, they gain the attention of the templar Fresiva. She decides to target the PCs either because they have truly broken an ordinance or because she needs slaves for a new project that has been assigned to her.

Possible laws that the PCs may break include:

- Wearing cloaks. Only templars may wear cloaks, and only Hamanu may wear a cloak with a fringe.
- Walking around after dark. This new law prohibits citizens and visitors from walking the streets during the night until the nighttime killer has been apprehended.
- Giving alms to a beggar who is standing in a beggar free zone.

Whichever transgression catches Fresiva's eye, she brings six city guards with her to detain the PCs. This encounter is meant to show how dangerous Urik can be. The PCs should be given every opportunity to evade Fresiva's clutches.

**Fresiva:** Tp8; AL LE; AC 5 (carru leather — Dexterity); MV 12; HD 8; hp 34; THAC0 16; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8 -2 (obsidian long sword); ML 13; Str 14; Dex 16; Con 15; Int 13; Wis 14; Cha 11.

**City Guards:** F4; AL NE; AC 6 (mekillot hide); MV 12; HD 4; hp 26; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (bone spear — Strength); ML 10; Str 17; Dex 10; Con 11; Int 9; Wis 9; Cha 8.

### The Shadow Returns

This encounter can take place at any time (indeed, at various times) while the party is still in the city, but before they enter the disused sewer. Each time this encounter is run, a different member of the party briefly catches a glimpse of Arvego—or someone who looks very much like him. The PC spots him, meets his evil, hateful gaze, then watches as the psionicist vanishes into the crowd. No matter what actions the PCs take, no matter how hard they search, they will find no trace of the mysterious man who trails them.

### The Killer Strikes

This encounter takes place at night. The PCs (or any who are on the streets after dark) hear a scream of horror, followed by a scream of pain. By the time they rush through the narrow, mostly deserted streets to the source of the screams, they are too late to be of any help. They find the body of a dead dwarven slave, the remains half eaten, a terrified death scream etched on his face. The murdered dwarf is obviously another victim of the nighttime killer. The killer has left no trail by which it can be followed, and if the PCs linger at the murder site, they will be arrested by the fast approaching templars.





## Meeting Old Friends

Once the party has rested from its long journey to Urik, they must find a way to penetrate the defenses of Hamanu's palace. Smart characters will try to contact their friends and associates in Urik's Veiled Alliance. Of course, since the PCs' last adventure in Urik (see the Arcane Shadows flip book module), the Veiled Alliance has had to retreat into the most secure hiding places. No matter how hard the PCs search, they can find none of their old contacts. However, when the time is right, the Alliance will find the PCs.

*As you finish a meal at one of the local food stalls, you notice two men watching you from across the square. They are dressed as street peddlers, but the food before them seems richer than their garb would suggest they can afford. The two whisper to themselves, never taking their eyes off you. A moment later, they leave their unfinished food behind and stride across the square to your stall.*

*Before you can object, one of the men pours himself a drink from the jug in front of you. "Welcome to Urik, friends," he says calmly while his companion scans the nearby crowd. "Is the Great One well?"*

If the PCs fail to realize that these men are members of Urik's Veiled Alliance, they may attempt some sort of violent action. The men wave off any displays of violence and urge the PCs to sit and relax. They repeat the phrase, "Is the Great One well?" hoping to rekindle the PCs' memory of the Alliance's name for Korgunard. However, the men will not admit to knowing anyone named Korgunard, or to being members of the Alliance. They will pay for the PCs' meal, then offer this bit of parting advice as they exit the stall.

*"Reliable information is hard to come by in Urik," the apparent peddler confesses. "What*

*shops have the best bargains, which taverns the best drinks, that sort of thing. Should you require assistance in your sightseeing, come to the Dustdevil Inn this evening. Some old friends want to say hello."*

## The Dustdevil Inn

The Dustdevil Inn is situated in Urik's beggar's quarter. Like the neighborhood around it, the inn is a rough, unsavory place, but the ale is good and the food is tasty and cheap. Cutthroats, mercenaries, gamblers, and beggars frequent the establishment, and city official rarely venture into its seedy interior.

The characters are expected after dark, and even the toughest adventurers will feel nervous here. Harsh stares and muttered insults greet them, but none of the patrons attempt anything of a more serious nature. The following scene unfolds when the PCs enter the dim interior.

*For a moment after you enter the Dustdevil Inn's dark interior, everything seems to stop. No one in the crowded common room so much as breathes for the count of five heartbeats. You feel them all looking at you, trying to determine if you are some sort of threat. Then you catch a barely audible comment—something to do with how much your mothers must have resembled dune freaks to have produced offspring such as you. With that, the noise you heard as you approached the inn resumes as the patrons pick up paused conversations and call for refills for their mugs.*

*All around the common room -sitting at tables, leaning against the bar, and huddled in shadowy alcoves that line the far walls—a wide variety of patrons mingle, drink, and talk. Over there, cowed figures haggle with a thri'kreen. In the corner, merchants drop money into a beggar's outstretched palms. Everywhere, deals are being made and games of chance are being played. If Urik has a darker side than what you have already seen, then it must come to this place to wash away the dust of the day.*



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A serving woman carrying a precariously balanced tray of ceramic mugs points out an open table as the PCs push their way into the inn. A few moments later, she returns to take their orders. For the better part of an hour, the PCs can eat and drink and listen to the crowd. No one approaches them during this time, and only the serving woman even bothers to talk to them. As the hour draws to a close, she returns to collect their mugs and whispers, "You're expected upstairs." With that, she nods toward a set of stairs at the far end of the common room and winks. Then she wanders back into the crowd to fill orders.

If they accept her invitation, the PCs notice many sets of eyes following them up the stairs. At the top of the stairs, a tough dwarf leans against the wall, cradling an unusual crossbow in his powerful arms. Without a word, the dwarf nods toward an open door. He gestures for them to enter, then closes the door behind them.

### The Alliance Responds

*The interior of the room is a stark contrast to what you saw downstairs. This room is richly furnished, filled with soft hides and long couches. Lounging on one couch is a tall woman with long hair and dark eyes. You recognize her serious face from your last visit to Urik and from your previous adventures with Korgunard in the wilderness. She is Elentha, the preserver who splits her time between Urik's Veiled Alliance and the slave tribe called the Free. Sitting near her on other couches are two men who look exactly the same—the same height, the same long red hair, the same lopsided grins.*

*Elentha nods a greeting and gestures for you to sit down. "We have much to discuss, my friends," she says. "Do you remember the ceremony we participated in? The Great One has asked me to help you again.*

Elentha met the PCs when they were in Urik for the ceremony that transformed Korgunard into an



avangion (see the *Background* section of Part One and the flip book module, *Arcane Shadows*). She respects what they have accomplished regarding Korgunard, but she remains distant and overly serious. That is her nature. Still, she has agreed to provide them with whatever aid she can, and as the Veiled Alliance's representative to them, that aid can be great indeed.

The twins are Rondal and Randol, preservers in service of Urik's Veiled Alliance. They have been assigned to help Elentha in her efforts regarding the Great One's (Korgunard's) agents. The twins are identical in every way, even as far as finishing each other's sentences. It is nearly impossible to tell them apart.

Elentha received a magical message from Korgunard, telling her to expect the PCs and giving her a few clues about their mission. She calls for food and drink, then asks the PCs to tell her what they need. Once she is certain that their story matches what Korgunard told her, she gets down to business.

"There is a secret way into Hamanu's palace," Elentha informs the PCs. "It was used by an old slave when he needed to sneak into or out of Destiny's Kingdom. It hasn't been used in decades, but the way should still be clear. The path is marked by a dotted square—a symbol with great meaning to members of the Veiled Alliance. The path begins in the disused sewers outside the palace's walls. You must seek the dead end wall in the sewer's northern reaches. The wall is unadorned save for the dotted square at its center. This marks the first secret door.

She continues by telling them that a narrow tunnel leads to a second secret door. This door leads to an abandoned cellar in the lowest level of the fortress-palace. Across the cellar room, hidden in a small alcove, is a spiral stair that leads upward. "Climb these stairs past four landings," Elentha advises, "until you reach the concealed door marked with the dotted square. This will put you in

an abandoned wing of the palace that has been sealed for more than a generation. Follow the wide hallway past a great set of double doors and a deserted chapel. In the room beyond the chapel, look for the dotted square and you will find another secret door.

"This spiral staircase leads down. One level below the abandoned wing, you will discover another secret door. This will take you to a kitchen in Hamanu's guest area. Our informants in the palace tell us that the council hall in this area has been selected as the site of Hamanu's upcoming meeting with his generals. You will learn all you need to know from that meeting."

She explains that her sources tell her the meeting will start at the sounding of the evening bells tomorrow night—two hours past dusk. Hamanu is waiting for a few more important guests to arrive before he calls his council to order.

"When you have learned what you need to know, you can return through the disused sewer," Elentha concludes, waiting for the party's inevitable questions. Elentha knows that Hamanu has called his most trusted advisors, wizards, templars, and generals to the palace for a special council meeting. Rumors concerning the reason for the meeting are nearly endless, though she believes it has something to do with the psionic interference blanketing the region. She offers whatever help the Alliance can provide as far as supplies are concerned, including enough *fruits of invisibility* to adequately hide the party once they reach Hamanu's guest area. Under no circumstances will Elentha or any other Alliance members accompany the PCs into the sewer or the palace beyond.

With that, Elentha wishes the party good luck. She has made arrangements for them to stay at the inn, and the twins will be available in the morning to help them gather supplies. *Fruits of healing*, weapons, armor, spell components, and other basic equipment is available, but no other magical items.



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### Beneath the Streets of Urik

At dusk the following night, the twins lead the PCs to an abandoned building in the tradesmen's district. Five impressive-looking guards wait within the building's quiet interior. They indirectly serve the Alliance and have volunteered to assist with this mission by keeping the escape route safe and open for the PCs.

One of the twins produces a sack of fruit and hands one piece to each party member. These are fruits of invisibility that the Alliance has donated at Korgunard's request. The twins explain that the fruits can be consumed all at once, providing 24 hours of invisibility (as per the 2nd-level wizard spell), or they can be nibbled. Each nibble, equal to 1/8 of each fruit, provides 3-6 turns (30-60 minutes) of invisibility. The twins caution that if any invisible character attacks something, the spell effect is broken. "Save the fruit until you are ready to enter the palace," Rondal cautions. "Perhaps a bite before entering the abandoned wing would be prudent," Randol suggests.

*"You have three hours to find your way to the council chamber," the twins say in unison. "Follow the dotted squares and stay out of sight." They lead you to where the guards stand, and you notice a heavy stone door in the floor. Two of the guards strain, lifting the huge door to reveal a rope ladder dropping down into darkness. "Rap on the stone five times when you return and the guards will open the door," Rondal says. "Good luck and may the Great One be with you," Randol adds. You start down the ladder, and the huge stone is lowered over you with a heavy thud.*

### The Disused Sewer

The disused sewer is dry and dark. It leads to the secret door, just as Elentha promised. However, there is one major obstacle that stands between the secret entrance into the palace and the player char-

acters. This disused sewer has become the lair of the dread nighttime killer that stalks the streets of Urik.

The arch defiler Rankir, at King Hamanu's urgings, had been experimenting in opening portals to other planes of reality. One day he opened the wrong portal and something full of dark, vile hatred stepped through. The creature is a tanar'ri, a member of a chaotic evil race that lives in the Abyss. This particular one is a greater tanar'ri, called a nabassu. When it stepped through the portal, it used the moment of surprise to slay Rankir and increase its own power. The nabassu grow and gain power by slaying and devouring humans on the Prime Material plane. Only humans that have been completely devoured increase the nabassu's strength, so although it has committed many murders, it has only fully devoured four humans thus far.

The locations described below are marked on the map of the disused sewer in the Map Book.

**1. Ceiling Door.** *The darkness and silence hang oppressively in the cool, stale air of this disused sewer. Your torches barely penetrate the heavy darkness, yet in your circle of light, you see no evidence of vermin and hear no distant scuttling sounds. It seems even the expected pests have deserted this place. You walk across the hard-baked mud that covers the floor, the only evidence that this place was once used as a sewer.*

The heavy stone door in the ceiling leads to an abandoned building in the tradesmen's district of Urik, just outside the walls of Destiny's Kingdom. The main tunnel is 15 feet wide and 10 feet high. The walls and floor are made of hard-packed sandstone. No pools of stagnant water or standing waste mar this disused sewer. The tunnels are completely dark.

The heavy stone door in the ceiling will be opened only if the guards above hear the special knock the twins described. Any attempt to open the door from below requires a successful lift gates roll by two characters working in unison.



**2. Dead Templar.** As you near a side tunnel, you notice a still shape huddled against the wall. On a closer look, the shape is seen to be the corpse of a templar. The templar's white cloak is stained dark with his own blood. Something with very sharp claws killed the templar, and a look of total fear remains on his lifeless face.

This templar was a member of the team Hamanu sent out to locate the nighttime killer. The team tracked the killer into the disused sewer tunnel where it waited until they reached the main tunnel before it turned and attacked. This templar lies where he fell, though the nabassu may return to claim the body at a later time.

**3. The Pantry.** *As the light of your torches penetrates the darkness around the tunnel's bend, you come upon a grisly sight. Bodies, some half consumed, are piled high in the middle of the tunnel. Among the dead forms are two more white-cloaked templars and three city guards. All wear expressions of terror on their mutilated faces. As you stare at the scene, you hear an awful sound from up ahead. Something is dragging sharp blades across a sandstone wall, and the screech sends shivers up your spine.*

The rest of the templar's special team has been stored here by the nabassu. By this time, the creature knows the PCs are in its lair. As it enjoys the terror of its victims, the nabassu has decided to play a game with the party. It gives them the first indication that they are not alone in the darkness by scratching its talons over the stone walls farther up the tunnel. If the PCs bother to search among the bodies, they can find a useful weapon left by one of the dead guards. The weapon is an obsidian long sword +1, and it is the only weapon that has not been damaged. It shows evidence of hurting whatever attacked the templars (dried blood coats part of its sharp surface).

**4. The Nabassu's Lair.** *The area ahead, where two side tunnels meet the main tunnel you are walking in, has been converted into a den of nightmares. The bones of humans, dwarves, half-giants, and even animals have been piled like pillows in the stone crossroad. The stale air smells of death, rotting flesh, and some alien, evil thing. You feel as if something is watching you, then terrifying images flood into your mind. As you struggle to contain the fear these images inspire, a nightmare creature rushes at you out of the darkness.*

The PCs meet the dreaded nighttime killer, a nabassu from the Abyss. It uses its ability to communicate telepathically to flood the PCs' minds with images of horror, then it rushes to attack. It feels very confident, so it starts by attacking with its bare hands for the sheer pleasure of it. Once it realizes the PCs pose some small measure of danger to it, it will begin using its other powers.

**Tanar'ri, Greater—Nabassu:** AL CE; AC 2; MV 12, Fl 15; HD 7+6; hp 38; THAC0 13; #AT 3; Dmg 2-8+7/2-8+7/3-2+7; SA death gaze, backstab; SD +1 or better weapons to hit; SZ M (7' tall); ML 16; XP 22,000.

The nabassu is a fledgling of its kind, though it still stands seven feet tall. Its gaunt body is covered with tightly corded muscles, and its skin is leathery. Wings rise from its back, and great claws sprout from its hands and feet. Its potent physical attack combines two vicious claw swipes and a powerful bite, all of which is augmented by its massive strength. It loves to stalk, terrify, and kill, and it grows in power with each victim it kills and devours.

It has the following spell-like abilities: *darkness*, 15-foot radius, and *death gaze*. The gaze causes characters who do not save vs. spell to become ghaunts (or ghouls if the victims are demi-humans). This change is permanent and irrevocable. It can use the gaze 6 times per day.



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Only attacks from magic or cold-wrought iron weapons hurt the nabassu. It has the following thief abilities: move silently 40%, hide in shadows 50%, detect noise 55%, and backstab  $\times 2$ .

The nabassu loves to kill its prey by using only its claws and teeth. It gains nothing from turning the living into the undead, so only uses its death gaze if it is losing the battle (reduced to 10 hit points or less). It generously employs its magical darkness and backstab abilities, however. If the nabassu is reduced to zero hit points, it returns to the Abyss.

**5. Stone Door.** This door leads to a natural cavern that runs below a portion of Destiny's Kingdom.

**6. Natural Cavern.** This cavern consists of a single, immense room, and the only exit is also the entrance. While something of interest may lie in this vast, rocky room, it is beyond the scope of this adventure. The PCs should realize that this is not the path Elentha described, and the battle with the nabassu has used up much of their time. If they are going to reach the council chamber by the time the meeting starts, they will have to hurry.

**7. The First Secret Door.** *The northern wall of the disused sewer is finally in sight. You search around the middle of the wall, eventually finding the carved symbol of a dotted square. A little more searching reveals a secret door that opens into a narrow corridor.*

This secret door leads to the abandoned cellar of Hamanu's palace, just as Elentha said it would.

**8. Side Tunnels.** *This small side tunnel, set at a slight incline, must have once brought waste down into the main tunnel. Now it is dry and covered with a fine layer of dust and sand.*

Most of these tunnels lead to a series of small, five-foot-wide drainage tunnels, and many have collapsed over the years. The tunnel that begins at location 2 maintains its 10 foot wide size all the way to the surface. It is the path the nabassu uses to exit its lair when it goes out to feed. If any PC makes a successful Intelligence check, he or she notices that the tunnel's layer of dust and sand has been disturbed by something large.

## Destiny's Kingdom

Destiny's Kingdom is Hamanu's huge fortress-palace. It measures more than a mile long on each side, and its obsidian towers climb high into Athas's sky. The palace serves as Hamanu's personal monument, his home, and the seat of his government. The huge palace contains miles of corridors and hundreds of rooms, including templar offices, troop barracks, training grounds, and more. For the purposes of this adventure, only three small portions of Destiny's Kingdom are depicted on the map in the Map Book. These are an abandoned cellar, part of an abandoned wing, and part of the occupied portion of the palace. If the PCs decide to wander beyond the scope of these areas, they will not be able to complete their mission and they will quickly become lost. Capture will be inevitable as they try to find their way around the massive palace.

Once the PCs enter any level of Destiny's Kingdom, the DM must keep track of when and how they decide to use their *fruits of invisibility*. Most of the descriptions below assume that they are invisible at the time they enter a specific location. If they are not, the DM must alter the situation accordingly.

## Palace Guards

Throughout this section of the adventure, the PCs will encounter a number of palace guards. Hamanu insists on the finest warriors to patrol his palace. All belong to an elite detachment of half-giants. They are completely loyal to the sorcerer-king.



Each half-giant guard wears braxat hide armor and carries an obsidian halberd. They patrol the palace in pairs and may be encountered at any time while the PCs are in Hamanu's guest area. Roll 1d10 every other round. On a roll of 1, a patrol wanders down the corridor. There are also two half-giant guards stationed in front of the council room (as marked on the map), and more guards in the two guard rooms responsible for the area.

**Half-Giant Guards:** F6; AL NE; AC 6; MV 15; HD 12; hp 76 each; THAC0 13; #AT 1; Dmg 1d10+8; SA nil; SD nil; SZ L (11' tall); ML 13; Str 21; Dex 10; Con 14; Int 11; Wis 7; Cha 10; XP 420 each.

Alarm bells can be found in a number of places throughout the palace. Once the alarm has been raised, patrols are increased to four guards and the chance of encounter is 2 in 10. If the alarm has been raised, no one will be allowed into or out of the palace until a signal has been given that the crisis is over.

If the alarm is raised, but no trespassers are found, the palace returns to normal after one hour. If dead guards or servants are discovered, or if specific items are noticed as missing, the alert remains in effect until the trespassers are found.

In addition to half-giant guards, the palace can call forth human guards, templars, and even Hamanu's personal defilers as needed. The supply is virtually endless.

**Human Guards:** F4; AL NE; AC 6 (mekillot hide); MV 12; HD 4; hp 25; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (bone spear); ML 12; Str 17; Dex 13; Con 13; Int 12; Wis 10; Cha 11.

**Palace Templars:** Tp6; AL NE; AC 8 (Dex); MV 12; HD 6; hp 21; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4+1 (metal dagger); ML 11; Str 16; Dex 16; Con 9; Int 13; Wis 14; Cha 13; Spells: 3 1st level, 2 2nd level, 1 3rd level as necessary.

**Palace Defilers:** D10; AL NE; AC 8; MV 12; HD 10; hp 23; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4-1 (bone dagger); ML 12; Str 8; Dex 16; Con 8; Int 15; Wis 11; Cha 9; Spells: 1) hold portal, sleep, grease, alarm; 2) detect psionics, web, wizard lock, bind; 3) dispel magic, hold person, slow; 4) psionic dampener, fumble; 5) domination, wall of force.

## Abandoned Cellar Level

**1. Wine Cellar.** *The secret door from the disused sewer opens into what was once the sorcerer-king's wine cellar. This large storage area must have once held an enormous number of bottles, casks, and barrels, but the area has clearly fallen out of use. In fact, the racks that once lined the walls have been broken up and thrown atop piles of other fine items now reduced to so much trash.*

The PCs enter this area at spot A on the map. They notice the piles of trash and may realize (on a successful Wisdom check) that these have been formed into high walls. Due to the height of these trash walls (7' high), it is difficult to see across the room. The ceiling of the cellar is 11 feet high.

This cellar has become the home of a clan of hej-kin. These vile-looking, subterranean humanoids found the abandoned area a few months back and have been decorating it to suit their unusual tastes and needs. They have access to much of the abandoned cellar area, and the trash used to make the walls comes from other deserted storage rooms. The door marked B on the map leads to these other areas. Eight hej-kin inhabit the area, but only four are in the wine cellar when the PCs arrive. The others return within 1d4 rounds of hearing the sounds of battle.

Location C is a secret room that the hej-kin have not yet discovered. It is filled with six kegs of fine ale and a sack of 100 cp. While the hej-kin are only



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interested in defending their home, they also fear that the PCs have come to heap further abuse on their portion of earth and stone. They are also extremely agitated by the effects of the Psionatrix field. If the PCs find the kegs of ale, they can use them to make peace with the hej-kin and receive safe passage through the area. Location D is the hej-kin's infant nest, where three children are currently being cared for. Location E is the spiral staircase the PCs need to climb.

**Hej-kin (8):** AL NE; AC 10; MV 6; HD 2; hp 12 each; THAC0 19; #AT 2; Dmg 1-4/ 1-4; SA psionics; SD psionics; ML 9; XP 65 each.

**Psionic Summary:** PSPs 80; score 14; psychometabolism—sciences: life draining; devotions: body equilibrium, heightened senses, biofeedback. Telepathy—sciences: tower of iron will; devotions: intellect fortress, psychic crush, send thoughts, post-hypnotic suggestion, contact.

### Abandoned Wing Level

**2. The Second Secret Door.** The PCs follow Elentha's directions and soon find another dotted square on the staircase's fourth landing. Stepping through this door puts the PCs in an abandoned wing of the palace.

**3. Collapsed Room.** Some long ago accident caused this room to collapse. Rubble and fallen stone fill the room, and the broken ceiling is open to Athas's night sky.

**4. Empty Room.** This room is empty.

**5. Grand Hall.** This high, wide hallway was once a magnificent affair, and even through the dust and neglect you can still see signs of grand splendor. Marble floors and walls reflect the light of your torches, and wonderful tapestries still hang in places. At the grand intersection, the hall stretches into the darkness to your right and left. Straight ahead,







however, are the massive double doors, Elentha told you to look for.

Once the PCs pass through the intersection, they gather the attention of a group of halflings who are hunting farther down the hallway. These halflings are the same ones the PCs encountered at the city gates, and their leader remembers the smell of the PCs he passed.

The halflings are members of Hamanu's army, part of the company provided through an agreement with Chief Urga-Zoltapl. The halflings often explore the vast palace at night, and these four have come to this abandoned wing to hunt for vermin. Once they catch the scent of the PCs, they will hunt them down.

**Halfling Warriors (4):** F5; AL CN; AC 5 (carru leather — Dex); MV 9; HD 5; hp 34, 28, 27, 21, 13; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6-1 (bone short sword); SA nil; SD nil; ML 10; SZ S (3' tall); XP 270.

**6. Templar Office.** This room once served as an office for Hamanu's templars. Desks and chairs still fill the room, and everything has a thick layer of dust. A secret door in the far wall leads to the abandoned chapel. Otherwise, this room is empty.

**7. Templar Chambers.** Four templars once occupied this living chamber, and the evidence of their presence remains. Lush pillows and thick rugs fill the chamber, and tapestries depicting the glory of Hamanu's military might cover the walls. Dust coats everything, and nothing seems to have been disturbed in many years. Three hurrums live in the pillows. These brightly-colored beetles are harmless, and they do make a pleasant humming sound. A secret door leads to the abandoned chapel

### 8. Abandoned Chapel.

*The double doors open upon a deserted chapel*

*dedicated to King Hamanu. The walls are inlaid with a mosaic showing the sorcerer-king in action, leading his armies to war. Altars on opposite sides of the chapel are made of solid blocks of obsidian, and obsidian busts of Hamanu rest atop these black slabs.*

Though this chapel is interesting, there is nothing of value here. If the PCs paused to explore either room 6 or 7, the halfling hunters catch up with them here. Remember, they are tracking the PCs by scent, so it does not matter if they are invisible at this time or not (though invisibility will still give them certain advantages).

**9. Chamber of the High Templar.** The templar who once ran this chapel used this room as his office and living quarters. All important items have been removed, but a couch and small table remain. If the PCs did not stop to explore rooms 6 or 7, the halflings meet them here. A dotted square on the wall shows the location of the next secret door.

**10. The Third Secret Door.** This secret door opens upon a spiral staircase that descends down toward the occupied areas of the palace.

### Hamanu's Guest Area

**11. The Fourth Secret Door.** Following Elentha's instructions, the PCs reach the door that leads to Hamanu's guest area. Wonderful smells waft from the other side of the door. If the PCs do not eat some of the magic fruit before entering, they will be spotted by the cooks and their assistants.

**12. Kitchen.** *As you open the secret door, the aroma of cooking food fills your nostrils. This busy kitchen is occupied by six cooks and their assistants, all frantically preparing a huge feast.*



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The cooks shout at nervous slaves as serving girls and boys carry food in and out of the doors across the room. If the PCs are invisible, they must still make Dexterity checks to cross the busy kitchen without walking into someone (or having someone walk into them). Even if a slave bumps into an invisible PC, it is unlikely anyone will notice. Instead, the cooks will scream at the slave for dropping whatever he or she was carrying.

**13. Feast Hall.** Many servants travel between this room and the kitchen as they prepare for the feast that is scheduled to follow Hamanu's council meeting. Great decanters of wine and water cover the huge table, and baskets of more fruit than the PCs have ever seen in one place are already being placed on the table.

**14. Guard Room.** The half-giant guards not currently on patrol use this room to rest and wait their turn. Eight half-giants occupy each room, and one contains the captain of the palace guards, a templar named Severin. If an alarm bell sounds, Severin takes six of the half-giants and rushes to Hamanu's side.

**Severin, Captain of the Palace Guards:** Tp 15; AL LE; AC -2; MV 12; HD 15; hp 61; THAC0 12 (7); #AT 1; Dmg 1d8+4; ML 15; Str 18; Dex 17; Con 14; Int 16; Wis 17; Cha 13.

**Spells:** 1) *detect magic, cause light wounds x.2, command, cure light wounds x 2*; 2) *charm person x 2, hold person x 2, spiritual hammer, flame blade*; 3) *dispel magic, conjure lesser elemental x 2, spike growth, cause blindness*; 4) *cause serious wounds, spell immunity, free action, cure serious wounds*; 5) *flame strike, cause critical wounds, conjure fire elemental*; 6) *blade barrier, heal*.

**Equipment:** Metal long sword +2, metal shield +2, splint mail of blending (appears as normal templar

cloak), *wand of enemy detection* (6 charges), *ring of human influence*, 3 fruits of extra healing, 2 fruits of proof against detection and location.

**15. Concubine Chamber.** This door opens into a smoky, heavily-perfumed chamber. Soft furnishings and silk drapes fill the room, and bowls of fruit rest beside every plush cushion.

The 20 concubines who inhabit this room are more than mere entertainment, though most of Hamanu's guests do not realize it. These women are extremely loyal to the sorcerer-king and form an important part of his palace Intelligence network. While treating guests with their charms, they are also collecting useful facts, rumors, and other information for Hamanu. At this time, the women are preparing for the feast. They will call for the guards if anything out of the ordinary occurs.

**16. Guest Chambers.** *These luxuriously furnished guest rooms sport exquisite beds and fine decor. The rooms are being used by Hamanu's council guests, and are currently empty.*

**17. Hamanu's Office.** The door to this room, which bears the seal of Hamanu but not the ornate carvings of the council chamber doors, is locked. Only Hamanu has a key, but industrious PCs could open it with a *knock* spell or by a successful open locks attempt (made with a -25% modifier).

Hamanu uses this office when his council is in session, instead of going to his master office in another part of the palace. A writing desk, shelves, and long couches fill the room. All of the items are worth vast fortunes, including gold candle holders and a ruby paperweight. These objects bear the royal seal of Hamanu and could fetch as much as 100 gp on the black market—if someone were to steal them and risk the wrath of Urik's sorcerer-king.

Among the letters on the desk are several that are still in progress. One is addressed to the Shadow



King of Nibenay, requesting any information on the psionic interference that he may have. Others warn Hamanu's foreign agents of the problem and set forth orders concerning what to watch for so that they can help unravel the mystery. If the letters are to be believed, it seems clear that Hamanu is as much a victim as the rest of the Tyr region.

**18. Hamanu's Private Chamber.** This door is also locked. Inside are splendid pillows of the most plush fabrics, thick rugs, and other comforts for when Hamanu wishes to nap. A mosaic of a huge dragon leading a vast army across the desert sands fills one wall, and a huge, ornate mirror the other. If the PCs look into the mirror and say Hamanu's name, the surface becomes clear and they can see into the council chamber. This is the best location to watch the meeting, and the magical properties of the mirror even allow them to hear what is being said.

## 19. The Council Chamber.

The large double doors to this chamber are ornately carved with arcane symbols. In the very center, spread across the two doors, is Hamanu's clenched fist motif. Inside, the huge chamber is dominated by Hamanu's raised throne of silver and gold. Statues of the sorcerer-king flank the doors and the throne, and trophies of battle decorate the walls. Currently, a grand table has been set up for the council meeting, and Hamanu's generals and advisors are gathered around it.

The PCs can watch the meeting through the mirror in Hamanu's private chamber, or they can sneak into the council room when the doors are opened to admit a legitimate guest. From the meeting, they learn the following information:

- Hamanu has gathered his arch defilers, templars, generals, and other advisors to discuss the effects of the psionic interference field currently in place across the region. Hamanu is clearly as mystified by the field as were the leaders of Tyr.
- Hamanu listens as his advisors list possible suspects, including the Veiled Alliance, the various sorcerer-kings (even dead Kalak receives blame!), a slave tribe (Hamanu scoffs at the idea), and even Korgunard (Hamanu names him, himself).
- The arch defilers propose that the effect has nothing to do with the Dragon.
- The generals clearly want to go to war, and they vow to crush whoever is responsible in the name of Hamanu. The sorcerer-king quiets them, for though it pains him he is not sure that open conflict is the answer to this problem.
- The templars admit that the palace libraries have been of no help in locating a cause or solution.
- The arch defilers state that their calculations show the effect to be getting steadily worse. They believe the threat could eventually eliminate all psionic abilities.
- Hamanu vows to end this threat to his rule, no matter what the cost.



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After the PCs hear the meeting, or if they try to attack Hamanu, go to *Captured!*

**20. Templar Office.** Templars assigned to this part of the palace operate out of this location. The desks are covered with writing utensils, scrolls, clay tablets, and even a few ancient books. All relate to problems that have once threatened Athas, but none are of a magical nature. There is only one templar in the room.

**21. Storage Room.** The door to this room is locked. Paintings of many battles line the walls, showing Hamanu's troops in action. These paintings, although faded with age, clearly show the sorcerer-king and his mighty war machine mercilessly crushing enemies of Urik. Though this room must have once served another purpose, it is currently being used as a storage room for part of Hamanu's vast collection of treasures and artifacts. There is little of real use to the PCs unless the DM needs them to find something to aid them.

**22. Library.** Three sparkling crystal candle chandeliers hang from the painted ceiling in this vast room. Ancient bookcases stand everywhere, each filled with tomes and scrolls on all imaginable subjects. Long writing desks are piled high with scrolls and books as templars are busy searching for references to the Psionatrix field. Characters who investigate the piles of books notice that all of them deal with the subjects of psionics, legends, prophecies, and curses, many written in unknown languages.

**23. Fountain Room.** This chamber should both surprise and delight the PCs—and perhaps frighten them a bit as well. Lush, growing plants burst from the dirt floor, filling the room with smells reminiscent of Desverendi's valley. Two great fountains bubble with clear water, and it is obvious that Hamanu has used much magic to preserve this idyllic setting. There is a 50% chance that 1d6 halflings will be here at any given time.

**Other Locations.** Location F is a grand staircase that descends to another occupied area of the palace. Location G is a staircase leading up. Those locations marked with an H refer to corridors that lead to other parts of Destiny's Kingdom.

### Captured!

Any violent action taken by the PCs in the council chamber will be met with vicious stares as Hamanu and his defilers rise to defend themselves. They will not be alerted to the PCs if they enter quietly and take no hostile actions, but the moment the party so much as draws a weapon, protective spells warn Hamanu of the danger. When this occurs, the generals and templars draw their own weapons and form a protective circle around Hamanu. If the party decides to fight Hamanu, the PCs are likely to be killed. Such an action is deliberately in contrast to their mission from Korgunard, and DMs should treat them harshly. However, Hamanu and his guards will try to capture as many of the PCs as possible so that they can be questioned. The group of people in this room are of such high levels that the PCs should not be able to win a fight or escape, should a fight begin.

If the PCs remain hidden throughout the meeting and also avoid encountering any palace guards, the DM must help them get captured, as that is the course this adventure is designed to take. As they watch the meeting, they see a human templar enter the chamber, bow, and approach Hamanu. He speaks quietly into the sorcerer-king's ear, then turns and leaves. This is Severin, who has just informed Hamanu that he has detected the presence of intruders in the palace. He knows their general location and has gone to seal the area.

*Hamanu gazes at his advisors and declares, "We have been spied upon." He turns in your direction and says harshly, "Surrender, fools! Did you think to hide from the King of the World for long?"*



The PCs have no chance to win this fight or escape. DMs are advised to capture the party as quickly as possible, using maximum force where necessary. As a 21st-level Dragon, Hamanu can unleash *wishes*, *meteor swarms*, and *time stops* all day long. Hamanu's orders are to capture the party alive, but it is possible for a PC to take an "escape or die" attitude. Such a character should be killed as quickly and spectacularly as possible to show the others how hopeless this fight is. This section of the adventure ends with the capture of all surviving PCs.

## An Audience with Hamanu

Once they have been captured, the PCs are brought before Hamanu's throne in the council chamber. The sorcerer-king stares at them with cold, terrifying eyes, seeming to look right into their very souls. If they try to explain themselves, make a deal, or even inform the king about the psionic interference, he orders them to be silent. "You are either overly brave or extremely foolish, I care not which," Hamanu declares. "If you wish to speak to the King of the World, you must prove yourselves worthy. Only the worthy can survive the rigors of the arena."

In order to plead their case before King Hamanu, the PCs must demonstrate their worth by competing in the upcoming Day of Battle holiday tournament. If they can survive the game of death ball, then Hamanu will grant them leave to express themselves.

## The Day of Battle

After being captured, the PCs are stripped of their weapons, equipment, and the precious shard of crystal. The PCs are then roughly escorted to a spartan cell deep in the bowels of the arena. Each PC gets a bunk and a meal of bread and water. The cells are cold with stone bunks and no comforts. From the other cells they can hear shouts, jeers and laughter throughout the night.





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Bread and water are always on hand for those about to participate in the holiday games. Guards will supply more when called upon to do so. Fruit and meat are delivered to the cell each morning. The human guards perform their jobs without malice, although they will not converse with the PCs.

*After finishing your morning meal, a jolly overseer named Yorik appears at your cell door with a suit of carru leather armor for each of you. "Today's the day," he laughs, "the grand games of the Battle Day. After a few regular gladiator matches, you'll get to show your stuff at the death ball match. I'll be back in a while to give you your weapons." Before he goes, he calls for templars to heal any wounds you may still be suffering from.*

Hamanu wants a good contest, so the templars will completely heal the party if they allow them to come near. While this is going on, the sounds of hundreds of people can be heard in the arena above. As each match begins, an accompanying shout of excitement rises out of the crowd. After a few hours, Yorik returns. "Good luck out there," he laughs, "you'll need it against the Bloody Claw." Then he asks what weapons each PC prefers. Each is allowed to carry up to two of the following weapons, until the supply is exhausted.

Six stone clubs (1d6/1d3, -1 damage, -2 to hit), four heavy crossbows with six iron-tipped heavy quarrels each (1d4+1/1d6+1), four bone daggers (1d4/1d3, -1 damage, -1 to hit), four battle axes with obsidian blades (1d8/1d8, -1 damage, -2 to hit).

**DMs Note:** Provide the characters with at east two weapons with which they are proficient.

### Death Ball

*You step into the arena to the cheers of a filled stadium. The crowd seems very excited. Across the arena, you see Hamanu seated in his royal box. He*

*seems to be paying you some attention. The arena itself is an oval of sand. Two raised platforms can be seen on either side. Steps lead up to a hole in the wall above each platform. Oddly shaped pits stand open in the center of the field. You are directed to a line about a third of the way from the platform. A short, five-foot wall, topped with spikes surrounds the entire oval.*

*When a vicious looking group of gladiators strides toward the line on the opposite side of the pits, the crowd goes wild, cheering and chanting, "Bloody Claw! Bloody Claw!". It seems they are more popular than you.*

Use the map of the death ball arena located in the Map Book when running this encounter.

The crowd favorites are the renowned Bloody Claw team from the stable of the merchant, Hargen Stel III. They have fought 11 contests and won them all, making them incredibly popular among the common people. Hamanu, however, hates them—they have beaten his best and he has almost given up any hope of beating them. He expects the PCs to die, just like all the rest. At least this way he has given them the opportunity to die like warriors.

The Bloody Claw emerge into the arena and spread out across the far side, bowing and playing to the crowd. After a short while a fanfare is sounded and they turn menacingly toward the PCs. The crowd resumes chanting, repeating the words "death ball" over and over again.

Yorik emerges from a side passage and approaches the PCs. He tells them to stand side-by-side on the starting line, just as the Bloody Claw team is doing on the other side of the field. "The object is simple," Yorik explains. "All you have to do is dunk the five death balls into goals on the far side of the arena."

In the center of the field, resting on the ground between the two pits, are five leather balls. Each ball is slightly larger than a man's palm, with sharp obsidian spikes protruding from the leather covering.



The object of the game is to score as many goals as possible by pushing the death balls into the platform holes on the opposing team's side of the field. The winning team is the team that scores the most goals by the end of the match. The match ends when all five death balls have been placed in the goals.

There are only three rules: the opposing teams must begin on their starting lines, the balls must start in the center of the field, and all hostilities must end when the fifth ball is placed in one of the scoring holes. Otherwise, anything goes. The teams compete against each other for the death balls in order to score them. Members of each team may attack each other at any time, using melee weapons, spells, psionics, and even the crossbows provided by Yorik.

## Scoring a Goal

The platforms on each end of the field rise six feet off the ground. Long, narrow steps lead up to the goal. To score, a death ball must be pushed all the way into the hole. This activates a spring-loaded arm trap that snaps shut to indicate a successful goal. Of course, the character who scores a goal must make a Dexterity check at +3 to pull his arm free before the trap slams down. Failure causes 3D6 damage to the unlucky character.

## Hazards of the Game

The spikes set along the perimeter wall are sharp and deadly. If a character is thrown onto the spikes, he will suffer 3d6 points of damage.

Characters with heavy crossbows must spend a full round reloading, after firing a quarrel. They can do nothing else during that round.

Attacks on opponents atop the scoring platforms are made at a -1 penalty to hit (if the attacker is striking from below). Attacks made by characters on the platforms against opponents below receive a +1 bonus to hit.

The spiked death balls can be thrown, either to

pass them to another team member or as an attack against an opponent. A successful Dexterity check must be made at +2 when either attempting to throw or catch a death ball. Failure causes 1d3+2 points of damage to the thrower and 1d6+2 points of damage to the catcher. A death ball is thrown successfully on an unadjusted THAC0 roll. Death balls cannot be thrown into the goals.

Each pit contains one huge scorpion. These creatures cannot climb out of the pits, but they present a danger to anyone who falls into the pits. Anyone next to a pit will fall in if they are hit with any successful attack, and fail a dexterity check. A rope hangs down the side of each pit so that characters who fall in can climb out. Climbing the rope takes two rounds. Falling into a pit causes 2d6 points of damage and leaves characters open to attacks by the huge scorpions.

**Huge Scorpions (2):** AL Nil; AC 4; MV 12; HD 4+4; hp 18, 20; THAC0 15; #AT 3; Dmg 1-8/ 1-8/ 1-3; SA poison sting; SD nil; SZ M (4' long); ML 10; XP 420 each.

## The Bloody Claw Team

The current gladiatorial champions are the renowned Bloody Claw team from the stables of House Stel. The team has fought side-by-side through many matches—they fight to win, and the DM should play them as tough opponents. The team consists of the following members:

**Rend the Half Giant, Team Scorer:** G9; AL CE; AC 5 (leather — Dex); MV 15; HD 18; hp 117; THAC0 8; #AT 3/2; Dmg 1d4+9/1d3+9 (fighting claws); SZ L (11' tall); ML 13; Str 21; Dex 16; Con 17; Int 9; Wis 7; Cha 9.

**Human Defiler Receivers (2):** De5; AL LE; AC 9 (Dex); MV 12; HD 5; hp 14, 10; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4-1/1d3-1 (bone dagger); SZ M



## Urik by Nightfall

(5' tall); ML 8; Str 12; Dex 15; Con 11; Int 16; Wis 9; Cha 8. Remaining Spells: Defiler #1: 1) *feather fall*, *jump*, *color spray*, *burning hands*. Defiler #2: 1) *shield*; 2) *invisibility*, *levitate*, *mirror image*.

**Human Fighter Blockers (2):** F6; AL NE; AC 6 (leather); MV 12; HD 6; hp 30, 26; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8 (obsidian battle axe); SZ M (6' tall); ML 10; Str 17; Dex 13; Con 12; Int 13; Wis 8; Cha 12.

**Halfling Defender (1):** F8; AL CN; AC 4; MV 9; HD 8; hp 43; THAC0 13; #AT 3/2; Dmg 1d6-1/1d3-1 (stone club), 1d4+1/1d6 +1 (six heavy crossbow quarrels); SZ S (3' tall); ML 11; Str 14; Dex 16; Con 15; Int 15; Wis 11; Cha 13.

Rend is captain of the Bloody Claw and its highest goal scorer. Both of his arms bear many scars from getting caught in the goal traps. He uses his fighting claws to tear opponents apart. He also likes to pick up smaller foes and toss them onto the spiked wall.

The blockers stay near Rend, using their battle axes to clear a path to the goal. The defender remains at the platform, shooting at anyone who comes near until he runs out of arrows. The receivers try to avoid opponents and maneuver around to catch and score with the ball.

The Claws attempt to rush the goal all at once with as many balls as possible. They rarely pass the ball or throw it to cause damage. If forced to defend, they will attempt to knock opponents into the pits.

### Time In

Once everyone is in position, a fanfare sounds to signal the start of the match. The crowd works itself into a frenzy as the match gets underway.

The match is played in combat rounds, using movement ratings and number of attacks to deter-

mine how many actions a character can take each round. A character who gets three attacks every two rounds can take three actions every two rounds. In death ball, actions include moving, climbing, attacking, picking up a ball, throwing a ball, and scoring a goal.

Death ball is not, necessarily, a fight to the death. The first team to score three or more goals wins and the match ends.

### Ending the Match

No matter how the match ends, as long as the PCs made a good showing of themselves (scored at least one goal) and have at least one living character left, then Hamanu allows them to present their case before his throne. If they actually manage to win the death ball match, then Hamanu will grant them a sumptuous feast before calling for them.

## The Magical Conference

When the PCs come before Hamanu, they must be very careful. Their best course of action is to tell the truth. Around the throne are six templars, Severin, 12 half-giant guards, and two defilers. Hamanu does not appear to be in a good mood. He sits brooding for some time before finally speaking. "Who are you?" he demands, glaring at the PCs while the defilers begin casting know alignment spells and a few templars cast detect lie.

Hamanu wants to know why they dared sneak into Destiny's Kingdom. His initial questions include: "What were you seeking to steal? Which city hired you? How much did you hear?" Then he will get into more direct lines of questioning, based on the latest information his advisors have turned up: "Did the Order send you? What do you know about the Order? Tell me about this rock crystal found with your belongings."

If the PCs mention Korgunard, Hamanu leans back in his throne, smiles, and strokes his beard.





"Ah, the 'Great One.' I see. What is 'my friend' up to now?" The best course of action for the PCs is to tell Hamanu as much as they know and ask him to contact Korgunard directly. After all they have found in the palace, it should become clear to the PCs that Hamanu is not responsible for the psionic interference. If they do not suggest a team-up between the sorcerer-king and the avangion, then Hamanu will come to that conclusion himself. The PCs may believe that Korgunard can help release them, so they should be willing to go along with this suggestion.

I can contact the avangion," Hamanu declares, "but I will need the help of minds that know him well. Will you submit to my magic for purposes of this meeting?" If the PCs agree, then the arrangements continue as described below. If they refuse, Hamanu uses them anyway, for he knows he needs Korgunard's help at this time. Hamanu and his aids use whatever magic they must to hold the PCs in place until the contact is established.

### Calling Korgunard

A great marble edged sheet of obsidian is brought before the sorcerer-king. The PCs are told to look into the black surface and to picture Korgunard. Hamanu touches each of them in turn, then he touches the stone. It glows brightly and an image begins to form in its black depths.

Korgunard's image appears in the stone. He seems quite surprised to see Hamanu, and a little concerned by the general physical state of the party. He asks about their health and the events that have led to this unique meeting.

Throughout the conference that follows, both Korgunard and Hamanu will be polite to each other. It is obvious to the PCs, however, that a deep hatred exists between the two. It will be up to the PCs to convince Korgunard that Hamanu is as much a victim of the interference as everyone else, and that the best course of action will be for the two to work together

toward a solution. This should be done through role-playing, with the DM taking on the roles of both powerful beings. Once that is settled, the conversation will include the following elements:

- Hamanu declares that the sorcerer-kings are not to blame for the current crisis.
- Korgunard gives assurances that neither the preservers nor the pyreen are responsible.
- An ancient preserver fortress is believed to exist within the Road of Fire, the chain of islands in the Sea of Silt. Both agree that if the place exists, then it should contain information to help put a stop to the Psionatrix field. Hamanu lets slip that he has concerns regarding the site, though he refuses to elaborate.
- Korgunard mentions a halfling psionicist he has dealt with who may be of help in the current crisis. The halfling should be consulted, he advises.
- Finally, when all of the possible suspects are eliminated, Hamanu and Korgunard agree that the Order must be responsible.

The PCs should participate in this conversation, giving their opinions, asking questions, and providing options. In the end, all should agree that there are two major courses open to them: to find the Order and to seek ancient knowledge from the preservers. Korgunard, who is already in the Hinterlands, agrees to seek out the Order. His mission, he informs them, will start with the halfling psionicist. Meanwhile, someone must locate the preserver fortress in the Sea of Silt. If the PCs do not volunteer, Korgunard asks them to take up this quest. Once they agree, Hamanu decides to send his own chosen retainers to help them. He will not hear of any changes after he has made up his mind on the matter.

With the conference at an end, Korgunard's image disappears and Hamanu calls for his aids. The PCs are given time to memorize spells and are provided with healing and supplies for the trip. All of their equipment is also returned at this time.



## Part Three : The Giants of Lake Island

### Previous Events

Upon the orders of Korgunard, the Avangion, the PCs travelled to the City of Urik, the realm of Hamanu, self-proclaimed King of the World. Their orders were to infiltrate the Sorcerer-King's fortress-palace and determine his level of awareness about the current psionic crisis and his involvement, if any, in the situation.

The PCs successfully infiltrated the palace after battling their way past the "killer" that was terrorizing the city from the ancient sewers. However, their presence within the complex was detected and they were sent to the gladiator pits.

Eventually victorious in the savage conflicts of Urik's arena, they received an audience with Hamanu that gave them an opportunity to save their lives and enlist Hamanu as an ally for their cause.

The sorcerer-king and the Avangion Korgunard argued and eventually agreed that they must work together to fight the mysterious menace that threatens them both.

Korgunard told them that he would travel to the Forest Ridge with a halfling psionicist whom he knew, while the sorcerer-king offered to mount an expedition to the Road of Fire, the site of an ancient preserver fortress in the Sea of Silt, which might shed some light upon the current crisis.

### Overview

The Sorcerer-King and Korgunard agreed to work together to defeat this threat, and all will turn to the PCs to aid in the removal of the null-field that is destroying all psionic effects across the realm. The PCs will be sent by Hamanu and their patron with a contingent of the sorcerer-king's finest operatives to search for the preserver fortress. The Urikites who travel with the PCs will hold them in the greatest contempt, causing friction throughout the journey and adding to the problems they will encounter on the way.

The expedition will first travel through the Tablelands, north of the Dragon's Bowl, to the oasis at

Bitter Well. During this journey through the desolate wilderness, the group will come under attack from a band of marauding gith, but will be aided by the Free, an old ally, before they can come to too much harm at the hands of the raiders.

The desert will provide several threats to the group, causing the loss of several Urikites along the way and possibly leading to the deaths of one or two of the PCs if they are not vigilant. The expedition arrives at the tiny oasis settlement of Bitter Well, where they will hire the giants to carry them into the Sea of Silt.

However, the evil-psionicist Arvego will already have visited the giants and dominated their leader, who, after coercing the PCs across to their island home on Lake Island, will have them imprisoned to deal with as he sees fit.

The Urikites at this point will betray the PCs and bargain their way to freedom, leaving the PCs to escape on their own. Still imprisoned by the giants, the PCs will receive a cryptic message from Korgunard. They will escape and follow the Urikites to the preserver fortress on the Road of Fire.

### The Adventure Begins

After their victory in the arenas of Hamanu's palace and their audience with the "King of the World," the PCs have been given time to recover from wounds inflicted on them by the Bloody Claw and from the terrors of Death Ball. They are provided with accommodations and sustenance, until the sorcerer-king has finished talking with Korgunard through the mind-link. The PCs, while provided with some luxuries, are well aware of their status as "guests" of Hamanu. Two half-giant guards, from Severin's personal company, are stationed outside the doors. As an additional security measure, the PCs' weapons, armor, spell components, and thieves' picks have been removed.

Once all of the PCs have recovered from their wounds, read the following to the players:

## The Giants of Lake Island



*The din of the arena still echoes in your ears, as you wait in the quarters so graciously provided by Hamanu, while he and your patron Korgunard make decisions. The quarters are plushly furnished and a spread of exotic fruits and salted meats have been laid out for your pleasure. Hamanu's personal physician, a wiry and sickly-looking half-elf, has wrapped your wounds and for the first time in a long while, you aill feel quite well, physically and mentally. With the events of the past few weeks finally bringing positive results, you are eager to continue your quest, if only to escape the watchful eye of Hamanu.*

*After several hours, Severin enters the chamber accompanied by eight of his half-giant guards. He commands you to follow him to Hamanu's audience chamber where the Sorcerer-King has some important news regarding the current situation.*

The PCs should follow Severin and his retinue—they have virtually no other options. As they are led through the maze of chambers and corridors in the fortress, one of the PCs receives a psionic mindlink message from Korgunard:

*Agree to whatever Hamanu demands of you, for we must be united in this undertaking. When you have finished the task he will give you, meet me at Desoverendi's valley.*

After the receiving player relays the message to the others, the party continues past the huge barracks and parade grounds, to the imposing mass of Hamanu's inner palace. The half-giant guards remain at the doors of the audience chamber, while Severin leads the party inside.

The Sorcerer-King sits upon his ornate throne deep in concentration, staring into the marbled mirror and occasionally making comments, as if in conversation. As he registers the presence of the PCs, he looks into the mirror and says, in a mocking tone of voice, "Your pets are here, my friend."

With that, he rises and, beckoning the group forward, begins to speak:

*I have discussed the current crisis with Korgunard. Although we disagree regarding several aspects of the situation, we do agree that we need each other to defeat this threat. Whatever the cause of the dampening of psionic powers, it has affected the entire region. Korgunard intends to travel with a halfling colleague to the Forest Ridge. There, he hopes to discover some truths regarding the effect. He will contact you once he has explored this area. Meanwhile, I have graciously offered to release you from bondage and commission an expedition to the Road of Fire. Your master believes that the preserver fortress that is within the chain of islands could provide an explanation as to the cause of this problem, and he wants you to find it.*

*I would accompany you personally on this hazardous journey, yet affairs of state prevent me. I must apologize if I disappoint you. However, I have decided to send a group of my most trusted subjects with you to represent my interests in these matters. Send them in, Severin!*

At this point, the main doors of the audience chamber swing open on heavy iron hinges and a band of Urikite guards, dressed and ready for the harsh desert beyond, march into the chamber. The Urikite group consists of a number of NPCs equal to that of the PC party.

*Your comrades stand in the doorway. All appear to be veteran soldiers, and apart from the half-giant member whose eyes show only the meager intelligence of his race, all eye you with little more than contempt. Upon a gesture from Hamanu, the Urikite leader motions his men forward, and they stride into the chamber, bow once to Hamanu, and stand to attention, motionless.*



## The Giants of Lake Island

Hamanu steps down from his throne and speaks:

**Chtek Ch're:** 10th-Level Thri-Kreen Fighter

The mission that you are undertaking is one of utmost importance to the city of Urik, and to the entire region of Tyr. If you do not complete this duty, many will perish in the bloody conflict that erupts as the situation deteriorates further. Therefore, you must not fail. You will succeed in this mission to explore the preserver fortress, or you will die in the attempt. Fail, and none of you will be welcome in the city of Urik, if it still stands. prepare yourselves for your journey. My quartermasters will supply you with provisions and mounts. All of your weaponry will be returned to you, along with any other personal belongings that were confiscated. That is all!

Severin motions for both the PCs and the Urikites to follow, and leads the party to the Quartermaster's store. Each is equipped with two weeks of rations and water-based on their race and special requirements. While the kanks are being prepared, the PCs and the Urikites are left to get acquainted.

### The Urikites

Full statistics for the following NPCs are provided at the end of this chapter. The following character descriptions should be summarized to your players, when they wish to examine their new allies.

**Thovadarak:** 11th-Level Male Human Templar

Thovadarak is the leader of the Urikite party and considers himself the leader of the expedition to the Road of Fire.

**Ulreg the Strong:** 8th-Level Female Half-Giant Gladiator

The most imposing of the Urikite team, Ulreg will do little but stare at the party, a menacing glint in her eye. Although a beauty by half-giant standards, she still looks capable of reducing any of the party to a crumpled mess in a matter of moments.

The Thri-Kreen member of the Urikite group betrays little emotion. It merely stands in one corner of the room, watching with insectoid-eyes. Apart from an occasional rasping click from its mandibles, it offers no communication of any kind. The party should sense the general contempt it holds for all of them.

**Dokala:** 7th/7-th-Level Female Halfling Fighter/Psionicist

Probably the most active antagonist the party must deal with on the long journey to the Road of Fire is Dokala, the Urikite halfling. She is constantly at the side of Thovadarak, her leader, and leans up to whisper in his ear, watching the party in the process. Her comments probably center on them. She will add her own derogatory comments to any discussion or argument that occurs.

**Jherid the Dark:** 10th-Level Male Human Defiler

Thoroughly evil and untrustworthy, Jherid is the team's primary source of magic. His long years of secret study into the dark arts have left a permanent imprint upon his psyche and a dark streak through his heart. He is a cold, emotionless man who considers himself superior to all others, although he does respect Thovadarak as a commander.

Any other defilers within the party will be singled out as potential adversaries, and he will do his best to make them as uncomfortable as possible.

**Aramao the Quick:** 13th-Level Male Elven Thief

This thief likes to spend his time indulging in his favorite pastime—the glorification of self. Any situation and any discussion will soon be graced by Aramao's arrogance, and he will proclaim his own superior abilities on every topic. He has spent years perfecting his skills as a thief, and thinks himself the best that the region Tyr has to offer.

## The Giants of Lake Island



Any thief characters within the party will be subjected to an almost constant barrage of snubs and insults regarding their abilities. Aramao is confident that he can deal with the PCs, especially if he believes the rest of the team is behind him.

**Tirian:** 10th-Level Female Human Templar

Tirian will automatically raise the suspicions of the PCs and the Urikite templar. The child of slaves, Tirian vowed never to be a slave again, a goal she prefers to accomplish by ensuring that others are sent to the slave pits in her place.

She is ruthless and calculating, making her a good friend of Jherrid, the Urikite defiler.

She will pay little obvious attention to the group, because she prefers to observe and assess the abilities of the party before deciding her own actions. This method has kept her alive for many years, and she does not intend to change her policy. Of all of the Urikites, it is Tirian who spends the most time in conference with their leader Thovadarak, regarding

the actions of the Urikite team.

*Note:* Full NPC stats will be found on pages 73-76.

### The Road to Bitter Well

*You leave the relative safety of the City of Urik at first light, as the burning orb of the sun begins its fiery ascent into the parched skies of Athas. The Urikites follow you from the city after conversing with the guards at the gate and the Captain of the Guards, Severin. They soon join you and fall into place behind your group on the road into the bleak and desolate deserts. The journey ahead is going to be a tough and hazardous affair, with threats coming from both the land itself and the nightmarish inhabitants of Athas that call the desert home. You will see little of civilization for sometime now, not until you reach the oasis at Bitter Well. Apart from the occasional dust-settlement, Bitter Well will be the only town in a desolate landscape.*



## The Giants of Lake Island

The group must travel to Bitter Well to locate and hire the giants necessary to carry them across to the Road of Fire. To reach the oasis town, the expedition must cross approximately 150 miles of burning deserts, devoid of life—save for the various dwellers who hunt within that sun-blasted hell. Urik and Bitter Well are connected by a road that runs arrow straight, but the road offers little safety or shelter from the scorching heat.

Throughout the journey, the Urikites will show little interest in the PCs, except to pass an occasional derogatory remark regarding the general abilities of specific party members. Every mistake or misjudgment will be met with fierce rebukes and insults from the Urikite team, who will soon begin to invent crude and insulting jokes at the expense of the characters.

The DM should play the Urikites as arrogant and malicious cutthroats who firmly believe that they are quite capable of completing this mission without the interference of the PCs. Any injury that befalls one of their team will result in accusations of incompetence against the PCs, as will any other actions the party attempts to take.

Several encounters can occur during the trek to Bitter Well, which, given good conditions, should take five to six days. Remember that the party is traveling overland, on kanks. The character MP cost is  $\frac{1}{2}$  MP, the kanks, 15 MP. With the Urikites pushing them, the PCs should be able to make 30 miles per day. In addition to the encounters detailed in this section, any of those suggested in the Desert Perils section can be used here, although they may have to be altered to increase the level of threat due to the addition of the Urikite team within the party.

### Worm Sign

*For several days now you have been journeying through the harsh wastelands of the northern Tablelands, passing the great Dragon's Bowl to the south. Your mounts are already tiring from the intense heat and all of you feel the need to rest, yet there is no respite from the elements to be found.*

*The land around you is an endless plain of hard-baked sand and blistered rocks.*

*Eventually, as the sun begins its descent, plunging the world into darkness, you locate a place to rest. It is a small depression in the sand, sheltered on two sides by a structure of sandstone that provides limited protection from the winds of the desert; winds that will soon drop to freezing temperatures with the final disappearance of the sun.*

*Tired and in need of sustenance, you tie your mounts and settle down into the depression, trying your best to find a comfortable spot to sleep in the sandy bowl. Soon you begin to slip into the land of dreams, but as you do you become aware of a deep rumbling emanating from the ground around you. As you wake, the rumbling becomes more intense, until the ground itself is actually vibrating beneath you. As you begin to move, all hell break loose in the camp.*

The party has unfortunately made camp beneath one of the favorite haunts of a sink worm, one of the gigantic subterranean predators of the desert. Sensing vibrations of the party as they prepared to bed down, the sink worm investigates the disturbance. The sink worm's sudden appearance results in a -4 penalty to the party's surprise role, as it bursts up into the midst of the camp.

**Sink Worm:** Int Animal; AL N; AC 6; MV 12, Be 18; HD 14; hp 68; THAC0 7; #AT 1; Dmg 2-24; SA Swallow Whole; SD Phasing; SZ G (50' long); ML Steady; XP 7,000.

Should the sink worm exceed its required attack roll by 4 or more, it can swallow its victim whole, causing an automatic 2d12 damage per round.

- If wounded badly, the sink worm can use its phasing ability to shift through up to 30 feet of solid rock to escape.

**DM's Note:** the sink worm will not differentiate between the parties' members-PCs, NPCs, or mounts-the DM should make random rolls for the creature's target each round.

## The Giants of Lake Island



### Black Waters

*It has been two long days since you left the sanctuary of Urik, and the long journey through the desert is already beginning to take its toll upon both you and your mounts. Your kanks are becoming more difficult, and every so often one of them refuses to accept your commands, and begins to wander off in a direction of its own choosing. As the afternoon moves on, you spy the glint of water on the horizon, reflecting the light of the sun in a brilliant cascade of color.*

*Soon you can see the source of this water, and your hearts rise to the thought of a refreshing stop upon the banks of this oasis. However, as you approach, you see the oily-black sheen that covers the surface of the waters. You have arrived at the fabled Black Waters, poisoned many years ago by the foul magic of Hamanu in his efforts to destroy the city of Yaramuke. This is not a place to drink, yet you need rest and even this dark place will provide some protection from the night. Thus, you settle down for the night, and watch the sun disappear behind the horizon, plunging the world into night once again.*

The Black Waters are well known throughout the Tyr region for their poisonous nature. Anyone fool enough to drink from their oily depths feels an instant chill ripple through his body, as the poisons work their way slowly to his heart.

Upon drinking, a saving throw vs. poison should be made. Success indicates that, while the poison has been resisted by the character's body, he will gain no sustenance from the waters. Failure on the other hand has a more dramatic effect.

Each hour after drinking from the waters, the character must make a Constitution check at -3, or immediately lose 1 Constitution point and 10% of his hit points (round up). His suffering is curable only by a heal or wish spell. A cure disease spell will not return lost health, only prevent further deterioration. During the night one of the denizens of the dark waters will rise to investigate the disturbance of his resting place.

The DM should choose one of the PCs to be the first to meet their new companions for the night, and read him the following passage:

*You awaken from your dreams to the sound of shuffling feet. It is still night, and the stars hang in the shadowed sky, casting their dim light across the oasis. As you slowly lift your head, you see forms moving between the sleeping bodies of your comrades. These forms seem vague, shifting from time to time as they move, sniffing at the sleeping shapes around them. Then one looks up at you, its glowing red eyes burning malevolently into your soul. Then it screams.*

At this, the ghost and its company of seven faithful ghouls attack. The ghost will direct its hostility against the PC who saw it, while the ghouls will attack the sleeping characters. Besides those already in the camp, a further 1d8+2 ghouls will rise from the water every round until the ghost has been destroyed.

These unliving spirits are the fallen souls of those who drank from the Black Waters and died of its effects. In life the ghost was a powerful defiler, yet he was slain by the waters and transformed into his present form. He is more powerful than the usual ghost and still possesses the magic he held in life.

**Ghost:** Int Very; AL CE; AC 4; MV 15; HD 7; hp 37; THAC0 14; #AT 3; Dmg 1-4/1-4/1-8; SA See Below; SD See below; SZ M; ML Elite; XP 1,400.

The ghost emits a stench so bad that all within 10' of it must make a saving throw vs. poison or suffer a -2 to initiative for the duration of the combat. Additionally it possesses the same paralysis attack that ghouls bear, affecting even elves, and lasting for 1d6+4 rounds.

Due to its magical power, this ghost can only be turned as if it were a vampire.



## The Giants of Lake Island

### Spells:

1) *chill touch, shocking grasp, sleep, magic missile*;  
2) *blindness, darkness 15' r, shatter*; 3) *lightning bolt, vampiric touch*; 4) *improved invisibility*.

**Ghouls:** INT LOW; AL CE; AC 6; MV 9; HD 2; hp 9 each; THAC0 19; #AT 3; Dmg 1-3/1-3/1-6; SA Paralyzation; SD See Below; SZ M; ML Steady; XP 175.

Ghouls are subject to all forms of attack except sleep and charm spells. They are fully affected by protection from evil spells.

Until the ghast has been slain, the ghouls will continue to rise from the murky depths of the black waters to plague the party. If at any time the party decides to flee the area, a course of action the Urikites will gladly go along with, the ghouls will at first attempt to follow, but after three turns will tire of the chase and return to their aquatic graves.

### Ambush

*The blazing sun burns down on the arid wasteland around you as you continue on the long road to the oasis town of Bitter Well. The scenery is little more than occasional desert shrubs and small rock formations dotting the otherwise unremarkable sands of the harsh desert. Meanwhile, you continue, sweat dripping from your skin and boiling away as it drops and touches the surface of the road.*

*The desert is silent, the creatures that call this their home safe from the rays of the sun inside their burrows and lairs. No sound penetrates the haze, save for your own laboring breathing and the complaints of your cantankerous mounts.*

*As you travel farther, you spy something on the horizon. As your party moves closer, you can see the banners of an independent trader flying in the air. Your hearts rise as you think of the supplies these merchants are sure to hold within their caravans, supplies you sorely need. You spur your kanks to a faster pace.*

*Your hopes are shattered as you arrive to find the caravans burned out and gutted of all materials. The bodies of the caravans' guards lie half-buried by the desert sands. All have suffered hideous wounds from a variety of weapons, including teeth and claws. You are having increasing difficulty in controlling your mounts as you survey the scene. They are pulling at their harnesses, as if afraid the carnage has not yet stopped. A young human woman bursts into the ruined camp, her club still dripping with the blood of the gith.*

Her name is Selanu and she is a member of the infamous slave tribe known as the Free. She is tattered and in shock. Her tribe was surprised by the gith they were tracking and overrun. She and two companions escaped into the desert, but the gith caught them and only Selanu escaped. When the PCs question her she will tell her story impatiently, anxious to learn what happened to her people. She will explain that they had followed the gith who had been raiding Free caravans. The gith spotted them and led the Free into a trap. Selanu has no idea how many of her people are left, if any. Selanu knows where Bartras, the leader of the Free, thought the gith lair was hidden. She will make an impassioned plea for assistance.

Thovadarak is not impressed, and grumbles that if the PCs want to go charging off to play heroes, that is fine with him, they don't need their help anyway. The PCs should remind Thovadarak of their common need for supplies. The PCs, remembering their old debt to the Free, are ready to leave. Besides, they still need supplies, and perhaps the Free. . . . And so, loosely united by a common need, the party can move forward in anger and resolve. For their part, the Urikites could care less. Thovadarak, however, realizes that the intentions of the gith, after a protracted battle with the Free has raised their blood-lust, may be eventually turned on the party. They cannot remain where they are. In addition, he agrees that the Free may be able to give them some desperately needed supplies.



## The Giants of Lake Island



Selanu leads, your entire party follows. After a few miles the ground begins to rise, sloping gently into low hills. On the way, you learn that Free fought the gith to a standstill, as one by one the remnants of the Free join your rescue party. Belana, an old woman who was left for dead at the scene of the battle, watched Bartras and another warrior led away. She speaks, haltingly:

*"The gith needed food. . . us, we were to be diners for weeks. They trapped us. They had a defiler with some kind of magical pipes, tried to control us. They hurt. Bartras got him, but the gith got Bartras, and another. They both tried to struggle. . . it was no use. Then the gith stripped them. . . naked they were. Took all equipment. . . weapons. . . stolen. They were gagged, bound hand and foot. Naked. . . they were. Then two gith threw them over their backs and made off, through the desert, to their stinking lair."*

You follow Selanu up one of the hills to the top of a rise. She watches carefully, and points, below you is the gith Lair.

The gith, secure in their once-secret lair, have not even bothered to post guards. Why should they? Who would dare attack them where they live in numbers? Thovadarak suggests that, since it was their idea, the PCs and the Free survivors should enter the cavern lair first. He and the Urikites will fight a 'rear-guard' action, and act as reinforcements if they are needed.

You find yourselves underground, in a roughly-hewn tunnel. The walls of this burrow are lit by crude torches, and in the distance the inhuman cackles of more gith can be heard. You move forward cautiously, keeping behind the outcroppings of boulders, ducking in to wall depressions, feeling your way in the dim torch light. The sounds of gith approaching cuts through the cavern's still air. Soon, several torches can be seen coming up the

tunnel to a side cavern, carried by a group of gith warriors. They enter the cavern, and two of you follow to see what is happening. Hanging on the wall of the cavern, in chains, are Bartras and his loyal tribesman. The gith roughly unshackle the two Free warriors from the walls, connect their manacles to each other, and lead them to the main chamber of their lair where their leader awaits. As they pass Selanu's voice whispers:

*"We are here to rescue you, be patient and you shall be free."*

There is no reply, but Bartras, head nods slightly—he has heard. They are dragged into the dimly-lit court of the gith chieftain. He sits upon a crude throne of bones and skulls, his mouth still caked with dried blood from his last feast. The chamber is filled with gith cackling and taunting the two Free as they are pushed down to their knees in front of the chieftain. As they are forced to kneel, you see the rotting meat and bones that litter the floor beneath their legs. The stench in the chamber is almost unbearable.

The chieftain leers at them from his throne and, after muttering words, unrecognizable speech, to his people, motions for the ceremony to begin. Two gith step forward, each bearing a huge, two-handed scimitar of corroded metal, with rough, deadly edges.

**Gith (80):** INT Average; AL CE; AC 8; MV 10; HD 3; hp 16 each; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 -1 (Bone Spear); SA Springing; SD Nil; SZ M; ML Steady; XP 175

**Chieftain:** INT Average AL CE; AC 4 (+2 Hide Armor); MV 10; HD 7; hp 42; THAC0 13; # AT 1; Dmg 1d10+1 (+1 Metal Two-handed sword); SA Springing; SD NJ; SZ M; ML Steady; XP 650.



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All gith may use their Springing ability to close the distance between themselves and their targets. When employing this ability the gith gain a +2 bonus to their THAC0 for the first round of combat only.

**DMs Note:** The gith morale is high within their own lair. The PCs should take up a position on the left flank, and must defeat 30 gith. The gith will attack the PCs in 3 waves of 10. The final wave will be lead by the gith chieftain. When the gith chieftain is slain, the gith must make Morale check. Once the gith have lost two-thirds of their numbers, they have lost and will flee into the maze of tunnels that is their home, where it will be impossible to locate them effectively.

Selanu gives the signal and the combined force of PCs and Free charge into the assembly. Fury and rage from both sides breaks loose within the chamber as the battle, fueled by additional gith arriving from other chambers, is joined. Breaking the chains of the two warriors requires two successful bend bars rolls. When the leader of the Free and his warrior are released, they grab weapons from slain gith and join the fray. Overall, there are 80 gith warriors, along with the gith chieftain and his two defiler advisors. Although bloody and protracted, the battle will eventually be won by the party, after suffering heavy casualties. The Urikites and the Free immediately begin to antagonize each other, especially those ex-slaves who recognize the uniforms of the Urikites. It will be the responsibility of the PCs to ensure that a second battle does not occur, especially when the party recovers their lost possessions.

Bartras, the leader of the Free, approaches the party after the battle is over. His clothing is soaked with the blood of his enemies, and the battle lust is obviously still in him as he looks to the Urikites who stand beside the group. After a few moments he takes a deep breath and smiles at the group, "Thank you, my friends," he says simply, greeting each of them warmly, "I fear I would have been a

tough morsel for them, without your aid." He explains that his tribe had been tracking the gith to this lair for weeks, after they raided several Free caravans. He continues by asking them about their exploits since their last meeting.

After hearing what is said, he considers the implications of the situation for a moment, occasionally casting a glance in the direction of the Urikites. Bartras then goes to talk with Selanu, the human who first discovered the caves. They talk for some 10 minutes before both return to the party. Bartras says that the desert ahead is considerably more active than usual, possibly because of the psionic effect, and that Selanu will go with them as far as Bitter Well to ensure they arrive in safety. She is an excellent scout and knows the deserts between here and the oasis well. Bartras will answer any questions that the PCs ask of him, though his answers will be phrased to avoid revealing any sensitive information to the Urikites who will be standing close by, listening with interest.

### Final Approach

*For several days now you have been traveling under the direction of Selanu, the rogue. She has successfully managed to take your group through the perils of the desert with only a few minor injuries to yourselves and your mounts. Even though the journey was a great deal less hazardous than it would have normally been, all of you are feeling the effects of the long trip and your bodies ache continuously from the constant motion of your kanks. As the sun rise over the desert you continue your journey for what Selanu promises will be the final day of travelling. With good speed she believes that you will arrive at Bitter Well by sunset.*

Most of this final day of travel is quite uneventful apart from the usual discomfort caused by the blistering heat. The approach to Bitter Well appears as if it will be quite easy. However, Arvego the psionist who has been tracking the movements of the group has prepared a few surprises for the party.

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*It is approaching sunset as you catch your first sight of Bitter Well. In the distance lies the great wall of silt that blows up from the dusty ocean beyond, rising up hundreds of feet into the air, like a monstrous plateau. Down below it, only just visible in the haze of the silt-storm, a clutch of stone-huts can be seen, huddled around in a semi-circle. Several small caravans can be seen within the perimeter of the settlement, and even at this distance, the occasional sound of voices and music can be heard emanating from the huts.*

*With Bitter Well in sight, Selanu turns and bids you farewell, begging you to take care in your quest. She wishes all good luck, even the Urikites, before spurring her kank around and riding back into the desert that you have just departed.*

*As she disappears from view, you all turn again to appraise the view over Bitter Well. However, as you do, the air around you is split by a terrible cry coming from beyond the dunes to your south. You spin round and scramble up the dune to behold the plain beyond.*

*Charging across the desert come four beasthead giants, coming in a direct line toward you, screaming for joy. Each swings a cruel-looking blade over his head in delight.*

These four beastheads are a welcoming committee laid on by Arvego the psionist who has been tracking the group's progress since they began their quest. Using mind domination powers, he has directed these giants to act as part of a plot to ensnare and eliminate the entire party. They are under orders to cause as much damage as they can while driving the group to the oasis, where the next stage of the plan can commence.

**Beasthead Giants (4):** INT LOW; AL NE; AC 3; MV 15; HD 15; hp 75 each; THAC0 5; # AT 2; Dmg 2d8+14/2d10+14; SA Psionics, Bite; SD Nil; SZ H (20' Tall); ML Champion; XP 7,000.

**Psionic Summary:** PSPs 75; Level 5; Dis 2/ Sci 3/ Dev 10; Attack/Defense PB, EW, II/M-, IF, TW; Score 13.

**Clairsentience:** Sciences; aura sight, clairvoyance; **Devotions:** combat mind, danger sense, know direction. **Telepathy:** Sciences; tower of iron will; **Devotions:** mind blank, ego whip, id insinuation, intellect fortress, psionic blast, conceal thoughts, life detection.

The giants will attempt to steer the party toward Bitter Well, though not so the group realizes it is being guided. Once they have harassed them enough, they simply pull back and disappear from the area. They will throw rocks at the group to scare them toward the settlement, hoping to spook the kanks enough to bolt.

Once within 50 feet of the settlement, the giants will withdraw from the scene, leaving the group tired, scared, bruised, and just a little confused.

### Bitter Well

(See Map Book pg. II)

With the event of the giants still heavy in their minds, the group will no doubt be extremely relieved to find safety within the settlement of Bitter Well. Under the relative shelter of the canopies that protect the settlement from the elements, the party can at last relax and refresh themselves before continuing their journey. The Urikites immediately head off for one of the two taverns within the settlement and tell the party they will meet them at dawn to locate a ride across the Road of Fire, leaving the group to arrange their own evening's activities.

### A Brief Guide to Bitter Well

The oasis known as Bitter Well has only been in existence for the last few centuries. Before its existence, the only sign that water existed in the area was the constant echoes that bounced across the plains, bringing the sound of running water to the ears of



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the exhausted merchants who have for centuries plied their trade across the region. After many years of rumors and tales talking of a great underground lake, a group of industrious dwarves set out to tap the water and create a profitable enterprise that could feed their families. The dwarves spent many years digging under the burning heat, only to discover that the huge lake they expected to find was little more than a stream, amplified by the rock mantle that it cascaded over. Disheartened and bitter, they left the well to those who had use for it.

Since then, a small but quite prosperous settlement has built up around the meager waters of the well, acting as a trading post for the merchants as they journey across the deserts.

Bitter Well supports a population of approximately 80 people on a permanent basis, and another 60 on an irregular temporary basis. Due to the constant traffic from the surrounding desert, there will always be at least 100 people within the settlement. It is controlled by the Sadrak family who have maintained the supply of water since the original dwarven architects abandoned the site. They charge nothing for the water, except the privilege of receiving the first draw from the well every sunrise.

The entire settlement is constructed from sandstone huts packed closely together to create shelter. Hanging between the huts are canvass drapes that help to shield the streets from the sun's heat. While this does have the desired effect, it also increases the general odor of humanity that hangs around the village even more than is usual for a settlement of this size.

All standard supplies can be purchased within Bitter Well, although the consumer can expect to pay at least 20% more for an item here than he would in one of the larger cities. Besides the mundane items that can be found here, there is also a large illicit trade in the distribution of information and illegal goods such as spell components.

There are two meager taverns within the settlement, both relying upon the merchant caravans to

bring them their wares, and to keep them in business. The Orb is the most lavish of these establishments, catering mostly to the merchants who stop at the settlement to replenish their water supplies. The food and refreshments at this tavern are of a good standard, and the few rooms it has to offer are generally clean.

At the other end of the scale is The Dragon, a seedy and generally disreputable establishment frequented by more dubious characters who find themselves in need of a watering hole. It is a cheap and inferior tavern, complete with foul-tasting wines and inedible food, yet it is the most popular, mainly due to its support of the black market that for years has helped to keep the town solvent.

The position of each of these taverns reflects the general class of the areas of Bitter Well. The north side of the well is primarily dominated by the more prosperous merchant classes who use the settlement as a base for their operations. The lower classes of Athasian culture congregate around the Dragon on the southern end of the settlement. People from the two sections seldom venture into each other's neighborhoods, as the poor are well aware of the fate that awaits any who are caught stealing from the merchants. The merchants in turn are fearful of the ever-present threat of mugging and murder that exists within the slums of the south.

The well itself is a rather grand affair, considering the nature of the minor stream that supplies its water. The original dwarven architects created a magnificent stone bowl measuring 50 feet across to hold what they thought would be a deluge of water. Down the inner wall of this bowl runs a curved walkway that slowly circles down to the actual well, some 30 feet down. At any given time, the walkway will be packed with people coming to fill their waterskins. Anyone joining the procession can expect at least a two hour wait before being able to fill their skin. Additionally, due to the minor nature of the water source, there is a 50% chance each day that the water supply will be depleted to such an extent that the

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Sadrak family, and their personal guards, will ordain and enforce a rationing order, reducing the settlement to temporary chaos until the water has been replenished. Because of this, a number of severe droughts in the past have almost wiped out this town, as the water supply, so vital to its existence, threatened to disappear.

### Night in Bitter Well

The Urikites, upon arrival, disappear to the Orb tavern in the merchant quarter of the settlement and make it quite clear that they do not wish to see the PCs until morning. Even if the PCs decide to follow them to The Orb, they will discover the Urikites have rented all of the remaining rooms within the tavern, forcing the party to travel back across the settlement to The Dragon in the slums.

Once the party has settled in at The Dragon, the second stage of Arvego the Psionist's plan goes into effect. Before the party's arrival, the psionist passed through the settlement and, using his domination powers, subverted a number of undesirable characters to his control. These individuals are hidden within the settlement, waiting for the chance to move against both the party and the Urikites. During the evening, any of the following encounters may be played upon the party, preferably when one or two PCs go off somewhere on their own.

### Crossfire

As the PCs weave their way through the narrow streets of Bitter Well on their way to another part of town, several of Arvego's minions begin to trail them obviously. Each character should make an INT test at +3 to notice their pursuers as they move. These minions, however, are only a diversion designed to draw the characters' attentions away from the three archers hidden in one of the back streets, waiting for the characters to move into their field of fire. As the characters move past, each will fire his short bow at a single character.

**Archers (3):** INT Average; AL CN; AC 8; MV 12; HD 2; hp 10 each; THAC0 18; #AT 2; Dmg 1d6-1/1d6-1; SA Nil; SD Nil; SZ M; ML Steady; XP 35 each.

On the first round of combat the archers will have surprise on their side. The characters must make a surprise roll at a -4 penalty.

As the players move to engage the archers, they will withdraw as quickly as possible, while the three minions previously following them draw their bows and complete the ambush from the opposite side, forcing the players into a crossfire. These three will then also withdraw.

### Scapegoat

When the characters decide to eat, another of Arvego's subjugated minions, this time a young serving woman, will poison one character's food as she prepares it. Upon ingesting it, the character will suffer a series of agonizing pains in his chest. This will cause 1d6 damage, unless the character makes a successful save vs poison roll at a -2 penalty. An unsuccessful roll will cause intense hallucinations quickly followed by unconsciousness for 1d6 hours. Once this is done, the serving woman will be completely unaware that it was she who poisoned the food, due to the post-hypnotic suggestion placed by Arvego. Even a detect lie spell will not register her guilt, because she genuinely believes that she is innocent. If pushed far enough it is likely that she will become hysterical and cause difficulties for the players in the midst of such a seedy and hazardous tavern. The Dragon is usually filled with plenty of customers who will take an intense dislike to anyone who bothers the serving women. Persistent interrogation of the woman is likely to incite several local inhabitants to challenge the party, encouraged by jeers and threats from the rest of the clientele.



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**Tavern Drinkers (8):** INT Average; AL CN; AC 8; MV 12; HD 3; hp 14 each; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6-1 (13 one Short swords); SA Nil; SD Nil; SZ M; ML AVERAGE: XP 65 each.

### Sleeping Partner

During the evening a beautiful young woman will enter the tavern in which the party is currently relaxing, and after touring the main bar will sit opposite them. She will eventually wait until one of the male PCs walks to the bar and will join him, offering to buy him a drink and share her company. If the character refuses, she will continue to watch the group until another leaves for the bar and then attempt to seduce him also.

Any character who is lured by this woman's charms to return with her to her modest home in the slums will initially find himself in the company of a charming and highly attractive young courtesan. However, after the character has consumed several goblets of fine wine (-2 to all actions), he will discover the true nature of this houri.

Her name is Salina and she is another of Arvego's subverted minions, ordered to lure one of the characters away and then murder him, leaving his body in the street as a warning to his friends.

**Salina:** Half-Elf 8th/8th-level Defiler/Thief; INT Exceptional; AL CN; AC 6 (+2 Leather); MV 12; Hp 32; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6+1 (+2 Bone Short sword); SA Magic, Backstab; SD Nil; SZ M; ML Steady; XP 1,400.

Spells: 1) *shocking grasp*, *charm person*, *hold portal*, *magic missile*; 2) *ray of enfeeblement*, *invisibility*, *blindness*; 3) *hold person*, *slow*, *blink*; 4) *fear*, *emotion*.

### First Light

After the night's events, the party wakes to find that the normally huge cloud of silt that hangs over the settlement of Bitter Well has retreated during the

night, revealing the coast of the Sea of Silt. After a quick breakfast, the party hurries out into the streets almost immediately meeting the Urikites, and several of them look slightly worse for wear.

Thovadarak will be fuming when the characters arrive. Several of them were attacked in unrelated skirmishes during the night, nearly costing the lives of two of his people. It appears that it was not just the player characters who were the targets of attacks. Several times during the night The Orb became the scene of bloody, raucous fights. Thovadarak informs the group that Jherrid, the Urikite defiler, has gone to find a local who can summon the giants to the settlement. They will then be able to bargain for passage across the Road of Fire. He also suggests that if the group requires any supplies, they should purchase them now, as Jherrid will soon return.

After an hour Jherrid reappears, accompanied by a grimy and extremely ancient dwarf, dressed in simple robes. He is carrying a long staff, from which hangs a bone horn. He is Freeman, a long-time inhabitant of Bitter Well and a friend of the giants who inhabit the islands nearby.

The dwarf leads the group out of the settlement and, after several hours of travel through the desert, to a rocky outcrop above the murky Sea of Silt. Here the group is told to wait. Freeman climbs to the peak of the outcrop and, after murmuring a brief prayer, the dwarf places the horn to his lips and blows. A single, clear note echoes out across the endless wastes and tracts of silt before him.

This ritual continues over the course of several hours—with the dwarf repeatedly blowing the horn out over the apparently empty silt. As the heat of the day begins to build, Thovadarak's people become agitated, complaining that the dwarf is of no use, they are tired of his noise, and that they should make their own way across the Sea of Silt. However, their leader tells them to remain patient, his manner keeping them in check.

Eventually, as the sun reaches its zenith, Jherrid



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leaps up and races to the outcrop where the dwarf stands in meditation. Grabbing the dwarf by his robes, Jherrid begins to threaten and insult the ancient Freeman, who appears to take little notice of the irate defiler. As Jherrid continues to scream and rant at the dwarf, all of the characters notice several figures moving toward them through the Sea of Silt.

The figures move closer, growing in size, while Jherrid continues to shout at Freeman. He is oblivious to the approach of what can only be the giants. As the huge creatures reach the banks of the Sea of Silt, they rise from the dust to their full height, their shoulders level with the platform on which the dwarf and Jherrid are standing. At this the defiler notices their presence and finally falls silent.

Unfortunately for the characters, the giants are under the influence of Arvego the psionicist who has dominated the mind of their leader. These giants have been told to capture the party at all costs, using whatever methods they consider will work the most effectively.

*The largest giant climbs up onto the outcrop and kneels down beside the dwarf, greeting him in their own guttural tongue. After the two have conversed for several minutes, the giant turns to you all and greets each of you in turn, introducing himself as Mulak, the son of the leader of the giants of Lake Island. Once he learns of the identities of the group, he explains that his father sent him and his hunting party out to meet the group several days ago, but they were held up by movements within the silt and were unable to meet them at Bitter Well.*

*His father has need of them on Lake Island, and he and his hunters are to take all of you across the Sea of Silt to their home.*

Each of the seven giants carries a basket-worked saddle bag arrangement over his shoulders. Each basket is capable of easily carrying three humans, two thi-kreen, or one half-giant, along with any supplies that they have with them. The mounts cannot,

however, be taken across to the island. However, the Freeman offers to buy the kanks from the group for 6 silver pieces each. He will not bargain with the group, stating that his price is fair and fixed. With this transaction dealt with, Freeman wishes all a good journey and promptly rides back for Bitter Well on his newly acquired kanks.

The giants meanwhile prepare to make the journey back to their home with the party. Each character will ride in one of the baskets harnessed over the shoulders of a giant, as they wade through the silt to their island home. The journey is a difficult one, crossing some of the most dangerous areas of the silt, but with good speed should only take around four or five hours to complete.

After making the necessary preparations for the trip across the silt, the giants inform the group that they are to be ready to leave in an hour. The sun is already beginning to heat the air, and the fine spray of silt that blows up from the sea is already beginning to find its way into the clothing and possessions of the party. The entire party is beginning to itch as they climb into the giants' carrier baskets. The giants, for unknown reasons, do not seem bothered by the constant irritation caused by the silt. With all preparations complete, the giants wade down into the silt and begin the long journey to Lake Island. The giants know of a single, safe island in the silt where the party can bed down for the night. The little island is about halfway to Lake Island. The plan is to make that island by tonight and finish the journey on the morrow.

### The Sea of Silt

The Sea of Silt is without a doubt one of the most arduous and hazardous places for travelers in all of Athas. The silt is thought to run to depths of hundreds of feet in some places, while in others it is dense enough for even giants to walk as if the silt were any other solid terrain.

The silt is home to a variety of creatures and



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many of these are predatory creatures who live by attacking travellers as they move across the silt. Only the sheer size of the giants prevents them from becoming prey for such creatures. Most creatures that live within the silt prey upon surface dwellers, especially those humans foolish enough to venture out into the dust.

Another constant threat while in the dust is the danger of suffocation in the silt. While the giants use the ancient paths trodden down by their ancestors, humans are far too short to attempt such a crossing alone, and would soon drown in the dust should such an attempt be made. The silt is not dense enough to bear any weight until a depth of about 15 feet is reached, on the average, prohibiting any attempt to wade through the silt by anyone except the giants. The additional hazards of unseen sink-holes and chasms on the bed of the sea also discourage inexperienced travellers from wading.

Visibility is another problem that discourages extensive travel within the sea. The dust that blows up from the surface creates a thick fog that reduces vision to 10 yards and sometimes even less. The particle fog coats everything, from clothing to skin, and even the lungs unless precautions are taken to prevent it. It is possible to choke to death on the fog if it is allowed to enter the lungs.

Another major problem of travel here is the lack of available sustenance to be found within the silt. Most silt-dwellers are carnivores, relying upon other creatures for their food and water. For such races as humans, there are no ready sources of either food or water in the silt. This fact has resulted in the deaths of many previous expeditions—those who failed to carry enough supplies to see them through the miles of dust.

Finally, humans require rest, a difficult need to fulfill when wandering in the Sea of Silt. There are few places capable of withstanding the weight of humans, and those that do exist are likely to be the lairs of creatures that will not take kindly to their territories being invaded by outsiders, and who are probably hungry.

## Silt Encounters

The following encounters are designed to be used during the journey, although they may be changed for others if so desired. Alternatively, the DARK SUN™ Encounter Tables found in the *Monstrous Compendium* supplement may be employed. The Sea of Silt Encounter Table should be used for these purposes.

### Running Scared

*After leaving the relative safety of the deserts, you entered the Sea of Silt in the baskets of your giant guides three hours ago. The going is slow, and all around you the fog seems to press in upon your body, the dust cloaking you in a film of gray grime. The giants pay little attention to your discomfort, for they themselves are oblivious to the irritation caused by the dust. They simply continue to wade across the silt, following the old, worn paths trod by their kind over thousands of years.*

*As you travel, you become aware of occasional movements in the silt all around you. The movements are characterized by churning paths cutting through the silt, as if something were moving at great speed beneath the surface. However, the movement stops almost as quickly as it began, leaving you uneasy but unharmed.*

*Eventually you feel yourselves rising up, and you realize that the giants are climbing up onto a low island in the silt, covered by twisted shrubs and a few stunted trees. The giants let you down and lay themselves down to rest, telling you they will continue at first light. So you also bed down as the fog darkens with the last dying rays of sunlight disappearing from the horizon.*

*Just as you lay down to sleep though, you again catch sight of the dust churning, out in the silt. This time however, it is constant and you can make out multiple paths being cut through the dust, all heading directly for the island.*

*Then as the paths reach the shores of the island,*



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*they explode upward and outward, as silt runners burst onto the island to claim their next victims.*

The silt runners have been hunting the expedition for several hours and now that it is dark, they have decided to make their attack. There are 30 silt runners, plus an additional five guards who shield the leader of the band.

Their tactics are simple. They attack and try to carry off one or two characters before retreating. At all cost, they will avoid the giants, who are too slow to swat the runners, but can still cause damage, even accidentally. Instead they will concentrate on the smaller-sized characters like humans, but especially they try for elves, which are a delicacy.

Every round, there is a 25% chance that the giants will be able to swat 1d4 of the runners.

**Silt Runners (30):** INT Low; AL CE; AC 7; MV 48; HD 2; hp 12 each; THAC0 19; #AT 3; Dmg 1-3/1-3/1-6; SA Nil; SD Nil; SZ S (3-4' tall); ML Average; XP 35

**Psionics Summary:** PSPs 24; Level 1; Dis 1 /Sci 1/ Dev 3; Attack/defense -/TS; Score 10.

**Clairsentience - Science:** Clairaudience; Devotions: Combat mind, radial navigation, see sound.

**Silt Runner Guards (5):** INT Low; AL CE; AC 6 (Shields); MV 48; HD 3; hp 18 each; THAC0 18; #AT 1; DMG 1d8-1 (Bone Long sword); SA Nil; SD Nil; SZ S; ML Average; XP 65 each.

**Psionics Summary:** PSPs 24; Level 1; Dis 1/Sci 1/ Dev 3 /Attack/defence -/TS; Score 10.

**Clairsentience - Science:** Clairaudience; Devotions: Combat mind, Radial navigation, see sound.

**Silt Runner Leader:** INT Average; AL CE; AC 5; MV 48; HD 4; hp 28; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg

1d8 + 1 (+1 metal battle axe); SA Nil; SD Nil; SZ M (5' tall); ML Steady; XP 120

**Psionics Summary:** PSPs 24; Level 1; Dis 1/Sci 1/ Dev 1; Score 10.

**Clairsentience - Science:** Clairaudience; Devotions: Combat mind, radial navigation, see sound.

If more than 20 silt runners have been slain, the leader, if still alive, will order a retreat. He, and the remainder of his people, will disappear again back into the silt, to recover from their losses.

During the fight, one of the giants will lose his footing and be swarmed by the runners who will drag him screaming into the silt, never to be seen again.

### Dawn of the Dead

*As you wade through the silt, you spot another small island in the distance, covered with what appear to be slabs of stone, toppled upon one another in a random fashion. Each of the stones is approximately two feet wide and three feet long. Most of the stones are cracked and chipped, and all appear to have been carved and weathered by the winds and dust that have passed over them, probably for aeons. The giants stop at the island to allow you to get off, while they continue onwards to scout the surrounding area and locate the next path outbound, toward Lake Island.*

The giants have unwittingly left the characters on top of a mass grave. This small island was once part of a cemetery, back in the days when the Sea of Silt still contained water and solid islands. It is now the home to a small horde of skeletons under the power of the spirit of an ancient lord, one Raphlin, to whom the island grave was dedicated. As the characters watch the giants disappear into the silt, the ground behind them will begin to stir as the undead spirits of those buried here rise to destroy the intruders.

## The Giants of Lake Island



**Skeletons (25):** INT Non; AL N; AC 7; MV 12; HD 1; hp 6 each; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1-6 (spear); SA Nil; SD Immune to sleep, charm, hold and fear; SZ M; ML Special; XP 65 each.

**Animal Skeletons (hunting dogs) (6):** INT Non; AL N; AC 8; MV 9; HD 1-1; hp 5 each; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1-8; SA Nil; SD Immune to sleep, charm, hold and fear; SZ M; ML Special; XP 65

**Raphlin (1):** INT Average; AL LE; AC 5; MV 12; HD 8+8; hp 27; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 1-4; SA Constitution Drain; SD Require +1 or silver weapon to harm; SZ M; ML Elite; XP 975.

Raphlin is similar to a wight, but drains Con. In addition, his direct gaze is a weapon that causes paralysis in a victim for 1d6 rounds.

The giants will return from their scouting trip after 10 rounds. They were unaware of the battle that

was raging. Once they arrive they will help destroy the remaining undead that still plague the group.

Hidden within the gravestones that litter the island are the following items:

85 silver pieces

1 pearl (75 sp)

A set of *splint mail* +2

A *long sword of life stealing*.

### Ghost Ship

*You are once again being carried through the silt upon the shoulders of your giant guides. You are becoming weary of the endless straits of changeless silt and, with no apparent end to them, you are beginning to sink into a deep depression. However, today something appeared on the surface of the silt, most likely pushed up and into the air by the eddies and tides of the dust, deep beneath the surface. At first you can only make out the vague outline of a structure upon the surface of the silt, but as you approach you see the wooden hull of some ancient and great vessel, weathered with*



## The Giants of Lake Island

*age and cracked and splintered along its length. Even the giants are a little nervous of going any closer. They have never seen anything like this vessel, either. With great apprehension, you carefully climb on board.*

What the expedition has discovered is a relic from an age long past. The vessel that lies upon the surface of the silt is the wreck of a merchant ship that sank beneath the Sea of Silt when the sea was water and the silt was honest sea bottom. It has been pushed to the surface by the deeper movements of the silt and now sits upon the surface for the first time in centuries. Forced up and into the sunlight by a large chunk of solid rock, it is quite safe to stand within 15 feet of the ship in any direction.

### **Main Deck** (See Map Book pg. II)

The main deck of this bizarre vessel measures approximately 50 feet in length and 30 feet in width, although one end of the vessel has been torn off, leaving the cabins beneath exposed to the air. In the center of the deck stand two stumps, remains of what were once the masts of this ship. The vessel stands useless and rotten now. In the bow of the vessel, mounted upon the hull, is a worn figure of a knight bearing what must once have been a two-handed sword. It is now little more than a corroded piece of rusty metal. There are two hatches in the deck disappearing into the twin holds of the ship.

There is little of interest on the deck of the ship, although close examination will reveal the name of the vessel carved into the prow. It was once called the *Dominion*.

**1. Access way.** *Both hatches lead down into this dark corridor via rotten ladders. One end of the access way is open to the elements, while the walls and opposite end have several doors leading presumably to cabins in the vessel. In the foot of silt that covers the floor lies a decaying human skeleton, clutching a glistening short sword in its hand.*

Both ladders are badly rotted and any weight placed upon them in excess of 50 pounds will cause them to collapse, inflicting 1d6 damage upon the character climbing down them.

The skeleton is quite dead, and although tarnished, the short sword in its hand is perfectly usable. (metal *short sword* +1.)

**2. Wreckage.** *What the original purpose of this area may have been is impossible to tell now. Most of this chamber is missing, along with the remainder of the stern of the ship. Now only a tiny portion of the floor remains, and the walls are little more than rotted planks, clinging to the hull for their very existence.*

This cabin is utterly unsound and any attempts to enter it will result in the floor collapsing, plummeting the character into the silt below.

**3. Store.** *Although the north wall of this chamber is no longer intact, and this side is open to the elements, the contents of the ship's store are still here. However, the rope and food that were once kept here have long since turned to dust. The only items that remain intact are three fine-chain nets hanging on the south wall.*

The three nets were used to fish for the sharks and other predatory sea creatures that swam in these waters. None of the nets are magical, but they could fetch around 25 silver pieces each on the open market.

**4. Crew Cabin.** *This large chamber evidently served as the crew's quarters, judging from the rotting bunks that line the north and south walls. In the center of the cabin, lying on its side, is a rotten table, its former contents spread across the floor. Besides decayed clothing, the only item of any value is a copper flagon lying on the floor beside one bunk. Lying next to the flagon is a dusty bottle of wine, its cork intact.*

The copper flagon is worth around 20 silver pieces. The bottle of ancient wine, if uncorked, will prove to contain liquid, although tasting it will show

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that it has not aged well and has turned to vinegar. Any character drinking from the bottle must make a CON test or begin to vomit the vinegar up for 1d6 minutes, and additionally take 1d6 damage.

**5. Captain's Cabin.** *This cabin is as decayed as the rest of the ship. Apparently this was once the captain's cabin, given the rotted furnishings and the tattered art hanging on the walls. In one corner of the room sits a collapsed bunk, while the remains of a wooden desk rest in pieces against the opposite wall. Above the desk sits a rack containing what were once maps. One collection of scrolls still survives, sealed in a dirty, bone scroll case.*

The Captain's cabin contains a number of interesting items. The old bone case contains three scrolls that yield the following spells:

Scroll #1: *create food & water, dispel magic.*

Scroll #2: *cure serious wounds, protection from evil 10' radius.*

Scroll #3: *slow poison, hold person.*

Under the debris of what was once the bed is a small wooden chest. Due to its extreme age, it will crumble into dust if touched. Inside the chest are the following items:

5 silver pieces

Two *arrowheads of undead slaying.*

A sextant (worth 15 sp)

A ring of sustenance.

However, anyone who attempts to touch the chest must deal with the family of scorpions that have taken residence under the rubble before claiming it. Any attempt to take the chest will result in the creatures attacking.

**Scorpions (3):** INT Non; AL Nil; AC 5; MV 9; HD 2+2; hp 15 each; THAC0 19; #AT 3; Dmg 1-4/1-4/1; SA Poison Sting; SD Nil; SZ S (2' long); ML Average; XP 120 each.

**Poison:** Type A; saving throw at +2 or 15 damage, no damage if successful. If reduced to 1 or 2 hit points the scorpions will enter a stinging frenzy gaining two attempts to sting each round.

**6. Galley.** *The ship's galley was holed by whatever sank the ship; much of the floor is missing. You can make out the vague form of a skeleton, caught upon a plank, and the silt beneath can be seen through a hole in the floor. The walls and ceiling show evidence of a fire and much of the wood is blackened and scorched.*

The skeleton at the bottom of the hole does not actually belong in this ship, and that will become apparent if the hole is investigated. The skeleton's weapons and armor are of current manufacture, made of bone and kank-hide. He is, in fact, a victim of a silt horror that lives beneath the hole in the ship. Anyone investigating will alert the white horror to their presence, and it will react by launching its tentacles up into the cabin.

**White Horror (1):** INT Animal; AL N; AC 8; MV 3; HD 14; hp 70; THAC0 7; #AT 10; Dmg 1-8 (× 10); SA Constriction; SD Air Jet; SZ G (50' long); ML Average; XP 7,000.

When a tentacle attack hits by 4 or more, the victim is grasped by the tentacle and takes an additional 1d8 damage each round until released. The horror will attempt to drag the victim into the silt, which may be resisted by an Open Doors roll, if the victim is anchored to something.

Each tentacle can withstand 10 hits of damage before being severed, causing the victim to be released. Alternatively, very strong characters with Strength exceeding 21 can make a Bend Bars roll to pull free. Blunt weapons cause half-damage to the tentacles.

If badly wounded, the horror will use its air jet to push itself back into the silt at a rate of 50 yards per round, creating a huge cloud of silt to cover its retreat.



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**7. Main Hold.** *Once containing some animals being shipped from one city to another, the hold of the ship now contains hundreds, perhaps thousands of bones. All around the floor they lie, creating a thick ivory carpet.*

Apart from the hundreds of animal bones within the hold there is nothing else of interest.

**8. Secret Store.** *You are amazed when you open the door and discover a small armory and store, almost entirely untouched by the ravages of age. You opened the door, and a sudden rush of air proved that the chamber had not been open to the air for centuries. Much of the equipment in this room is still in perfect condition.*

This was the Captain's emergency store. It contains several items, all in excellent condition, and some magical items. It also contains a guardian to prevent thieves from emptying it of its contents.

When anyone enters this storeroom, a lesser air elemental will form in the center and attack the first character.

**Lesser Air Elemental (1):** INT Low; AL N; AC 4; MV 18; HD 6; hp 37; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 1-12; SA Vortex SD +1 wpn to damage; SZ M; ML Elite; XP 1,400

The elemental can whip itself into a vortex that doubles the damage it can inflict. However, this effect halves the number of rounds it may stay on this plane from 12 to 6.

Inside the cabin are the following items:

- 3 metal long swords
- 2 metal maces
- 1 metal battle axe
- 4 metal daggers
- 40 steel-tipped arrows
- 3 sets of leather armor
- 2 sets of chainmail armor
- A longbow +1
- 3 potions:
  1. *Extra Healing*

2. *Flying*

3. *Fire Resistance*

Whether the party decides to stop at the vessel or not, they may continue onward through the silt. By sundown they will clearly see the peak of Lake Island rising up ahead of them in the haze of the dust cloud.

### Lake Island

Lake Island is all that is left of a dormant volcano that first exploded into the world some 500 years ago. Since then it has slowly increased in height and circumference as magma slowly trickles from the sides of the main cone and raises the peak a little higher each year. All around the mount, the rich volcanic ash has created a lush grassland plain. The ash is not the only reason for the rich profusion of vegetation here. The lake itself sits within the crater of the volcano and is constantly heated by the magma deep inside. Giants graze their herds of kank and erdlu over the green fields and the lake provides all the water they and their flocks need. Lake Island is one of the most prosperous sites in the entire Tyr region; indeed, it is one of the most prosperous on Athas itself.

### The Road to Lake Island

*At dusk, on your second day of travel, the giants finally wade out of the Sea of Silt as the dying rays of sunlight disappear beneath the horizon. You are lowered from their shoulders and now you can feel the lush green grass beneath your feet for the first time. In the distance, you can make out the forms of other giants herding kanks and erdlus up the side of the volcano to home, their crude torches piercing the ever-deepening darkness like the stars in the sky.*

*You move on and are soon climbing the steep path to the giants' stockade. As you walk, the giants offer explanations of the sights and sounds of their unique land—rivulets of magma trickle out of the rock above you, great plumes of super-heated steam*

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issue from the summit of the volcano, where the molten rock steams into contact with the waters of the lake held in its cone.

Finally, you arrive at the gates of the giant stockade, a pair of heavy wooden doors guarded by six huge giants, all of whom eye you warily as you approach. At the command of Maluk, they swing the gates open and your party enters the stockade. Then, as the last one enters, the vast doors swing shut, momentarily deafening you as they slam back into position with a resounding crack.

### The Giant Stockade

The giants of Lake Island have lived in the cone of the volcano for hundreds of years, making their living by raising kank and erdlu, and by harvesting the grain that grows in the tundra, below the slopes of the peak. There are a total of 66 giants living here, 15 of whom are women, and nine that are children. The party is treated with curiosity as they are led toward the chieftain's hut. One or two of the children occasionally approach to get a better view of these strange "little people" who have entered their fortress.

Unfortunately for the party, the psionicist Arvego has already visited the giants and, using his psionic powers, has subverted the chieftain and shaman of the tribe to obey his will. They now believe that the party is a direct threat to the security and continued existence of the settlement and intend to deal with them as necessary.

Maluk leads the group toward the largest hut within the stockade and, after ordering the guards at the door to allow them entry, he takes them into the court of the chieftain.

Maluk leads you through the ornately carved doors of the chieftain's hut and into a smokey room. This chamber is vast, its ceiling towering over your heads for at least 60 feet. The walls bear exquisite tapestries, and the floor is carpeted with animal furs. Down each wall stand 10 giant guards, their faces and eyes set, looking straight ahead at all

times. At the end of the chamber, atop an elaborate wooden throne, sits the chieftain. A truly massive being, even by giant standards, he sits, frowning, and watches your approach. Standing at his side, occasionally whispering into his ear, is the tribe's venerable and respected shaman.

The giant chieftain remains silent as the party steps forward to introduce themselves. He says nothing, but has the party explain to his shaman their reasons for coming to the island. Only after they have finished speaking does he speak. His words are not expected, neither by the party nor by Maluk who stands at their side.

"I believe lies you speak, you think? Stupid think you of giant? Stupid me? Why you come here? Why? I know this thing. Trusted little one knows much. Him knows you. He me told why you here. Giant treasure you want steal. Know I, told me he before you come. He say you come here steal treasure. Smart me. Never here leave, you. Know I, told I. Treasure mine! Guards, grab!"

At this command, the 10 giant guards who were standing against the walls of the chamber leap forward with huge clubs, ready to attack. The shaman will employ a hold person spell on anyone who attempts to escape. The giants lumber forward and disarm the party. They also remove all of the party's possessions except those specifically concealed by individual characters. Once this is done, the chieftain orders the entire group taken to the cells-in preparation for the sacrifice.

You are tied and gagged by the giants and marched unceremoniously across the stockade to one of the many caves that ring the walls of the settlement. Inside the cave, you discover a series of cells with heavy iron bars on the doors. You are thrown into a cell, the door slams, and you are locked in. The Urikites in their turn are pushed into an adjoining cell. Two of the giants remain in the cave as guards, making themselves comfortable at a huge table across from your cell. They are talking and you hear them discussing the



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pending sacrifice in the boiling lake. As they talk, they keep looking at your cells!

Five minutes later you receive another surprise. Arvego, the giant chieftain tagging behind him, enters the cell block.

Staring into your cell, Arvego smiles. "Chief, if you want to keep them here, you had better have someone remove the crystal shard from that one and put it with the rest of the booty you took off this lot."

Arvego will point to the PC who was given the shard by Korgunard. Arvego will also recommend that their hands be tied so they can use neither magic nor lock picks. The PCs are going to stay here until Maluk comes to aid them.

After a few hours, Thovadarak of the Urikite party calls to the guards and asks for an audience with the chieftain. At first the guards ignore him, but then he removes something from his tunic and throws it across the hall to them. One of the guards picks it up, looks at it, and hurries out of the cave. The other picks up his club and eyes the Urikite warily. Five minutes later, the guard returns with another two giants and Thovadarak is led away.

For several hours, all is quiet. Then six giants appear, along with a smiling Thovadarak. He watches the party with an evil glint in his eye. When he reaches the PCs' cell block, he speaks:

*"My friends. I have some excellent news for you. After a long discussion with the chieftain, I have managed to guarantee us safe passage from this place and onward to the Road of Fire. It seems even the chieftain recognizes the true power of Hamanu and does not wish to invoke his wrath. Therefore we are to be set free.*

*"However, there is one condition that we must meet if we are to escape. The giants still wish to make their sacrifice to the lake in two days' time, and to do this they need some prisoners. Therefore, my comrades and I will leave to complete our quest, while you shall remain here to entertain the giants, if you see what I*

*mean. I'm sorry to have to do this to you, but to be honest, you were our prisoners anyway. Whatever the outcome of this quest you would have been put to death eventually. So farewell, my friends. I don't think we'll be meeting again. Not in this world anyway."*

With that, the other Urikites are released from their cell block and their possessions returned. Without even a farewell they leave, giving the party an opportunity to consider their situation.

### A Cryptic Clue

*Sitting within the darkness of your cramped cells, you wait. Several times you have examined the doors and walls for signs of an escape route, and so far you have found nothing. Your hearts are heavy and your morale low. It appears that you will soon be sacrificed to the great lake, and all because of the treachery of the Urikites. You curse their very souls for what they have done to you and vow that, should you live, they will pay for their betrayal.*

*As you sit on the straw-covered floor of your cells, you hear a voice. At first, you look at each other through bars, but none of you have spoken. Then you hear it again. Distant and somewhat distorted, you recognize the voice. It is Korgunard, your patron.*

*His voice is becoming clearer, yet almost immediately you can sense that he is in pain and that this long-distance communication is extremely difficult for him. You strain your ears to make out his words, but realize the voice is all inside your head. Although his voice is weak and his words are often garbled, Korgunard tells you:*

*". . . was a trap . . . The Order. . . They must not succeed . . . must escape . . . you must escape . . . follow the Road . . . I am lost . . . you must follow the Road. . . only hope . . . escape . . . escape . . . the Road . . . no . . . no . . . please."*

And then Korgunard screams and a heavy wave of reflected, psychic force washes over the charac-



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ters, momentarily stunning them with pain. Then, just as quickly as it came, the voice and the pain vanishes. The characters are again alone.

It should be obvious to the party that it is now up to them to continue the quest and find the preserver fortress. However, they are currently locked inside a cell with no weapons and very little hope of rescue.

### Unexpected Ally

*You look out of a window in the cell door and note that your giant guards have fallen asleep, heads peacefully laid on the table. And then, to your astonishment, you see Maluk, the giant who guided you to the island, enter the room. He ignores the sleeping guards and walks over to your cell. He stops, laughing softly at you, locked in his father's jail. Anger begins to well up inside your heart, but it quickly subsides as Maluk stealthily unlocks the cell door. Winking at you, he holds a finger to his lips. "Shhhhh! Being quiet," he whispers, "I come you to get out. Father take all treasure for self. Take all Maluk pieces too. Me and friends get you out. Back to Bitter Well. You pay Maluk and friends, yes?" You look to the guards who are beginning to snore loudly. Nodding, you accept your good fortune and follow Maluk into the night.*

Maluk—upset with his father, the chieftain, for confiscating the silver pieces Maluk accumulated—has decided to aid the PCs and recover some of his treasure the only way he can. He will also tell them that Arvego was the one who told his father that the PCs had come here to steal, and that Arvego seems to be controlling his father somehow. Maluk no longer knows his father. He will lead the party to the store (see below) and aid them in regaining their supplies. Then he will give the party  $2d6 \times 10$  minutes to explore the stockade and gather whatever they wish to take with them. They must meet him at a small side gate that was built to allow the children to come and go without the need to open the great, heavy doors.

Maluk will fight his fellow giants if he must, but he does not want to if it can be avoided. The party should not consider this to be a simple case of fighting their way out of the stockade, even with Maluk's help. Outnumbered, they would almost definitely be slaughtered by the giants. Therefore they should formulate a plan for stealthy search and escape.

### The Giant Stockade

(See Map Book pg. 12)

It is likely that the party will have to move through a great deal of the stockade to find their belongings. Therefore the following section provides details of each area, including the number of giants who remain stationed at each.

**1. Cells.** This rough-hewn cavern is some 30 feet long and around 20 feet wide. Much of the western part of the chamber is dominated by the cells. Fast asleep at the opposite end of the chamber, sitting at a huge table, are the two giants who have been assigned to guard them until the sacrifice. There is a 25% chance that they will awaken as Maluk and the PCs make their escape from the cells.

**Giants (2):** INT Low; AL NE; AC 4; MV 15; HD 14; hp 76 each; THAC0 7; #AT 1; Dmg 2d8 + 14; SA Hurl Rocks; SD Resistant to Psionics (save vs spells to negate effects); SZ H; ML Champion; XP 6,000 each.

Apart from the bones that they used to pass the time and the handful of copper pieces that they use to bet, the two giants have little of any practical use on their persons.

**2. Main Stockade.** The stockade is actually the remains of a cave in the wall of the volcano crater that collapsed many years ago. It formed a natural alcove open to the skies and surrounded on three sides by rock walls. The walls of the stockade rise 100 feet and are pitted and scarred from years of subjection to the

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elements. On the western edge of the stockade, the ground drops away 50 feet to the boiling lake below. There are a total of seven buildings within the stockade, as well as five cave entrances in the walls.

When the PCs enter the stockade, there are six giants visible, each of whom will spot the party on a roll of 1 or 2 on 1d6. If they do, they will call to the four guards on the gates. They will arrive to attack the group in three rounds.

**Giant (6):** INT Low; AL NE; AC 4; MV 15; HD 14; hp 76 each; THAC0 7; #AT 1; Dmg 2d8 + 14; SA Hurl Rocks; SD Resistant to Psionics (save vs spells to negate effects); SZ H; ML Champion; XP 6,000 each.

**3. Fire Pit.** Measuring 12 feet across and some 25 deep, this fire pit provides heat and light for the entire stockade. It is kept burning at all times and illuminates an 80-foot circular area. It is upon this fire that the party is to be burned alive, their ashes then scattered on the surface of the lake as a sacrifice.

**4. Well House.** Built at the edge of the lake and overhanging it by 20 feet, this wooden building provides the water required by the giants. Inside the building is a system of pulleys and winches that lower a huge stone bucket down into the boiling waters and fills it with about 20 gallons of water. Several vats are kept in the chamber to hold the water while it cools.

At all times two giants operate the winch to ensure there is enough water for the tribe.

**Giants (2):** INT Low; AL NE; AC 4; MV 15; HD 14; hp 76 each; THAC0 7; #AT 1; Dmg 2d8 + 14; SA Hurl Rocks; SD Resistant to Psionics (save vs spells to negate effects); SZ H; ML Champion; XP 6,000 each.

**5. The Lake.** In the crater of the dormant volcano is the lake for which the entire island was named. Hundreds of feet deep and hundreds wide, the lake

provides the island with the water necessary for life to exist. The waters, constantly in contact with the super heated rock beneath, are kept at the boiling point. Contact will cause 4d6 points of damage to anyone unfortunate enough to fall into the water; saving throws to be made at a -2 penalty. Much of the lake is obscured by the clouds of steam rising from its surface.

**6. Living Areas.** There are three huts that are used as general living areas within the stockade. Each is a wooden building measuring 60 feet by 80 feet down each wall, and 50 feet high. They are well lit and warm and are used as living areas at various times by all of the giants of the tribe. At any time, should the characters enter one of these huts, they will be confronted by four male, four female, and two infant giants. The women and children will move behind the males, who will draw their weapons and defend their families with ferocity.

**Giants (4):** INT Low; AL NE; AC 4; MV 15; HD 14; hp 76 each; THAC0 7; #AT 1; Dmg 2d8 + 14; SA Hurl Rocks; SD Resistant to Psionics (save vs spells to negate effects); SZ H; ML Champion; XP 6,000 each.

Within the huts, a variety of implements may be discovered that could be of use, including giant daggers that make excellent swords for those in need of weapons. Most of the giants' possessions are of too great a mass to be of any practical use to the party.

**7. The Shaman's Hut.** When not at his chieftain's side, the tribal shaman spends his time locked in his hut. Here he experiments with new spells and performs the rituals that are an essential element of his religion. The shaman worships the spirits of the island, particularly those of the lake itself, and his hut is filled with the trappings of his faith.

At all times, two guards are stationed within the outer room of his hut to challenge and prevent anyone from entering without invitation.



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**Giants (2):** INT Low; AL NE; AC 4; MV 15; HD 14; hp 76 each; THAC0 7; #AT 1; Dmg 2d8 + 14; SA Hurl Rocks; SD Resistant to Psionics (save vs spells to negate effects); SZ H; ML Champion; XP 6,000 each.

The inner chamber of the shaman's hut is reserved exclusively for him—unauthorized entry is punished by a swift and painful death. There is a 50% chance of the shaman being in his hut, and 75% if it is entered at night. If he is at home when the characters enter, he will be fully prepared for them, having been alerted to their presence by the noise they made trying to get past the two giants outside his door. If the characters confront him, he will cast magic stone on a boulder and hurl it at them. There is a 35% chance of being struck by the boulder. Any character who is struck will suffer 1d6 points of damage for 1d6 rounds.

**Giant Shaman (7th-level Cleric):** INT Very (for a giant); AL NE; AC 2; MV 15; HD 14; hp 76; THAC0 7; #AT 1; Dmg 2d8 + 14; SA Clerical Magic; SD Resistant to Psionics (Save vs. spells to negate effects); SZ H; ML Champion; XI? 3,000. Spells: 3rd — *animate dead, cause blindness, dispel magic, meld into stone*; 2nd — *dust devil, hold person, silence 15' radius, trip, warp wood*; 1st — *cause fear, cause light wounds, protection from good, magical stone*.

In his hut the shaman has a variety of nonmagical shamanistic trappings as well as the following magical items.

- A Staff of Withering (12 charges)
- A Ring of Protection +2
- A Potion of Extra Healing

Additionally he has 60 silver pieces in a small chest beneath his litter, and two heavy iron keys.

**8. Store Area.** This hut is used to store all of the tribe's general equipment. This includes captured weaponry (such as those items that were taken from the characters), giant-hair rope, oil, torches, and a variety of other items. The door to the hut is always locked and requires two keys to open. The keys are in the possession of the shaman.

The party needs to gain entry to this hut; they will be able to reequip themselves with their own possessions, the crystal shard, and any other items they find here. Most of the captured weapons in the store are substandard and of little use, except a quiver of 12 steel-tipped arrows that, unknown to the giants, are actually magical, bearing a +2 enchantment. There is a 60% chance that the store is being guarded by one or more giants.

**9. Chieftain's Hut.** The chieftain's hut is the largest of the free-standing buildings within the stockade, and the most elaborate. On the external walls are crude murals depicting the heroic chieftain and his tribe in battle against the various denizens of the silt that surrounds the island. All of these show the chieftain in glorious victory, slashing his foes and reigning victorious.

Inside the hut, the main chamber is dominated by the chieftain's throne. This centerpiece throne is where he sits during the day and sleeps during the night, unless otherwise engaged with his three concubines who have their quarters in his private chamber at the back of the throne room.

At all times, the chieftain is guarded by two of his warriors, though whenever any visitors arrive to seek an audience with him, the honor guard is increased to 10 to suitably impress those who meet the chieftain.

**Giants (2):** INT Low; AL NE; AC 4; MV 15; HD 14; hp 76 each; THAC0 7; #AT 1; Dmg 2d8 + 14; SA Nil; SD Resistant to Psionics (save vs spells to negate effects); SZ H; ML Champion; XP 6,000 each.

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**Giant Chieftain:** INT Low; AL NE; AC 4; MV 15; HD 16; hp 93; THAC0 5; #AT 1; Dmg 2d8 + 16; SA Nil; SD Resistant to Psionics (save vs spells to negate effects); SZ H; ML Champion; XP 8,000.

In combat the chieftain wields a two-handed metal *battle axe* +2.

The chieftain's concubines and their children will cower in the corner of the rear room if threatened, and will allow the party to search the room should they choose. Inside this chamber they will find the following:

- 10 silver pieces
- 1 ruby worth 100 silver pieces
- 1 +2 *Spear* (steel-tipped)

**10. Stores.** These two natural caverns contain the entire grain supply for the tribe. At each harvest, the giants reap the fields of grain and then store the bulk food in these caverns on wooden pallets. The atmosphere in the caves is cool and dry, perfect for preserving grain. Currently, both stores are approximately half full.

Because of the huge amount of food stored in these chambers they both harbor small colonies of giant rats that feed upon the grain.

**Giant Rats (20):** INT Animal; AL N(E); AC 7; MV 12; HD 1; hp 5 each; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1d3; SA Disease; SD Nil; SZ T; ML Unsteady; XP 15 each.

This is a 5% chance of contracting debilitating disease from any rat bites.

**11. Erdlu Pens.** Another natural cavern, this one is used to keep the erdlu in at night. There are 80 erdlu in this cavern, held in a number of wooden pens. Any activity in this area will result in the erdlu becoming agitated and frightened, no doubt bringing several giants to investigate the commotion.

**Erdlu (80):** INT Animal; AL N; AC 7; MV 12; HD 3; hp 15 each; THAC0 17; #AT 2; Dmg 1d6/1d4; SA Nil; SD Nil; SZ M; ML Average; XP 65 each.

**12. Kank Pens.** Just like the erdlu pens, this cavern is used to keep the kank herds in during the night. These docile insects will take little interest in the affairs of those who enter the cavern unless they are directly threatened. Should they be threatened, they will attempt to stampede. There are 60 kanks in the wooden pens.

**Kanks (60):** INT Animal; AL N; AC 5; MV 15; HD 2; hp 10 each; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6; SA Nil (No warriors present); SD Nil; SZ L; ML Elite; XP 35 each.

**13. Main Gates.** The gates that protect the entrance to the stockade are fashioned from strengthened wooden beams, lashed together with giant-hair ropes. At all times, they are guarded by four giants who will challenge anyone who attempts to leave the stockade. The gates themselves are particularly heavy and require a total Strength of 50 to open, and even then they take three rounds to open, though a single human can squeeze through them after two.

**Giants (4):** INT Low; AL NE; AC 4; MV 15; MD 14; hp 76 each; THAC0 7; #AT 1; Dmg 2d8 + 14; SA Hurl Rocks; SD Resistant to Psionics (save vs spells to negate effects); SZ H; ML Champion; XP 6,000 each.

**14. Entrance Tunnel.** This entrance was bored through the rock face by the giants when the stockade was built. The tunnel is lit by a series of huge torches set into the walls, 20 feet off the floor. The ceiling of the tunnel is 50 feet high and constantly drips water onto the ground. The water is the result of the condensation of steam escaping and cooling from the boiling waters of the lake.



## The Giants of Lake Island

**15. Guard Posts.** These two wooden huts are used by the four guards who are stationed at the entrance to the stockade to prevent any unwanted visitors from entering the tribal home. Three sides of each hut are open to the elements to allow the guards to see out into the surrounding area. At all times there are four guards stationed here, keeping a constant vigil for any signs of trouble either inside or outside the stockade.

**Giants (4):** INT Low; AL NE; AC 4; MV 15; HD 14; hp 76 each; THAC0 7; #AT 1; Dmg 2d8 + 14; SA Hurl Rocks; SD Resistant to Psionics (save vs spells to negate effects); SZ H; ML Champion; XP 6,000 each.

### The Escape

The party should have realized from the beginning that any attempt to simply fight their way out of the stockade would be both futile and potentially fatal as an escape plan. With the assistance of Maluk, stealth is the only real means of escape.

Meeting Maluk and two other disgruntled giants at the old children's door, there is an 85% chance that they will be discovered when attempting to leave and the alarm has been raised. If they have been discovered it will take the guard who spotted them 1d8 × 10 minutes to rouse the chieftain and raise a party to follow. While the giants, and particularly the chieftain, are angry and will give chase initially, they will soon give up the hunt if the party continues to run.

### Leaving the Island

The main problem the party must face after they have escaped the clutches of the giants is how to leave the island and continue on their quest for the preserver fortress hidden within the Road of Fire. Lake Island lies within the Sea of Silt, and it is quite isolated from the rest of the world. It is imperative that the party return to Bitter Well as quickly as possible. The party may have sufficient magic to transport them to their target; however, they have a

duty (and a debt to pay) to the giants.

Clinging to the giants' shoulders, their baskets back at the stockade, the party rides in even less comfort than when they first came this way. The chieftain and his guards are in hot pursuit and Maluk and his friends are not going to waste any time. They will travel back across the sea of silt the same route they followed to the island.

DMs may make the escape from Lake Island a difficult and potentially hazardous affair. If the chieftain's forces catch up with the party, they may have a rough time escaping the resulting melee. Perhaps the party will have to find a different route back because a new pack of silt horrors is attacking all comers on the old trail.

### Concluding the Adventure

The Urikites are another major concern at this time. They have several days' lead over the PCs and are well along the Road of Fire. They also have the advantage of being on good terms with the giants. The party, on the other hand, has made permanent enemies of the giants, except for Maluk and his friends. And this could be temporary if the party cannot or will not pay them once they return to Bitter Well. They must get transport in Bitter Well as they attempt to catch up with the Urikites. However, the party must be extremely cautious, for any action that reveals their location to any giants may result in the entire tribe coming after them.

They will have several days during which they can recover from their wounds and find transportation at decent prices.

One other consideration that should be noted is the location of the party's possessions. If they did not recover them during their escape from the giant stockade, they will have to purchase new supplies, as the party will stand very little chance of survival without the equipment and provisions that their packs contained. Possibly through the intervention of the giant Maluk, the group may be able to return

# The Giants of Lake Island



and collect the necessary supplies and equipment with which to continue their quest. This will work best only if their escape was not discovered by the guards.

Maluk and his loyal people will transport the group to Bitter Well, where they will be able to purchase transportation to carry them to the preserver fortress. The group will still be several days behind the Urikites, a fact that will be evident from the signs of habitation that they will pass, such as the Urikite camps.

The PCs should realize that they are now involved in a desperate race against time to beat the Urikites to the preserver fortress to unlock its secrets. The group is now effectively on their own with their mentor Korgunard removed from the scene, so their situation should seem even more desperate.

## Important NPCs

### Thovadarak

Male Human Templar  
11th Level  
Lawful Evil

Str 12 Int 17  
Dex 16 Wis 18  
Con 13 Cha 17

hp: 60

AC: 1

#AT: 1

THAC0: 14 (+1 to hit with sword)

Dmg: 1d8+1/1d12+1 (bone bastard sword +1)  
or 1d4+1/1d6+1 (lead sling bullet)

**Wild Talents:** Control Body, Telekinesis  
Psionics: PSP 80

**Equipment:** Studded leather armor, shield, +1 ring of protection, bone bastard sword +1, sling, 20 lead bullets, scroll of protection from fire, cloak of the bat, potion fruit of healing.



### Templar Spells:

- 1) *Command, cause fear, cure light wounds* ×2, *create water, detect magic*
- 2) *Aid, dust devil, fire trap, flame blade, hold person*
- 3) *Animate dead, call lightning, dispel magic, hold animal*
- 4) *Cause serious wounds, cloak of fear, neutralize poison*
- 5) *Wall of fire*

Thovadarak is an ambitious templar in the service of King Hamanu. A talented and ambitious man, he has already made a name for himself as a rising power in the templar hierarchy. Thovadarak is motivated by pure self-interest in most matters, but he also understands that cooperation is sometimes an unavoidable evil.

### Ureg the Strong

Female Half-giant Gladiator  
8th Level  
Evil (variable)

Str 23 Int 10  
Dex 14 Wis 12  
Con 18 Cha 12

hp: 119

AC: 3 (hide armor +1, shield, optimized)

#AT: 3/2 (mace, axe) or 1 (crossbow)

THAC0: 13 (+1 to hit with mace), +5 to hit with axe, +2 to hit with crossbow point-blank

Dmg: 1d6+14/1d6+13 (mace), 1d6+12/  
1d4+12 (axe), or 1d4/1d6 (obsidian quarrels)

**Wild Talent:** False Sensory Input, Mindlink, Contact

Psionics: PSP 63

**Equipment:** Inix hide armor +1, large shield, iron mace (specialized), 3 bone hand axes (specialized), heavy crossbow with 12 obsidian bolts, 6 steel bolts





## The Giants of Lake Island

+1, *potion fruit of levitation*, *potion fruit of healing*.

+/-4 Chart bonus to punching/wrestling attacks  
**Armor optimization:** -1 bonus to Armor Class

Ulreg is a skilled veteran of the arena in Urik. She fought well enough to come to the attention of King Hamanu himself. By his order she was freed and appointed to his private guard. She is immensely strong and possesses a frightening instinct for violence and mayhem.

In combat, Ulreg prefers to throw her hand axes first and then close in to melee with her mace. She is content for now to follow Thovadarak's orders, but may run amok if the templar tells her to do something she doesn't feel like doing.

### Chtek Ch're

Thri-kreen Fighter  
10th Level  
Neutral Evil

Str 18/57    Int 13  
Dex 18      Wis 15  
Con 14      Cha 8  
**hp:** 61

**AC:** 1 (natural, dex)

**#AT:** 2 and bite (gythka), 4 and bite (claws)

**Dmg:** 1d4+3 (claws) or 1d4+4 and paralyze (bite), 2d4+6/1d10+6 (gythka +2), 1d6+5/1d4+4 (chatkcha)

**Wild Talent:** Feel Sound

Psionics: PSP 53

**Equipment:** Obsidian *gythka* +2, 3 chatkcha, *dust of disappearance* (4 pinches), *potion fruit of gaseous form*, *potion fruit of healing*.

Jump 50' forward or 20' up, dodge missiles on a roll of 3 or better (1d20), paralyzing bite (victim must save vs paralyzation or be paralyzed 2d10/1d8 rounds; size H or G paralyzed only one round).



A wanderer of the deep desert, Chtek Ch're was cast out of its clutch two years ago. It has never told any person what its crime was, but it must have been terrible to deserve such punishment. Chtek Ch're eventually found itself in the ancient city of Urik, where it found it was able to support itself by acting as a killer for hire. News of the thri-kreen's prowess spread quickly, and the servants of King Hamanu contacted Chtek Ch're with an offer of employment. The thri-kreen accepted at once.

Chtek Ch're prefers to begin a fight by throwing its chatkcha and then finishing its opponents with its gythka or claws. It is a very competent killer and offers no quarter to its unfortunate victims.

### Dokala

Female Halfling Fighter/Psionist  
7th Level/7th Level  
Lawful Evil

Str 13    Int 14  
Dex 20    Wis 19  
Con 16    Cha 15  
**hp:** 49

**AC:** 3 (studded leather armor, dex)

**#AT:** 3/2 (sword) and 1 (dagger), or 2 (bow)

**THAC0:** 14 (+1 to hit with sword or dagger, + 3 to hit with bow.)

**Dmg:** 1d6+1/1d8+1 (sword), 1d4+1/1d3+1 (dagger), or 1d6/1d6-1 (bone-tipped arrow)

**Psionics:** PSP 113

**Primary Discipline:** Psychometabolism

**Sciences:** Animal Affinity (giant scorpion), Clairvoyance, Shadow-form, Teleport

**Devotions:** Adrenalin Control, Body Equilibrium, Cause Decay, Cell Adjustment, Chameleon Power, Danger Sense, Dimension Door, Displacement, Heightened Senses, Know Location, Reduction, Teleport Trigger

**Defense Modes:** MB, M-, TS, TW





# The Giants of Lake Island



**Equipment:** Studded leather armor, bone *short sword* +2, steel *dagger* +1 (specialized in two-weapon fighting style), short bow, 15 bone-tipped arrows, 6 steel *arrows* +1.

Dokala was born in the jungles of the Forest Ridge. As a young halfling she took service in the company of halfling scouts and rangers that aids the army of Urik. A few years ago she was offered a permanent position in Urik, in Hamanu's guard. Dokala now ambitiously seeks power and promotion within Hamanu's palace.

Dokala realizes that her psionics are now very difficult to use, but will still attempt Animal Affinity or Adrenalin Control before entering melee.

## Jherrid the Dark

Male Human Defiler  
10th Level  
Chaotic Evil

Str 8 Int 17  
Dex 17 Wis 10  
Con 15 Cha 13  
hp: 33  
AC: 5 (cloak, dex)  
#AT: 1

**THAC0:** 17 (+2 to hit with dagger)  
**Dmg:** 1d4+1/1d3+1 (dagger), 1d3/1d2 (darts)

**Wild Talent:** Dimension Walk  
Psionics: PSPs 60

**Equipment:** Bone *dagger* +2, 12 iron-tipped darts, *cloak of protection* +2, *ring of sustenance*, *wand of fire* (14 charges), *potion fruit of glibness*, *scroll of protection from petrification*, *potion fruit of healing*, *oil fruit of feather fall*.

### Defiler Spells:

1) *Burning hands*, *magic missile*, *phantasmal force*, *shield*

2) *Blur*, *alter self*, *invisibility*, *web*  
3) *Fireball*, *fly*, *suggestion*  
4) *Charm monster*, *fear*  
5) *Cloudkill*, *wall of stone*

Jherrid is the son of a Urikite noble who found that his father's position and wealth protected him as he pursued his dark studies. His abilities helped his family destroy several powerful rivals. Eventually, the templars of the city discovered Jherrid's abilities, and the young defiler was offered a choice: enlist and serve Hamanu or die as an outlaw sorcerer. Wisely, Jherrid joined Hamanu's forces.

Jherrid is a very cold, calculating person who likes to show off his intelligence. He has a stonesskin spell in effect that blocks the first seven physical attacks directed at him. He prefers to avoid melee and attack with his considerable arsenal of spells. Jherrid will conserve his wand charges for emergencies.

## Aramao the Quick

Male Elven Thief  
13th Level  
Chaotic Evil

Str 16 Int 17  
Dex 22 Wis 9  
Con 10 Cha 14  
hp: 46

**AC:** 1 (leather armor, ring, and dex)  
**#AT:** 1 and 1 (sword and wrist razors) or 3 (thrown daggers) or 2 (bow)  
**THAC0:** 14 (+2 with sword, +3 with thrown daggers, +4 with bow)  
**Dmg:** 1d8+2/1d12 +2 (sword), 1d6+2/1d4+2 (wrist razors), 1d4/1d3 (throwing daggers), 1d6+1/1d6+1 (arrows)

**Wild Talent:** Control Body, Telekinesis

**Equipment:** Bone *long sword* +2, iron wrist razors, 6 bone throwing daggers, long bow with 20 steel ar-





## The Giants of Lake Island

rows, leather armor, ring of protection +2, rope of climbing; scroll with levitation, web, haste.

PP 95%    OL 79%    FRT 82%    MS 95%  
HS 95%    DN 90%    CW 95%    RL 55%  
Backstab at +4 to hit, ×5 damage

Aramao grew up as an elf of the Jura Dai tribe in the tablelands. He was schooled in the arts of thievery there and often joined wandering trading and entertaining parties that visited various cities. In Urik, he decided to remain behind to ply his trade in the city. His skills became legendary and several patrons sought his service. Aramao decided to enlist in the king's service, since no other patron was worthy of his talents.

### Tiaran

Female Human Templar  
10 Level  
Lawful Evil

Str 17    Int 13  
Dex 11    Wis 19  
Con 16    Cha 14  
hp: 64

AC: 5 (studded leather armor, shield)

#AT: 1

THAC0: 12 (+2 to hit with sword, -1 with crossbow bolts)

Dmg: 1d8+2/1d12+2 (sword) or 1d4/1d4 (obsidian bolts) or 1d3/1d3 (bone bolts)

**Wild Talent:** Animate Shadow, Telekinesis

Psionics: PSPs 55

**Equipment:** Studded leather armor +1, light crossbow, steel long sword +1, 12 obsidian bolts +1, 12 bone bolts, ring of mind shielding.



### Templar Spells:


- 1) Bless, command, create water, cure light wounds, endure heat, light
- 2) Aid, charm person or mammal, find traps, flameblade, resist fire, silence 15' radius
- 3) Animate dead, call lightning, spike growth, summon insects
- 4) Cure serious wounds, giant insect, neutralize poison, produce fire

Tiaran was born into slavery in the city of Raam, but eventually she escaped and made her way to Urik. Once there, she decided that she would never be enslaved again, and she joined the templars as the surest way of staying out of the pits. She has since found that she likes the power and authority wielded by the templars, and she has risen rapidly through the ranks. In combat, Tiaran likes to cast self-enhancing spells like *aid* or *flameblade* and then wade into melee. She is not a fanatic and will abandon a hopeless cause before her life is endangered.



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Advanced Dungeons & Dragons<sup>®</sup>  
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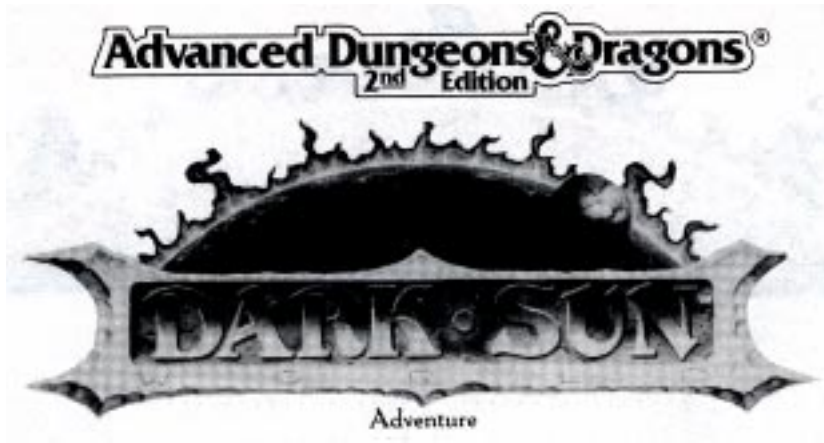
W O R L D

ADVENTURE



D • R • O • M

## The Road of Fire



## Dragon's Crown™

### Book Two: The Road of Fire

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# Book Two: The Road of Fire

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## Part Four: The Road of Fire

The Road of Fire runs the characters through a gauntlet of volcanic islands, angry giants, and undead warriors. It tests players' abilities to manage difficult personalities and their resourcefulness when overwhelmed. This adventure will reference *Dune Trader*; *Monstrous Compendium, Vol. 1*; *Monstrous Compendium, DRAGONLANCE® Appendix*; *Monstrous Compendium, DARK SUN™ Appendix*; and *Valley of Dust and Fire*. Although not necessary to play this module, these accessories will enhance your game and make a significant difference in the richness of your players' experience.

### Previous Events

Seeking guides and transportation to the Road of Fire, the party, accompanied by a team from Urik, traveled with several giants to Lake Island. Under the influence of a psionist of the Order, the giant leader imprisoned the PCs and the Urikites. The Urikites negotiated their own release and betrayed the player characters by abandoning them to their fate.

After receiving a mysterious warning from Korgunard, the PCs escaped captivity and made their way back to the mainland. The party is now preparing to travel across the Road of Fire in search of an ancient preserver's fortress with the hope of discovering the secret of the psionic-null field.

### Overview (See Map Book pg. 16)

The Road of Fire will take the party across the chain of volcanic islands to the fortress of Haakar, an undead preserver. They will finally learn the truth about the Psionatrix and gain the power to destroy it.

This section begins at Bitter Well where the PCs can gain passage (*The Silt Skimmer*) to the head of the Road of Fire (*Charvass*). There they hire a guide and begin the trek to Dhuurgazh in a cage carried by two beasthead giants (*In the Cage*). The group is attacked by a Silt Horror (*Learning the Ropes*) and stranded in the silt when the surviving giant runs away. The giant does return for them (*A Second Chance*) and agrees to carry the PCs the rest of the

way to Dhuurgazh. In exchange, the PCs agree to recover a herd of erdlu that has been stolen from the giants (*Lair of the Wolves*). Upon investigating the thieves' den, the party discovers that a fire drake has taken up residence in the cave where they expect to find the stolen herd (*The Cave of the Clan Tor*). They also find some clues to Haakar's past. The group then encounters thieves and another clan of beasthead giants (*Homecoming*). After defeating the cultists and recovering the birds (*The Shepherd*), the PCs are carried to the shores of Avegdaar by a grateful giant (*Leaving Dhuurgazh*).

At the beaches of Dhuurgazh the party must fight their way through the undead crew of two sunken silt skimmers (*The Pyrus* and the *Hesper*). The PCs begin a search for their guide's who has been held captive on the island for 10 years (*The Clans of Avegdaar*). After discovering the strange truth behind the prisoner's exile (*The Reunion*), the PCs must battle a group of fire minions who are threatening to destroy the island in a volcanic eruption (*The Stockade*). Having saved Avegdaar, the party travels across the mudflats to Haakar's island (*The Mudflats*). Upon their arrival, the PCs will fight their way through the encampment of an army that lay siege to Haakar's fortress centuries ago (*Calm Without A Storm*, *The Lookout Tower*, *The Parade Grounds*, *The Forge*, *The Ramparts*). Outside the walls of the fortress the PCs will be waylaid by a spirit who claims to be Haakar (*In The Shadow Of The Keep*). They will finally reach Akarakle (Ah-car-i-cool), Haakar's ancient fortress, only to find that the Urikites have already been there (*The Fortress*), but were beaten back. The PCs will then have to survive the onslaught of the undead preserver until they convince him that he should not destroy them (*The War Beetle*). Finally, they will learn of the true power and the fatal weakness of the Psionatrix. They will discover the dark secret behind the ruins of Akarakle and the undead army preparing for the battle that was never fought (*Haakar*). By laying the preserver's spirit to rest, the PCs will restore a man's lost faith in himself and gain the power to destroy the Psionatrix (*The Garden*, *The Armory*). Too late, the Urikites will return to the for-



## The Road of Fire

gress only to find that the PCs have gotten what they came for and have left.

### Beginning the Adventure

The adventure begins on the shores of Bitter Well, a small oasis at the edge of the Sea of Silt, about 18 miles north of Lake Island. Bitter Well is a stop for caravans of the Dedys Consortium and other merchant houses with outposts in Ket (see *Valley of Dust and Fire*). There is a well here that is fed by an underground stream. It is not necessary to allow the party to heal and memorize spells before beginning this adventure. The first encounter will provide them with a chance to rest on a silt skimmer.

### The Silt Skimmer

The party has an opportunity to buy or earn passage to the gateway of the Road Of Fire on a silt skimmer. The silt skimmer is headed to retrieve a large obsidian sphere from the M'ke outpost at Charvass.

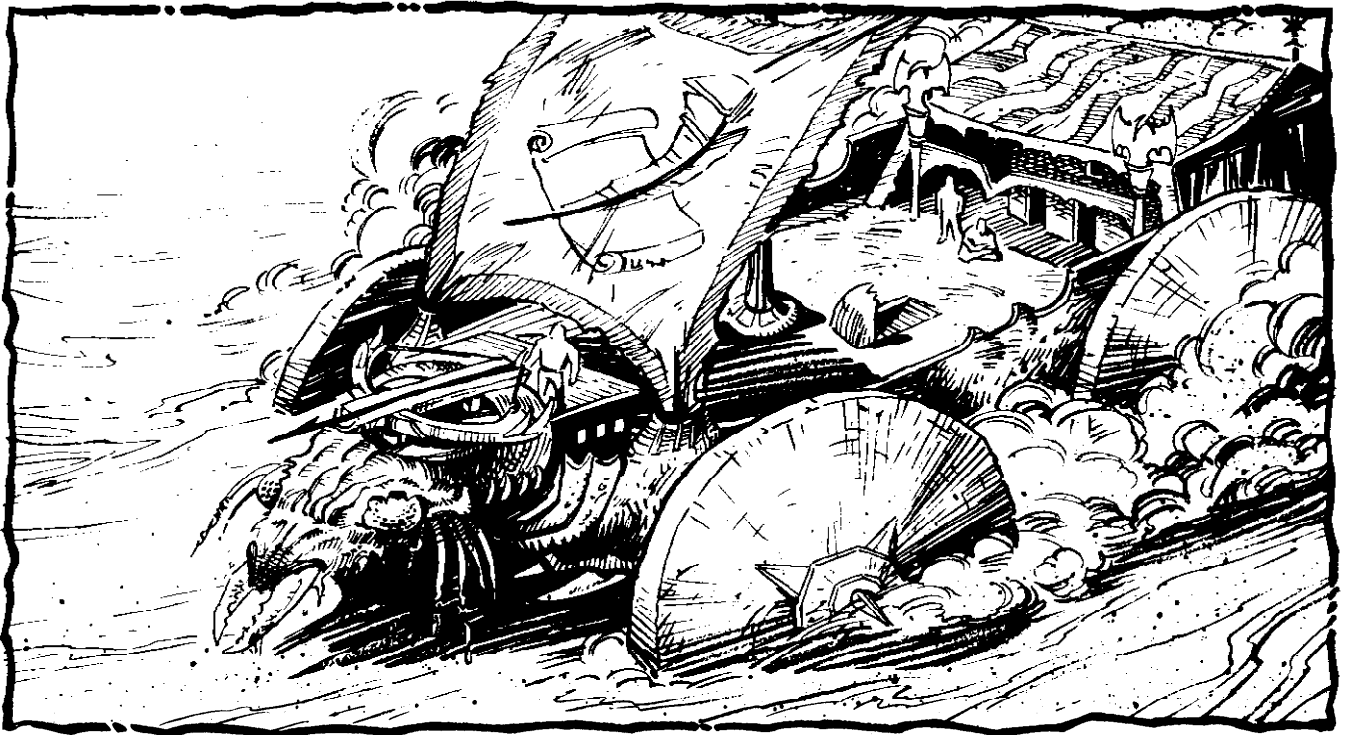
*You are at Bitter Well, a small oasis on the shore of the Sea of Silt. The town is named for the meager well at the town's center. It is dawn and the gray light of morning filters through the fine veil of silt that hangs in the air.*

There is a 50% chance that the well has been drawn dry by a passing caravan. It will take 1d6 days to adequately replenish a caravan's water supply.

Allow the PCs to mill around the well for a few minutes and then continue reading to the players:

*From a rolling cloud on the horizon you hear a deep rumble and the hiss of churning silt. A large dark shape is nearing the shore. You can see a tall mast emerging from the diffuse grays of the surrounding wake. A red banner, emblazoned with a silver quill pen, snaps at its pinnacle. As the huge, square sail takes shape, you realize this is a dwarven silt skimmer. It is headed toward you.*

Allow the players to react to the scene and then continue reading:





## The Road of Fire



As the silt skimmer hits the shore, a huge crossbow mounted on the prow fires a harpoon into the dirt. This seems to brace the ship as dwarves swing to the ground on lines cast from the port and starboard rails. A few muls follow closely behind as the crew grab hold of the lines and heave the towering ship onto solid earth.

The ship is the *Ballamarash*, a trading vessel out of Fort Firstwatch. It has been in the service of the besieged House M'ke of Raam for over 10 years. The ship is under the command of caravan master, Azran Allraam'ke. He is headed to Charvass, a dwarven village and M'ke outpost at the head of the Road of Fire, to retrieve a large obsidian sphere from the Moratuc, a tribe of dwarves who mine the shattered slopes of the volcano at Charvass. The journey has been undertaken in a silt skimmer to reduce the likelihood of harassment by rival merchant houses.

Azran will order a team to top off the water barrels with whatever water is left in the well. He will then allow the dwarves to set up a makeshift table for a feast before embarking again. It is always good luck for a "silt runner" to take a meal on land.

Azran will introduce himself to the PCs, and several other bystanders, as a caravan master of the House M'ke; and invite them to join his crew for dinner. During the meal he will speak freely about traveling on the silt. He will tell the group that he is headed to Charvass to pick up some goods from the M'ke outpost there. If the party expresses an interest in purchasing passage on the *Ballamarash*, he will accept 10 cp per passenger, if they have their own water; 20 cp per passenger if they don't. If the PCs show no such interest, Azran will try to hire a few more hands. He has noticed that Ko Blinn, the ship's psionist, seems to have been having difficulty lately and he thinks it may be prudent to hire some extra muscle for this trip. He will offer two sp per traveler, serving as a mercenary. If you are integrating this adventure into an existing campaign you may want to adjust these prices to be consistent with the availability of currency in your campaign. None of the bystanders will choose to travel to Charvass.

If the party tries to negotiate a deal to be taken beyond Charvass, to the islands of the Road of Fire, Azran will decline explaining that it is too dangerous. "The Road is off limits to M'ke traffic". He will refuse to discuss the matter but will suggest that they may be able to get some assistance from his nephew Trenbull. Azran will explain, "Trenbull has manned the M'ke outpost at Charvass for over five years. If anyone can help you out, it's him."

The dwarves are stoic and unfriendly while working, but during the meal their spirits will lighten. If asked directly about the Road of Fire, the dwarves will look down and mutter, "May the earth keep them still." They will drop the subject, explaining that it is bad luck to speak of the place. If the party travels aboard the *Ballamarash*, the dwarves will gradually become more talkative.

If they travel aboard the *Ballamarash*, Azran offers each PC a long strip of cloth called a *silter*. The cloth is wrapped across the nose, mouth, and around the head when the silt blows. He will slap them on the shoulders announcing, "Keep this damp and clean and we'll make real silt runners out of you in no time!"

To avoid the Gray Death (gradual suffocation from silt inhalation) the PCs must use ½ gallon of water per day to keep their silters clean.

Neither Azran nor his crew knows anything of Haakar, nor have they ever heard of his fortress, Akarakle. None of them know of the Urikites who betrayed the party on Lake Island.

**Dwarf Crew (30):** INT Avg; AL N; AC 8; MV 6; Ftr 3; hp 15 (X 30); THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6-1 (bone short sword attacks at -1); SZ S; ML 14 XP 35.

**Ko Blinn, ship's psionist:** AL LN; AC 6; MV 12; Psi 9; hp 28; THAC0 16; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (short sword); ML 12; Str 10; Dex 16; Con 18; Int 16; Wis 16; Cha 14; Psionics Sciences: 4; Devotions: 14; Def Modes: IF, TW, MB, M-, TS; PSPs 98.



## The Road of Fire

### A Note on Traveling in the Silt

The PCs will be traveling through shallow silt throughout this adventure. They can wade to a silt depth equal to 3/4 of their height. The silt has a terrain cost of eight MP for wading creatures. Traveler's movement rate is reduced to 1/3 while wading in combat. Use the weather and temperature charts in *Valley of Dust and Fire*. The charts will help you decide how the party's mobility, rate of water consumption, and susceptibility to the Gray Death change as the PCs progress. Various alternative methods of travel and their respective problems are also detailed.

Throughout this adventure the party will be trying to cross wide stretches of silt between the islands on the Road of Fire. While an opportunity for passage will be made available to the PCs at each island, players may try to find their own way across.

### The Trip to Charvass

If the party decides to travel to Charvass by land, use the DARK SUN™ Rules Book and the random encounter charts from *Terrors of the Desert* to moderate their travel. If the party has boarded the *Ballamarash*, continue with this encounter.

*You quickly become accustomed to the whisper of the silt, the groaning of the wheels, and the sighing of the slaves. The silt seems to get everywhere. Even on days when the gray sea is still, the dust permeates everything you touch. At midday the temperatures become so intense that a haze hangs in the air as particles are suspended in air, not by the wind but by the heat of the sun. Darkness offers little respite from the swelter, the warmth of the day penetrates the sea and persists through the night.*

Unusually favorable winds, coupled with two shifts of muls turning the wheels below deck, cut the trip of the *Ballamarash* down to 10 days. The ship's psionist is still able to ensure the *Ballamarash* evades any encounters while at sea. The party will sight some creatures that populate the sea; use the Sea of Silt

Random Encounter charts in *Terrors of the Desert* to roll monsters for sightings. These episodes should be used to evoke the constant uncertainty pervading the lives of the "Silt Runners," but should not result in combat.

As the crew becomes comfortable with the travelers, they will begin to speak more freely.

### Rumors Heard on Board the *Ballamarash*

1. It's bad luck to speak of the Road of Fire. Two ships went down there 10 years ago. (True)
2. The outpost at Charvass is run by Azran's nephew, Trenbull. (True)
3. The giants of Avegdaar killed Azran's brother and sank his flotilla. (True)
4. Trenbull Allraam'ke thinks he's a dwarf. (False—he's just very close to them.)
5. Ko Blin has been behaving strangely as of late. (True—the ship's psionist has been feeling the effects of the Psionatrix.)
6. Azran's brother, Marcus Allraam'ke, died on the Road of Fire 10 years ago. (This is generally believed to be true, but it is false.)
7. It's bad luck to travel across those islands. (Who can say?)
8. The dwarves of Charvass are not really dwarves. (False, they are dwarves.)
9. The *Ballamarash* is named after the constellation of Ballamarash the Caravan. (True)
10. The *Ballamarash* was commissioned with two sister ships. They were also named for star signs—the *Hesper*, for the sign of the kenku, and the *Pyrus* after the sign of the wheel. (True)
11. The *Ballamarash* and her sister ships went on an expedition to the Road of Fire 10 years ago. The *Hesper* and the *Pyrus* never returned. (True)

### Charvass

*It is dusk when you see the crown of Charvass looming in the distance. Through the haze of dust, the dull red glow of a signal fire is pulsing. "Fire sign! Prepare to land!" a dwarf shouts from the mast. As you near the*

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*shore, you can see the light of torches. A group of small shadowy figures waits to meet you at the beach.*

Charvass is a small outpost of the House M'ke and home to the Moratuc, a tribe of dwarves who mine the slopes of the volcano. The Moratuc consider themselves a unique people. They feel no particular affinity for other dwarves, but they do feel a strong bond to the volcano for which their town is named. They wear simple leathers for working the mine. They also wear a wide stripe of gray ash across their eyes. They will explain that ash is all that can outlast the fury of the volcano's fire. The mark, they believe, gives them the endurance of the ash.

Trenbull Allraam'ke mans the outpost alone, supported only by the Moratuc. Ten years ago Trenbull's father, Marcus Allraam'ke, was given up for dead. Five years later, Trenbull was told by an aging psionist that Marcus was still alive and on Avegdaar. The man claimed to have visited Avegdaar in a dream.

Trenbull could get no support for a rescue expedition from the House M'ke. No one had any interest in opening old wounds, nor in pursuing such a frivolous venture when the survival of the House was threatened in Raam. Trenbull used the excuse of establishing the outpost to pursue his goal of launching an expedition to find his father.

Upon his arrival Trenbull found the Moratuc eking out a meager existence by farming. Trenbull taught the dwarves how to better their condition by mining obsidian from the slopes of Charvass and selling it through his outpost. He wears the leathers and ashen stripe of the Moratuc and is fiercely protective of the dwarves. The dwarves actually consider Trenbull their village leader. Watching his single-minded determination to establish the outpost and build the village around it, the dwarves have come to believe that he is the only human that has ever had a focus. They call him *Uhrnius*.

The ship drops anchor and the party and crew disembark. Azran and Trenbull coordinate teams of dwarves to unload baskets, barrels, and sacks from the *Ballamarash*. When this is complete the dwarves will continue to work in shifts to fill the ship's hold with

crudely built palettes of obsidian. The dwarves will be particularly careful with a large, flawless sphere of obsidian that was packed in a protective crate before loading. As soon as the ship is loaded and refitted, she will cast off. The entire process will take about 10 hours. During this time, Trenbull will greet the PCs and show them to a hut, where they are told they are welcome to stay during their visit.

If the PCs offer to assist in moving the freight Trenbull will pay them one bit per hour. If the PCs wish to look at merchandise in the outpost, Trenbull will ask them to wait until they have finished bringing in the new stock. The PCs may notice that the dwarves of the *Ballamarash* do not mingle much with the Moratuc. If approached directly, the Moratuc will prove to have some difficulty with Common. They speak a dialect of dwarvish among themselves that dwarves of the tablelands can understand with 60% accuracy. Although preoccupied with their work, the Moratuc laugh easily and seem less dour than most of their race. As the *Ballamarash* casts off, the tribe will gather in the center of the village for dinner. Trenbull will invite the PCs to join them.

As the group sits on the ground in a circle, large shallow bowls of roots, erdlu, and stuffed leaves are passed around. During the meal, Trenbull will ask the group about their journey. He will encourage them to recount their adventures. If the PCs comply, the dwarves will all listen attentively and respond to the tales vocally. Occasionally, Trenbull will translate a word or offer an explanation in dwarvish when the Moratuc are confused. If the PCs have not yet made their intention to cross the Road of Fire clear, Trenbull will ask about their presence in Charvass. If they have openly inquired about transportation across the silt, or about Haakar, Trenbull will respond, "I must be honest, I know nothing of this Haakar, but I do think I can help you get across the powder."

As dinner concludes, he will rise and raise a small bowl of water as a salutation:

*"It's a remarkable thing, really. Trade, I mean. Look at this village. Built on trade. These dwarves*



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*had nothing but a rocky slope from which they could barely scratch out a living. Because of trade they can exchange the obsidian beneath this ground for things of real value to them. Food. Shelter. Leather. Trade makes farmers and kings equal! To trade!"*

After draining his bowl he will sit and continue:

*In the spirit of trade allow me to suggest an exchange—an exchange by which we both will profit. It's a dangerous journey you are undertaking. The Road of fire is unkind to strangers. Have you ever seen the ground open to swallow a companion, or watched a man disappear in a geyser of molten earth? Did you know there are vents that issue an odorless but lethal gas? Can you tell the difference between the fumes that will kill you and those that will merely make you sick? Few people last the night out there, even if they do manage to cross the silt.*

*I would like to suggest an exchange. What I would like to extend to you is my company. I can serve you as a guide, and I will make available all the resources of the outpost, so we can assemble supplies for the journey.*

*And you can assist me. My father has been held by the giants of Avegdaar for 10 years, and I long to free him.*

The party may press Trenbull for more information regarding his father. If it is appropriate, use Trenbull's story from the encounter *Stranded*.

If the party agrees to Trenbull's proposal, he will suggest that they get some rest and outfit themselves in the morning. If they refuse, he will carefully assess what might motivate them. If he perceives the party to be a compassionate group, he will attempt to appeal on behalf of his father. If that fails, he will try to negotiate. He has been waiting for this opportunity for five years. If necessary, he will offer two sp to each PC for their help and an equal share of any treasure.





## Role-Playing Trenbull

Key aspects of Trenbull's attitudes:

- He believes passionately in trade and the merchant houses as a force for good in a world plagued with scarcity.
- He is extremely bitter about his father's captivity and the lack of support in trying to find him.
- He deeply loves his father, although he grew up without him.

**Moratuc Dwarf (60):** INT Avg; AL N; AC 8; MV 6; HD 1; hp 7 (X 60); THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6; SZ S; ML 14; XP 35; obsidian spears.

## Gearing Up

The following morning, Trenbull will wake the party and suggest that they outfit themselves. Trenbull will provide any nonmetal item listed as miscellaneous equipment in the *Player's Handbook*, pg. 76. If the party ultimately refuses to take on Trenbull as a guide, he will still offer to outfit them, but at twice the cost.

## In the Cage

*There is a sudden commotion in the village. As you emerge from the outpost you see something extraordinary. Two enormous, wolf-headed humanoid stand in the center of town. They are carrying a giant cage full of erdlu, supported by two huge beams across their towering shoulders. The dwarves milling around their knees exaggerate the incredible height of the giants.*

The giants are Djorn and Snave, two beastheads from Dhuurgazh. The giants have given up trying to raid Charvass and are now content to trade with the dwarves. The Moratuc always detected the giants' approach and disappeared into deep tunnels in the side of the volcano before the beastheads made land. The beastheads have taken to calling the volcano Lazraag, meaning dwarf-eater. Frustrated by the dwarves, the would-be raiders have resigned themselves to a life of honest trade. The giants are attracted to the variety of items offered by the outpost. Every few months they

make the two day trip to trade their erdlu for grain, sugar, and other items foreign to their home.

If the party has taken Trenbull on as a scout, he will tell them that their ride to Dhuurgazh has arrived; otherwise he will simply excuse himself and conduct business with the beastheads. Trenbull will greet the giants respectfully. The erdlu will be lifted out of the cage, examined, and then bargained for. Trenbull will allow the giants to load several sacks of grain into the empty cage. He will offer the giants an extra sack of grain for each party member they carry to Dhuurgazh. The giants will consider this offer.

If party members object to the idea, Trenbull will assure them that a beasthead escort is the safest way to travel, adding that he has done so many times himself. After a short wait the giants will grudgingly agree, and will allow the PCs to climb into the cage. The PCs may refuse to actually ride inside the cage and may ride on top. Trenbull will point out that the inside of the cage is more comfortable, since the party can sit on the grain sacks. He will say that it will be dangerous to be perched on top of the cage if either giant stumbles. Trenbull will ride inside. As soon as the PCs are secure in the cage, or perched on top, Djorn and Snave will lift the group and head toward the silt.

Although Trenbull will warn the PCs to treat the giants politely in all circumstances, Djorn and Snave will regard the PC's with some suspicion. They will answer the PCs questions but usually pause for a moment to think before saying anything. They know nothing of the Urikites, Haakar, or Akarake. They can, however, tell the PCs that long before the beastheads came to Dhuurgazh, an army of "little people" crossed the island. Every now and then they still find a "tiny" spear or wagon wheel.

Dhuurgazh is two days distant. If the party refuses to travel with the beastheads, they will have to find their own way to Dhuurgazh.

**Djorn and Snave, beasthead giants:** INT Low; AL NE; AC 3; MV 15; HD 15; hp 64, 70; THAC0 5; #AT 2; Dmg 2d8 + 14/2d10 + 14; SA bite; SZ H (20' tall); ML 15; XP 7000; Psionics Sciences: aura



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sight, clairvoyance; Devotions: combat mind, danger sense, know direction, ego whip, id insinuation, psionic blast, conceal thoughts, life detection; Def Modes: M-, IF, TW; Score 13; PSPs 75.

*The cage lurches as the giants stride forward, wading into the silt. A breeze kicks up a thick cloud of silt blinding you and filling the air with a chalky taste. "All is right, out there's nothing," mutters Snave. Djorn grunts assent and the team continues onward.*

### Learning the Ropes

*Toward the end of the first day of travel, something goes amiss. Just as you can see the hazy slopes of Dhuurgazh you hear a sudden gasp. The cage rocks. Behind you, Djorn reels backward. A thick, dirty white cable is coursing around his neck. Two more tentacles slide across his chest. He loses his grip on the cage and disappears in a blur of dust.*

The PCs must immediately make Dexterity checks. PCs riding on top of the cage who fail their checks are thrown into the silt. They will take 2d6 damage in the fall and be stunned during the next round, before they can attempt to climb the side of the cage. PCs failing their checks inside the cage will just be stunned the next round.

Immediately after making their Dexterity checks, the PCs who succeeded last round must make checks again and receive the appropriate penalties as Snave drops the front end of the cage and runs away.

PCs can hold their breath under the silt for a number of rounds equal to 1/3 of their Constitution score. After that, a Constitution check must be made every round at an accumulating -2 penalty. If a PC is unable to reach the surface and fails a check she will suffocate.

The silt is 15 feet deep where the cage fell. The cage is 11 feet tall, 10 feet wide, and 20 feet long. To modify a PC's base chance of successfully climbing the walls of the cage, use the *Player's Handbook*, charts 65 and 66, and treat the cage as a slightly slippery surface with abundant handholds. PCs can climb the

walls of the cage at a rate equal to 1/2 their current movement rate in feet.

The lid to the cage is a 10-foot square in the center of the top that can be lifted by an individual with a successful bend bars/lift gates roll, or by a team with a combined strength of 30.

Once the survivors have collected on the top of the cage they will be standing in 4 feet of silt.

Exactly six rounds after Djorn drops the cage and is pulled under the dust, a silt horror will attack the party. The top of the cage will serve as a tiny island, from which they will have to finish off the monster. Add 2 to the party's initiative as a penalty for wading during the combat. Subtract one from characters' rolls-to-hit as a penalty for fighting in a cloud of silt. Subtract an additional penalty of 1 from the roll-to-hit of any dwarves or halflings.

**Brown Silt Horror:** INT Semi; AL N; AC 7; MV 3; HD 9; hp 41; THAC0 11; #AT 8; Dmg 1-6(x8); SA Constriction; SD Air jet; MR Nil; SZ H (20'); ML 13; XP 5000; Psionics Sciences: precognition, domination; Devotions: feel sound, feel light, contact; Def Modes: M-; Score 12; PSPs 54.

The silt horror has been having difficulty hunting because of the effects of the Psionatrix. It will not waste any time attempting to use its psionics. It is starving and will not stop attacking until it is dead.

### Stranded

Trenbull is clearly shaken. "The beastheads have the ability to detect life around them. I have never seen them taken by surprise. Something is very wrong here," he stammers.

As the party recovers and tends their wounds, they may decide to make camp on the top of the cage. It is near dark, and the day has been exhausting. If Trenbull did not tell his story during the dinner at Charvass, he will do so now.

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### Trenbull's Story

*"I have spent five years on the shore of Charvass waiting for a chance to free my father. He must hate his captivity. He loved the caravan trail and the wide open spaces.*

*You see, my uncle Azran decided that he and father could build a trade empire across the Road Of Fire. If they could get the giants of the islands to mine the deposits of obsidian, pumice, and sulphur—they could increase the earnings for the House M'ke beyond imagination.*

*They had spent their youths training. My father took to the caravan trail; my uncle Azran spent his apprenticeship on dwarven silt skimmers. It was Azran who conceived of the plan to mine the legendary Road of Fire. He had heard of the islands from a traveler of the House Tsalaxa. Our patriarch dismissed the idea. Raam was unstable. He said it was a time for retrenching, not expansion. Azran privately financed the expedition.*

*It was agreed that, to avoid notice on the established caravan routes, the expedition would commission*

*three silt skimmers and the journey would be negotiated through the dust sea.*

*They bid us farewell and left. I'm told that a beach head was established at Charvass, but the party did not make contact with the Moratuc. They continued to Dhuurgazh, where they had a brief skirmish with the beastheaded giants and moved on.*

*At Avegdaar, the expedition encountered the desert. There an agreement was made with the giants to mine the sulphur of Avegdaar's craters. The gold that the party had brought was not enough to compensate the giants for the mineral wealth that they loaded onto the ships. They say my father volunteered to be left behind as an ambassador and trade hostage. He would stay on and lay the groundwork for a prosperous relationship until the ships returned and paid off the debt. The bond was made, but as the ships cast off the giants suddenly began hurling boulders at them. The Hesper and the Pyrus were destroyed. Only the Ballamarash escaped.*

*Everyone assumed that the giants killed my father. For five years I believed he was dead. Then, one night*





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*I was at a party in the noble district of Raam. There was a psionacist entertaining the group with mind tricks. When he saw me, he greeted me as if he knew me, but called me by my father's name. He said, "Marcus, I am glad to see that you finally got off that rock pile." I had him held and interrogated. He said he had visited Avegdaar in a dream, and that my father was still alive."*

Once the party has had a chance to rest, or if they are about to cross the rest of the way to Dhuurgazh, continue with the next encounter.

### A Second Chance

If the party has spent the night on the cage, this encounter occurs in the morning; otherwise, as the PCs are about to leave their perch.

*Along the horizon you can see two huge figures wading toward you through the silt. They are Snavé and another wolfhead giant. Snavé is panting as he approaches. "It has by me pleased, that you good still. Very strong enemy change my thoughts and make for me to run." He turns to the other giant, "These are the Tall Dwarf of Lazraag and his slaves."*

The other giant is Groth. He came searching for Snavé and Djorn when their cave on Dhuurgazh was raided by another giant clan. He is angry that Djorn was killed and that Snavé left the cage full of traded goods in the silt. Snavé and Groth are returning to collect the goods. Snavé has not yet mentioned to Groth that he was carrying passengers.

Upon seeing the PCs, Snavé will explain his agreement with them to Groth in giant. Groth will turn to the party and growl, "We cannot you all to carry. We must quickly the food with us."

Snavé will explain that their entire erdlu herd has been stolen and there is only one clan member left at the cave to defend their home. They cannot take the PCs along, because the extra weight will slow them.

The PCs may attempt to convince the giants to take

them along. Trenbull will thank the giants for returning and express his sympathy about Djorn. He will politely insist that Snavé honor their agreement. Snavé will apologize and offer a refund of the extra grain. If it comes to that, he will attempt to recover the sacks from the bottom of the cage, and then, upon discovering that many are broken, will say, "I guess that you bags have broken."

There are 1,000 pounds of recoverable goods in the cage. Snavé and Groth can each carry 1,600 pounds of weight on one trip.

If the party suggests that they can help the giants recover the herd, Groth will listen with growing interest. He will ask them why they want to go to Dhuurgazh. If they explain their story, he will agree to carry them to Dhuurgazh if they promise to help recover the herd. He will offer to take them to Avegdaar if they succeed. Groth knows nothing of Haakar, the Urikites, or Akarakle.

If the party becomes rude about his earlier flight, Snavé will attempt to kill the party and leave with his goods. If anyone uses magic or psionics to determine whether the silt horror had indeed seized control of Snavé's mind and forced him to flee, they will discover that he simply ran away out of fear. Exposing this, however, will serve no purpose. Snavé will try to kill anyone accusing him of cowardice.

### Lair of the Wolves

(See Map Book pg. 16)

If the party is with Snavé and Groth read to the players:

*Having successfully negotiated the rest of the distance to Dhuurgazh, you travel across a slate gray rocky plain toward a range of jagged black mountains. The ground is so barren here that even a well worn path would be indistinguishable from the wasteland. The slope begins to rise sharply as black crags of stone push up from the plain below. You see small vents and natural caves in the rock around you. Suddenly, the shiny blackness of rock gives way to the dull*





void of a huge cavern entrance. "Boruu! Boruu!" Groth calls, "We are back!"

Boruu, a smaller wolfhead giant with streaks of gray in his hair emerges from the darkness of the cave. Groth will allow the party to rest if necessary. He will assign Snave to stay with the PCs while he and Boruu look for sticks and boulders. They plan to prepare their cave in case of another attack. When the party is prepared to recover the herd, Groth will tell them that the erdlu were stolen by the Clan Tor, who live on the southern end of the island. Groth will send Snave to accompany the party while he and Boruu continue to prepare for attack.

If the party arrives without Snave and Groth, Boruu will be found inside the cave. He will be initially suspicious of the party, but if the PCs are friendly he will attempt to enlist their aid. "I know nothing why they have this done, they have us always alone left. Sometimes we one see at spring, but we until they are gone wait," he will complain.

A successful tracking check will reveal an erdlu path heading south east.

### Trenbull Earns His Keep

*As you walk the wind scarred ground, Trenbull suddenly stops. "Don't move," he says staring at the ground in front of you. "Everyone move single file to the right about 20 feet."*

If the party asks why they need to take this precaution, or simply obeys his suggestion, continue reading to the players:

*Trenbull turns and tosses a ceramic piece onto the ground where you were about to step. A 10-foot circle of what looked like solid ground drops in thin, crusty pieces to the boiling mud pit below.*

If the party continues to walk forward, each PCs will take 2d6 damage for falling into the mud pit.

Use this encounter as a model for incidents throughout the party's adventure, its purpose is to

make clear that Trenbull has real value to the group. If he is not with the group, treat this as a pit trap.

### The Cave of the Clan Tor

(See Map Book pg. 17)

*Crossing a plain of huge stones you see the gray carcass of an erdlu. There are two more ahead of you as you approach a rise that opens into a split in the earth. A widening path leads into a craggy ravine. In the distance, a hazy column of smoke rises from the crown of the volcano.*

A successful tracking check will show a trail made by large, clawed feet leading into the ravine. The party has found the cave of the Clan Tor, a family of goathead giants. The cave has been occupied by a fire drake. The beast drove the giants out of their cave and slaughtered their herd of erdlu. The giants decided to replenish their herd by stealing the wolfhead's livestock. They have gone to seek help against the drake from the Clan Bagg, another clan of goatheads on the east side of the island.

If the party travels along the lip of the ravine, they will eventually be able to see three large caves with boulders resting next to each entrance. At the bottom of the pathway leading into the ravine is a large wooden gate that has been knocked down. Across the floor of the ravine lie the scattered carcasses of a three gray erdlu. Snave will tell the party that the Clan Tor keep their birds in a pen inside one of the caves. If a PC directly asks Snave if the carcasses are his birds, he will tell them that the stolen birds are not gray, but red. If he is not directly asked, it will not occur to Snave to mention this. If the party waits here to watch for activity, they will see nothing. If the party stakes out the ravine for an extended period, the fire drake will eventually come out of the cave and attack the party.

If the party is going to enter the ravine, Snave says, "You are so tiny and sneakworthy. While you birds to catch, I will here wait."

If the PCs are still successfully tracking the erdlu



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herd from the trail that began at the wolfhead cave, they discover that the trail of clawed feet swings south of this area. If followed, it will continue east to the cave of the Bagg, the goatheads who have agreed to help the Clan Tor drive the fire drake out of their lair—for half of the stolen herd.

If the party avoids the ravine entirely and follows the erdlu trail toward the Bagg cave, they will meet the goatheads described in the next encounter, *Homecoming*. If Snave is with the party during this meeting, he will immediately shout, "Thieves!" and the incident will turn violent. If the party is alone, the goathead giants will suspiciously demand an explanation from the intruders. The party may attempt to parlay with the goatheads in which case they might wind up being hired to fight the fire drake in exchange for the return of the herd.

### 1) Cistern

*The cave opens into a large circular chamber. In the center there is a 10-foot-wide pit. You can see the glimmer of some liquid in it. A long black object floats in the water.*

This room is the clan Tor's water supply. The object in the well is a dead cistern fiend that suffered the elemental attack of the fire drake. The water here is safe. The well is 25 feet deep.

### 2) The Store Room

*This cavern opens up into long, narrow tunnel. There are heaps of dried fruit piled against the rough hewn walls. Roots spill across the floor. From outside, a thunderous noise shakes dirt from the ceiling.*

The party just heard the bellow of a yawning fire drake. There is nothing of interest in this cave. The dried fruit and roots are edible.

### 3) The Common Room

*As you enter this dark cave you can hear the slow draw of air. "Strange," whispers Trenbull. "Why would they pick a cave with active vents?"*

*The narrow entrance opens into a large cavern. There is a large wooden pen with a tightly built roof. Thatch mats cover the floor. As you enter the cavern*

*you feel a warm breeze that carries an overpowering stench. You can make out what seems an enormous boulder. It moves. Reflecting the light of your torch, you see points of several rows of teeth beginning to populate a yawning gap in the darkness.*

The drake will attack the party. Its tactical sensibility is driven by an aesthetic of cruelty, not efficiency. Consequently, it will use its abilities to extend the suffering of its victims. It will begin by using its ability to control flames to cause the PCs' torches to flare up in the form of lizards, engulfing anyone carrying a torch. It will then wade into melee. If the fire drake is seriously threatened, it will try to use shadow or ectoplasmic form to flee. It has already used its elemental attack for the week.

**Fire Drake:** INT Animal; AL NE; AC -3; MV 12, Jp 3; HD 20 + 8; hp 145; THAC0 5; #AT 4; Dmg 1-10 + 10/1 - 10 + 10/3-24/4-32 (claws/teeth/tail); SA Bite/Swallow, Elemental, Tail Lash; SD Psionic; MR Nil; SZ G (25' +); ML 19; XP 28,000; Psionics Sciences: telekinesis, energy containment, shadow form, mind link, mass domination; Devotions: feel light, hear light, control flames, control light, molecular agitation, displacement, double pain, ectoplasmic form, awe, contact, ego whip, false sensory input, inflict pain, mind bar, mind blank, psychic crush; Def Modes: M-, MB, TW.

There is a stone slab under one of the thatch mats. A successful bend bars/lift gates roll will allow a PC to move it. Underneath it the Clan Tor has stored some treasure. In a depression in the floor there are five gems worth 75 sp (X 2), 75 cp, 15 cp (X 2).

### 4) Haakar's Chamber

*In the rear of the cave is a low fissure in the wall with a 3-foot gap. A torch or infravision will reveal a pathway leading to carved stairs. The gap in the wall is much too small for anything larger than a human to enter.*

*The stairs lead upward to a small chamber. A number of narrow tapestries hang from ceiling to floor on*



three of the room's four walls. One of the tapestries continues past the floor, and several yards of the strange fabric lie curled on the ground; another is draped across a large stone table against the far wall. This weaving appears as if it were being repaired, or perhaps it was never completed, and ends in a tangle of brightly colored threads. In a corner of the room there is a dusty pile of clay fragments.

This is a room where Haakar, the preserver, compiled his research when he wanted privacy and needed to escape the prying minds of his fortress, Akarakle. At the time, Haakar's forces had control of the entire Road of Fire. This situation changed when the warlord defiler, Merek the Wrong, mounted a campaign to take Haakar's keep.

The tapestries will radiate magic, and, if a *read magic* spell is cast on them, the PCs will be able to discern the following fragments:

*Deciphered tablets . . . stunning . . . discerned the principle of the defiler's power . . . so simple . . . like a sail on a ship . . . their heightened power is tied to the unusual deforestation . . . it is inexorably interlocked . . . wide spread residual effects . . . must collect more data . . . Destructive behavior inherent in the implementation of the amplifying technology . . . fascinating*

Beneath the clay fragments there is a wooden tube with a scroll in it. The scroll, written in common, says "giant control." It has no magical power. Trenbull will suggest that they rest in this room.

### Homecoming

*As you emerge into the daylight you see an enormous crumpled shape in the middle of the floor of the ravine. It is Snave. Goat headed giants are moving down the path toward you. They stop momentarily, surprised to see you.*

Give the party one round to act, then a giant will yell "Thieves!" and the whole clan attacks the party.

There are two giants on the ledge who will be able to find and toss down a boulder once three rounds.

If the battle turns against the giants, one of the giants on the ledge will run away. If the party has killed both giants on the ledge, one of the giants in the melee will run and head east. Snave is dead.

If the party needs to retreat, the giants will not be able to follow them into Haakar's chamber. They will, however, place a large boulder in front of the tunnel in an attempt to either bury the party alive, or prevent their reentry into the cavern. A successful bend bars/lift gates roll must be made to move the boulder away from the entrance.

The Clan Tor has recruited some help to drive the fire drake from their home. They have promised the Clan Bagg half the stolen herd in exchange for their help. They left the stolen herd at the Bagg cave and returned to reclaim their home. The Bagg goatheads are not particularly dedicated to this task and their morale score has been adjusted to reflect this.

After combat is resolved, a successful tracking check, above the ravine, will reveal a trail leading to the Bagg cave. If the party chooses to return to the wolfhead cave, Groth will listen to the party's story and ask about the color of the dead birds. Any successful Intelligence check will allow a PC to remember that the birds were gray. Groth will tell the party that his birds are a rust red and that they may still be alive. He will ask the party how many giants they fought. Any answer over six will tell Groth that the Tor had help from the Clan Bagg. He will join the party on a trip to the Bagg cave.

**Goathead giants:** INT Low; AL NE; AC 3; MV 15; HD 15; Tor hp 64, 70, 58, 62, 76, 57; Bagg hp 62, 54, 64; THAC0 5; #AT 2; Dmg 2d8 + 14/2d10 + 14; SA bite; SZ H (20' tall); ML 15 (Bagg 10); XP 7000; Psionics Sciences: aura sight, clairvoyance; Devotions: combat mind, danger sense, know direction, ego whip, id insinuation, psionic blast, conceal thoughts, life detection; Def Modes: M-, IF, TW; Score 13; PSPs 75.



## The Road of Fire

### The Shepherd

*As you round a ridge you see a large clearing in front of a dark recess in a cliff wall. There is a large herd of rust colored erdlu milling about in the clearing. A lone giant sits and watches the birds.*

The giant is Olgra of the Bagg clan. She is watching the stolen herd while the rest of the clan joins the fight to drive out the fire drake. If any of her clan escaped the combat, they did not return here and she knows nothing about it. If the party stands a polite distance from the clearing and calls to her, she will approach out of curiosity. If the party tells her that they have defeated the goathead giants, she will initially respond with amused disbelief.

As the PCs convince her of their exploits, Olgra will begin to get angry, but then think better of it and listen quietly. If the party does not mention their run-in with the goathead clans, she will tell the PCs that she is waiting for her clan to return. She will tell them that the Clan Tor has promised her clan half the herd in exchange for their help with an intrusive fire drake. She does not know the birds were stolen.

If Groth is with the party, he will identify the birds and tell Olgra that he is taking them home. She will whisper, "They said theirs they were." If the party is leaving and Olgra knows her clan has been wiped out, she will ask, "To me what will happen?"

If the PCs suggest that Olgra join another clan she will silently shake her head. Groth will later tell the PCs that he plans to invite Olgra into the wolfhead clan but "It is not yet time."

If the party cut a deal to drive out the drake for the goathead clan they will all travel to the Bagg cave together. The Tor giants will tell Olgra to divide the herd evenly among the three clans. The party will have to fight a combat of champions with one of the giants if they want the entire herd back.

**Olgra, a goathead giant:** INT Low; AL NE; AC 3; MV 15; HD 15; hp 57; THAC0 5; #AT 2; Dmg 2d8 + 14/2d10 + 14; SA bite; SZ H (20' tall); ML 15; XP 7000; Psionics Sciences: aura sight, clairvoy-

ance; Devotions: combat mind, danger sense, know direction, ego whip, id insinuation, psionic blast, conceal thoughts, life detection; Def Modes: M-, IF, TW; Score 13; PSPs 75.

### Leaving Dhuurgazh

(See Map Book pg. 16)

If Groth eventually has some or all of his herd returned to him, he will agree to carry the party to Avegdaar. To reduce the threat from flying predators, he will carry the party only at night. The trip will last three days. Several hours will be spent each night looking for a safe crag to rest on.

Groth will carry the group to a point 300 yards off the shore of Avegdaar. He will set them down in 3 feet of silt. "I can go no further, I am not here invited to be," he will explain before turning back to Dhuurgazh. If the party wants to arrange a ride back, and relations with Groth are particularly good, he will agree to watch for a signal fire from the shores of Dhuurgazh 12 days from now.

If the party is entirely unsuccessful recovering the herd they will have to find some other way to cross.

### The Pyrus and the Hesper

This encounter will occur after the party has walked within 150 yards of the shoreline.

*As you are wading through the silt, the light of Gu-thay makes the calm surface of the sea seem plated in silver. You are surprised to feel how warm the silt is, so long after the sun has set. The smoking crown of a volcano on Avegdaar casts a red glow to the sky above it. Ahead of you, an enormous wheel leans against two huge broken masts rising up out of the silt like the arms of a drowning man. In the distance the sound of a silt skimmer's bell swells and falls on the wind. The bell is sounding a call to arms. Through the haze of silt you see a shadowy group of figures assemble near the wreckage. Trenbull gasps, "By all I hold dear . . . it's them."*

## The Road of Fire



They are the crewmen of the *Hesper* and the *Pyrus*, the two silt skimmers lost when the giants of Aveгдаar attacked the M'ke convoy. The dwarven banshees will attack and attempt to prevent the party from landing on the island. If the party runs past them, the banshees will only pursue them to shore.

When combat has been resolved Trenbull will seem upset and distracted. "Those men . . . those men cannot die. They'll be back, unless something changes. We cannot leave them like that." The banshees can be destroyed, but will return every night until their focus is destroyed. Trenbull will not know what the dwarves' focus was, but if the party spends some time trying to figure it out he may suggest, "Perhaps if we destroy the ships."

The focus of these crewmen was actually to see their ships back to land. To lay these banshees to rest the PCs must drag the wreckage of the *Pyrus* and the *Hesper* onto land—or destroy them by fire.

**Dwarven Banshees (8):** INT 10; AL LE; AC 0; MV 12; HD 3; hp 15 (X8); THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1d2+10; SA Gaze, malediction; SD Steel, or +1

or better weapon to hit; MR Fire, water, and air based attacks do ½ damage. Earth based spells do double damage; SZ M; ML 17; XP 120; Psionics: Sciences: death-field, shadow form; Devotions: body weaponry, cause decay, chemical simulation, double pain; Def Modes: IF, M-; Score 15; PSPs 110.

If eye contact is made, save vs. spells or fly into berserker rage and only attack other party members (+2 attack and damage bonus, may not leave fight for 2d6 rounds). Once per night each banshee may wail a malediction, PCs must save vs. spells or suffer the berserker rage.

### Tremors

*As you step onto the rocky shore of Aveгдаar you feel the ground shudder beneath your feet. A deep rumble resounds across the island like thunder from the heart of the earth.*

Each PC should make a Dexterity check to avoid stumbling, Aveгдаar is going to erupt. The PCs have exactly 24 hours to find and defeat the fire minions in





## The Road of Fire

the lava sea or the island will be devastated. A tremor occurs again in four hours. tremors will continue at increasing intervals until the final hour when they will occur every 10 minutes.

### The Clans of Avegdaar

Upon reaching Avegdaar, Trenbull will address the party:

*I believe that we need to be very careful about how we proceed from here. We know that the giants here are hostile. If they are holding my father, he is probably being kept in one of their caves. I do not think that we can hope to overwhelm the giants with force without endangering my father. I suggest we avoid any open confrontations and proceed with stealth. I would rather sneak into a cave at night and cut some throats than invite the beasts to dinner.*

Trenbull will not insist on this course of action. He has by this point seen the talents of the party at work and will defer to them if someone makes a good case for a different approach. His primary concern will be to avoid jeopardizing his father's life.

After the group has settled on a strategy and are about to traverse the island read this to the players:

*You see eight huge, lumbering men step onto the beach. They are dark red and stand 25 feet tall. Their coarse hair trails down their shoulders in braids.*

*One giant stares at Trenbull and snarls, "Look, it's the little fire eater and he has more of his friends got. Bored I am with him. I think I'll crush him."*

*"No, Progg angry will be. You cannot crush the little keeper," another giant objects.*

*There is some grumbling among the group as three giants plod forward wielding huge spiked clubs.*

*"Call Progg, tell him trouble there is!" A giant bellows as another turns and heads inland.*

The giants have mistaken Trenbull for his father. The three giants will focus their attack, not on Tren-

bull, but the party. They may slap him down, but with the intent to subdue, not to kill. The other giants will not interfere if the party defends themselves against the attackers, but if they are attacked they will retaliate. In 1d6+4 rounds Progg, a huge, coal black giant will appear. When he arrives he will roar a warning to stop the fighting and the attacking giants will withdraw. If the party kills the three attackers before Progg arrives, the other giants will stand around offering only, "Progg comes."

Progg will approach the party and, looking at Trenbull, begin to laugh thunderously, "This is not the little keeper you fools! We have been invaded!" He will grin good naturedly and continue, "We have not welcomed you kindly, perhaps you can tell us why you have come to visit."

The giants of Avegdaar have been isolated from the outside world for the past 10 years by the spirits of the crewmen that haunt their shores. The giants are desperate for trade. The clans survive by herding erdlu on the scrub of the island's northern shore. If treated courteously and openly, Progg will make overtures toward friendly relations. If the party becomes surly, he will respond angrily. Even under the best circumstances the giants' have short tempers.

Progg will be able to tell the party that Trenbull's father lives in the crown of the volcano by the lava sea and helps the giants with their herds. Some of the giants are angry with him because they think he is responsible for the recent rise in the lava sea. Progg knows nothing of Haakar, Akarakle, or the Urikites. He will warn the party that, while they can walk from Avegdaar to Morgazh across the mudflats, Morgazh is home only to dark spirits.

The idea will not occur to Trenbull, but if the party suggests establishing trade with the giants, they will have made lasting allies of House M'ke.

This encounter will naturally be an emotionally difficult experience for Trenbull. He will, at first, behave insolently, but will follow the party's lead if they are civil. He will try to find out where his father is, and get the party moving as quickly as possible, even if it means cutting conversation short.



**Desert Giants of Avegdaar (9):** INT Low; AL NE; AC 4; MV 15; HD 14; hp 65, 81, (attackers) 65, 57, 58, 56, 54, 64, 77 (non-attackers); THAC0 7; #AT 1; Dmg 2-16+14 (huge spiked clubs); SA Hurl rocks or spears; Resistant to psionics; MR Nil; SZ H (25'); ML 16; XP 6,000.

### The Reunion

*Just beneath the rim of the volcano's crater a small stone lodge has been built. Under the open shelter you can see several pottery jars full of roots. Below you the cauldron of lava that seethes in the mountain's crown glows an intense orange. At the edge of the lava, amid the smoke and the soot, a man sits huddled on a stone. Before the crouched figure, four small fires circle in a wheel like motion.*

In the crater of the volcano, Trenbull's father, a druid, makes his home. He is weak and sick from 10 years of guilt for having caused the deaths of the crews of the *Pyrus* and the *Hesper*. He has summoned some lesser fire elementals and is simply staring at them. He will release them when the party make themselves known.

Trenbull will call to him, half sliding, half stumbling down the slope of the volcano's crater. The man will stare at the party in apparent disbelief.

*"I never gave up hope for you, father, I never gave up. No one believed me. No one would support me. The whole House gave up on you, but I never did. I never will. They said the giants killed you when they betrayed the House. But I knew you could hide from them!"*

*Marcus will respond very hesitantly. "So this is my punishment? To have my boy see me like this. You should have listened to them, Trenbull; it would have been better if you had believed me dead. The giants didn't kill anyone. It was me, son."*

Marcus will invite the party to sit with him. He will tell his tale to his son. He had developed a deep love of the land during his years as a caravan master. By stop-

ping repeatedly at a small oasis he fell under the tutelage of a druid. During his travels he devoted himself to the practice of druidic arts with the hope of helping to heal the land that he loved.

Arriving at Avegdaar with his brother and their ships, he was filled with the profound awe of recognition: he had found his guarded land. He contrived to be left behind. Sick at the thought of trade despoiling the island, he schemed to convince the giants that they had been robbed. He did not expect anyone to die. He had only wanted to dissuade the giants from engaging in trade in the future, and to chase the fleet away.

After the giants sent the *Pyrus* and the *Hesper* to the bottom of the silt, Marcus was overcome with self loathing and has become increasingly detached over the years. He now aids the giants and tends the volcano's crater.

Upon learning the truth about his father's exile, Trenbull will become enraged and attack his father. He will attempt to beat him to death with his fists. Marcus will make no attempt to defend himself. Whether Marcus lives or dies is entirely up to the actions of the party. Trenbull will only continue to fight for two rounds after someone intervenes. Trenbull's face turns red and he spits with rage:

*You cared more about these rocks than you did for your crew, than you did for me. Who are you to decide what is best for the people here? Who are you to isolate them from the world?" Suddenly the ground rocks. The lava churns and seems to swell.*

*"It's worse than that, son. You see I have not even been much of druid. Druids are here to maintain the balance. The balance of the elements. The balance between life and death.*

*The first night after the massacre I saw the crew assemble off the shore, their eyes glowing with hatred. I realized I had done something even more unspeakable than I had previously believed. I made something that tore the pattern. The undead refuse death and cannot live. Their very existence blasphemes the balance of life.*



## The Road of Fire

*I became unable to sustain myself I lost sight of the balance, and in my desperate search for absolution I began to dwell on the purity of fire. Staring into the lava I could see the cleansing power of the flame. I used my power to call forth beings of the pure element. I summoned them just to look at them. Then, after a time, I believe the walls between us and the plane of pure fire began to weaken. Perhaps it was the power of the volcano combined with my constant summons. They began to come of their own volition. Not like the ones I had called. They look like fiery beasts. They carry swords and horns grow from their heads. I have been fighting with them . . . driving them back. I think they are causing the tremors. There are four left and if they are not destroyed, I believe the lava sea will soon cover the island. I no longer know what to do."*

If the party agrees to help, he will say that there is much time and he will lead them to the lava sea.

If the party asks about Haakar or Akarake, Marcus will tell them that, while the names are unfamiliar, there are some old tapestries in an ancient stockade at the shore of the lava sea. The stockade has been there for centuries and may hold some clue to what the PCs are seeking.

### Role-Playing Trenbull and Marcus

Trenbull has essentially renounced and forsaken his father. He is extraordinarily bitter. In his eyes, his father abandoned him and murdered good men of their House to serve some nonsensical personal obsession. He will, for all intents and purposes, ignore his father's presence.

Marcus is a broken man. At times he becomes distracted and seems unaware of what is going on around him. In combat he nearly loses control, enraged, he delivers unnecessary amounts of force.

These interpersonal difficulties should require the attention of the party at times. It is important for the PCs actions to directly impact these characters' attitudes about themselves and one another. At the end of this adventure, the father and son will finally find some common ground and reconcile their differences.

The PCs should feel as if their actions and decisions lay the groundwork for this change.

### The Stockade

*As you cross the smoldering mud you catch sight of the lava sea. It looks like the surface of the sun. The molten earth casts a dark red pall on the air. Silhouetted against the black and ember lake, a small stone building sits in a low tide of lava that is slowly rising across the smoking ground. Suddenly a bonfire spills out of the doorway. It seems to take a human-like form, with fangs and horns. It draws a burning sword. Marcus chokes, "It's them! They are in the stockade!"*

The creature is a fire minion. There are two others behind the building and one more inside. The stockade is a single room in a simple 15-foot stone cube with a five-foot-wide door. It sits in a half-inch pool of lava. The lava surrounds the building to 10 feet on three sides. The lava extends from the back of the building to the lava sea.

Three of the fire minions will assemble in the lava in front of the building and prepare for combat. They can leave the lava freely, and will do so at the beginning of combat. If the battle starts to turn against them, they can disappear into the lava in one round and reappear in the next, somewhere else in the pool, up to a distance of their full movement rate. This does not give them an advantage in combat, but should unnerve the PCs. The fire minions will taunt Marcus during the battle. If three are killed, the last one left will visibly begin to torch the tapestries inside the stockade for two rounds. The open doorway will give the party a clear shot at him while he is doing this. He will then disappear into the lava and reappear at the pool's edge to directly engage the combatants.

If the party manages to get inside the stockade after the battle, they will find fragments of one unburned tapestry. If read by magic, the tapestry will be revealed to be notes belonging to Haakar. The tapestry is somewhat damaged, but the party can discern the following:





. . . I have discovered the culmination of the defiler's inquiry. . . amazing . . . the end is really) a beginning . . . a transfiguration . . . obsidian . . . obsidian is the key . . . a large structure . . . a tremendous pool of life energy . . . there is some sort of metamorphosis . . . into what I cannot tell . . . immense power . . . a conduit to the elemental planes . . . the defiler can fuse mind and magic . . .

**Fire Minions (4):** INT 17; AL LE; AC 3; MV 12; HD 6; hp 29, 33, 35, 36; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 2d6; SA flame aura automatically causes 1d6 damage to all within 5' fire; SD immunity to fire; MR Nil; SZ L (9'); ML 15; XP 975; MC4, DRAGONLANCE® appendix; fire based attacks restore the number of hit points equal to the damage that they would normally cause.

## Leaving Avegdaar

After helping to defeat the fire minions, Marcus will ask to accompany the party back to the mainland. He will explain, "These lands need to be guarded from me. I am not helping here anymore, it is time to leave." He will ask the party to join him saying goodbye to the giants. The giants will, for the most part, be indifferent to his departure. Some will seem relieved. Progg will use the opportunity to suggest a trade arrangement with Trenbull's outpost, if such an arrangement has not already been made.

## The Mudflats

(See Map Book pg. 16)

*The hard cracked crust of the edge of the mudflat stretches out before you. Your feet sink several inches below the dry shelf and into the mud. Up ahead you can see the twisted thickets of low lying brambles that whisker the flats. The air seems alive with the ticking and hum of insects.*

The problem the players will face in the mudflats is that there is no place to rest. Within 1d4 hours of any

attempt the PCs make to rest, the group will hear the loud clicking of approaching beetles. If the group does not break camp and move on immediately, the beetles will attack within 1d8+5 rounds. Use the boring beetle statistics from the *Day One* encounter below for each wave of insects.

The party will face some of the predators that populate this area. The trip should take the party about four days to complete. Use one of the following encounters once each day the PCs spend in the mudflats. These may occur anytime the party is moving. If it takes more than four days to reach Akarakle, feel free to reuse any of the encounters.

### Day One

*You hear a skittering noise like a bit of driftweed being blown across a stretch of dry mud. The sound persists with an unsettling rhythm.*

Party attacked by beetles.

**Boring Beetles (18):** INT Animal; AL N; AC 3; MV 6; HD 5; hp 19, 19, 20, 22, 28, 21, 22, 18, 27, 23, 20, 25, 13, 19, 30, 27, 22, 24; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 5d4; SA Nil; SD Nil; MR Nil; SZ L (9' long); ML 14; XP 175; MC1.

### Day Two

*The brackish mud here is about a foot deep. Tall, sharp reeds slow your travel and obscure your vision. You see some olom reeds rustling in the distance. In a chain of twitching rushes a trail is being made toward you. Then as quickly as it started, the motion stops.*

Party about to be attacked by a Kluzd.

**Kluzd:** INT Animal; AL N; AC 2 (8 out of mud); MV 12, Br 12; HD 4; hp 18; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1-8; SA Suffocation; SD Nil; MR Nil; SZ M (6' long); ML 14; XP 270.

### Day Three

*The brambles grow thicker here. Tiny insects swarm around your eyes. Without the silter across your nose*



## The Road of Fire

and mouth, the insects would clog your breathing. You suddenly hear a hissing sound like hot steel being doused with water.

Party has just stirred up a clutch of nesting wyverns.

**Wyverns (3):** INT Low; AL N; AC 3; MV 6, Fl 24 (E); HD 7+7; hp 43, 50, 38, 32, 45; THAC0 13; #AT 2; Dmg 2d8/1d6; SA Poison; SD Nil; MR Nil; SZ G (35' long); ML 14; XP 2,000; MC 1; stinger injects type F poison, save vs. death.

### Day Four

The surface here is as dry as the desert and as hard as stone. Gray traces of silt fill the cracks that scar the hard baked earth. An unsettling scraping sound frightens a flight of small birds from a hedge. From behind the dry scrub you see three enormous scorpions clambering toward you.

**Giant Scorpions (3):** INT Non; AL N; AC 3; MV 15; HD 5+5; hp 22, 23, 35; THAC0 15; #AT 3; Dmg 1d10/1d10/1d4; SA Poison; SD Nil; MR

Nil; SZ M (5' long); ML Steady 11; XP 650; MC 1; stinger injects type F poison, save vs. death.

If a giant scorpion hits a PC with a pincer, it will result in an automatic 1d10 damage to the victim each round. The victim may attempt a bend bars/lift gates roll once, to escape. If a giant scorpion is reduced to 1 or 2 hit points, it will go into a frenzy, giving it an extra attack each round with its stinger.

### The Silent Shore

As you approach the barren shore of Morgazh, the silence is stifling. The clatter of bone breaks the air as a pack of skeletal hounds sprints to the beach. Their jaws flex frantically as if they are baying. As two of the dogs break from the pack and dash up a wide, overgrown road leading inland, the rest of the hounds gather on the shore in anticipation.

If the party tries to advance onto the beach, the dogs will ferociously attack them. These skeletal dogs are unique in that they carry a rotting disease similar





to that usually associated with mummies. The rotting disease will kill a victim within 1d6 months of being bitten. Every month the disease progresses the victim suffers a permanent loss of two points of Charisma. *Cure wounds* spells have no effect on victims of this disease and their wounds heal at 10% the normal rate. Only a *cure disease* spell can stop this ailment.

**Skeletal Hounds (20):** INT Non; AL N; AC 8; MV 12; HD 1; hp 8 (X 20); THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1-4; SA cause disease; SD take ½ damage from edged weapons and none from cold based attacks; MR immune to sleep, charm, hold, and fear spells; SZ M; ML will fight until destroyed; XP 100.

## Resting on Morgazh

The party will find resting on Morgazh fairly safe, the predators of this region are averse to undead.

## Calm Without a Storm

Merek, a warlord defiler, lay siege to Haakar's fortress centuries ago. The army had cut off the fortress from its supply lines for nearly a year, and was preparing an assault on Akarake, when a sudden catastrophic event annihilated both armies and split the walls of the preserver's keep.

This section features a collection of encounters that will allow the party to confront an undead army preparing for a battle that was never fought.

Note that Marcus believes undead to be a mockery of all that druids hold sacred. He will find them abhorrent and generally cower from them or attack them rabidly. Druids cannot turn undead.

## How to Run Calm Without a Storm

Only a few of the encounters on the journey across Morgazh are tied to specific locations on the map. As the PCs move through the remains of the invading army's encampment, you should select encounters from this section to heighten the drama of the story. These encounters are not dangerous. They are to be used to create the mood of somber desolation that per-

vades the island of Dawnfire.

NOTE: If blood or water spills onto the soil of Morgazh the voices of the spirits can be heard. Consequently, whenever a PC takes damage you can use the *Voices of the Dead* list to seed the encounters with additional information.

## Voices of the Dead

1. You hear what sounds like a huge crowd of men cheering. The sound fades into the rushing wind.
2. None died with honor. We fell before the battle.
3. Collaborators are you? This is what we think of collaborators.
4. It's so cold. Is it time yet? Is it time to leave?
5. Merek feeds the deserters to the shadow beast.
6. A full cycle of the sun we have laid siege to the wizard's fortress. Our men are restless, I think we will soon storm Akarake's walls.
7. Merek has had a sword made to take the wizard's head.
8. What happened? For a year we prepared for this battle, and in the dark of night our lives are stolen?
9. So sudden. And no one raised a sword.

### 1. Officers

*Three shadowy forms appear at the end of the path; they are warriors mounted on crodlu. One raises a sword. They turn and charge toward you.*

The warriors will charge toward the party and then fade away just as the PCs are about to engage in combat. Their passage will be accompanied by a chill breeze.

### 2. Fathers

*A small group of huddled, ghostly figures approach you. Some are in rags, others are dressed in red and black battle leathers. A stooped man in a breech cloth steps hesitantly forward from the group. He holds out a small bowl, cut from a gourd. The others watch, expectantly. Looking up at you, he extends the bowl.*

If the party pours blood or water into the bowl, the liquid will spatter on the ground and the group will hear the murmuring voices of the dead. The old man



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will ask, "Did we win? Did Merek lead us to victory? Did the battle ever come?" The spirits will then fade from view.

If the party evades the spirits, they will follow the PCs for about a mile before dissipating. If the party attacks the spirits, they will disappear. They can be turned as wights.

### 3. The Training Fighters

*You see two tall men in red and black, mismatched leather armor. They are swinging at one another with poles. At first they seem to be fighting, but you soon realize that this is some form of ritualized training.*

These spirits will not respond to the party in any way. They will continue to fight despite any distractions the PCs may create. Contact with these spirits results in 1d6 of cold damage. They can be turned as wights.

### The Parade Grounds

*The road opens on to a wide field dotted with scrub. At the far end of the field several weathered poles and a heap of bleached boards mark the site where a dais once stood.*

*The air is filled with glinting light like the sun flashing off helms and spears. A raucous cheer echoes across the field. The steady chanting builds, and then, as quickly as it came, the lights wink out and the sound is gone.*

*Two short columns of men in rotted black and red leather armor shamble across the field toward you. They attack.*

**Zombie Soldiers (10):** INT Low; AL NE; AC 6; MV 9; HD 6; hp 30, 40, 34, 34, 25, 35, 30, 32, 27, 20; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 4d4; SD only hit by +1 or better weapons, blunt and piercing weapons and fire do half damage, immune to poisons, electricity, cold based attacks and telepathic psionics; MR immune to sleep, charm, hold, *magic missiles*, death magic, and illusions; SZ M; ML 16; XP 975; MC1; turned as a specter.

These zombies behave as juju zombies (see MC 1).

They do not have to attack last; use normal rules to determine order.

The undead soldiers have been trained in the army of a defiler. Each zombie carries a spear with an obsidian head. Five of the zombies will hang back and throw their spears at potential spellcasters. They will seek out targets who are not carrying weapons, or not wearing armor, in the back ranks.

### Lookout Tower

*The path winds up the steep slopes of the dormant volcano and levels off at the crown. This is the crater of Morgazh.*

*Standing on the broken rim you can see a stone causeway that circles the inside perimeter. The encamped army used this natural feature as an enormous lookout tower.*

*In the center of the crater you see what looks like a collapsing barn. Huge crooked slats covered with lichen and moss make it difficult to see what sort of structure this may have been. As you watch, the thing begins to move.*

The rotten building is an undead roc. Its wings have rotted and it can no longer fly. It will lumber across the crater and attack the party. Its rider is now a common zombie, he will join the fray, arms wide.

The crater is 200 feet across and covered with weeds and stones. If the party defeats the monsters they will find a wooden map tube that had once been tied to the roc's harness. Inside the tube the group will find an arrow of slaying druids and a message that Trenbull can read to the party:

*Hammanu,*

*Tomorrow we will begin the assault on Akarakle. By sun ascending, I will control the largest deposits of obsidian on Athas. By morning, the red and black will fly over Akarakle and Haakar's head will adorn the battlements of my new home.*

*Glad tidings,*

Merek



Remember that unless a PC is a templar, a merchant, or has reading as a nonweapon proficiency, it is unlikely that he can read at all.

From the crater's rim the PCs will be able to see the entire island. Show the players a copy of the map of Morgazh, but cover the map key.

**Zombie Roc-rider:** INT Low; AL NE; AC 6; MV 9; HD 6; hp 30; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8; SD immune to poisons, electricity, cold based attacks; MR immune to sleep, charm, hold, death magic; SZ M; ML Fight until destroyed; XP 65; MC1.

**Zombie Roc:** INT Animal; AL NE; AC 6; MV 6; HD 15; hp 65; THAC0 5; #AT 1; Dmg 3d6 or 5d6 (claw or beak); SD only hit by +1 or better weapons, blunt and piercing weapons and fire do half damage, immune to poisons, electricity, cold based attacks and telepathic psionics; MR immune to sleep, charm, hold, *magic missiles*, death magic, and illusions; SZ G (50' long); ML 12; XP 5,000.

### The Forge

*At the crest of a chalky hill the empty ruin of a small stone structure standing against the sky. As you crest the rise, a wide plain opens before you. From here you can see the wide contour of crumbling, earthen ramparts sweeping across your field of vision in an arc, on the smoking land below. Miles farther, you can see the walls of Akaracle split wide from their heights to their foundation, as if the earth itself had decided to break open the fort's proud gates.*

*Up ahead a short way, you see the remnants of a small, clay shed, only the foundation of the building remains. Standing next to a huge, black anvil, a dark, amorphous, vaguely human form, hammers silently on a large sword. Its glowing red eyes are fueled by the intense red glow of an unseen forge and illuminate the dirt brick around it.*

The smith is a wraith. If the party approaches within 10 feet of the forge, the wraith will attack the group. If the party defeats the smith, they will find a

huge steel bastard sword lying on the anvil. There are strange inscriptions along the side of the blade.

The sword had not yet been enchanted, but was being prepared by Merek for Haakar's execution. If a PC wields this sword in Haakar's presence, he will assume that character is an assassin and focus his attacks on that individual.

**Wraith Smith:** INT 11; AL NE; AC 4; MV 24; HD 5+3; hp 25; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 1-6; SA Energy drain; SD Hit only by silver or +1 or better magical weapon, silver weapons do half damage, immune to poison and paralyzation; MR immune to sleep, charm, hold, death and cold based spells; SZ L; ML 15; XP 3,000; MC1.

### The Ramparts

*The earthen walls of Merek's camp, though worn by weather and broken by time, still inspire a sense of awe. Twenty feet high, the sloping barricade stretches east and west as far as the eye can see. The shell of a huge siege engine lies on its side, in fragments.*

*You see two black, hazy clouds begin to take shape. They are the vague forms of two men, mounted on crodlus. The eyes of the riders and their mounts burn red. From the wreckage of the machine a line of dust covered half-giants slowly muster.*

*Suddenly, the shadow of the machine begins to spill forward across the ground. It stretches 25 feet and then begins to take on solid form. As if an ink black giant suddenly rose from sleep, the shadow beast rises before you, eclipsing the light of the moon (sun). Luminous blue eyes look down at you. As a sweeping sapphire grin slashes the darkness of its head, smoky vapor begins to trail to the ground.*

**Zombie Half-giant Soldiers (10):** INT Low; AL NE; AC 6; MV 9; HD 6; hp 30, 40, 34, 34, 25, 35, 30, 32, 27, 20; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 4d4; SD only hit by +1 or better weapons, blunt and piercing weapons and fire do half damage, immune to poisons, electricity, cold based attacks and telepathic psionics; MR immune to sleep, charm, hold, *magic missiles*,



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death magic, and illusions; SZ M; ML 16; XP 975; MC1; turned as a specter.

**Wraith Officers on Crodlu (2):** INT Animal; AL NE; AC 4; MV 24; HD 5+3; hp 20, 25; THAC0 15; #AT 6; Dmg 1-6/1-6/1-6/1-6/1-6/1-6 (claw/claw/rear claw/rear claw/beak/rider); SA Energy drain; SD Hit only by silver or +1 or better magical weapon, silver weapons do half damage, immune to poison and paralyzation; MR immune to sleep, charm, hold, death and cold based spells; SZ L; ML 15; XP 6,000; Turn as wraiths.

These undead spirits share the same attributes as wraiths, except for the added advantage of the multiple attacks that the crodlu provide. Only the beak and the rider's attack drain levels.

**The Lesser Shadow Giant:** INT 17; AL LE; AC 4; MV 15; HD 14; hp 56; THAC0 7; #AT 1; Dmg 2d8 (fists); SA fog bank; SD immune to telepathic psionics, electricity, fire and cold based attacks; MR immune to sleep, charm, hold, magic missiles, death magic, and illusions; SZ H (20' tall); ML 15; XP 7,000.

The giant can, once per day, transform into an ebony fog bank for a duration of 15 rounds. Black wisps of fog will issue from its mouth as it diminishes in size. The fog will eventually cover a 20 cubic foot area. Creatures of less than 5 Hit dice caught in this haze are immediately slain. Creatures of greater than 5 hit dice must save vs. death magic or die. Creatures making their saving throws suffer 3d10 cold damage and an additional 3d10 for each round they remain in the fog. When the fog passes, everything that was reduced to zero hit points by its effects disappears. These beings are irrecoverably lost.

The giant can reform itself at will, within the area of the fog bank. The haze will begin to swirl, and then be sucked up into the giant's form as it rises.

The shadow giant can employ the psychometabolic science shadow form as an innate ability. It can strike with its fists for 2d8 of cold damage. If its attack succeeds by four or greater, the shadow giant has grasped

its victim, it can lift him from the ground with effects identical to the fog bank. The victim may make one bend bars/lift gates to free himself. If the character is reduced to zero hit points he will appear to be absorbed into the shadow giant's body.

Once the party has finished the battle, they will find that the ramparts have an easy grade to climb, but there is a sheer, 15-foot drop, on the other side. A trench, five feet deep, runs the length of the barricade's far side.

### In the Shadow of the Keep

Read this to the players after the PCs have scaled the ramparts of Merek's camp:

*You see before you a wide and barren plain of stony ground. More than three miles away the shattered walls of Akarake rise; stands of twisted trees dot the landscape.*

When the PCs have crossed about a mile of the plain, read to the players:

*A pale, incorporeal human boy of about 14 approaches the party. He wears a loose red and black robe tied off at the waist with a cord. His skin is chalky white and he casts no shadow. There is an air of calm about him. He walks toward the party, climbs onto a large stone, and sits. He watches you with intense interest. "Are you lost?" he asks.*

The boy is the undead spirit of a waterboy from the defiler's army. He is a dhaot—a spirit created when a person with an intense love of home dies far away. The spirit cannot rest until its body is home.

The dhaot is desperately homesick and needs to have his bones laid to rest in a field outside Draj, once farmed by his family. Unlike most dhaot, who harass the living into retrieving their remains, this young boy will attempt his goal through deception.

Through a series of unassuming, probing questions, the dhaot will try to determine what the PCs are doing. If the party tells him that they are looking for



Haakar, he will tell them he is Haakar. He will make up answers to whatever questions the party puts to him. He will often answer a question by posing another, to avoid being caught up in too much detail. He knows that Haakar was a wizard and commanded the forces of Akaracle.

*Haakar? I am Haakar. What do you want of me? I commanded the forces of Akaracle, my fortress. We had been under siege for months, but I was preparing an assault to drive the invaders into the sea. Then one night, without warning, a plague swept the island destroying both armies. To this day my fortress brings only death to the living.*

He will tell the party not to explore the fortress because the land there is still poisoned. He will mention that the Treasure of Akaracle was smuggled out of the fortress during the siege, and was buried in a field near Draj. The treasure includes a powerful, magical item that can provide the answers to their questions. To discover these things, the PCs must carry his bones

to the far away field.

If the party agrees to exhume the boy's bones, he will lead them to a small grove about 500 yards away. On the ground, by a small spring, the bones of the boy lie where he fell centuries ago. Across the bones and the remnants of black and red cloth, lies a long yoke, balanced with an oversized gourd on either end. It is a yoke for carrying water.

## How to Run the Dhaut

Players will most enjoy a deception like this if they are misled, but don't actually wind up abandoning their search and heading for the fields of Draj. Try to string the players along. If the party is particularly crafty, the ruse will not last long. If the players are unusually glib, they may wind up collecting the boy's bones and heading back to the mainland. If the boy has gained the party's trust, you may want to allow him to slip up a bit when the PCs are preparing to recover his remains. He may become so excited at the prospect of going home, that he blurts out something revealing.





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If the party challenges the dhaot, he will appeal for the support of any sympathetic PCs, attaching himself to the most vocal. Under stress he may make a few more mistakes until the party becomes unanimously skeptical. He will attack the group in a desperate rage.

**Dhaot:** INT 12; AL NE; AC 2; MV 12, Fl 30 (B); HD 7+3; hp 38; THAC0 13; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8; SA dehydrate, energy drain; SD +1 or better weapon to hit; MR immune to sleep, charm, hold and cold based spells, also poisons and paralyzation attacks; SZ M (5' tall); ML 15; XP 3,000.

A *raise dead* spell will destroy the dhaot, if he fails his saving throw. The dhaot will drain a life level with each successful hit. Additionally, the undead water-boy can cause a victim's body to "age" as though it has gone one day without water. This results in a 1d6 Constitution loss with each successful hit by the dhaot. A character's hit point adjustment, system shock, resurrection survival, poison save, and regeneration rate are all adjusted immediately. Characters who have been attacked by the dhaot must rehydrate normally as described on pg. 86 of the DARK SUN™ Rules Book. A character killed by the dhaot does not become a dhaot. The dhaot may be turned as a specter.

## The Fortress of Akarakle

The party will now be able to progress across the broken plain to Akarakle. Haakar is prepared for their arrival. They may approach the outer walls at either the main gate or from the huge crack that runs down the wall's north face. The gates are barred shut, magically held, and require a siege engine to open. The outer wall is 20 feet high.

Once inside the fortress, read to the players:

*The first thing you notice, as you look across the courtyard, is that the inner wall of the keep is also broken apart. The ground is blanketed in shattered bones and brick. Skulls lie strewn about the yard like*

*broken pottery. Against the inner wall, the sun bleached skull of a giant stares blindly from lifeless sockets. Halfway to the inner wall, a bizarre sight catches your attention.*

*The huge body of a half-giant lies curled on its side. You can see clearly through a charred tunnel in the torso of the smoking corpse. A large blackened shield and an iron mace lie at the half-giant's side.*

If the party advances to inspect the body, they will discover that it is the Urikite gladiator, Ulreg. While her inix hide armor is burned beyond use, her iron mace and *fruit of healing* survived her. The moment the party crosses the line, halfway to the inner wall, read to the players:

*With a grinding sound, the skeleton of a giant rises from a heap against the inner wall. It holds the femur of another dead giant as a club. Tilting back its head, its jaw drops open and a huge ball of flame billows toward the sky. Thousands of tiny bone fragments across the courtyard begin to twitch and flicker with life. The giant strides forward.*

Haakar casts a *fireball* so that it appears to be a breath weapon of the skeletal giant. The twitching bones are the product of a *cantrip*. Haakar will allow the giant to "breathe" one more fireball into the party before it engages in melee.

If the players retreat or destroy the skeleton they can rest undisturbed.

**Skeletal Desert Giant:** INT Non; AL N; AC 6; MV 12; HD 6; hp 37; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 2d8; SA Nil; SD only take ½ damage from edged weapons and none from cold based attacks; MR immune to sleep, charm, hold and fear spells; SZ G (25'); ML will fight until destroyed; XP 650.

### 1. The Outer Wall

A 10-foot thick, fortified wall surrounds the fortress. Twenty feet high, it has a circular pit four feet deep and six feet across at each corner. These pits are empty now but were once used as guard posts. Small





holes around the rim of each pit indicate where a tent like awning was once erected to protect a guard from the heat of the sun. There is a stairway leading to the ground next to each pit. The wall is level on top, and intact.

## 2. The Outer Wall Gate

This gate was bolted shut with massive beams centuries ago. Huge stone slabs were then wedged against it, and nothing short of a siege engine will open it.

## 3. The Cleft Wall

The gaping crack in this wall extends through all of the structural foundations of the fortress. Any time a PC crawls over the rubble here, or elsewhere in the compound, the character must make a successful Dexterity check to avoid stumbling.

## 4. Guard Posts

The guard posts are empty.

## 5. The Gate Houses

The gate houses are empty.

## 6. Stable

The stable once housed the officers' crodlu.

## 7. Crodlu Corral

This corral is littered with crodlu bones.

## 8. The Garden Wall

This is the ruin of a two-foot high, marble wall that surrounds a bare patch of dirt in the center court. This small patch of earth is unique in that it is the only stretch of ground in the courtyard that is not covered with bones.

## 9. The Archery Range

There are the remnants of six straw men propped up against the western wall. Broken arrows lie scattered at its base. A close inspection will yield three flight arrows in good condition.

## 10. The Courtyard Well

Although the rope that once served to draw water from this well has rotted away, the well still holds fresh water at a depth of 60 feet. The well is 80 feet deep and a useless bucket lies at the floor.

## 11. The Entry Hall

The enormous gates and dirt floor of this large room suggest that messengers must have been ridden their mounts right into the keep. The hall may have also been used to outfit wagons of some sort.

## 12. The Receiving Rooms

These rooms have large wooden benches and rods on the walls where tapestries once hung. The stairways lead only to impassable rubble.

## 13. Living Quarters

These rooms have a bed and a small chest for personal effects. There is a 10% chance that an item on the miscellaneous chart on page 67 of the *Player's Handbook* will be found in any one of these rooms.

## 14. The Kitchen

This room contains a large hearth.

## 15. The Dining Hall

The large dining hall is marked by large overturned tables and benches. A hole in the floor leads to the well cut in the floor of room 18, the Roc Landing. A broken, crystal window is set in the southern corner.

## 16. The Pantry

The pantry has a stairway leading down to the lower level.

## 17. The Halls

These rooms were of indeterminate purpose. The violence of the splitting walls and the passage of time have left no clues about their use.



## The Road of Fire

### The Lower Level

#### 18. The Roc Landing

This cave was apparently used as a rot landing by the besieged army of Akarakle. The 30-foot ceiling is marked by a hole, opening into room 15, The Dining Hall. This portal provided access to the well immediately below it. The well drilled in the floor of the roc landing is 50 feet deep, although the surface of the fresh water is only 30 feet down.

#### 19. The Tack Room

This room contains heaps of rotten leather. There are enough pieces here, in good condition, to assemble the complete leathers required to saddle two rocs. The weight of each set is 900 pounds.

#### 20. The Root Cellar

The roots that once filled this room are dust.

#### 21. The Wine Cellar

Twenty large, dusty pottery jars, sealed with wax and filled with vinegar, can be found here.

#### 22. The Armory

The stone door to this room cannot be opened until Haakar is laid to rest. Any attempts to teleport into the room, while Haakar's restless spirit still roams the walls of this fortress, will fail.

### The War Beetle

When the PCs have crossed the inner wall to the center court read to the players:

*You are in the center court. Like the outer yard, the ground here is littered with bones. Only a desolate patch of dirt, in the center of the court, surrounded by the ruins of a low marble wall is clear of the splintered remains.*

*Without warning the gates of the keep begin emanating light as a massive form swells forward from the doors. An enormous, spectral rezhatta beetle takes shape and lumbers forward. From among the shards of scattered bone a retinue of skeletal attend-*

*ants assembles and takes up positions to either side of the war beetle.*

Haakar commands the battle from within the spectral war beetle. Before passing through the gates he has protected himself by casting *globe of invulnerability* and *spell turning*. He will begin his attack by cutting off the party's exit with a *wall of fire* thrown up against the wall behind them. He will then cast *fear*. Beginning with *magic missiles* he will now start moving through his offensive spells with increasing intensity. *Fireballs*, *ice storms*, and *chain lightning* follow in order. If any PC is wielding the executioner's sword from The Forge, Haakar will direct all of his attacks on them.

After delivering his wall of fire, Haakar will begin to berate the party with each attack.

"Looters! You will not return home with stories of your plunder here! Your children will always wonder where you fell! Drop your arms! Do you yield?"

All of the attacks will seem to emanate from the enormous spectral war beetle as it lumbers forward. The beetle itself will not attack, but will absorb 46 points of damage before it fades, leaving the party to face Haakar directly.

The skeletons will not attack either, but will advance, 11 to each side of the beetle.

If the party attempts to communicate with Haakar, he will respond to them and continue to attack until he becomes convinced that they are not looters or agents of a defiler.

**NOTE:** Haakar cannot be turned.

**Spectral War Beetle:** INT Non; AL N; AC 2; MV 6; HD 9; hp 46; SD immune to cold based attacks, poison and paralyzation; MR immune to sleep, charm, and hold spells; SZ; ML Special; XP 150.

**Skeletons (22):** INT Non; AL N; AC 7; MV 12; HD 1; hp 6 (X 22); THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (spears); SA Nil; SD only take ½ damage from edged weapons and none from cold based attacks; MR immune to sleep, charm, hold, and fear spells; SZ M (6' tall); ML will fight until destroyed; XP 65.



## Haakar

In this encounter, the party discovers the truth about the Psionatrix. They will learn where to find it and how to destroy it.

If the players surrender or convince Haakar that they are not looters or agents of a defiler, the skeletons will clatter to the ground, the beetle will fade, and Haakar will float before the group.

He appears as a weary middle aged man with thinning hair and kind eyes. He will ask the group who they are and why have they come. He will cast *know alignment* on any mages to ensure that they are not defilers. Haakar knows of Hammanu and will not take kindly to anyone who admits to cooperating with the sorcerer king.

By the time the PCs finally get to talk to Haakar, they will have many questions to ask him. For ease of use, what Haakar knows is presented below as a series of answers to specific questions. The following text can actually be used as a monologue but will be much more effective if it is adapted and integrated into an interactive exchange in which the PCs have a chance to probe the preserver for information.

NOTE: Haakar knows nothing about the Order.

### • Have the Urikites been here?

*The half-giant's friends? They were here and gone. To where I know not, but I am certain that they will not be returning.*

### • What happened here on Morgazh?

*These are your heroes and your heritage scattered across this courtyard; men who resisted the rise of the defilers. We are all here now, mere shades. I cannot rest. I am held here at the sight of my failure.*

*I thought, it would work. Perhaps the legions outside our gates made me impatient.*

*It began the day I discovered the source of the defiler's power. It was not at all obvious, but once understood, so simple that it was stunning. It was like adding a sail to a ship. It was destructive, of course, but I never imagined just how destructive. Sometimes*

*to know your enemy. . . I guess you must become your enemy. Yes?*

*I began to discern the logical extension of the defiler's inquiry. Transfiguration. Channeled through the structure of these very walls, fueled by the life force of my enemy's minions, and focused through the veins of obsidian beneath our feet I discovered that I could transform myself. I did not fully understand what I would become. I was certain it was conduit of immeasurable power—some kind of a gateway into the very elements around us. Something, something wonderful.*

*With more time to study I would have learned, but my time was running short. Merek's legions had been outside my gates for a full cycle of the sun. My people were starving. We could not resist long. My choice was clear. It was either succumb to the defiler, or use the defiler's science against them. Just this once would I use it. It was, I believed, just. I would use their own weapon to defeat them. Think of the lives I would save, and the damage I would do to the defilers' growing ambition.*

*The spell failed of course. Not a soul within these walls survived. I got my wish, I suppose. Merek's forces were consumed too. And now here I am waiting for the day that my spirit can finally be laid to rest. And that day may never come.*

### • Do you know anything about the widespread psionic dampening?

*Yes, yes, amazing that it still works. I can feel its effects even now. It's very fragile, you know. A remarkable achievement, the Psionatrix is. Our greatest, I think. It actually integrates magical science with the disciplines of the mind. Extraordinarily powerful device; it looks like a water blue gem the size of a mul's fist.*

### • Do you know where to find the Psionatrix?

*The Psionatrix was constructed at our fortress Darasaches in the cradle of the Dragon Crown Mountain. I don't know if the fortress ever fell, but the Psionatrix could never be moved without destroying*



## The Road of Fire

its power. Obviously it is still working, so I am certain that it is still there.

- **Can the Psionatrix be destroyed?**

The society of mages was always very careful about these things. Every action has unanticipated consequences, and those were violent times. Naturally, we had our shield crystals. They were small stones that protected the wearer from the effects of the various devices we built. We also made certain that each of us had the capability to destroy any of our devices if need be.

There is an extremely delicate device kept in the armory called a water hammer. It looks like a black glass cylinder open at one end. A thinly etched line rings the outside of the glass. Stand within 10 feet of the Psionatrix and fill the cylinder precisely to the line with water. A pure clear tone will begin to emanate from the water hammer. The Psionatrix is extremely unstable and hence, very vulnerable to sympathetic vibrations. Within a few minutes the gem will explode.

- **How can we get into the armory?**

The armory is in a hall beneath the keep, but it cannot be entered as long as my spirit persists here.

- **How can you be laid to rest?**

Haakar will turn toward the barren patch of dirt surrounded by the low marble wall.

The tools made to snatch the breath of life must be used to restore it, he will murmur. I am so tired, I must rest now.

Haakar will slowly become less responsive to questions, almost as if he is falling asleep. To lay Haakar to rest, the party must use the tools made to snatch the breath of life to replant and restore the courtyard garden. He will not explain this, the party must figure it out.

## Reconciliation and Responsibility

If Trenbull and Marcus are both alive and present:

Trenbull asks the specter, "Obsidian? You said you focused your magic through stone?"



"Yes, quite. Obsidian is the defiler's fuel. Without it they cannot fuse the arts of the disciplined mind with the sciences of magic. Without it, they cannot increase their power. Without it they cannot transform. What I failed to understand when I tried my experiment is that a defiler's metamorphosis changes a man into a dragon. Obsidian is at the center of dragon magic."

"I feel sick," Trenbull sputters, "I taught the Moratuc how to mine the obsidian of Charvass. I have had them preparing a large obsidian sphere under commission of Abalach-Re, the sorcerer queen of Raam. I had no idea. I must get home. I must stop them."

"Put an end to it, son?" Marcus interrupts. "But who are you to decide what is best for the Moratuc. Who are you to keep from them the prosperity to which they are entitled?" Trenbull turns and stares at his father, then stalks away, brooding.

From this point forward, in the role-playing of events, Trenbull begins to warm up to his father.



## The Garden

If the party has not figured out that in order to lay Haakar to rest they must replant the courtyard garden, Marcus will suggest the idea.

He will direct the transplantation of some small fig trees from the ravines on the island. The process will take about 10 hours. Now Trenbull will, for the first time during this adventure, work with his father.

When the task is complete, Marcus will ask the PCs to contribute small amounts of water to soak the roots of the trees. Haakar will scan the bones across the courtyard and, as if addressing an unseen audience, announce, "It is done!" The preserver will gradually fade from view.

## The Armory

Near the rear of the tower's entry hall, the party will find stairs leading down to an enormous stone door.

If the party has replanted the courtyard garden and laid Haakar to rest, the door will open to reveal the

armory. The armory is a 40 X 50-foot room lined with racks of decaying equipment, most of which is useless. The PCs will, however, find the following items: a spell string with two *restoration* spells knotted into it (treat this item as a scroll), a steel *long sword* +2; a steel *bastard sword* +3, and a *ring of protection* +1.

The group will also find a shelf of different colored glass cylinders that radiate magic. Most are broken, but two, one red and one black, will be found intact. The black cylinder is the water hammer that can destroy the Psionatrix. The red water hammer was built to shatter a device that was never completed. You should stress the fragility of the water hammer. If the PCs attempt to transport it over any significant distance without somehow padding it, it will break.

In a small box the PCs will find a red, a green, and a water blue crystal shard. Only the blue one radiates magic. This device protects the wearer from all effects of the Psionatrix.



## The Road of Fire

### What Happened to the Urikites?

The Urikites arrived on the far north shore of Morgazh several days ago. Following the narrow path below the cliff wall, along the eastern side of the island, they scaled the precipice due east of Akaragle, managing to avoid Merek's encampment entirely.

Upon breaching the walls of the preserver's fortress they were beaten back, losing Ulreg in the skirmish. They dropped back, over the side of the cliff, and are healing-up on a ledge. A few days after the PCs leave, the Urikites will return. Marcus flees, but the Urikites learn what had happened with speak to dead spells and psionic object readings.

### Concluding the Adventure

The PCs can rest in the safety of Akaragle's walls. When they decide to leave, Marcus will tell the party that he has decided to remain at Akaragle to help continue the healing process of the garden and himself. Trenbull will encourage his father and bid him a warm farewell.

As the party travels back across the Road Of Fire, they may take a shot at establishing trade relations with the giants of Avegdaar for the House M'ke, if they have not already done this.

With the aid of their giant allies the entire party rapidly returns to Charvass. Trenbull halts work on an obsidian sphere the Moratuc are preparing and orders the sphere broken up into small, decorative items. He will provide a week's worth of food and water, and a kank for each PC (an inix with a howdah for half-giant characters).

### Return to the Valley

Note to DM: You may need to remind the players that they should meet Korgunard in Desverendi's valley. With the treachery of the Urikite party, there is little reason to return to Urik.

If the players decide to head straight for Dragon's Crown Mountain, they will by-pass Part Five, *The Uncomfortable Closeness of Trees*. In that event, the

next Part of the adventure will be Part Six, *Pack Frenzy*. Whether the heroes go to Desverendi's valley or straight to Dragon's Crown, they will have an overland journey of two to three weeks before they reach the next part of the adventure. This is an excellent time to insert an encounter from Part Eight, *Desert Perils*.

Try to move the party through this journey quickly, since time is pressing. Encourage the players to ride their mounts hard and to spend some money to change mounts frequently. If the PCs are dawdling, you may prod them along by describing the suffering caused by the psionic interference.

### A Note on NPCs and Survival

The nonplayer characters Trenbull Allraam'ke and his father Marcus should be used to add a broader dimension to the PCs adventure across the Road of Fire. Their knowledge and skills can help the party advance and their interpersonal conflicts can create challenging obstacles for the PCs as well.

Try to keep them alive. This does not mean they should walk out of every encounter unscathed, but the story will certainly be more exciting for the players if Trenbull and Marcus make it through with them.

### Important NPCs

#### Trenbull Allraam'ke

Male Human Trader/Ranger

Level 12/10

Neutral Good

Str 17 Int 10

Dex 17 Wis 17

Con 17 Cha 8

**hp:** 60

**AC:** 4 (studded leather)

**#AT:** 5/2 (long sword/dagger)

**THAC0:** 11 (+1 to hit with long sword/dagger)

**Dmg:** 1d8+1/1d4 (steel long sword/dagger).

**Wild Talent:** Heightened Sense



## The Road of Fire



**Psionic Summary:** PSPs 81

**Priest Spells:** 1) *cure light wounds* (X 2)

2) *withdraw*

Trenbull is the master of Charvass, a remote outpost of the dynastic merchant house M'ke of Raam. He is fiercely independent and single-minded. He was raised by agents within the merchant house as his father was believed dead. He is honest and hardworking to the point of obsession. The travels of his apprenticeship convinced him that the single greatest challenge faced by the people of the Tablelands is scarcity. He passionately believes that trade is the means by which all Athasians can better their own condition as well as others. The merchant houses, he believes, are the most powerful force for social good on Athas. He has spent the past five years chasing the unlikely hope that his father is alive and held captive in Avegdaar. Establishing an outpost at Charvass, Trenbull organized a small tribe of dwarves to operate an obsidian mine. Trenbull has become fully indoctrinated into the dwarven culture. He has shaven his head and wears the distinctive mark of the dwarf tribe—a wide stripe of ash across the eyes. He wears a leather, apron-like garment and studded leather pads on his knees and elbows.

### Marcus Allram'ke

Male Human Trader/Druid

Level 12/10

Neutral

Str 10    Int 10

Dex 19    Wis 17

Con 16    Cha 17

hp: 55

AC: 4 (leather)

#AT: 1

THAC0: 14

Dmg: (1d6-1) obsidian short sword.

Wild Talent: Flesh armor

Psionic Summary: PSPs 104



**Druid Spells:** Marcus has major access to the spheres of fire, earth and the cosmos.

1) *endure heat*, *detect magic*, *remove fear*, *cure light wounds* (X 3).

2) *slow poison* (X 2), *hold person* (X 3).

3) *cure disease* (X 2), *prayer* (X 2), *negative plane protection*.

4) *cure serious wounds* (X 3).

5) *conjure elemental (fire)*, *flame strike*.

6) *heal* (X 2).

Marcus is a druid who lost faith in himself after indirectly causing the deaths of two silt skimmer crews. He now lives a reclusive life in a fiery crater on the island of Avegdaar.

After seeing the natural resources of the Tablelands fall prey to freebooters and would-be merchants, he grew increasingly disillusioned with the trader's life. While serving on an expedition, mounted by his brother to establish trade relations with the giants of the Road of Fire, he agreed to be left behind as a trade hostage and ambassador of the House M'ke. Marcus was immediately taken with the stark beauty of the volcanic island and realized that he had discovered his guarded land.

Afraid that active trade would threaten the natural balance of the island, he convinced the giants that the expedition had cheated them. As the silt skimmers cast off, the giants attacked; only the flagship escaped. At the cost of 20 lives, Marcus had gotten his wish. The undead crews of the silt skimmers returned to haunt Avegdaar and have kept travelers from her shores for 10 years.

Marcus is initially withdrawn and distracted. In combat he will tend to be overly intense, almost as if he is fighting something besides the battle. He is a compassionate and capable man, and, given the opportunity, he will take great satisfaction in healing related activities. Because of his unfortunate experience, he distrusts people with passionate beliefs and will usually advocate moderate approaches to things.



## The Road of Fire

### Haakar

Male Human Preserver (undead)  
17th level  
Neutral Good

Str 17    Int 20  
Dex 11    Wis 12  
Con 20    Cha 13

hp: 73

AC: 3

#AT: 1

THAC0: 11

MV: 24 (Fly)

Dmg: 1d8 plus drain 2 levels

SD: can only be struck by +2 or better weapons.

Psionic Summary: PSPs: 108

Primary Disciplines: Telepathic.

Sciences: Mindlink, Ejection, Clairvoyance.

Devotions: Contact, Aversion, Awe, Id Insinuation, Mind Thrust, Combat Mind, Danger Sense.

Defense Modes: all.

Preserver Spells:

- 1) *magic missile* (X 3), *read magic*, *detect magic*
- 2) *detect evil*, *know alignment*, *forget* (X 3)
- 3) *fireball* (X 3), *hold person* (X 2)
- 4) *ice storm* (X 2), *fear*, *wall of fire* (X 2)
- 5) *chaos*, *feeblemind*, *domination* (X 3)
- 6) *globe of invulnerability*, *chain lightning* (X 2)
- 7) *control undead* (X 2), *spell turning*
- 8) *power word blind*, *polymorph object*

Haakar is a powerful, free-willed, undead spirit. He haunts the fortress Akaracle that once belonged to a society of mages whose master he was. The society of preservers had ties across Athas and fought against the rise of the defilers. Their fortress, Dasaraches, in the Dragon's Crown Mountains, is now in the hands of The Order.

Haakar carried out the duties of his command, but his heart was always in magical research. During the rise of the defilers, he discovered their method of power amplification. His interest was clinical and



while he knew the evil wizards to be enemies, he did not grasp the moral dimensions of their magical methods. As his research continued, he stumbled on to the principles of defiler metamorphosis.

At the time, Akaracle was under siege by Merek the Wrong, a defiler warlord. He had cut off the mage's supply lines for a full year. Haakar did not fully understand the metamorphosis process, nor what its end was. He believed that by trying this one use of defiling technology, he might be empowered to defeat his attackers and save his people. The spell failed, but not before the walls of the fortress split wide and the life force of every being on the island of Morgazh was snuffed out. Haakar is a scientist who, in becoming obsessed with magical research, lost his moral compass.

He haunts Akaracle and defends the keep from looters and glory seekers. If one can engage him in conversation, he quickly reveals himself to be remote, but once on any topic related to research he will become extremely conversant.

In combat, he prefers to prepare himself with some powerful defensive spells and then assault his opponents with a series of offensive spells of escalating intensity.







## Part Five: The Uncomfortable Closeness of Trees

The Uncomfortable Closeness of Trees is a story of vengeance that introduces the player characters to the exotic world of the Forest Ridge and the bizarre culture of the halflings who make their homes there. The adventure sends the party on a search for a missing friend and eventually finds them caught up in murder and deceit. It offers a challenging struggle for survival in a hostile environment as well as a disturbing mystery that forces the players to make some difficult decisions. This scenario refers to the *Dragon Kings* hardbound, *Dune Trader*; *MC1, Monstrous Compendium*; and *MC12, Monstrous Compendium, DARK SUN™ Appendix*. Although not necessary to play this module, these accessories will enhance your game and make a significant difference in the richness of your players' experience.

### Previous Events

After being betrayed by the Urikite party, the PCs escaped from the giants of Lake Island and made their way to the Road of Fire aboard the silt skimmer Ballamarash. They hired a guide from the M'ke outpost at Charvass to help them cross the chain of volcanic islands. After a series of encounters with hostile giants and beasts from the elemental planes, the group managed to arrive at the fortress of Haakar, an undead preserver. Some initial skirmishes with the spectral wizard gave the PCs an opportunity to pacify him. The party's new ally revealed to them the secrets of the Psionatrix as well the key to its destruction. Armed with this information, the group now returns to meet Korgunard at Desverendi's valley.

### Overview

While the PCs were wandering the Road of Fire, Korgunard went to visit a halfling elder in the Forest Ridge. The party had agreed to meet Korgunard upon completing their journey to Haakar's fortress. This adventure begins when the PCs reach Desverendi's valley.

Upon arriving at the valley (*The Valley*), the group

finds no sign of Korgunard. At Desverendi's prodding, the party sets off for the Forest Ridge in search of the missing wizard.

The PCs venture into the Ringing Mountains (*The Journey into the Mountains*). As they near the top of the ridge they are set upon by kirres. The encounter seems somewhat unusual since the animals are almost never found outside the Forest (*The Ridge Crest*). Just over the ridge, the PCs find a strange outpost (*Outpost Zero*) that has been overrun with halfling refugees from the Forest. Here they meet the unusual group of characters who inhabit the outpost (*The Expatriates*), and find Kass Pahr, a guide who can lead them to the home of the halfling elder (*The Patchwork Man*). The guide, a strangely disfigured man, collects a handful of halflings to serve as scouts and the party sets off (*Into the Woods*).

In an encounter with some Athasian sloths, the PCs have their first frustrating experience with the peculiarities of halfling culture (*The Story Makers*). The following night, two of the halfling scouts will disappear. That morning, the party learns the legend of an invisible tribe of renegades who stalk their fellow halflings (*The Life Stealers*). As the journey continues, the PCs fend off a clutch of battle-mad thri-kreen and two more of their scouts vanish (*The Thri-kreen*). Finally, the leader of the scouts attacks Kass Pahr in an inexplicable frenzy. The remaining halflings desert the party and Kass heads off to find more scouts (*The Turning*).

Forced to make their own way through the Forest, the PCs are nearly waylaid by two crystal spiders (*The Spiders*). The group then finds themselves under attack by an unseen group of halfling hunters (*The Unseen Enemy*). A series of hit and run attacks drives the PCs into a trap where the entire party succumbs to the paralytic poison of the halflings.

The PCs wake to find themselves tied to feast stones at a halfling village (*Basha's Kraal*). The chieftain, Basha, decides to consider the party's fate for the evening and puts the PCs under guard. The following morning the chieftain demands that the party prove their devotion to the Forest by destroying its enemies. He then presents a brutalized Kass Pahr to the group



## The Uncomfortable Closeness of Trees

and exposes the man as the murderer of the disappearing halflings (*The Test*). The chieftain insists that the PCs kill Kass Pahr.

Having won the trust of the halfling clan, the party is outfitted with a group of scouts and led through the jungle toward the home of Pakk the psionicist elder (*The Journey to Pakk's Lair*).

The group fights their way past some carnivorous plants (*The Garden*) and eventually finds Pakk's lair (*Into the Valley of the Think-Maker*). Here the party meets Pakk and learns that Korgunard is in retreat in preparation for a metamorphosis. The PCs are finally contacted by the avangion who arranges to send for them that evening (*The Elder*). The party is led to the meeting place where a dimensional door opens. The elder beckons the party through and they find themselves falling into a deadly trap (*The Temple of Ral*). Depending on the previous actions of the PCs, Kass Pahr may show up to help the group escape (*The Return of the Patchwork Man*).

The group now seeks out Pakk for some answers. They discover a huge, broken granite table. Using a halfling artifact, they unlock a vision of Korgunard's death. He was destroyed by Pakk and his fellow conspirators in the Order (*The Vision*). The PCs find Pakk and confront him with his crime. The halfling explains the necessity of his actions and dismisses the party. Reconsidering the wisdom of leaving them alive, Pakk attacks the PCs (*The Burden of Honor*).

In the aftermath of their harrowing experience, the PCs encounter something they have never before experienced (*Rainfall*). The PCs now prepare themselves to call on Dragon's Crown Mountain, where the Order is expecting them.

### Beginning the Adventure

This adventure begins at Desverendi's valley near Tyr. You may want to use Desert Perils while the party travels from Charvass to their meeting place. When they arrive, the party will be able to rest safely and memorize spells.

### Attempting to Contact Korgunard

Korgunard is dead. Attempts to contact him psionically or magically will be unsuccessful. If a PC attempts to telepathically contact Korgunard, roll as if making a check and then announce, "Your attempt is unsuccessful." You should not explain why the effort failed.

### The Valley

*The sand beneath your feet gradually gives way to a grassy plain. Ahead of you rises the forest surrounding Desverendi's valley. The familiar break in the treeline reveals the sheltered vale. You can see the monumental stone bluff that rises above the clear glassy pond at its base. You hear the welcome sound of water cascading down the cliff face and spilling into the pool.*

If the PCs participated in the Arcane Shadows adventure, read the following:

*In the gentle stillness of this valley, it seems difficult to imagine the fierce trials that you endured to ensure the safety of the avangion. Where once you heard the ranting cries of Malestic, you now hear only the soft rustle of the leaves. Where once you watched your companions fall before the volleys of the templar's archers, you now see only the dappled shadows of the Forest around you.*

*You were no richer when that day was over, but you held a little more of the one thing the avangion had to offer—hope. His words still ring in your ears. "When we have finished, I promise that you shall witness a shift of power from the sorcerer-kings to those who wish to restore Athas to its former glory and abundance."*

The group should be filled with excitement and uncertainty. They have traveled hundreds of miles and endured incredible hardships to come to this point. They can now tell Korgunard of their discoveries, make plans to assault Dasaraches, and ask him the

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meaning of the ominous warning they received while imprisoned on Lake Island.

The party will find no signs of Korgunard's presence. A ranger making a successful tracking check will be able to tell that no one has been at this site for at least several weeks. Efforts to contact Desverendi will be unsuccessful; he is mulling over the avangion's disappearance. Desverendi will, however, make an appearance if, after several days, the party has not headed for the Forest Ridge.

*The rock outcropping above the pool seems to shift, and a sound like an echo without a source swells around you. "The avangion is not here. I am concerned. He has not returned from the Forest on the shoulder of the earth. Find him."*

### The Journey into the Mountains

As the party scales the mountains, they will notice kirres lurking in the crags. A ranger or druid making

a successful Intelligence check will know that it is unusual to see kirres outside the shelter of the trees. The thri-kreen incursion has driven halfling clans into each other's territories. The resulting scarcity of game has forced the forest animals into the mountains.

The party will also find the remains of a thri-kreen clutch. An inspection of the fragments of chitin by a ranger or druid will reveal that the creatures tore one another apart.

If the PCs spend an inordinate amount of time in the mountains, you may want to introduce some random encounters. Use the Mountains row on Table 56 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* to determine the frequency of events and chance of occurrence. To reflect the migration of the forest animals, you should use both mountain and forest terrain types for rolling these encounters. On a d6 roll of 1-3, use one of the Mountains encounter charts from MC12, DARK SUN™ appendix, *Terrors of the Desert*. Use one of the Forest charts on a roll of 4-6.



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### The Ridge Crest

(See Map Book pg. 18)

*Your breathing becomes labored as the air seems to thin. You find yourself becoming exhausted more easily as you negotiate your way endlessly upward. Each step is an effort to avoid twisting an ankle or losing your foothold, and falling.*

*As you reach the summit, you survey the staggering panorama of the Forest Ridge. A riot of trees seems to pour down the slopes and recede in the distance as far as the eye can see. The whole forest moves as if it is alive. The sight reminds you of standing in the highest bleachers of Tyr's arena, looking down on the densely-packed mob in its causeways. At the crest of the forest, just a few hundred feet below you, a tiny compound of thatch-roof huts seems in danger of being washed away by the surging tide of trees.*

**Kirre (2):** Int 6; AL N; AC 7; MV 15; HD 6 + 6; hp 33, 37; THAC0 13; #AT 7; Dmg 1-4/1-4/1-6/1-8/1-4/1-4/1-6 (2 claws, bite, horns, 2 claws, tail); SA Psionics; SD nil; MR nil; SZ L (8'); ML 14; XP 650; Psionic Summary: PSPs 100; Sciences: project force, psionic blast; Devotions: soften, levitation, awe, psychic crush, id insinuation, life detection, contact; Defense Modes: TS, IF, TW; Score 15; defense modes are always considered to be on.

### Outpost Zero

(See Map Book pg. 19)

*You descend a rocky path toward a compound surrounded by a wooden stockade. The thatched buildings stand close to the rock face of the mountain. From the large open gates, wide trails lead into the darkness of the Forest, which sweeps away from you for miles. All around the compound you see halflings living in squalor. They lie still or crawl across one another, seeking shade or shelter from the flies. On the porch of the largest building are several humans seated in wicker chairs. Two halflings stand quietly and*

*fan the humans with enormous palm fronds.*

*As you cross the compound the glassy eyes of the indigents follow you with interest. Stepping over prone bodies, a small flock of feral halfling children pick their way toward you. They circle around, touching you and nipping at your hands.*

The PCs have found Outpost 23, abandoned by the House Wavir. Fifteen years ago they decided that the cost of maintaining the outpost was prohibitive and deserted it in favor of Outpost 10 (See *Dune Trader*, Pg. 36). The current residents call their home Outpost Zero. For purposes of tracking the party's progress, place the outpost on your map wherever the PCs cross the mountains and reach the Forest Ridge.

The Master of the outpost, Shiller, decided to stay on and support the traders and halflings who patronized this last outpost on the edge of the world. Outpost Zero has become a neutral zone for expatriates and adventurers.

Repercussions from the effects of the Psionatrix are being felt throughout the Forest. For months, halfling refugees have been showing up at the compound. They report that thri-kreen from the Hinterlands are moving into the Forest. The mantis warriors are battle-crazed and mad for blood. The halflings have been sweeping eastward, displacing other tribes and driving toward the mountains. The refugees here have hunted the Forest bare and are surviving on the meager stores Shiller provides.

The halfling tribes are facing scarcity for the first time and each clan deals with it differently. Some have become renegades, attacking other clans. Some have come looking for help. Still others have scrambled into the mountains. Shiller is worried. He knows that it is only a matter of time before his stores run out and the halflings turn on him.

Shiller will emerge from one of the huts:

*You see a tall human with a wide, friendly grin stride toward you. He has graying, unkempt hair and half-a-day's beard. He shoos the children away with birdlike hoots and turns to the party. "Well, what*

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*have we here? Visitors? What might you be looking for so far from home?"*

Shiller will question the party to determine if they are hunting any of the outpost's residents. If Shiller feels the PCs present no threat to the outpost, he will invite them to rest-up and join his other guests. The party will be provided with one of the empty huts and given access to the well.

If asked about the avangion, Shiller will tell the party that no one has passed through Outpost Zero for months. He will suggest that the party question some of the halfling refugees later. He will also mention that Kass Pahr, one of the residents here, travels frequently through the Forest Ridge. Remind the players that, as the PCs move around the compound, their every movement is followed by the eyes of the refugees that crowd the ground.

*"I have one rule here. No trouble. If you give me trouble, I'll feed you to the halflings. I don't care if you're here looking for an enemy or an escaped slave – as long as they are at Outpost 23, they are under my protection. And likewise, anyone who threatens you will have to answer to me. Understand?"*

*"One more thing: watch out for the halflings. I won't be responsible if you get yourselves eaten."*

**Halfling Refugees (150):** Int 11; AL LN; AC 7; MV 6; HD 1; hp 6 (-150); THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (spears); SA +1 to hit with thrown weapons; SD +3 save vs. magical attacks, poisons and disease; MR nil; SZ S; ML 8; XP 65

The buildings of the outpost are constructed with lashed log walls and thatched roofs. A 12-foot tall wooden stockade circumscribes the perimeter of the compound. A walkway of logs connects the buildings of the compound. The logs serve as a secure foothold when seasonal rains cause runoff from the cliff wall.

**1. The Corral:** The corral was once used to confine pack animals at the outpost. It is now packed, wall-to-

wall, with halfling refugees. There is a 70% chance that any PC venturing into the corral alone will be attacked by 20-40 halflings, and eaten.

**2. The Canteen:** This building has a large porch screened with light, gauzy material. The porch is the social center of the community. There are four wide-backed wicker chairs; two long benches run the length of the porch. At least two residents can always be found here between mid-morning and midnight.

Two doorways strung with beads lead into a large dining hall. This room has three large wooden tables. The benches that once sat next to the tables were used for firewood long ago.

**3. The Well:** The well is shaded by a canvas roof secured to four posts by tight lines staked into the ground. A wooden bucket hangs on a long rope. The well is 100 feet deep. The water line is 80 feet down.

**4. The Garden:** Shiller used the garden to raise fresh produce for the outpost. Now the garden is bare, having been picked clean by hungry refugees.

**5. The Storehouse:** Shiller maintains an old habit practiced by the earliest merchant outpost masters: he sleeps with his inventory. There is a 50% chance that any non-metal item listed as clothing, household provisioning, or miscellaneous equipment on Table 44 in the *Player's Handbook*, can be found in the store-room. There will be 1d4 of any item found. Shiller's bedroll and personal effects are also in here. He will sell equipment for 30% above market prices in Tyr. The prices of food are doubled.

**6. Guest Huts:** These thatch-roofed huts shelter guests of the outpost. Four of the huts are occupied. Each hut has one or two cots and a large wooden chest. Shiller will provide a key for the chest in any guest hut. The doorways are strung with beads.

**7. The Kitchen:** Shiller uses the kitchen to prepare meals for the guests of the outpost. There are two



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dozen sets of bowls and mugs in here. Guests are expected to provide their own knife for eating.

**8. The Pantry:** This small room off the kitchen was built to hold provisions used in the preparation of meals. Shiller keeps all the household provisions in the storeroom and leaves this room empty.

**9. The Gate Huts:** Once used by Wavir staff to monitor traffic in and out of the compound, the huts are now occupied by halfling refugees.

### The Expatriates

In this encounter, the party meets the residents of Outpost Zero. They pick up a few bits of information about their journey into the Forest. The PCs also obtain a guide for their trip.

After the party rests, they may decide to join the residents of Outpost Zero on the canteen porch.

*The wide porch of the canteen is screened with sagging gauze. Beyond the curtain, a mul and a dwarf sit in wide-backed wicker chairs, concentrating on a game played with pebbles. On a wide bench, a female half-elf stretches languidly and rests her head in the lap of a distinguished-looking man. On another bench, a pale, bald man with a grotesque grid of leather thongs woven through his skin sits cross-legged, rocking back and forth. A tall young man rests his hands on his shoulders. On a stool in the corner, a man leans against the wall, his face shadowed by a wide-brimmed hat.*

*Shiller walks out of an open doorway onto the porch. "Ah, our new guests have decided to join us!"*

*"How delicious!" purrs the half-elf as she rolls upright and stands. "Company!"*

Delia, the half-elf, will make introductions and direct the conversation. She is bored with her present company and will pepper the party with questions. The PCs may speak freely with the residents here.

The group will generally avoid the issue of the "halfing problem," but it is certain to come up. If one of the player characters is a halfling, the NPCs will treat the PC respectfully but will seem somewhat uncomfortable with the party. Still, the residents are becoming nervous about the refugees.

Below is a summary of each of the expatriates. There should be no reason to need any of the statistics for these characters except Kass Pahr who will serve the party as a guide. All of the others are benign and have no interest in getting involved with the party. Also, Shiller will not tolerate aggression from the PCs. None of the class-related abilities of these NPCs are presented. If, however, the PCs manage to get themselves into trouble, feel free to generate more detail on these characters as needed. To determine an NPC's level, roll 1d8+5. If the party shares their own story, they may learn some of the following from the residents:

**Delia** is a defiler who fled with the templar Scaurus to the Forest Ridge. She has bright red hair and stunning blue eyes. She has come here with the hope of practicing magic in isolation. Her manner is impish and flirtatious. She loves to tease her companions, and her merry laughter can often be heard in the compound. Delia shares Scaurus's hut, but the arrangement does not seem at all permanent.

She has an insatiable appetite for new experiences that borders on decadent. She will insist that the PCs each tell their story, and interrupt for details on sights, smells, flavors and emotional sensations.

If the refugees are discussed, she will playfully remark, "Oh they won't bother with me! I'd hardly make an appetizer as long as the mul's around." The defiler knows nothing about the avangion, the Order, or the halfling elder. If the avangion is discussed, her only remark will be: "No offense, but he doesn't sound like much fun. Personally, I'd just be glad he got lost without having to be told!"

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**Scaurus** is a refugee templar from Tyr who fled when Kalak was assassinated. Fearing a purge, he left when Tithian took the throne.

The defiler knows nothing about the avangion nor the halfling elder. If the Order is discussed, his only remark will be, "Back in Tyr, I once heard one of the master templars mention something about a powerful group of psionics. He said that they minded their own business and never interfered with the affairs of the state. It was rumored that now and then that they would actually seek out and kill a master of the Unseen Way, but, as far as the king was concerned, that was a public service."

**Cered** is a fugitive mul slave. He managed to escape Kalak's slave pits while working on the sorcerer-king's massive ziggurat. He arrived here about four months before Scaurus, and believes that the templar was sent here to recapture him. He believes that the stories Scaurus tells of the fall of Kalak and the liberation of the slaves are only a trick to deceive him.

The slave knows nothing about the avangion, the Order, nor the halfling elder. If the halfling is discussed, his only remark will be: "I don't trust those little savages. Look at them all, scattered around the ground, staring at us. Soon they'll have stripped the Forest bare and we'll all be done for."

**Drayden** is a young dwarf druid from Urik who ambitiously set out to find his guarded land beyond the Ringing Mountains. He discovered that life in the Forest Ridge was more than he was prepared to deal with and has retreated to Outpost Zero while he decides what to do next.

Drayden knows nothing about the Order, nor the halfling elder, but he has heard of the avangion. He can tell the party, "Months ago I heard some of the halflings talking about a shining man with gossamer wings. They said he passed south through the ridge and spread light beneath the darkness of the trees."

He will volunteer the warning to "Be certain of yourself before venturing into those trees. It is unlike anything you have seen. Under the canopy of the For-

est, the darkness becomes suffocating. Close your eyes and you can hear life breathing all around you. Here, all your instincts are wrong. All you can do to stay alive is listen, but don't listen too hard—it will immobilize you. Many travelers lose their wits fixing on the sound of rustling leaves and snapping twigs."

**Wheelock** is, perhaps, the greatest poisoner of the Tablelands. He makes his home at the oasis 35 miles northeast of North Ledopolus, on the edge of the Great Ivory Plain. Every five years he journeys to Outpost Zero to collect poisonous plants from the halflings. Wheelock can identify any poison by taste and is completely immune to their effects. Due to the deterioration of his nerve endings, the poisoner takes only half damage from any physical attack.

Wheelock is notable for his bizarre appearance. The skin of his arms and bald head are threaded with leather thongs, moist with the discharge from the small wounds through which they pass. His skin is chalky white and he has a bluish tint to his lips. His eyes are dull and cloudy, and seem unable to focus. He rocks back and forth, head tilted to one side as if he were listening to something. He tends to hear voices and consequently ignores anyone who attempts to speak to him directly and waits instead for his assistant, Toth, to relay any information. The one exception to this is females. When a woman speaks to Wheelock, he seems to light up and communicates with her directly. Delia enjoys this attention and will often affectionately toss little comments to Wheelock.

If questioned by a woman, or indirectly through Toth, Wheelock will be able to tell the party, with certainty, that the Order does exist, and that traditionally they have never involved themselves in anything but the pursuit of pure psionics. If asked whether the Order might be behind the Psionatrix, Wheelock will say that it seems unlikely that a group concerned with the pure discipline of the mind would be associated with anything that might disrupt it.



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**Toth** is a cleric of the earth and Wheelock's personal assistant. As years of exposure to various poisons have reduced Wheelock's ability to care for himself, Toth manages the prisoner's business and personal affairs, and shares Wheelock's hut.

Toth will not enter a conversation unless directly questioned. His responses will always be polite but unhelpful. He knows nothing about the avangion, the Order, nor the halfling elder.

**Shiller** is the master of Outpost Zero. Until recently, he managed the compound with the aid of T'kortek, a thri-kreen druid. Beginning a few months ago, T'kortek began to act increasingly irrational. He eventually had to be shackled in a cell to prevent him from attacking people. In captivity, his condition worsened and he eventually snapped his own neck while straining at the bonds.

Shiller was deeply disturbed by T'kortek's death, and believes that it is related to the thri-kreen attacks that the halfling refugees have reported.

### The Patchwork Man

Kass Pahr is a horribly disfigured human cleric/ranger. Kass is the only resident who makes regular forays into the woods. No one knows much about him except that he is accepted by the halflings and seems to know the Forest. He will not volunteer personal information. If asked directly about his disfigurement, he will hiss, "I fell down."

Kass Pahr will remain silent throughout the group's discussions, and it is Delia who will question him if the PCs do not. Delia will chatter:

"The woodsman knows all about the comings and goings of the little forest rats, don't you, Kass Pahr? Why, I think he may have a family of halflings out there somewhere. I guess that would make the children three-quarterlings." The man in the corner raises his head, revealing beneath the brim of his hat a distorted grin that cuts Delia's laughter short.

"Yesss. I think I once heard of an elder of the people of the wood who was a master of thought. He is

called *Pakk*, that means "think maker." He is said to live in a nest of brambles far to the south."

Shiller will suggest that if the party is planning on traveling to find Pakk, that they hire Kass Pahr to serve as a guide. It is always dangerous to travel with a halfling escort and, under recent conditions, the prospect is even riskier. Kass Pahr will agree to serve as a guide in exchange for one bit per day. Pakk is actually the halfling leader whose decision resulted in Kass Pahr's mutilation years ago. Kass will not know this until he sees him again.

The group will be permitted to stay at Outpost Zero as long as they like at a cost of one cp per room per night and one cp per meal. The PCs may try to question some of the halfling refugees through magic, psi-onics, or a PC who can speak halfling. There is a 20% chance that a halfling will have heard of the "shining man" who passed through the Forest. They will not be able to say when or where the avangion was seen. There is a 50% chance that a halfling will know of Pakk, the "Think-Maker," and be able to confirm that he lives in the southern end of the Forest Ridge. If the party asks any halflings to serve as guides, they will grin, lick their lips, and nod their bushy heads vigorously.

Kass Pahr, Shiller and Drayden can understand halfling with 80% accuracy, and speak simple phrases with 80% success. Any halfling PCs with the party will be able to converse freely with the refugees.

### Into the Woods

If the players agree to hire Kass Pahr, he will select 10 halfling scouts from among the refugees to accompany the party:

*A squad of dirty halflings cross the dusty grounds, accompanied by Kass Pahr. They approach and poke each of you in the stomach with their forefingers. "It's a halfling greeting for old friends," explains Kass Pahr. "It means 'have you been eating well?'"*

*"We don't need supplies for the halflings; they take their food and water where they find it. The leader*



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*says she knows how to find Pakk the Think-Maker. As long as we don't run into any renegade clans, they should ensure that we don't get eaten by any of the tribes out there. Of course, there are no guarantees that these fellows won't turn on us."*

The halflings are from a clan that has been displaced by the migration of the thri-kreen. Although they appear underfed, they exhibit the irrepressible curiosity that seems to be characteristic of all halflings. They have joined the PCs to learn about the strange habits of the foreigners. The halflings also recognize that their options are better with the party than at the outpost, where the Forest is being hunted bare. If events turn against them, at least the party will serve as food for a week or so. The leader of the halfling scouts is Dede, a storyteller. Dede knows that Pakk lives in the southern end of the Forest. She believes that she will be able to find the elder once they get closer. If none of the PCs are halflings or speak halfling, Kass Pahr will be able to translate for the scouts.

As the party enters the Forest, the narrowness of the trail will require the group to travel in single file. Three halflings will lead the group, three will trail behind, and a pair will move through the forest on both flanks. Each halfling will carry a short bow, a bone dagger, and a spear. Any non-halfling PC stepping off the trail in combat suffers a -2 penalty to hit. Halflings, rangers, druids, Kass Pahr, and creatures native to the Forest may move freely off the trail without suffering a penalty.

At night the halflings set watch in a circle about 20 feet off the trail. The density of the forest will prevent visual contact, but the halflings communicate through a complex series of hoots and shrieks. They will wake the party if there is trouble.

Kass will suggest that the PCs stay within the circle to avoid being taken by surprise. He will also suggest that he stay awake first watch and that a PC stay awake second watch in case the halflings turn on the party. Every night when the party selects a campsite, Kass will walk the perimeter several times to survey the

area. While on watch, Kass will circle the group and make occasional trips into the woods. He will leave for five minutes at a time and will sometimes return with some small game.

The PCs only need half of their daily water requirement while traveling in the Forest's shade.

*As you move from the bright light of the clearing to the mottled shadows of the Forest floor, you are overcome by the energetic display of life beneath the canopy of trees. All around you, the unrelenting cycle of rebirth and decay sweats with a dank steaminess. Sounds surround you as the whole jungle seems to churn with corrupt excess. Towering conifers sway on their segmented trunks. Moss trails like tapestries from every surface. You have never seen anything quite so opulent nor quite so alien.*

**Halfling guides (10):** Int 11; AL LN; AC 7; MV 6; HD 3; hp 11, 19, 16, 20, 18, 15, 17, 15, 14, 15; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (short bows), 1d4-1 (bone daggers); SA +1 to hit with thrown weapons; SD +3 save vs. magical attacks, poisons and disease; MR nil; SZ S; ML 9; XP 175.

### The Story Makers

*As you hike along the Forest trail, the air is suddenly filled with the snap and whisper of halfling bowstrings. Amid a disorienting flurry of flashing claws, you see the halflings in the front and rear guard positions disappear.*

The beasts attack simultaneously at the front and rear of the line. The sloths have a 90% chance of attacking a halfling when given a choice of targets. The scouts will insist that only one person attack each sloth at a time. It is considered an act of great heroism among halflings to single-handedly defeat a sloth. None of the halflings are so greedy as to steal a friend's "story" by joining in the battle. One will engage a sloth while the others hold back and wait for their comrade to fall, before taking a turn at the beast.



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Kass Pahr will warn the PCs once not to attack the sloths for fear of angering and offending their scouts. He will stand by even as halflings are killed. If two are killed, the others will call out a full war cry and descend on the beasts. If the party joins the fray earlier, the halflings will later treat the PCs with indignation. If the party joins in at the appropriate time, the halflings will later commend the PCs' valor.

**Athasian Sloths (2):** Int Animal; AL N; AC 5; MV 24; HD 11; hp 58, 39; THAC0 9; #AT 3; Dmg 2-8/2-8/2-20 (claw/claw/bite); SA Forces a -3 penalty to opponents' surprise roll; SD Saves against poison at +2; MR nil; SZ L (8' long); ML 7; XP 2,000; MC 12.

If the sloth bites with a roll of 18 or better, it hangs on, delivering an automatic d10 of damage to the victim in each ensuing round. It lets go if reduced to 50% of its hit points, or if the victim dies. If it is hanging onto a victim, the sloth receives an additional +4 bonus to its claw attacks.

### The Life Stealers

The night following the attack of the sloths, Dede removes a small milky stone from a leather pouch as the party makes camp. It is a "storyteller's stone," the halfling explains, as she takes the weapon of one of the halflings who fell in combat with the sloths. She will hold the weapon and eulogize her fallen friend by recounting his deeds in the hunt. (This, of course, assumes that a halfling died in the melee.) If all of the scouts survived, she will read the weapon of one of the halflings who fought with unusual bravery. The stone is psionically empowered with clairsentient science, object reading. Dede begins:

*"Stone tell the story of sloth-biter, blood-drinker. Stone tell the story of tears. Night-climber tree-stalker was tall in our heart. Now our friend is keeping the stars apart."*

That evening, two of the scouts will leave the campsite for several hours to hunt for food. They will seem disappointed when they return with only roots and berries. That night, two of the scouts will disappear. When they are found missing, in the morning, the storyteller will mutter something about the Life Stealers. Kass Pahr will explain:

*"The halflings believe that there is a tribe of their kind called the Life Stealers. No one has ever seen one, but sometimes halflings disappear while they are out hunting, or scouting for foreigners. The Life Stealers are invisible and silent."*

*"You should understand that the very idea of one halfling willfully killing another is terrifying to them. They have deeply-seated traditions of resolving disputes through peaceful rituals, adjudicated by their priests. There are the odd clans of renegades whose only bond is to their tribe, but those primitives are known and kept at bay."*

### The Thri-kreen

*Columns of sunlight penetrate the vaulted ceiling of soaring branches. The sense of calm reminds you of a temple. Suddenly a halfling to your left lets out a quick staccato call of warning. Seconds later you hear something crashing through the underbrush.*

The party is under attack by a pack of thri-kreen, reduced to animal intelligence by the effects of the Psionatrix. The thri-kreen use no weapons and their leather harnesses are torn and tattered.

The halflings have no customs regarding combat with thri-kreen and all join the battle with enthusiasm. PCs who hold back will be deemed cowards. At night, the halflings insist that cowards sleep outside the camp since a person who acts unwilling to put his life before his companions' cannot expect protection at night. They understand about spellcasting and psionics, and will not call a PC who fought from the back rank "cowardly."

As the party sleeps, two more halfling scouts disappear. Dede is afraid the Life Stealers are angry that

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she is bringing flatlanders into the Forest. Kass Pahr privately tells the party that he is losing confidence in the scouts.

**Thri-kreen (6):** Int Animal; AL CN; AC 5; MV 18; HD 6+3; hp 22, 27, 28, 30, 31, 33; THAC0 13; #AT 5; Dmg 1d4 (X 4)/1d4+1 (4 claws and a bite); SA save vs. paralysis on bite or be paralyzed 2d10 rounds; SD dodge missiles on a roll of 9 or better on a d20; MR nil; SZ L (11' long); ML 17; XP 1400

### The Turning

There are no encounters the day after the thri-kreen attack. The following evening, two halflings leave camp to hunt; they return shortly with two large z'tal strung up on a pole. One of the lizards is sufficient to prepare a stew that feeds 12-man sized, or smaller creatures. That night, select a PC who is on watch or pick one asleep who has the lowest Constitution score. If the selected PC makes a successful Intelligence check, read the following:

*You hear a twig snap. Peering into the shadows, you can see a dark form moving swiftly away from the camp. Dede calls out and the movement stops. Apparently, two of the halflings were sneaking away from camp with all the leftover z'tal and the remainder of their meager supplies. Dede barks an alarming barrage of chattering sounds and the two scouts return to the campsite with downcast eyes.*

PCs who understand halfling will hear "Stop now! What foolishness is this? You would take the food from the hands of your sharers? Will you let fear turn us all into Life Stealers?"

The halflings are very nervous. In a private discussion with the PCs, Kass Pahr will stress that the PCs must be wary of the halflings.

*"You know, I am beginning to believe that the myth of the Life Stealers is just a way for the halflings to deal with their own fears. They are so focused on ra-*

*cial unity, they must have some way of explaining it when one of them abandons the others, or kills another halfling anger. While it is uncommon, it must happen sometime. This racial myth of an invisible tribe that strikes without warning is a perfect way of explaining their behavior."*

The next morning another of the halflings is gone. As the group prepares to move on for the day, one of the remaining halflings will let out a shriek.

*Ten yards into the twisting vines and curling leaves, you see two small legs dangling from a branch. As you get nearer, you see the missing halfling tucked awkwardly in the forked branches of the tree.*

Dede stares blankly. "We had better bury the body," Kass Pahr says. As Kass gets the body from the tree, his dagger drops from his belt. Dede picks up the knife, pauses momentarily, and lunges savagely at Kass Pahr. The ranger dispatches her with his sword. The remaining halflings look once at the party and disappear into the Forest.

Dede accidentally performed an *object reading* on Kass Pahr's dagger and discovered that he is the Life Stealer. If any explanation is called for concerning Dede's attack, Kass Pahr will simply indicate that one can never tell with halflings.

Kass Pahr will give the storyteller's stone to a party member and tell the group that he will go recruit more scouts. He will urge the PCs to continue moving down the trail; the only way to ensure the group's safety is to avoid staying in one place too long. Kass Pahr will emphasize the necessity for the PCs to assume responsibility for themselves. He will tell them to stay on the trail and head south. If the PCs want to stay with Kass, he will explain that they will slow him down. He will say that he knows of a nearby halfling clan from which he can recruit, but that it would be too dangerous to take the PCs.



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**Earthtalker, the storyteller's stone:** Int 12; Ego 5; AL N; Psionic Summary: PSPs 20; Sciences: object reading; Devotions: spirit sense.

Earthtalker is used by halfling storytellers to recall the past events that are their legends and sagas. The stone can only communicate semi-empathically itself, but a psionist's probing will find information about any object that Earthtalker has ever read.

### How to Run the Disappearing Halflings

Kass is killing the halflings, although some may have run away out of fear. The disappearances do not need to occur in exactly the time frame presented. Kass will wait for any appropriate opportunity to strike. The density of the foliage makes visual contact impossible. Kass's habit of circling each campsite assures that his tracks are everywhere. When he has the opportunity, Kass will sneak up on a halfling by hiding in shadows and moving silently. He is well practiced in stalking halflings and will cast a hold person spell on his victim before cutting its throat with his dagger. If there is any indication that he may betray his intention, Kass will abandon that attempt and pretend to be circling the area. He will use his sporadic hunting trips into the woods to dispose of bodies. He generally leaves the victim in the branches of a tree, but will cover them with dirt and leaves if he thinks more secrecy is called for.

If Kass is confronted by the PCs, he will warn them against making accusations in front of the halflings. "You could get us all killed," he will chide. If pressed, Kass will attempt to diffuse the situation and smooth over ill feelings thus:

*"Of course I'm killing them. Do you know why no one travels the trails of this Forest? Our little companions are eager to make a meal of any passersby. They hunt and kill people like you. How do you think? Shiller and his friends are going to survive among the halflings at the outpost? I do what I can to make the Forest safe for peaceful people. I would not do anything to jeopardize this journey. I know the Forest inti-*

*mately and we only need guides to deter other halfling attackers. Believe me, we would not have made it this far without them.*

*"I understand all this is confusing to you, but we still need to work together. I suggest that we put our differences behind us and continue. In the Forest, we cannot afford the luxury of enemies."*

### The Spiders

*The dirt path before you is like a lifeline in the Forest darkness. As you travel, the sounds of the jungle are more disorienting now that you are alone.*

The narrowness of the trail requires the group to travel in single file. The PC in the front rank should make a surprise roll. If the PC fails the roll, she will take 4d6 points of cutting damage; walking into the web of a crystal spider. A Dexterity check is required of a trapped PC to free herself from the web. Failing this check will result in an additional 3d6 damage.

If alerted to the party's presence, one spider will wait one round and then move onto the trail 20 yards in front of the web. A second spider will wait one round before attacking the party from the left flank. The first spider will deliver 3d6 of heat damage with a light beam to a PC in the front rank. The PC must also save vs. wands or be blinded for 1d6 turns. The spider must make an attack roll-to-hit with its beam, but it gains a +4 bonus.

If the PCs do not stumble into the web, the spiders will simply engage the party in melee with its two foreleg attacks and its poisonous bite.

When melee is resolved, the party will hear the sounds of something scampering away through the woods. Any PC making a successful Intelligence check will know that it was a halfling.

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**Crystal Spiders (2):** Int 2; AL N; AC 2; MV 24; HD 4; hp 29, 32; THAC0 17; #AT 3; Dmg 1d8/1d8/1d4 (two forelegs and bite); SA save from type E poison bite at -2 penalty or die, successful save results in 20 points of damage; if both forelegs hit with 18 or better, the victim takes an automatic 4d6 damage from grasp, and spider gains +4 bonus for bite attack rolls; light beam; SD nil; MR nil; SZ L (8' body); ML 13; Psionic Summary: PSPss 33; Devotions: control light, inertial barrier; XP 1400.

### The Unseen Enemy

*The trees seem to be somewhat sparser but the undergrowth remains thick. The path widens and you can walk two abreast.*

The party has stumbled into the territory of a halfling clan. Halfling hunters are trying to drive the party into a trap. They want to capture the party alive. The hunters approach the party from behind, armed with spears and daggers. They fan out behind their targets and launch a volley of spears. The next round they will run away. Their spearheads are coated with type O poison (Method: Injected, onset: 2-24 min., 2d6 hours of paralysis). They will return in 3-6 minutes to attack again.

Although there are 30 hunters, they will only approach and attack six at a time. Range attacks against the halflings will suffer a -3 concealment penalty. If the party attempts to conceal themselves, the halflings will never suffer more than a -1 penalty to their attacks. See *Player's Handbook*, page 99, for rules on Taking Cover Against Missile Fire.

If the party stops traveling after the attack, the halflings will return every 3-6 minutes to attack until the PCs have been subdued. If the party keeps moving, the group will face the added danger of the halfling snares and traps as well. The halflings will continue these tactics until they can easily overwhelm the party. In addition to his spear and dagger, the leader of the hunt carries a sling and eight agony beetles in a pouch. He will use the agony beetles if the hunters are

in danger of being overwhelmed or losing their quarry. The leader gains a +1 attack bonus with his sling.

If there are halfling characters in the party, they will not be targeted unless they attack the hunters, in which case the halflings will assume the PC is a renegade. If a halfling PC attempts to contact the hunters, they will not respond. The PC will be able to tell that the hunters are on a "beast-think hunt." During this activity, the hunters assume an animalistic mindset and communicate only in a hunting language of simple signals that is specific to their clan. The intensity of concentration required to prevent themselves from thinking on a higher level results in a -2 penalty to any PC attempting to use a telepathic power on the hunters.

From this point forward, the trail is wide enough for PCs to walk two abreast.

**Halfling Hunters (24):** Int 11; AL LN; AC 7; MV 6; HD 2; hp 10(-24); THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (spears) 1d4 (dagger); SA nil; SD +3 bonus to all saving throws against magical attacks, poisons, or disease; MR nil; SZ S (3'-4' tall); ML 10; XP 65; spearheads and daggers tainted with type O poison.

**Agony Beetles (8):** Int 1; AL N; AC 6; MV 3, Fl 6, Jp 3; HD 1+5; hp 11(-8); THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg Special; SA spinal tap, psionic drain; SD nil; MR nil; SZ T (1"); ML 7; XP 270; Psionic Summary: Sciences; mindlink, cannibalize other, psionic drain. The insect minds of the agony beetles have been affected by the Psionatrix, but this will not impact their usefulness to the halflings.

There are four traps on the trail. Place any or all of them as you see fit.

**The Pit:** This pit is 10 feet square and 10 feet deep. A grate of thin reeds covered with large leaves and a layer of dirt conceals the trap. Any weight greater than five pounds will cause the reeds to give way. The pit is lined with ten small stakes that deliver 1d4 points of damage each. The stakes are coated with



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type O poison (Method: Injected, onset: 2-24 min., 2d6 hours of paralysis). A PC falling into the trap must make a saving throw vs. poison for each stake.

**The Snare:** *Dangling six feet above the ground, suspended from a thin line, you see a small wild pig. It appears that the beast was caught in a snare.*

This is a lure. A fine wire traces a circular loop in a five-foot radius beneath the pig. The first PC to approach within five feet of the pig will trip the wire and be hauled 10 feet into the air. If two PCs are walking abreast, the snare will catch both. The halfling hunters will attack the PCs the melee round immediately following any character tripping the snare. Anyone caught in the snare will suffer 1d6 of damage. They will also suffer a +4 penalty to their armor class as the halfling hunters make an attack on the PCs. The line will take 10 hit points of damage from any edged weapon before parting.

**The Spring Board:** This trap is comprised of an eight-foot square, flat panel covered on one side with spikes made from the sharpened thigh bones of elves. The trap is triggered by the front rank of the party stepping on a dirt-covered plank. The treadle releases the panel that impales the rear rank of the party by swinging down behind the group from the foliage above. Any PC hit by the panel takes 2d6 damage from the sharpened bones and must make 1d10 saving throws vs. the halflings' paralytic poison or suffer the effects described earlier.

### Basha's Kraal

(See Map Book pg. 19)

*You see nothing but blackness, hear nothing but the rhythm of wind and water. You are listening to your own breathing, and the blood in your veins. A dim light filters in, then awareness slips away again.*

*You wake to find yourself stripped naked, upright on a large granite slab, your outstretched arms bound tightly. Your friends, similarly tied, stand with their arms and legs outstretched on other monoliths.*

*The stones form a semi-circle in the center of a halfling village. In front of you, the tiny survivors of the hunt stand with ceremonial spears, covered from head to toe in wide swaths of green paint. About the stones, a huge convocation of halflings watch.*

*One hunter begins to howl and the others start pounding a steady beat with their spears on the ground. The howler rolls on the ground, gnashing his teeth and throwing fistfuls of dirt on himself. He calls out a euphonic phrase and the crowd repeats it almost hypnotically. As this continues, you are slowly seduced by the savage beauty of the song.*

The party has been captured by the hunters. They have brought their quarry to their chief Basha, to offer it as a gift to the Forest. The howler is singing a story-song that recounts the hunt and celebrates the beauty and power of the Forest. The song credits the Forest with aiding the hunters and betraying their prey. It eulogizes fallen hunters and venerates the Forest that chose to take them.

The repetitive song increases in intensity. The whole village stamps out the rhythm of the dance. Finally, two halflings descend the pyramid steps. One wears a crown of leafy fronds on his bushy head. The other wears a clattering robe of small threaded bones and carries a large obsidian blade and an oversized bowl. It is chief Basha and his shaman priest, Fett. The priest says, in halfling: "You are a gift brought to us by the Forest. You are alone and wander without purpose. You war among yourselves. We will take you into the family of the Basha Kraal. We will release your blood from the heavy bonds of your flesh and take you into us."

The PCs are bound with giant-hair rope. This cannot be broken by anyone with less than 25 Strength. Spellcasting PCs have their fingers and hands wrapped to prevent movement. Their mouths are stuffed with grass and held shut with a strap. Any halfling PCs will be permitted to translate or speak on behalf of the party.

The best way to appeal to Basha is to convince him that the Forest is endangered by the Psionatrix. This

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should not be too tough to do, given the recent behavior of the thri-kreen. Also, Basha will have felt the effects of the Psionatrix himself. If the group successfully communicates with the halflings and speaks of Korgunard, the chief will decide that he must think things over. Remember that the PCs have had all their possessions taken: Basha has inspected the crystal shard that negates the effects of the Psionatrix and understands what it does.

Basha will state: "You call the burning man by his true name, but you may be a deceiver. I must take counsel with the moons, and perhaps the Forest will accept the gift of the blue stone you have brought."

Basha will announce to the crowds: "Our hunters have brought the Forest a gift greater than a feast, they have brought the Forest a riddle! The Forest will answer their riddle when the sun wakes!" The hunters beam at the praise and the crowds disperse, happily buzzing. The PCs will be left hanging on the stones under the guard of the surviving hunters.

For purposes of tracking the party's progress, you may place Basha's Kraal on your map as far as 30 miles from where the PCs were captured. You may move it south, to shorten the trip to Pakk's Lair.

**Halflings (200):** Int 11; AL LN; AC 7; MV 6; HD 1; hp 6 (-150); THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (spears); SA +1 to hit with thrown weapons; nil; SD +3 save vs. magical attacks, poisons and disease; MR nil; SZ S; ML 8; XP 65.

The village lies at the geographic center of the nine clan territories that Basha rules. The village is a small cluster of stone huts surrounding a 50-foot-high stone pyramid. Nine dome-like dwellings house Basha's nine wives (one from each clan). An empty tenth hut symbolically houses the spirit of the clearing. The ground here is covered with soft moss.

**1. Fett's Hut:** This elongated stone hut is the home of the shaman priest Fett, a cleric of fire. His dwelling contains a thatch mat, a bowl, and a pipe.

**2. The Pyramid:** The pyramid of smooth granite blocks rises 50 feet high. The flat apex supports Basha's hut, which is also granite. Outside his dwelling, a copper brazier smokes with slow-burning incense.

**3. The Low Hut:** This hut appears identical to the others from outside, but inside a pit houses troublesome guests. The pit is 12 feet deep and 6 feet across. Its floor is covered with soft moss. A long notched pole is used as a ladder to allow halflings to crawl into or out of the pit when necessary.

**4. The Tree of Life:** An enormous leafy tree stands at the far end of the clearing. Fett taps this tree of life for his work tending to the clans.

**5. The Feast Stones:** This is a semi-circle of granite monoliths. Each stone is eight feet tall, four feet wide, and three feet thick. Holes drilled through each stone serve both as a decorative pattern and as a means of fastening creatures to the stones. The halflings use giant-hair rope to secure their quarry. At the base of each stone is a semi-circular catch basin stained brown with dried blood.

### The Test

As dawn breaks, a group of halflings approach through the morning mist. With spears, they prod a stumbling figure toward you: a man with his arms bound to a pole across his shoulders. The halflings grab the ends of the pole and drag him before you. One grabs the man's hair and pulls his head upright. Kass Pahr's bruised face looks at you uncomprehendingly. A slick web of blood and saliva hangs from his jaw.

Basha emerges. "I believe the Forest is in danger. I do not know if you are strong enough to defend it. This man was stronger than the Forest. He deceived it, yet it opened its secrets to him. He has used his knowledge to kill the birds in the branches of the Tree. You are barbarians who war among yourselves. You do not know the unity of our people. You may not have the strength to work together, to overcome the



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threats to the Forest Ridge. Show us you will put the Forest above your own vanity and desires. Release the blood of this man. Kill him now.”

Basha will approach a PC of a warrior class who exhibited some prowess when his hunters ran the party down. Basha has used the water-blue crystal to probe Kass Pahr’s mind. If the PC does not know about Kass Pahr’s activity and protests, Basha will hand the PC the storyteller’s stone and Kass’s dagger. Copy down the following passage and hand the paper to the player to read silently. (This prevents the side-conversations that will start if you take the player aside where the other players cannot hear.)

Spellcasting characters have their mouths sealed shut. Basha will only address one warrior-class character. If the other PCs begin quibbling, he will tell them to be silent. If a PC does speak, a guard will slash him across the mouth for 1d6 of damage.

*It is long ago. You see an old man sharpening this dagger. A boy is playing with the knife, throwing it in the dirt. Now a young man and woman are traveling together. It is Kass. The woman is laughing. You see the Forest. Suddenly a battle. Blood. Halflings are attacking. You see an arrow lodge in the woman’s throat. You see Kass tending wounded halflings. You see him being torn to pieces by halflings. You see him stalking in the woods. You see a halfling throat cut. You see a halfling throat cut. You see a halfling throat cut. The images become faster, like a spray of blood behind a flashing blade.*

If the PC kills Kass, the chieftain will smile and free the party explaining, “You belong to the Forest now.” If the PC refuses, the chief will still free them. “Perhaps there is some halfling in you. You begin to learn. When you no longer kill one another, the Forest will begin to reveal itself.” In either case, he concludes, “I think you will give your lives to the Forest, but we will not be the ones to choose when.”

The hunters will free the PCs, and Basha will offer to provide them with a company of 10 scouts for the journey to the Valley of the Think-Maker. He will also return the party’s possessions. If the PCs offer Basha

a parting gift, they will be welcomed back. If they do not, Basha will feel that it is the responsibility of the Forest to provide for their well-being. If Kass Pahr is still alive, he will be taken to the Low Hut to heal. Basha will explain, “You have given him his life so that he may serve the Forest. He must mend here before he can make amends with the woodland.”

### How to Run the Test

The key to this event is to force the party to make a very hard decision very quickly. Regardless of the choice, the outcome will be the same: but they don’t know this. Do not allow your players to discuss their options at length. Immediately after reading Basha’s demand, ask the PC whose character was addressed what he or she is doing. Allow no table talk. Warn your players that anything they say will be interpreted literally.

**Halfling Scouts (10):** Int 11; AL LN; AC 7; MV 6; HD 2; hp 10 (-24); THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (short bow) 1d4 (dagger); SA nil; SD +3 bonus to all saving throws against magical attacks, poisons, or disease; MR nil; SZ S (3’-4’ tall); ML 10; XP 65; arrows and daggers coated with type O poison.

### Little Brothers

If a halfling PC has not fought the hunters, nor been paralyzed in a trap, the hunters will invite the PC to join them for a feast at the village of their chieftain Basha. If the PC complies, the character will be permitted to join the trek to the village. If the PC objects, the halflings will assume that their new friend must be suffering from some kind of psionic or magical effects and will paralyze the PC with poison. They will carry the PC with them so that Fett, their shaman priest, can cure the character. If the PC claims that she had captured the party and it belongs to her clan, the hunters will simply state that what is found in the Forest belongs where it is found, and that they are honored by the PC’s gift to *their* clan.



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If a halfling PC is poisoned, resulting from combat, a trap, or after raising objections to the hunters, the character will be taken to the Low Hut and left naked upon the group's arrival at Basha's village. Fett, the village shaman priest, will come to see the PC as the effects of the paralysis wear off. If the PC has not been paralyzed and plays along with the hunters, he will be permitted to roam freely around the village.

Halflings are very careful about hunting outside their own well-defined territory. Sometimes if prey is driven by one clan into the territory of another, the neighbors will take up the hunt and share the quarry with the hunters who flushed the game into their domain. A halfling who actually pursues game into neighboring territory is considered to be making a gift to the clan whose territory he has crossed into. Such a halfling is never permitted to return home without accepting another gift in kind.

This is how Fett and the hunters will perceive the actions of a halfling PC. They will assume that the player character was flushing the party into the hunters' territory as a gift. If the PC had raised objections, the hunters will become confused and poison the PC, giving Fett time to decide what to do. If the PC attacked the hunter, they will assume that the character is a renegade. Fett will, however, be sensitive to the idea that the PC may have been under the magical or psionic control of the party.

Fett will come see the halfling PC in the Low Hut to determine the circumstances of the character's unusual arrival. Fett displays the humility of a halfling shaman by always referring to himself in the third person. "Someone would ask you questions," he will begin upon meeting the PC.

Halflings love and fear their shaman priests, so if the PC behaves disrespectfully, Fett will try to *remove curse* and *dispel magic*. If the PC continues to act in this manner, Fett will call Basha to attempt psychic surgery. If Fett becomes convinced that the PC is acting thus of his own volition, he will decide that the "halfling" has left the body and it should be destroyed. The PC will then be strung up on a feast stone with the rest of the party.

Fett knows about Korgunard and the effect that the Psionatrix has been having on the chieftain's psionic ability. He also suspects some relationship between the psionic-null field and the rampaging thri-kreen. He knows that Pakk, the psionicist elder, lives near the boulder field in the southern end of the Forest. If the PC tells Fett that Korgunard went in search of a powerful psionicist elder, Fett will argue that Pakk can help Korgunard with the problem, and that neither should require the assistance of the party. The only way to successfully appeal to Fett is to convince him that the Forest is threatened, and the halfling PC requires the aid of the rest of the party to destroy the danger.

After the PC makes an appeal, Fett will tell the PC that he will think it over. If the PC has behaved well, Fett will allow the PC to roam the village.

**Fett (cleric of fire):** AL NG; AC 2 (shaman hides and Dex); MV 6; HD 10; hp 42; THAC0 14; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (spear); SA +1 to hit with thrown weapons; SD +3 save vs. magical attacks, poisons and disease; MR immune to *cause fear*, *charm person*, *command*, *friends*, and *hypnotism*; SZ S (3'); ML 14; Str 13; Dex 18, Con 14, Int 14, Wis 19, Cha 15; Clerical Spells: *bleed* (-3), *sanctuary*, *cure light wounds* (-3), *barkskin*, *hold person* (-3), *silence 15' radius*, *slow poison*, *prayer*, *remove curse*, *dispel magic* (-2), *produce fire* (-5), *conjure fire elemental*, *flame strike*; Fett has access to the *tree of life* at Basha's Kraal.

### The Journey to Pakk's Lair

Depending on the length of the journey from Basha's Kraal to Pakk's Lair, you may want to generate some encounters using the forest charts in the DARK SUN™ appendix, *Terrors of the Desert*.

### The Garden

*As you make your way through the jungle, you notice the lush blanket of colorful foliage thickens. Beautiful*



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*flowers with bright orange petals and green-tinted leaves line the trail. A large dusty cloud blossoms up from the ground.*

The party has tripped across some poisonweed.

**Poisonweed (1):** Int Non; AL N; AC 8; MV nil; HD 10; hp 47; THAC0 nil; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6; SA poison cloud; SD immune to cold based attacks; MR nil; SZ S; ML nil; XP 2,000.

The plant has 30 flowers in a 20-foot radius. Each time the plant is touched or attacked, it releases a cloud of poison dust that affects everyone within 15 feet. Those within range must save vs. poison or take 1d6 of damage and fall asleep. A successful saving throw allows one to avoid falling asleep, but does not protect from the damage. The plant will attempt to grow around its victim, which requires three turns. Then it endeavors to absorb the victim with corrosive enzymes that deliver 1d10 of damage per round.

Each flower can deliver two dust clouds for a total of 60 poison clouds. Each poisonweed flower has 2 hit points. The whole plant has 10 Hit Dice. It takes double damage from fire-based attacks.

### Into the Valley of the Think-Maker

(See Map Book pg. 21)

*A scout breaks away from the group and scampers on ahead. A moment later he jogs back grinning, chattering, and pointing down the trail. As you move forward, the treeline breaks and a wide mist-filled valley opens before you. A broken maze of low marble ruins rises from beneath the covering vines. A relay of bird calls echoes across the canyon.*

*As the party heads down the trail, five halflings career down the trail toward you. They are unarmed. They stop about 20 yards away and chatter inquisitively. Your guides respond in kind and, in a matter of moments, the pack is hurtling away again.*

The group represents a few of Pakk's followers who have come to greet the visitors. Although there are ten followers, only five appear. They attempt to probe the non-psionists in the party during the conversation. If any PCs understand halfling, they will hear, "Welcome passersby. Are you lost?"

The halfling guides will reply, "We bring servants of the Forest who seek the Think-Maker."

"He has been waiting for you," a follower will respond, then turn and run back to Pakk's grove.

If the party attempts to interrogate the followers, they will ignore questions, finish what they have to say, and head to the grove. If anyone attempts to psionically contact the followers, they will find that the halflings have closed minds. PCs will have to initiate psychic combat if they want to establish contact. Such an action will be met with the appearance of Pakk in a rather testy mood.

If the party follows the halflings, they will be led to Pakk's grove. If the party does not follow, the halflings will run ahead, then make pawing motions with their arms until the group follows. They will continue in this manner, disappearing and reappearing to urge the party onward.

**What Pakk's Followers Know:** Pakk's students know that the avangion arrived several months ago. They have not seen him since his arrival and do not know about his death. They all know the location of the Sanctuary. They do not know anything about the Order. Pakk primarily communicates with his peers psionically and he almost never receives visitors.

**Pakk's halfling followers (10):** Int 11; AL LN; AC 7; MV 6; HD 3; hp 10(-15); THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (spear) 1d4-1 (obsidian daggers); SA nil; SD +3 bonus to all saving throws against magical attacks, poisons, or disease; MR nil; SZ S (3'-4' tall); ML 10; XP 175; Psionic Summary: PSPs 40; Sciences: probe, teleport; Devotions: contact, life detection, psychic crush, mind thrust, ego whip, ESP; Defense Modes: M-, TW; Score 15.

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### The Elder

*The halflings lead you along an ancient walkway paved with cracked marble stones and overgrown with lush weeds. Vines stretch from marble pillars suspending huge sheets of moss. You are led across small streams on rope and log bridges that marble stones once must have spanned. After a circuitous journey through the ruin, you arrive at an archway shaped of brambleweed.*

*In a clearing surrounded by trees, a huge brown-and gray-striped cat lies curled up on its side. Yellow eyes stare at you indifferently and it flicks its barbed tail. Resting as if in a chair, a halfling with a riot of gray hair lounges amid the beast's striped legs. The halfling's expression is one of serene calm. He wears a breechcloth and holds a staff set with a water-blue gem. Basha's halflings sit as the escort stands to the side, looking at the reclining one expectantly.*

The party has found Pakk the Think-Maker, a telepathic psionist of the Order. Pakk will smile and rise. He will probe the non-psionic PCs and Basha's halfling escorts while he talks with the party. He will not speak in common, having little use for language since he does most of his communicating by mindlinking. If there are no halfling PCs, one of Pakk's followers translate. If the party suggests telepathic communication, Pakk will ask the PCs to open their minds and then contact the party members. He will not permit them to contact him. If a PC begins to use psionics in the grove, Pakk will gently, firmly, and very politely tell the PC not to think so hard while they are here.

Pakk will greet the party warmly. "Welcome, pilgrims. I trust that you are eating well?" Pakk will ask the party why they have come to the valley. If the party explains that they are looking for Korgunard, he will be genuinely surprised.





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"He is here. I do not know why he said nothing about pilgrims. He has been consumed in his work. I am surprised that he has not contacted you."

If the party explains the difficulty they have had contacting him, Pakk will nod. "He has been in the Sanctuary and your minds are not disciplined enough to reach there. In Korgunard's state, it is likely that he is unaware of the passage of time."

Note that anyone using some means of detecting whether what Pakk has said is true will find that he is not lying. He is surprised. Korgunard is here (his remains). Korgunard was consumed (literally) in the pursuit of his work. Having probed the PCs, Pakk will be able to tell the party what they expect to hear. He will know if they suspect the Order, and that they are aware of the Psionatrix. Pakk does not know the Psionatrix can be destroyed.

Pakk will explain that Korgunard arrived months ago to ask about the growing psionic-null field. "I told him that I believe that the power to silence the mind grows from the cradle of the Dragon's Crown Mountains. My staff protects me from its reach. He then asked that I offer him access to the Sanctuary so that he might prepare himself to challenge the power. He has been secluded there since."

If the party inquires about the Order, Pakk will reply: "I have heard of such a society, but I cannot verify that it exists. I get few visitors here." If they ask about the Sanctuary, he will explain that it is a powerful shelter for the mind.

The party will certainly ask to see Korgunard. Pakk's reply is, "I cannot take you where your mind is not prepared to go. I will, however, contact him and tell him that you have arrived. Sit with me."

Pakk will sit in the center of the clearing and gesture for the PCs to follow suit. His eyes will roll back and his head slump forward – then suddenly jerk upright. He will begin to speak, but with Korgunard's voice. "Open your minds; I will contact you." Pakk achieves this effect by controlling his own voice. He will already be maintaining contact with the non-psionic PCs. He will now use split personality to split his mind, using half for a psychic impersonation to

emulate Korgunard. He will contact the psionic members of the party and send thoughts to each PC in sequence. The PCs will hear Korgunard say, "Finally, you have come! I will need you for my transformation. I will send for you at the Temple Of Ral tonight at high moon." Lasting only one round, the voice will grow faint toward the end.

Any psionicist PC will be able to assure the party that that was, indeed, Korgunard. Be certain that a PC deciding to use identity penetration has time to successfully activate the power before allowing the player to learn that they have been deceived.

If the party does detect the deception, Pakk will explain that Korgunard was too weak to reach the PCs outside the Sanctuary. He will tell them that Korgunard felt that conveying the message to them in that manner would assure them of its veracity, since a psionicist must have successfully probed someone's mind before impersonation is possible.

If the party is unsuspecting, Pakk will say, "His message grew faint. I sense him gathering his energy, conserving it. The Temple Of Ral is at the edge of the valley. I can show you. But I do not understand what he meant about a transformation." Pakk will try to get the players to talk about Korgunard and preserve metamorphosis. Pakk wants the players to believe that this is what Korgunard is preparing for, but he wants them to feel as if they figured that out and that Pakk does not understand.

Pakk will finally excuse himself. He asks the PCs not to leave the grove until he returns, at which time he will show them the way to the Temple Of Ral. Pakk will leave with the kirre, and retreat to the Sanctuary until evening. He will conceal his thoughts and think about whether the PCs pose a threat to the Order.

### How to Run the Elder

Pakk is extremely intelligent and knows that the best way to lie is to tell as much truth as possible. While Pakk "contacts" Korgunard, play the encounter in real time and do not allow players to discuss options. When Pakk tells the PCs to open their minds, im-

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mediately ask each psionist player if their character's mind is open. Allow nothing beyond a simple yes or no. If a PC closes his mind, Pakk will not contact them. If the issue is discussed after, Pakk will tell the party that Korgunard cannot afford to waste energy playing games. He will criticize any PCs who waste Korgunard's energy by keeping their minds closed.

**Beast-Mastered Kirre (1):** Int 6; AL N; AC 7; MV 15; HD 6+6; hp 33, 37; THAC0 13; #AT 7; Dmg 1-4/1-4/1-6/1-8/1-4/1-4/1-6 (2 claws, bite, horns, 2 claws, tail); SA psionics; SD nil; MR nil; SZ L (8'); ML 14; XP 650; Psionic Summary: PSPs 100; Sciences: project force, psionic blast; Devotions: soften, levitation, awe, psychic crush, id insinuation, life detection, contact; Defense Modes: TS, IF, TW; Score 15; Defense modes are always considered to be on.

### Pakk's Lair

(See Map Book pg. 20)

Pakk has established his center for telepathic study in the marble ruins of an ancient settlement of moon worshippers. The buildings are connected by pathways cut from white marble. A stream that flows from the west side of the valley passes through a network of canals in the center of the structure and continues out the east end of the valley.

**1. The Grove:** This is an island in the center of the lair, surrounded by water and protected by a wall of brambleweed 10 feet high. Stately trees with low-hanging branches wall the clearing. Accompanied by his students, Pakk takes meals and sleeps here.

**2. The Well:** This area is surrounded on three sides by walls of brambleweed. The east side abuts the 15-foot wall of the cells. Four marble pillars and a low moss-covered wall surround the well. The water drawn here actually flows from the stream.

**3. The Kirre Lair:** This small forest serves as the lair of Pakk's kirre. The creature ignores residents but will attack anyone entering its lair. It will also prey upon lone wanderers in the valley after nightfall.

**4. The Cells:** A solid-looking monolith of marble blocks 15 feet high and over 100 feet on a side. Inside are student meditation cells that can only be accessed by teleportation. Each room is empty but for a small water-blue gem embedded in the floor. The austerity of the cells reflects Pakk's belief that students should work their minds free of distractions. Contact with the gems negates the effect of the Psionatrix. Pakk teleports his students to cells where they can exercise their psionic abilities freely. The students can teleport out when finished. With a successful bend bars roll, a PC may pry a gem from the floor, but this will also crack the jewel and destroy its power.

**5. Guest Room:** One of the few with a door, this room houses visitors to Pakk's lair. The stone door is wedged shut. Behind it Ptalán, a pterrán, is being held against his will. The pterrán was a follower who expressed dissent after Pakk destroyed Korgunard. Pakk has isolated the pterrán to allow him time to "reconsider" his feelings.

**What Ptalán knows:** Ptalán is a young psionist who came to study under Pakk when he began to feel the effects of the Psionatrix. Ptalán is the only follower who knows about Korgunard's murder. He does not know about the Order nor the specifics about the avangion's death. He knows about the Sanctuary, and that Pakk would retreat there if threatened. The pterrán language is very difficult for humanoids: apply a -5 penalty to anyone using a language proficiency to interpret Ptalán's words.

**Ptalán (Pterrán Follower):** Int 12; AL N; AC 8; MV 12; HD 4; hp 21; THAC0 17; #AT 3; Dmg 1-4/1-4/1-6 (claw/claw/bite); SA psionics; SD nil; MR nil; SZ M (6'); ML 12; XP 270; Psionic Summary: PSPs 70; Sciences: aura sight; Devotions: ego whip, id in-



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situation, ESP, life detection, contact; Defense Modes: M-, TS; Score 12; Defense modes are always on.

**6. The Kitchen:** The front room of the kitchen has six obsidian daggers and six bone knives jammed into a wooden plank. There are twelve wooden bowls, and three sticks used to process seedy grasses.

The back room has an open roof and a large fire pit. Animal carcasses on spits lean by the wall. A bed of coals is always kept smoldering here. Several blackened humanoid skulls lie amid the embers.

**7. The Slaughterhouse:** The sloped floor of this room is stained deep brown with dried blood. Small channels in the floor lead to the west wall and open through a slit to empty directly into the stream outside. An oddly-shaped knife with a curved obsidian blade lies against the wall. If used in combat, it should be treated as a short sword.

**8. The Round Table:** This marble plaza, secluded but open to the air, is almost entirely surrounded by trees. A single broken column stands in the corner. In the center of the floor, a solid granite table lies split in two. The table is covered with intricate astronomical markings. Close inspection will reveal that the table was only recently broken. Tiny traces of dried blood stain the marble floor.

If a PC performs object reading on the stains or the table, refer to the encounter *The Vision* on pg. 60.

**9. The Armory:** A recess in a brambleweed wall is used to store weapons. Six obsidian-headed spears lie on the ground with three short bows (for halflings) and a heap of 60 obsidian-headed arrows.

**10. The Menageries:** Here collapsing walls lack even wooden roofs, which long ago rotted away. A leafy sprawl of vines has erupted through the ancient marble floor, where it remains; mostly the floor is dirt. The rooms are home to various psionic beasts that Pakk studies. The beasts do not leave their confines, but

will attack anyone venturing in.

The western menagerie houses a pack of zhackals. These beasts rarely leave their lair because of the effects that the Psionatrix has had on their feeding, although if they sense suffering, they will emerge to feed. The eastern menagerie has been abandoned since a strangling vine took root there.

**11. The Temple Of Guthay:** This is a large marble plaza flanked by two rows of pillars. Lichen and moss obscure a network of deep lines cut into the stone floor. The lines were once used to track the course of Guthay in the heavens.

**Zhackals (12):** Int 5; AL NE; AC 7; MV 18; HD 1; hp 8, 5 (-11); THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1-3; SA psionics; SD psionics; MR nil; SZ T (1'); ML 12; XP 120, Pack Leader 175; Psionic Summary: PSPs 24; Devotions: contact, mindbar, mindlink, ego whip, invisibility; Defense Modes: none; Score 12; Pack Leader has 10 extra PSPs; pack attacks as one mind.

**Strangling Vine:** Int Non; AL N; AC 5; MV nil; HD 5; hp 29; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 1d10; SA strangulation; SD -1 to victims' surprise roll; MR nil; SZ H (25' long); ML nil; XP 650; initial attack causes 1d10, each round after causes 1d6 from strangulation, a victim may make one Strength roll with a -5 penalty to escape the vine.

### The Temple of Ral

(See Map Book pg. 21)

*The night sky above the valley seems bright against the darkness of the forest. Pakk's halfling followers meditate in the moonlight. You see Pakk's shadowy form. "It is almost time. We will go now to the temple." His students fall in line behind the party.*

*You leave the ruin to follow a dirt path up the contour of the valley. Near the rim, you arrive at a wide marble platform. Broken pillars lean askew like ancient trees storm-blown. Moss-filled etchings on the*

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ground suggest this plaza's ancient use.

The entourage waits silently. The minutes seem like hours. Suddenly, a vaguely-outlined portal begins to shimmer and pulse with energy. Pakk looks up. "He wants us," he mutters. "You students wait here. He does not have enough strength to hold the door open long." With that, Pakk disappears through the portal.

The temple looks virtually identical to the Temple of Guthay on the valley floor except that all these pillars are broken, making the plaza look like a mouth with broken teeth. Close inspection will reveal that the markings on the floor are different.

Just beyond the trees lies the Brambleball: a hollow sphere 30 feet across and made of brambleweed.

The party is being set up. Pakk has not yet resolved what to do with them. He is fascinated by advanced beings and believes that he may be able to glean a greater understanding of Korgunard by mining the PCs' memories. He also knows that the PCs may become a threat to the Order's plans, and he may be forced to destroy them. He has decided to keep them safe until he settles the matter.

Pakk has stepped through a dimension door, back to his grove. He also created another dimension door immediately behind the first. After Pakk steps through the first door, he closes it—an undetectable act because of the second door beyond. It will appear as if he stepped through a door that remains open for the PCs to follow. As the PCs walk through, they will suddenly be plummeting through the air, with their fall broken by landing in the Brambleball. PCs will take 2d6 of damage from the fall and be stunned for 5d4 rounds. Make an attack roll with a +1 bonus to determine if each PC suffers 1d20 damage from landing on the brambleweed. There is an accumulating 10% chance that each character will land on the previous character who passed through. This will result in the first character suffering another attack by the brambleweed. The second character only suffers 2d6 from the fall. The second character through the door has a 10% chance of landing on the first. The third

character has a 20% chance of landing on the second, and the fourth has a 30% chance of landing on the third.

If a PC sticks his head through the door to look beyond, while successfully making a system shock roll, the character will see only darkness.

If one or more PCs stay behind, they will be led by the followers back to Pakk's lair. Here, Pakk will tell them that Korgunard needs help for some metamorphosis. He will say that the avangion was disappointed in them. Pakk will offer to teleport the players to join Korgunard and the rest of the group. If a PC agrees and is a psionist, Pakk will teleport the PC to the Brambleball. If the psionist PC is wearing his water-blue crystal in an exposed place, Pakk will attempt to destroy it before teleporting the PC. If the PC is not a psionist, he will teleport the PC to a student cell.

### How to Run the Temple of Ral

Again, this is a situation where the DM should not allow the players to debate. Once Pakk steps through the door, insist that the players react quickly. They should have the distinct sense that if they do not react quickly, they will lose their chance to pass through the doorway. Wait until all of the PCs have either gone through the door or stayed behind. Then moderate any players who stayed behind before telling the trapped players what they see on the other side of the door. Remember that a dimensional door stuns an individual for one round after he passes through. Combined with the impact of the fall, this will eliminate any possibility of the PCs warning their companions once they are on the other side.

*As you step through the door, you lose the ground to darkness and feel momentarily suspended in air before plummeting down. Suddenly your body plummets through a profusion of thorns. It feels as if flesh is being stripped from your bones. You lose consciousness.*



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### The Return of the Patchwork Man

This encounter allows the party to escape from the trap. If Kass Pahr is alive, he will turn up to help.

*Your head reels. You gather your breath and, as the shock of your fall fades, the pain of your wounds sets in. As your eyes adjust to the darkness, you see that you lie at the bottom of a huge crater lined with brambleweed. The impact of your fall has driven dozens of sharp thorns into your body. The party lies around you. As you concentrate on trying to lie still, you are unsure how much time has passed.*

The zhackal pack from the menagerie has sensed the PCs' suffering. Using *invisibility*, they surround the Brambleball. They will begin to ego whip the party, inducing a growing sense of hopelessness.

If Kass Pahr is dead, allow the group to struggle out of the sphere and deal with the zhackals on their own. If they attempt this, the group can move at 1/3 their normal movement rate while on the brambleweed. The wall of the sphere is five feet thick. To make a hole large enough for a mul to crawl through, the weed must take 25 points of damage. Each round a PC crawls across the brambleweed, make an attack roll for the weed's thorns. PCs may try to limit their movement cutting through the weed. If a PC delivers more than 3 points of damage to the weed with one physical attack, the movement results in an attack roll by the plant. The effect of a defiler's spellcasting can create a hole by disintegrating the weed to ash. If Kass Pahr still lives, continue with this encounter five rounds after the zhackal attack.

*Suddenly you hear a scuffling noise beyond the thicket. Then a familiar voice sounds clearly from out of the darkness. "Run, you mutts!" It is Kass Pahr. "Lie still, friends. I'll cut you out."*

Kass has surprised the zhackals, who were all visible to him. He will drive them off, then work to free the party from their thorny cage. Kass will suffer an attack

by the brambleweed only on rounds in which he delivers more than 6 points of damage.

Having freed the party, Kass will encourage the PCs to confront Pakk to find out if he gated them into the brambleweed. If the party fills Kass in on recent events, he will also urge them to try to contact Korgunard. Failing this, he will tell them to demand that Pakk produce Korgunard.

**Brambleweed:** Int Nil; AL nil; AC 5; MV 1" per day; HD 4; hp special; THAC0 20; #AT see above; Dmg 1 hit point/thorn; SA nil; SD see above; MR nil; SZ G; ML nil; XP 15 per 10' square.

### The Vision

This encounter occurs at the round table in Pakk's lair. While the party is likely to pass it if they return to confront Pakk, they may miss returning here after the confrontation. If it seems they are going to give up their search for Korgunard, or that they might miss this encounter altogether, you may need to move the table into their path.

*You step into a secluded marble plaza almost entirely surrounded by trees. A single broken column stands in the corner. In the center of the floor lies a round table of solid granite, split in two. The table is covered with intricate markings.*

Close inspection will reveal that the markings are some sort of astronomical charts, and that the table was only recently split. Tiny traces of dried blood stain the marble floor.

If a PC performs object reading on the stains, she must make a system shock roll to avoid taking 1d10 points of damage and being knocked unconscious for 1d10 rounds. If the PC makes the roll, they will only be knocked unconscious for 1d10 rounds.

If a PC performs object reading on the table, the entire party will share a vision.



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*Your vision is momentarily blurred, as if a blinding sandstorm suddenly blew by. You see the granite table again, but now it is whole. Korgunard stands before you. His radiant skin shines. He seems to be speaking to a group of shadowy figures around the edges of the plaza. You cannot hear him. Pakk stands silently beside him. The avangion concentrates intensely as he slowly moves around the table. He spreads his hands wide as if appealing to his audience. He touches his hand to his heart and extends an open hand. Suddenly he convulses. He paws at his head. His knees buckle and, as he twists to the ground, Pakk catches him under the arms. The avangion's gossamer wings billow in the breeze. Pakk raises a fist and pushes a long dart through the avangion's neck. Korgunard looks up at Pakk in bewilderment before he drops to the ground in a heap of broken wings and dimming light.*

Several months ago Korgunard arrived to ask Pakk what he might know about the psionic-null field. Pakk

was well aware of the avangion's innate ability to detect lie and decided to explain the true reasons behind the Order's actions. He also extended an invitation to Korgunard to renounce magic and to follow the pure path of psionic study.

Korgunard naturally rejected the offer and sought to persuade Pakk that the Order's current course was misconceived. Pakk sensed that he might be forced to destroy the avangion if he continued to dispute the Order. He told Korgunard that he would summon the Masters of the Order so that the avangion could make his case before them. Korgunard realized this might put him in danger, but he felt that he could persuade the Order to the righteousness of his cause.

Pharistes and his peers arrived. At the round table, the participants established contact with one another, and Korgunard began to present his case. As he did so, it became clear that an issue long a topic of debate within the Order was about to be resolved. As long as the Order has existed, it has never resolved whether





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advanced beings are the very manifestation of corrupt psionics or something else entirely that should not concern the society.

Pharistes believes that the extreme alignments of advanced beings distort their ability to reason. This ability, upon which all psionic discipline is founded, cannot be tainted with the sentiment of extreme good nor the malice of extreme evil. Pharistes resolved that advanced beings are, in and of themselves, a corruption of psionic purity. Within the fraction of a second, there was a consensus among the society members and Korgunard was destroyed.

Having put the Order at risk by revealing its plans to the avangion, Pakk assumed his responsibility. He eliminated the heresy and finished the kill.

### The Burden of Honor

If the group seeks out Pakk, he will wait for them with his kirre in the grove. If they leave the Brambleball and retreat to the woods, he will send a follower to request the PCs return to the grove.

Pakk will listen to the PCs' questions and accusations, and then raise his hands to request silence of the party. He is a true believer in psionic purity. Pakk trusts in reason as the root of psionic power. He will attempt to reason with the PCs before deciding it is necessary to destroy them.

*"There is a society dedicated to the purity of the Unseen Way and the preservation of this world's natural order. As Stewards of our planet, we realize that the corruption of the mind's power has sent life out of balance. We have found a means to silence the noise and confusion. One day, when the knowledge of the Unseen Way is long forgotten, we will restore the capacity of thought. We will nurture it with care. It will develop unspoiled by corruption. Although we will not live to see that day, the world still needs people of our strength to see beyond this darkness, to the dawn of the planet's reawakening.*

*"Korgunard came here to learn about the silence-*

*the silence that emanates from the Psionatrix. I would not lie to him. He could hear the sound of a lie. I told him that we are putting an end to the abuse of the mind. But he had been drawn away from the roots of psionic discipline onto its weakest branches. He lost touch with reason and let his heart rule him. He believed that he could sway our hearts, but only convinced us that he was all we disdain.*

*"Korgunard is dead, nothing you do will change that. Take a lesson from his fate; be wiser. Use your reason. We are putting this twisted world to sleep so it can wake whole again one day. For 200 years, the ground will breathe, free of impure thoughts.*

*"My death will change nothing. It will neither strengthen you nor weaken the Order. Let go of your anger; it clouds the mind. Korgunard would disapprove of you raising your spear in vengeance. I understand Korgunard now, I know him as I know myself. None of them understand that there are many different ways to internalize wisdom. In the end I had him to myself. All that is left of him, you see before you now.*

If the PCs attack Pakk, he will attempt to kill them. If they leave, he will decide that they still may pose a threat to the Order, and announce, "While it makes no sense for you to take my life, it is equally foolish for me to let you leave here alive."

Pakk will use split personality to divide his mind into two independent power sources, then splice psionic blast to ego whip in both minds. He will be able to treat the spliced powers as one combined attack. By using the standard two psychic attacks per round rule, he will actually be able to deliver two spliced attacks per round with one mind. By splitting his personality, he achieves an effective attack rate of eight attacks on four potential targets in one round. His followers will also put themselves between Pakk and the PCs, and attack with spears or psionics as appropriate. They will target their missile attacks to disrupt spellcasting if possible.

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He will use the ego whip to stun his victims and then reduce their hit points with psionic blasts. If he has successfully neutralized his opponents, he will use a few psychic crushes to finish them off. If Pakk feels he is in real danger, he will place a stasis field over the group before launching his attacks. This will allow him and his companions to launch 60 rounds worth of attacks for each round that the party can respond. If Pakk is reduced to 5 hit points or less, he will teleport to the Sanctuary.

Pakk's followers and his kirre will join in the battle. The kirre will try to prevent any PC from closing with Pakk, but the beast is also a weakness. Killing the kirre will force Pakk to save vs. paralyzation, or lose consciousness for 1d20 rounds. He will also lose 7 hit points.

The party may try to destroy the water-blue gem or his staff-. This can be accomplished several ways, including psionic disintegration and called shots. The staff can take 12 hit points of called-shot damage; the gem, 8. Use table 29 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* to determine the saving throws.

Kass Pahr can also be used to distract Pakk, who will immediately recognize him, but will suppress the memory. If the party needs help, Kass may launch a verbal tirade against Pakk. He will throw his dagger at the halfling, inviting him to read where it has been. The effect will cause a -2 to Pakk's power checks in the round that Kass begins haranguing him. If he is hit with the knife, it will result in a 50% chance of him losing contact with each victim and dropping any power he is currently maintaining. This will only happen one round. He will immediately be able to renew his attacks the next round. This may provide a valuable window of opportunity if things are going badly for the PCs.

### The Sanctuary

This encounter will only occur if Pakk is reduced to 5 hit points. If he has enough PSPs, Pakk will teleport to the Sanctuary. Ptalan the pterrann will volunteer the Sanctuary location if the PCs release him. There is a





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50% chance that any of Pakk's surviving followers will reveal it under torture. If pursued here, Pakk will fight to the death.

The Sanctuary is a private meditation chamber that lies 20 feet below a small marble ruin on the western slope of the valley. The stream passes underneath it before spilling out onto the surface 200 feet to the east. The only ways to access this room are by teleporting, digging, passing through the earth, or swimming up the underground stream.

The stream runs through a 10-foot-high tunnel with the water level of 9 feet. The tunnel walls are slick and there is only a 50% chance of finding a handhold along any five-foot stretch. The current is fairly strong and requires a successful Strength check to avoid being swept out of the tunnel once for every five rounds spent in the water. PCs successfully finding handholds may move at 1/3 their normal movement rate while in the tunnel.

The cell is empty except for a delicate, slightly elongated bone knife. Pakk has made a weapon out of Korgunard's thigh bone in case he must one day confront the sorcerer-kings. He knows that a weapon made from an animal will provide an advantage when stalking others of its kind. He believes that, by having eaten the avangion, he has absorbed some of Korgunard's attributes and that will help him understand the nature of advanced beings.

### Rainfall

*The sky has been overcast today. The sun never appeared to burn the morning mist from the rifts and channels of the valley. An unusual stillness settles like a fog on the valley. You realize that you have become so accustomed to the constant ticking and hum of the Forest that you only notice it now in its absence. The wind picks up and the conifers pitch lazily. The sky darkens almost imperceptibly and then, like grain spilling from a merchant's broken crate, the sky opens and water falls.*

*You have never seen anything quite like this. A shower of rain cascades from the diffuse grayness*

*above and spatters all around. As the rain soaks the ground, it saturates the colors of the valley and makes them vibrant. The water washes sweat from your forehead and stings your eyes. It is as if the whole Forest is stricken with grief and sheds tears at Korgunard's passing. There is something purifying about the water as you watch tiny streams course through the lines etched in your weary hands.*

### Concluding the Adventure

The battle at Pakk's lair has once again alerted the Order to the activities of the party. If the group finds Ptalán the pterran in the guest room, he will warn them against lingering in the valley. Any of Pakk's surviving followers will disappear into the Forest. If the group heads to Outpost Zero, they will find it abandoned. The furniture will be overturned and the belongings of the expatriates will be found scattered around their huts. If Kass has survived, he will accompany the PCs to Outpost Zero.

The party may head to Basha's Kraal, where they will be welcomed if they had offered Basha a gift after the test. The group will be able to rest safely before heading off for Dragon's Crown Mountain.

### New Magical Item

**Staff of Raket:** Int 12; Ego 3; AL N; Psionic Summary: PSPs 12; Sciences: energy containment.

Only 4 feet long, this staff was originally empowered by Pakk's master with the psychometabolic science, energy containment. He further modified it as a receptacle, holding a pool of 383 PSPs to access in times of need. He was also able to give the staff access to this pool to maintain its inertial barrier. Though intelligent, the staff communicates only semi-empathically, by tingling.

The water-blue crystal in the head of the staff protects him from the effects of the Psionatrix.



## Important NPCs

### Kass Pahr

Human Male Cleric/Ranger  
4th Level/10th Level Neutral  
Str 17 Int 14  
Dex 17 Wis 17  
Con 17 Cha 8



**hp:** 57

**AC:** 3 (hide armor, Dex)

**#AT:** 5/2

**THAC0:** 11 (-1 to hit with bastard sword and dagger, +4 vs. halflings)

**Movement:** 12

**Dmg:** 1d8/1d4 (obsidian bastard sword/obsidian dagger).

**Psionic Summary:** PSPs 91

**Wild Talent:** Contact, Aversion

**Enemy Species:** halflings

HS 83% MS 68%

**Clerical Spells:** 1) *cure light wounds* (X 5), *detect snares and pits* (- 2); 2) *hold person* (-3), *speak with animals* (-2)

Kass is an aging ranger who roams the hills of the Forest Ridge. He is quiet by nature but enjoys listening to others.

As a cleric in his youth, he traveled with his wife to minister to the needs of the halfling tribes. In a violent ambush, his wife was slain after wounding a dozen of the hunters. The halfling chief agreed to spare the young cleric's life if he agreed to heal the halflings who had been injured in the skirmish. Kass worked feverishly and succeeded in saving seven of the halflings. Five, however, died. The chief announced that he would only honor the agreement to the extent that Kass had. Kass, it was ruled, should give a piece of his flesh for each halfling that he had failed to save. The young man was left unconscious in a clearing with only three fingers on each hand. His ears and a long strip of flesh along his lower jaw and lip were also taken.

Kass Pahr's lower teeth are exposed, fixing a garish grin on his face and forcing a whistle and hiss into his speech. He abandoned clerical pursuits and has spent his time since his recovery studying the ways of the Forest Ridge. Driven by a dispassionate need for revenge and a desire to make the Forest safe for all races, Kass makes regular forays into halfling territory and stalks the feral people. He kills only when he can be certain of leaving no survivors. He has maintained his secret and is welcomed among the halfling clans as the "Patchwork Man."

### Basha

Halfling Male Illusionist/Psionician  
17th Level

Neutral Good

Str 13 Int 17

Dex 17 Wis 15

Con 14 Cha 19



**hp:** 50

**AC:** 3 (Dex, ring)

**#AT:** 1

**THAC0:** 16

**Movement:** 6

**Dmg:** 1d4 (metal dagger with type O poison)

**Psionic Summary:** PSPs 108

**Disciplines:** Psychoportation

**Sciences:** Teleport, Banishment, Summon Planar Creature, Mass Domination, Fatelink, Probe, Psychic Surgery

**Devotions:** Dimensional Door, Time Shift, Astral Projection, Teleport Trigger, Time/Space Anchor, Dream Travel, Psychic Crush, Awe, Conceal Thoughts, Contact, Ego Whip, Mind Thrust, Splice, Gird, Psionic Sense, Intensify, Psychic Drain  
**Defense Modes:** All.

**Magic Items:** *ring of protection* +4, *bone dagger* +1, *wand of paralyzation*

**Preserver Spells:** 1) *magic missile* (X 3), *read magic*, *detect magic*; 2) *detect evil*, *know alignment*, *forget* (X 3); 3) *fireball* (X 3), *hold person* (X 2); 4) *ice storm* (X 2), *fear*, *wall of fire* (X 2); 5) *chaos*, *feblemind*,



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domination (X 3); 6) globe of invulnerability, chain lightning (X 2); 7) control undead (X 2), spell turning; 8) power word blind, polymorph other

Basha is a tribal chief of the nine clans whose territories abut his kraal. There are about 200 halflings in his domain. He has a wife from each clan and provides them with stone huts. He and his wives are provided for by the tribes. He is a just ruler, but a halfling sense of justice is often at odds with that of other races.

### Pakk

Halfling Male Psionicist  
26th Level

Neutral

Str 13 Int 20

Dex 18 Wis 19

Con 14 Cha 11



hp: 81

AC: 0 (Dex, cloak, ring)

#AT: 1

THAC0: 8

Movement: 6

Dmg: 1d6 (long dart with type E poison)

Psionic Summary: PSPs 383

Discipline: Telepathy

Sciences (22): Domination, Probe, Psionic Blast\*\*, Mass Domination, Mindlink, Ejection, Fatelink, Mindwipe, Teleport, Teleport Other, Empower, Psychic Surgery, Split Personality\*\*, Disintegrate\*, Complete Healing, Object Reading, Animal Affinity

Devotions (45): Attraction, Contact\*\*\*, Conceal Thoughts, Ego Whip\*\*\*\*, False Sensory Input, Identity Penetration, Life Detection, Id Insinuation\*, Mind Bar, Mind Thrust\*, Psychic Impersonation\*, Flesh Armor\*\*, Psionic Sense, Receptacle, Splice\*\*, Stasis Field, Beast Mastery, Truth Ear, teleport Trigger\*, Time Shift, Dimensional Door\*, Animate Object, Control Sound\*, Levitation, Body Weaponry, Suggestion\*\*

Defense Modes: All.

**Magic Items:** Breechcloth of displacement (acts as cloak of displacement), ring of protection +4.

**NOTE:** Each asterisk (\*) raises power level by +1.

Pakk is a telepathic psionist of the Order. While still a hunter-chief, he led the pack that killed Kass Pahr's mate and made the decision that resulted in the young cleric's mutilation.

Later, he fell under the tutelage of Raket, a powerful psionicist who once ruled Pakk's valley. When he became powerful enough to gain the attention of the Order, they contacted him and he learned that they considered his mentor a renegade. His first act was to kill his teacher. Pakk is a true believer in the Order and all it represents. He is now completely devoted to psionic study and has a particular interest in the abilities of advanced beings.

He keeps a dart about 10 inches long in the waistband of his breechcloth. Pakk also has any magic items that Korgunard was carrying.




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## Part Six: Pack Frenzy

In this section, the PCs will struggle across the Hinterlands, always on the alert for the hordes of maddened thri-kreen that are making this a desolate and dangerous place to travel. Another difficulty the PCs will face includes the minions of the Order who are closing in on them. The Urikite NPCs will attempt to prevent the PCs from forging a link with a powerful tohr-kreen who can reveal details of the Order—and who is perhaps the only creature who can restore sanity to the Hinterlands.

### Previous Events

The PCs have just emerged from the Forest Ridge, where they had an encounter with a hungry halfling tribe. In a meeting with a halfling elder, they learned that Korgunard is dead and that the Order is responsible. They have also discovered a piece of the puzzle—a crystal shard that permits psionics use. The PCs have also learned that thri-kreen attacks are sending both halflings and animals fleeing from the Forest Ridge into the Ringing Mountains.

### Overview

In this section, the PCs will, through a series of structured encounters, learn three important pieces of information: first, that the thri-kreen packs that roam the Hinterlands have been driven into a killing frenzy by the Order's artifact; second, that the Urikite NPCs have somehow passed the PCs and are up ahead; and third, that the Order is hot on the heels of the PCs.

Three specific encounters (*Crazed Thri-Kreen*, *A Urikite Camp*, and *The Order Closes In*) are designed to convey these facts to the PCs. The encounters can be run in any order, but PCs should conclude all three before moving on to the next section.

The climax of the adventure is a meeting between the PCs and Chax-chik, a 26th-level tohr-kreen psionicist who is assembling thri-kreen packs into a huge horde in an effort to assault the Order itself. The Urikite NPCs are present at this meeting. It unexpectedly turns into a full-scale battle as rival thri-

kreen, led by Bokum, a dwarven psionicist loyal to the Order, attack the meeting.

### Beginning the Adventure

Leaving the forests, the PCs set out across the unexplored Hinterlands to their next destination, the Dragon Crown Mountains.

Depending upon where the PCs left the Forest Ridge, they will emerge either onto stony barrens or sandy wastes. Either way, they will be crossing about 30 miles of flat, featureless ground before reaching the scrub plains, then they will have another 15 miles to travel before reaching the foothills of the Dragon Crown Mountains. For a mixed-race group traveling at moderate speed, without forced marches, this should take from two to five days. (DMs should work out the total for the party in advance, and space the first three encounters accordingly.)

The sandy wastes are featureless expanses of gently rolling dunes. Because of the constantly shifting sand, there are no clear trails, although keen observers may see an occasional animal track.

The stony barrens are vast expanses of flat sandstone, littered with stones ranging from pebbles to boulders. Drifts of fine red sand, in some places piled into mini-dunes as high as a human's waist, are constantly stirred by a gentle breeze that does little to alleviate the blistering heat of the day.

The PCs may find one of the many paths made by the wild herd animals, migrating from the Forest Ridge to the scrub plains of the Hinterlands. The best of these are wide trails of crushed rock left by the passage of wild mekillots, on which PCs can walk three abreast. Other trails are fainter and narrower.

The chance of finding a path is 25% for each five hours of travel (non-cumulative) through the stony barrens. There is a 50% chance the path goes in the direction the PCs are traveling. By following a path, the PCs can move at their normal walking rate, but their chances of meeting one of the predatory animals, lying in wait for the herds, are greater.

The scrub plains are flat expanses of dusty yellow soil in which small clumps of grass tenaciously cling.





The occasional thorny bush or spindly tree hints at the possibility of underground water, but most plants rely on infrequent rains; storing water inside hardy stalks. Here, the herd comes to graze. Following a herd may lead a lucky party of wanderers to one of the rare oases that dot the plains, but it is more likely that the herd will be spooked when PCs approach.

In the Hinterlands, the PCs will encounter only wild animals, monsters, and the packs of thri-kreen who claim this land as their own. There are no cities, villages, raiding parties, and no slave tribes. The halflings of the Forest Ridge make short work of the few wretches who flee over the Ringing Mountains. There are no large elven tribes—the thri-kreen here have developed a taste for elven flesh. There are no domesticated riding animals, the Ringing Mountains are impassible for mounted riders.

Those few hardy souls who are able to cross the mountains, survive the halflings of the Forest, and make it out into the Hinterlands on foot must face thri-kreen packs that are active day and night without rest, roaming the length and breadth of the Hinterlands in search of food. Most of the thri-kreen speak nothing but their own clicking language, and they are likely to regard intelligent races in the same light that they do the wild herds—as fresh meat.

The thri-kreen are dangerous enough under normal circumstances, but now the Psionatrix (the psionics-dampening device of the Order) has driven them into a killing frenzy. They are likely to attack anything they see, even other thri-kreen. (See “Thri-kreen Frenzy” entry below, under the *Crazed Thri-Kreen* encounter for details.)

The Psionatrix also has the effect of reducing the thri-kreens’ Intelligence and Wisdom. (Thri-kreen must save vs. spells once per day or lose one point of each.) By the time the PCs reach the Hinterlands, the device will have been in operation for at least 30 days. A number of the thri-kreen encountered will have been driven completely crazy and unable to use tools, weapons—or even speak coherently.

## Crazed Thri-kreen (See Map Book pg. 22)

This encounter can be set in either the stony barrens or the sandy wastes, whichever terrain the party is traveling through at the time. Its purpose is twofold. First, it alerts the PCs to the fact that something is driving the thri-kreen of the Hinterlands into an insane, killing frenzy. Second, it provides them with a thri-kreen ally who can take them to the tohr-kreen psionist’s base camp.

If this encounter is used before *A Urικite Camp* and/or *The Order Closes In*, the thri-kreen lieutenant (and her scouts) can serve as “cannon fodder” in either of those encounters—but only after the PCs learn enough to find their own way to the tohr-kreen’s camp. If it is used after the other two encounters, the thri-kreen lieutenant will lead the party directly to the tohr-kreen psionist.

The “hook” for this encounter is the PCs’ thirst and need for water. The encounter is set around an unusual water source—the remains of an ancient spa, which the PCs stumble across in the course of their day’s (or night’s) march. A random encounter can be used to ensure that the PCs are good and thirsty when they come across the spa. The PCs might get caught in a stampede of herd animals or wind up in a fight with a carnivore; either way, the DM should make sure most of their water containers are broken and their contents lost.

Read the following, adjusting it for full daylight or the bleak light of the moons:

*Ahead on the endless plain, you can see an unusual feature. Rearing up from the flat desert wasteland is a white arch, perhaps 12 feet tall. The tumbled remains of ruined walls suggest a fine building once stood here. The ruin must truly be ancient, for no intelligent beings (save for thri-kreen) have inhabited the Hinterlands for many millennium.*

*As you come closer, you see movement. Perhaps a dozen creatures are stirring inside the ruin. Squinting against the dust, you see they are thri-kreen. Clustered around a low, rectangular wall at the center of*



## Pack Frenzy

the ruin, the mantis warriors are chattering rapidly in their strange clicking language. They seem to be showing each other around, and are perhaps arguing, but without moving closer it is impossible to tell.

Because the thri-kreen are arguing, it will be easy for the PCs to sneak closer without being observed; large boulders to the west and south of the building offer ample cover, and parts of the walls of the building are intact to a height of about 5 feet. A sand dune has drifted against the north wall, and a careful thief can crawl up to peer in at the thri-kreen. When positioned, read the players the following:

*You now are close enough to hear the gurgle of water and to smell a hint of sulphur in the air. The low stone wall at the center of the ruin encloses a pool from which the thri-kreen are drinking. One wall of the pool is crumbling, and from it water is spilling in a steady trickle. Where it has soaked into the earthen floor of the ruin, a tangle of grass and shrubs is growing. The patch is perhaps 50 feet wide.*

*The high arch that forms the exit to the roofless ru-*

*in leads onto a patio raised perhaps a foot above the desert floor. On either end, part of the patio has crumbled away into a sand-filled depression.*

*The thri-kreen's clicking voices are very loud now. It is clear they are arguing; they shove each other out of the way for a drink at the pool, even though it is large enough for all of them to drink at the same time. Some thri-kreen are behaving very strangely, staring off into space one moment and lashing out in a tantrum at the next.*

*There are eight warriors around the pool. A ninth stands to one side, waving its four arms and clicking furiously at the rest. All are armed, although some have dropped their weapons; staring at them as if they have forgotten their function.*

These nine thri-kreen are a scouting party, sent out by the tohr-kreen psionist the PCs will encounter later. One thri-kreen, the lieutenant, wears a crystal shard that protects her from the interference of the Psionatrix. The rest are always on edge due to the constant "buzzing" that the Order's psionics-dampening device produces in their minds. They are



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barely under the lieutenant's control, and are likely at any moment to charge into a killing frenzy. All will repeatedly shake their heads, as if twitching.

The Psionatrix has also drained much of the thri-kreen's Intelligence and Wisdom; each will be at only 2d4. This will produce a variety of "insane" reactions: babbling incoherently when asked a question; forgetting how to use tools and weapons; being unable to distinguish friend from foe; blaming inanimate objects for their misfortunes, and lashing out at them. (A thri-kreen who temporarily "forgets" how to use weapons will fight using their natural claw and biting attacks.)

The ruins are the remains of an ancient spa; the water bubbling up into the pool is full of healing minerals as hot as a bath. If the encounter is during the cool desert night, steam rises from the pool.

Any character soaking in the pool (possible at night only) for one hour will regain 1d4 hit points; soaking longer means the loss of one hit point per hour spent in the pool that evening. (Soaking in the heat of the day is extremely uncomfortable and will result only in the loss of hit points.)

The spa has a lower level of which the thri-kreen are unaware. The stairs that once led down to the large bathing pool have long since filled in with drifting sand, and are now marked only by the depressions at either end of the ruins' outer patio.

Should one of the PCs understand thri-kreen, the following can be overheard:

- **Sane thri-kreen scouts:** "Hatchling of a putrid egg! Get out of my way or I'll break your limbs!" "Ha! I'd squish you like a larva. Out of my way or it's you who will be carried to the Circle!"

- **Insane thri-kreen scout:** "Nasty rock! Elf feather snack click! Hate it! Head hurts! Make it go away!"

- **Thri-kreen lieutenant:** "Stop it, all of you! Shut your minds to the buzzing. Think how angry Chaxchik will be when she hears . . ."

At this point, the lieutenant notices one or more of the PCs. The thri-kreen fall silent, and all heads turn in the direction of the PCs.

**Klox-ick:** Thri-kreen lieutenant F8; AL N; AC 5; MV 18; HD 8; hp 57; THAC0 13; #AT 5 (claw and

bite) or 2 (gythka and bite); Dmg 1d4 (-4) (claw) or 1d10 (gythka +4 strength), plus 1d4+1 (bite); SA paralyzation; SD immune to charm person/mammal, hold person, dodge missiles; SZ L (11' long); ML fanatic (17-18); XP 1,395. Leap 50' forward, 20' up.

**Thri-kreen, adult (8):** AL CN; AC 5; MV 18; HD 5+3; hp 28 (-8); THAC0 15; #AT 5 (claw and bite) or 2 (gythka and bite); Dmg 1d4 (-4) (claw) or 1d10 (gythka) plus 1d4+1 (bite); SD immune to charm person/mammal, hold person; SZ L (9' long); ML fanatic (17- 18); XP 975

Once noticed by the thri-kreen, the PCs have several options: attack; try to speak with the thri-kreen lieutenant; or flee. Whichever they choose, at the end of this event, the thri-kreen lieutenant should still be alive to guide the PCs to the tohr-kreen psionist's camp, or to convey information that will lead the PCs there. Use one of the following scenarios based on PCs' reaction to being discovered:

- **PCs flee:** Additional thri-kreen scouts appear out of the desert, 1d6 per PC. Choreograph the battle so that at least a few of the PCs are driven back in the direction of the ruin. (Remind the PCs that the thri-kreen need not rest, and are likely to pursue them indefinitely.) A battle ensues.

- **PCs talk:** The thri-kreen lieutenant, Klox-ick, is the only thri-kreen present who speaks common and is still sane. She has traveled the Tablelands and is amazed that anyone from that land of plenty would travel to the Hinterlands in "this time of trouble."

Since she has been away from the tohr-kreen's camp for several days, Klox-ick has no knowledge of the Urikite NPCs. She will urge the PCs to "turn back, for we can no longer control our people."

If asked about the crystal hanging around her neck, she will give vague answers. She will advise the PCs not to approach the pool—the thri-kreen scouts will jealously attack to conserve the pack's water. As if on cue, the thri-kreen attack the PCs and a battle ensues.

- **PCs attack:** A fight with the thri-kreen is at the heart of this encounter. This introduces PCs to the "frenzy" that the artifact is causing in thri-kreen.



## Pack Frenzy

Every thri-kreen except the lieutenant will take part in the battle, attacking the PCs furiously and immediately setting upon any fallen PCs, tearing them limb from limb as they feast upon the bodies. But 2d4 rounds after the battle begins, frenzy sets in and the thri-kreen begin attacking each other. At this point, 1d4 thri-kreen will go into frenzy each round.

### Thri-kreen Frenzy

A “frenzy” can be triggered in thri-kreen whenever they see, hear, or participate in anything that even remotely resembles a “hunt”. During frenzy, thri-kreen attack the nearest individual—even packmates.

If the subject of the attack is a thri-kreen already engaged in a fight, there is a 75% chance that this thri-kreen will turn away from the person/creature/monster it was originally battling and will fight the attacking thri-kreen instead. Once locked in battle, the thri-kreen fight to the death.

The only thing that snaps a thri-kreen out of frenzy is a very startling event. The greater the number of thri-kreen in frenzy, the less the chance of this happening. The chance that a thri-kreen will not snap out of frenzy is 5% per frenzied thri-kreen it can see or hear, cumulative. (DMs may make this a group roll when dealing with large groups of thri-kreen, with the percentage based upon total thri-kreen present.) Unless protected by a crystal or shard, thri-kreen PCs are subject to the same rules for frenzy while in the Hinterlands.

After frenzy sets in, the PCs will eventually find that they are standing alone, ignored by the crazed mantis warriors who seem intent on killing each other. One after another, the thri-kreen fall, mortally wounded. All this time, Klox-ick will be shouting at her scouts to stop fighting each other, to stop fighting the PCs as well, since the PCs may have information that might help the cause of Chax-chik (the thri-kreen psionicist whom Klox-ick serves).

The battle should come to an abrupt halt when one of the following has occurred: the thri-kreen begin to get the better of the PCs; more than half of the thri-kreen are killed; or the PCs attempt to kill Klox-ick.

At that point, the ground will give way under Klox-ick, who will be standing on one of the 20-foot X 20-foot squares marked “A” on the map. These are skylights that have long been covered by a thick layer of dirt and sand a foot deep. The thick glass has weakened over the years. The stamping feet of the combatants caused one (or more) of the skylights to collapse and fall.

Read the following to the PCs:

*Klox-ick tumbles from sight as the ground opens beneath her, and a splash is heard below. All but one of the thri-kreen immediately break off the battle, and run over to peer down the gaping hole, calling to their leader. The sole exception stands slashing its weapon through the air, attacking nonexistent foes, spittle frothing from its mandibles.*

At the same time, a second skylight can also give way under one or more of the PCs. The PCs (and any thri-kreen) tumble 20 feet down into the second level of the spa. If the PCs fall through the southeast skylight, they land on soft sand and, on a successful Dexterity check, can resist tumbling into the pool. A fall through any other skylight sends them plunging into the pool. Neither fall does any damage.

The object of sending the thri-kreen lieutenant and/or PCs tumbling down into the second level of the spa is both to break up the battle and to give the PCs and thri-kreen a reason to cooperate. The PCs can form a bond with the thri-kreen lieutenant by helping her, or by being helped out of the pool themselves. The thri-kreen and PCs need to join forces to aid their companions who have fallen below.

Read the following to the PCs who fall through:

*You have fallen into a large, underground room about 120 feet wide and 190 feet long. In the center of the room is a 60-foot X 120-foot pool. A pillar rises up out of the middle of the pool and merges into the ceiling; from openings on its surface flow thin streams of water.*



Three wide steps lead down to the pool from the pillars on either side of the pool. At one end of the pool, a heap of desert sand has spilled in a gentle slope around one of the end pillars and down into the water. The wall at the opposite end of the pool has three wooden doors, all closed.

The underground pool holds water that is lukewarm by day and cool by night. The bottom is filled with silt, formed from the sand that has spilled down the staircases. This mud is hip-deep on a human. A foot of relatively clear water overlays this silt, and the water surface is about chest-high on a human. Unless a Dexterity check is successful, the PCs have dropped their weapons and must spend 1d4 rounds searching in the mud for them.

Taller PCs can easily wade to the edge of the pool and climb out. Shorter PCs may face the prospect of drowning. But even after reaching the edge of the pool and climbing out onto the tiled area that surrounds it, the PCs face an additional challenge: a kluzd has recently made this muddy pool its home after swimming up through a rupture in the floor of the pool. It hasn't eaten in days, and is very hungry. If the pool has been agitated in any way (e.g. by someone falling in) it attacks in 1d4 rounds (night) or 1d6 rounds (day).

**Kluzd:** AL N; AC 2 (8); MV 12; HD 4; hp 25; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8; SA nil; SD nil; SZ M (6' long); ML fearless (19), due to extreme hunger; XP 270.

The wooden doors leading to the smaller rooms at one end of the pool are warped and stuck, and require a Strength check to open.

Two of the rooms were once saunas. Low stone benches line three walls. Amid the coals and ashes it once held are the remains of an iron brazier, so rusted it crumbles if touched. Smoke-vent holes in the ceiling are plugged with dirt and stone.

The central room holds 10 small metal barrels. Each contains a different fragrant oil, once used by the ancients to cleanse the body. The barrels are in relatively good shape; each breaks open, if touched,

only on a roll of 1 on a 1d8. (Spilled oil will fill the room with a flowery scent and make the floor slippery, making a Dexterity check necessary.) There is a 10% chance per barrel (non-cumulative) that the oil it contains is flammable (scented lamp oil).

PCs may be tempted to carry away the barrels. The metal containers would fetch an excellent price (at least two sp each) and the oil could be sold as perfume (at five cp per ounce). Each barrel contains five gallons (80 ounces) of oil and weighs 50 pounds.

The encounter should end with the PCs and the thri-kreen lieutenant on at least neutral and preferably friendly terms. If the PCs helped the lieutenant, the thri-kreen scouts will accept them as pack members, although individual thri-kreen may challenge certain PCs to one-on-one, non-lethal combat to determine that PC's "ranking" within the pack. There is a 25% chance that any such contest will result in the pack going into a frenzy again, violently attacking the PCs and each other.

Upon learning that the PCs are the enemies of the Order, Kloxx-ick will volunteer the information that her leader, Chax-chik, is a high-level psionist who is also challenging the Order. She will not reveal the nature of Chax-chik's plans, but will suggest to the PCs, "perhaps you can help. Together, we might triumph." She will tell the party that the tohr-kreen's camp is located "at the Circle," 1d4+1 days to the northeast, in the scrub plains.

Kloxx-ick has been told that the Order has a magical artifact that is causing the horrible buzzing that is driving the thri-kreen of the Hinterlands mad. She will ask if the PCs can also hear the buzzing, and, being assured that they do not, will reveal that the crystal shard hanging from her neck is somehow preventing her from hearing and succumbing to it.

If asked, Kloxx-ick will tell the PCs that the thri-kreen (and their tohr-kreen leader) have not suffered any reduction to their psionic abilities. If any of the thri-kreen are still alive, she will get one of them to demonstrate a wild talent (Reduction).

Kloxx-ick will insist upon the bodies of any dead thri-kreen being carried back with the party. She will pick up a body, as will each of the remaining thri-kreen.



## Pack Frenzy

“Thri-kreen always return our dead to the Circle,” she explains. “It is our way.”

If the PCs have been accepted as “pack members,” they will be expected to help carry any additional thri-kreen bodies. Each body weighs about 350 pounds.

Klox-ick will not explain what the Circle is. (PCs probing her mind will get only a vague impression of a circle of pillars surrounding a depression in the floor of the desert.)

If the PCs help the thri-kreen carry their dead, or agree to aid the tohr-kreen psionicist in her struggle against the Order, they may travel to the Circle in the company of the scouting party. Klox-ick, however, will refuse to slow her party down to the PCs’ pace. She will understand the PCs’ need for sleep, but she will chafe while waiting. She will wake the PCs often to see if they are ready to go, but will allow them a normal rest period. However, she will not permit a stop of more than eight hours.

Any use of force by the thri-kreen scouts to get the PCs moving is 25% likely to trigger a frenzy. If any of the PCs oversleep, there is also a 25% chance that one or more of the thri-kreen will attempt to eat them.

## A Urikite Camp

(See Map Book pg. 23)

This encounter may be used while the party is traveling through either the sandy wastes or the stony barrens. (If used in the sandy wastes, the sand underfoot will be small wave dunes running north-south, created by a westerly wind.)

This is a benign encounter (no monsters!) designed to encourage role-playing and to provide the PCs with the first hint that the Urikites who have dogged their footsteps have already reached the Hinterlands themselves, and are somewhere ahead.

The “hook” for this encounter is simple curiosity. Once the PCs see the Urikite banner and the ruined state of the camp it flies over, they ought to be extremely curious for an explanation of what they see. Although there is nothing in this encounter to seri-

ously harm the PCs, encourage caution to heighten the sense of drama.

The day (or night) has a “light wind” (blowing sand) from the west. The encounter occurs an hour or two after the PCs set off on their march.

If the PCs are observant, they will see one or more of the following before sighting the camp itself: erdlu tracks (a skilled tracker can determine that there were at least four birds); a severed human forearm (careful observation will reveal that it is no more than one day old and that a scavenging animal dropped it); a patch of sand that has been fused into bubbled glass through the side-effects of a spell; a broken obsidian chatkcha.

Soon the PCs will stumble across the camp itself. Read them the following, adjusting it according to whether it is being viewed in full daylight or by the light of the moons.

*The desert ahead is flat and featureless, save for a tangled thicket of bramble-like thorn bushes ahead. Suddenly, a flash of white above the thicket catches your eye. Squinting, you see it is a piece of cloth, attached to a long, thin pole of wood. It appears to be a flag or banner of some kind.*

*Looking carefully, you can see that the thicket of thorny bushes has a ring shape; an area at the center is clear of brambles. Inside, you see the dark, square shape of a tent. Something seems to be moving around in there. But is it just the wind, blowing the tent flaps? There is no way to tell without moving closer.*

As the PCs advance, they will find that the sandy ground between their position and the thicket is crisscrossed with footprints—the insectoid prints of thri-kreen, and various-sized sandal and boot prints. From the shards of broken obsidian, tattered bits of cloth, and broken arrows that litter the site, it is clear a battle has taken place here recently. Completing the evidence is a grave. If the PCs investigate it, read the following:

*About 50 feet from the thicket of thorns is a low mound of piled stones. On closer inspection, you can see that the stones were little protection for the human body they were intended to cover. One side of the*



mound has been clawed away, and the corpse has been partially eaten by scavenging animals.

The body is perhaps one day old. It is a human male, wrapped in a plain white cloak. A beautiful pottery bowl, fired with a golden glaze, has been placed upside down over the man's face. But enough of the face is visible to tell that he had square-cut hair and a neatly curled beard. The man wears sandals and a striped, knee-length linen shirt, torn and caked with dried blood.

The burial is that of one of three Urikites who were sent out by King Hamanu to beef up the Urikite NPC party. This man, a templar charged by Hamanu with claiming new territory in the king's name, died when a band of thri-kreen attacked the Urikites one day ago. He was buried here by his companions (who first stripped everything of value from him).

The PCs should be able to tell the man was a Urikite by his clothing and hairstyle or by the Urikite pottery in the grave. They can identify the man as a templar by his cloak. They may even be able to tell that he was killed by thri-kreen, by the nature of his wounds. The bowl has been deliberately cracked (a custom of certain Urikite classes) and is useless.

When the PCs are within 50 feet of the clump of brambles, read the following:

*You are close enough to the brambles now to make out details of what lies inside them. A narrow passage has been cut through the ring of thorns. In the clear spot at the center of the tangled, thorny mass stands a black tent. There are several large rents in its side, and one corner has nearly collapsed. A thin wisp of smoke rises from a firepit in front of the tent. Broken weapons, bits of ruined gear, torn waterskins, and rags are piled in an untidy heap to one side. A dead erdlu, partially butchered, hangs from the flagpole.*

*This is obviously a camp, yet no people can be seen. You look up at the banner that flies over the camp and suddenly recognize it: the face of King Hamanu, superimposed upon a field of red flames. This was a Urikite camp! Then, inside the tent, something moves. . . .*

The thorn "fence" was created two days ago by the Urikite NPCs from a natural thicket of brambles. The perfect circle in the middle was created by a simple, first-level defiler spell, which turned the center of the thorny bush to ash. A "shadow" of ash, blown by the wind, lies to the east of the brambles.

(If the PCs have already spoken to the thri-kreen of the *Crazed Thri-kreen* encounter, they may think this is the "Circle". Any thri-kreen present will quickly let the PCs know that this is incorrect.)

A path, three feet wide, has been cut to the center of the brambles. Sharpened stakes, made from pieces of broken spear, have been set point-up.

Trying to push or hack through the thorny brambles elsewhere will result in 1d4 points of damage for every 5 feet of bush. (Rate of progress is 5 feet per round.) The thorns are 4 inches long, tough as iron, and hollow—they would make excellent darts, or spikes for a mace.

To beef up this natural fortification, the Urikites added eight pits, each about 6 feet deep, along the thinnest stretch of brambles. (Three are open now.) The bottom of each pit is lined with thorns, snapped off the brambles and placed point-up in the floor of the pit. The pits were intended to slow the thri-kreen down; three served this purpose during the battle. Anyone falling into one of the five intact pit traps will suffer 1d4 damage. Two blackened circles lie to the north and northwest of the camp. These are the result of a *wand of fire* being used by the Urikites against the thri-kreen. (If PCs have not already seen the wand in action, this is a clue to the type of firepower the Urikites are packing.) The fireballs have weakened the brambles where they overlap; the thicket can be hacked through at twice normal speed (causing half damage).

Hiding inside the tent is an elf herdsman with four erdlu. He is doing his best to keep them hidden, but after the PCs observe the camp for a few moments, an erdlu gives a loud squawk and wanders out of the tent. At first it is jerked back by the thong that encircles its neck, but the weight of the bird proves too much for the elf, and he is dragged from the tent.



## Pack Frenzy

**Elven Herdsman (2):** F2; Int Very; AL LN; AC 8 (Dexterity); MV 12; HD 2; hp 5 (wounded; normally 13); THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6-1 (obsidian short sword); SZ M; ML average (9); XP 30; Treasure -amulet of proof against detection and location.

**Erdlu (4):** Int Animal (1); AL N; AC 7; MV 18; HD 3; hp 15 (-4); THAC0 17; #AT 2; Dmg 1d6/1d4; SZ M (7' tall); ML average (10); XP 65.

If the PCs attack the elf (a herdsman named Jala), they will gain little of value. He has hidden his water containers and valuables in various caches in the ground inside the ring of thorns. Without some means of knowing where the items are hidden, it will take 1d4 + 1 turns of digging to uncover his six one-gallon waterskins (full), 1d4 small gems, and a one-ounce nugget of silver. In his camp, Jala also has a leather bucket, five candies, one pint of oil, a small iron cooking pot, two worn copper arm bands, a 60-foot length of giant-hair rope, three iron-headed arrows, and two glazed Urrikite eating bowls.

If thri-kreen are with the PCs, Jala will refuse to let any of the mantis warriors enter inside the ring of thorns. He will fight fanatically (Morale 18) against any that approach, screaming, "This is for Nolatta and the children!" as he swings his sword. (This attack has a 25% chance of triggering a frenzy in the thri-kreen; see *Crazed Thri-Kreen* for details.)

Jala is a tall, lanky elf who wears his hair shaved on one side, long on the other. (The shaved side now is covered in stubble.) He is dressed in dirty, tattered clothing, and several large slashes, only partially healed, can be seen on his body. A Urrikite scarf is wrapped around his waist as a sash. From it hangs a metal dagger with a broken point. Bright red strips of cloth are wrapped around each ankle. (The scarf on his right ankle has a slight bulge, not noticeable except to close observation. It covers a crystal amulet in the shape of a hollow skull. This is the *amulet of proof against detection and location*, lost in the thri-kreen attack by one of the Urrikites.)

Jala arrived at this camp a few hours ago. He had five erdlus at the time; one fell into one of the pits and

suffered a broken leg, so Jala killed it and plans to eat it. He found the camp pretty much as it is now, and moved the trash (broken weapons, torn cloth, etc.) into a messy pile after carefully picking through everything and salvaging what he could. He speaks only an elvish dialect, and has never been further east than the Forest Ridge. He has no idea who the Urrikites, or the PCs, are.

Three days ago, Jala, his wife and three children, were attacked by a pack of frenzied thri-kreen. Only Jala survived, and badly injured at that. Out of a herd of 23 erdlus that were scattered during the attack, he managed to recover five.

Since he was a youngster, Jala has known of the thri-kreen's taste for elvish flesh, but in the past was always able to keep his family safe by burning ranike sap, which he obtained through trade with the half-ings of the Forest Ridge. He now realizes that something is driving the thri-kreen into such a killing frenzy that even the aromatic smoke of ranike won't keep them at bay. Even so, he keeps six balls of hardened sap beside the fire, ready for use. Each will burn for 1d4 + 2 hours, producing smoke that normally will keep thri-kreen at a 60-foot distance.

Until Jala regains his strength, he plans to rest inside this thorn-fenced camp. Then he will press on to the east; he has heard that elven tribes whose members number in the dozens (an astonishing number!) lie beyond the Ringing Mountains. He wants to join them.

"The Hinterlands once were home, but they have beaten me. Even my whispering voice is gone." (The "whispering voice" is Jala's wild talent psionic ability, Danger Sense. It disappeared "some time ago.")

If the PCs are friendly toward Jala, he will attempt to trade with them—especially if they show any interest in the former owners of the camp. He knows nothing of the Urrikites or of the attack, save what he has been able to piece together from the clues left behind. He will offer to trade the PCs "an item I found here that may be of interest."

Jala is adept at bargaining. He is eager to receive healing, food, equipment, and letters of introduction to elven tribes from any elven PCs. In return, he will give directions to the nearest source of water, one day





due north. He also offers a bone tube with rolled papers inside. This item has been buried outside the ring of thorns, at the spot marked "X" on the map.

The tube is the letter case carried by the three replacements who joined the Urikite NPCs. At the DM's discretion, it can also contain 1/2d4 scrolls. The letter, written on papyrus in gold ink reads:

*I Hamanu, king of the world, king of the mountains and the plains, king of Urik, for whom all the howling winds and the burning sun have decreed a destiny of heroism, and for whom the spirits of earth and water have made bountiful the city of Athas, placing it in my trust forevermore, do declare this templar Kashtor to be my lawful servant. And insomuch as I wish to extend my rule beyond my current domain, that land between the Ringing Mountains and the vast Sea of Silt, out into a hithertofore unexplored region known as the Hinterlands, I do bestow upon this my representative the right and duty to claim such new land as will benefit my kingdom. Give to him every assistance and consideration. I bestow upon him the right to make such Alliances with the Creatures of the region known as the Hinterlands as he should see fit.*

*Greetings to you all. Insomuch as it has come to my attention that great Treasures stand to be gained in these my new lands, I do order you, my minions, to return to me, intact and in fine working order, any Devices, Magics, or Artifacts you should find while em barking upon your explorations. This then is my most solemn command. May the Dragon devour you, and may the wrath of the mighty Hamanu fall heavily upon you, should you fail.*

Jala is determined to leave the Hinterlands and the haunting memories of his family behind him. He will only agree to throw in his lot with the PCs if no thri-kreen are with the party, and if the PCs have treated him well, fairly, and have restored him to full health. Even if these conditions have been met, Jala will only become a follower if at least one of the PCs rolls a successful Charisma check on percentage dice. Otherwise, Jala will wait here until he is well, then strike out on his own for the Forest Ridge.

## The Order Closes In

(See Map Book pg. 24)

This encounter should heighten the PCs' sense of urgency to complete their quest by demonstrating that the Order is still hot on their trail; and provide hints to the thri-kreen's awe and fascination with Korgunard's transformation into an avangion. (The thri-kreen refer to Korgunard as "the Great One.")

The "hook" is a driving sandstorm that forces the PCs to take shelter amid the dunes where they find a mysterious carved head. Before getting a chance to examine it carefully, they find themselves in a face-to-face confrontation with a psionist of the Order who has been following them.

This encounter should take place at least one day after the PCs begin traveling through the Hinterlands. The encounter should be foreshadowed at least twice, when the PC s notice a triangular-shaped object swooping through the sky behind them. This is, in fact, a cloud ray, ridden by Shammu, a psionist of the Order who is using her riding proficiencies and the psionic ability Beast Mastery (from the *Dragon Kings* sourcebook) to ride the huge creature. Especially observant characters might see crossed lines on the cloud ray's belly; this is the harness with which Shammu straps herself onto the beast. Instead of attacking as expected, the cloud ray stays well out of spell range, swooping lazily back and forth a few times high overhead, and then vanishes toward the northwest.

### Shammu

Half-Elf Female Psionist  
21st Level  
Lawful Neutral  
Str 10    Int 17  
Dex 15    Wis 18  
Con 16    Cha 11

hp: 72  
AC: 5 (hide breastplate, ring)  
#AT: 1 (light crossbow)  
THAC0: 10





## Pack Frenzy

**Dmg:** 1d4+1 (light crossbow and +1 quarrels) or 1d6 + 2 (+2 metal-headed mace).

**Equipment:** Hide breastplate, light crossbow and 20 quarrels +1, metal-headed mace +2, *ring of coolness* (see *New Magic Items*, Pg. 96), *ring of protection* +2, *net of entrapment*, *potion fruit of healing* (nectarine), two *potion fruits of polymorph self* (2 blueberries), *eyes of the eagle*.

**Psionic Summary:** PSPs 289;

**Disciplines:** Telepathy, Psychometabolism;

**Sciences:** Animal Affinity, Domination, Ejection, Fate Link, Mass Domination, Mindlink, Mindwipe, Probe, Psionic Blast, Superior Invisibility;

**Devotions:** Acceptance, Beast Mastery, Biofeedback, Catfall, Conceal Thoughts, Contact, Daydream, Ego Whip, ESP, False Sensory Input, Id Insulation, Identity Penetration, Invisibility, Life Detection, Mind Blank, Mind Bar, Mind Thrust, Psychic Crush, Psychic Impersonation, Send Thoughts, Sight Link, Truth Ear;

**Defense Modes:** M-, TS, MB, TW, IF.

A wiry woman with bronze skin and thousands of brown freckles, Shammu has the narrow face and infra-vision of an elf, but the wider shoulders and build of a human. She wears her curly hair short, unashamed of her pointy "elven" ears. Abandoned as a toddler by her human mother, Shammu was to have been bait for a trap set by hunters gathering exotic creatures for the gladiatorial games. When a kluzd approached the trap, Shammu's wild psionic talent Acceptance kicked in and the beast snuggled up to her and became her "friend." Seeing her potential, the hunters turned her over to the masters of the gladiatorial games, who found her an invaluable animal trainer.

Over the years, Shammu became increasingly despondent after seeing her "pets" killed in gladiatorial combat. Ill-treated by the pit crews who mocked her mixed-race origins, she had little loyalty to the games. When she reached her teens, she turned instead to the Unseen Way, developing her talents in the psionic arts. Now a 21st-level psionicist, she regards the Order as the family she never had. She is utterly loyal to it and will do anything to protect the Order and uphold its laws.

Despite her acceptance, Shammu still feels the need to wander alone in the wilderness. For this reason, she was chosen by the Order to shadow the player characters and report back on their progress.

**Cloud Ray:** AL N; AC 5; MV Fl 24; HD 15 + 7; hp 82; THAC0 5; #AT 1 tail or 1 bite and psionic; Dmg 5d10 (tail) or 10d10 (bite); SA swallow whole; SD psionics; SZ G (100'); ML very (14); XP 22,000; Level 3; Psionic Summary: PSPs 100; Disciplines: psychokinesis, psychoportation; Sciences: telekinesis; Devotions: control winds (special ability, no cost), dream travel, inertial barrier (special ability, no cost), levitation (special ability, no cost); Defense Modes: M-, MB, TS; Score 10.

Soon after the PCs sight the cloud ray a third time, a driving sandstorm blows up from the northwest. It builds quickly from whatever the wind conditions were that day, and then unexpectedly changes direction, blowing from the southwest. At the same moment, it slacks off (although still a driving sandstorm). With the change in wind direction, PCs must make a Dexterity check or fall over, when they are suddenly no longer leaning "into" the wind.

The northwesterly wind was natural, but the direction and velocity changes are not; the cloud ray used its psionic ability, Weather Control, to change wind direction and speed. However, it was not enough. Shammu was forced to land her mount.

Once the cloud ray lands and settles in, its psionic control ends and the wind shifts back around to the northwest and regains its original velocity. If the PCs are not yet encamped, another Dexterity check is required, with the same results as the first. The PCs decide to take shelter from the sandstorm. The most sensible place is in the lee of one of the large dunes, abundant in this part of the sandy wastes. Each of the dunes is about 80 feet thick and 250 feet from end to end, rising about 50 feet high. The concave side is steep, and provides an excellent windbreak.

Little do the PCs realize that Shammu is encamped behind the next dune to the southwest. Likewise, Shammu has no idea the PCs are nearby. When she



landed a short time ago, she circled the area once and saw no sign of life. She had time only to investigate the sinkhole, draw some water from it, and notice the wild critics living inside it.

Once the PCs stop to wait out the storm, they start the encounter from the spot marked "X" on the map. Just 2d6 rounds after settling in, they see something strange. Read the following:

*You finally find shelter from the stinging sand in the lee of a large sand dune. Sand streams off its crest, 50 feet overhead, and the wind howls so loudly that you must shout in your companions' ears to be heard. The sand has blotted out almost all of the light from the sky; an eerie darkness has descended. You can see no more than a few paces in the murk.*

*Suddenly, from out of the darkness to the southwest, there is a swirl of lights. Bright purple rays beam out in a twisting, swirling pattern. Then, as suddenly as the weird effect started, it stops.*

The PCs have two options. They can explore immediately, or wait-out the sandstorm.

- **Explore immediately:** If the PCs decide to explore during the driving sandstorm, maximum visibility is no more than 30 feet (10 feet in twilight; 3 feet on a moonlit night; 1½ feet on a moonless night). They are likely to stumble across the dais first, triggering another light show, then find the giant stone head that juts out of the dune. An observant PC may see a lone wild critic scurrying away; it was this creature that triggered the first weird light effect.

If the explorers continue to their right, there is a good chance one of them will bump into one of the columns (one point damage) or stumble into the sink hole (Dexterity check or fall in, taking 2d6 damage from the 20-foot drop). In the bottom of the sinkhole is 1-foot of water.

No matter how hard someone at the bottom of the sinkhole shouts, the wind will muffle all calls for help. And 1d4 rounds after falling in, the PC will be found by 1d6 wild critics that immediately attack the "prey" that has fallen into their den.

**Wild Critics (6):** Int Semi (2); AL N; AC 5; MV 12; HD 1+1; hp 6 each; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1; SD psionics; SZ T (17"); ML unsteady (3); XP 35 each; Level 2; Psionic Summary: PSPss 25; Disciplines: clairesentience; Sciences: precognition; Devotions: danger sense, poison sense, spirit sense; Defense Modes: M-; Score 10.

If the PCs circle around to where Shammu is encamped, they will have a good chance (75%) of surprising her while she is still huddled in her tent, deep in meditation, using her rejuvenation proficiency to regain her psionic strength.

Her cloud ray, however, is more likely to surprise the PCs than to be surprised itself. It will immediately attack any PCs who come close enough for it to notice the fresh "food" that has wandered into Shammu's camp. And 1d4 rounds after it attacks, Shammu will emerge from her meditative trance and come running out to investigate.

- **Wait-out sandstorm:** If the PCs wait the 1d4 hours it takes for the driving sandstorm to die down to blowing sand, visibility increases by a factor of 10. They will easily see all of the area at once. But there will only be a 25% chance of surprising Shammu in her tent. She is more likely to be harnessing up the cloud ray, preparing to leave.

If the PCs are fairly quiet, they will have a minute or two to explore the dais, stone head, sinkhole, and columns before Shammu rises from behind the dune on her cloud ray. If the PCs make even a moderate amount of noise (*i.e.* calling to one another, hammering on the stone head, etc.) Shammu will immediately mount her cloud ray and attack within 1d4 rounds.

The sinkhole will prove to be a source of cool clear water—the sweetest the PCs have ever tasted. It once was a well. It now is the home of six wild critics; 1d6 will be in it at any given time.

The stone head is a centuries old carving of a thri-kreen head, perhaps 50 feet across. If the thri-kreen from the *Crazed Thri-Kreen* encounter are with the party, they will click furiously to each other for a moment or two, then suddenly drop their heads close to the ground, creep forward, and touch their antennae



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lightly to the statue in an obvious act of reverence.

All thri-kreen PCs, unless they were hatched far from the Hinterlands, will act in the same manner. They will know that this is a holy image of "the Great O" and that it should be treated with respect, but will have no knowledge of how it works or who carved it. They will only be able to tell their fellow PCs that it is "very old" and "very holy."

The head is carved from a white stone unlike any of the rock found in this area. It must have been hauled a great distance to this spot. The stone head is only partially exposed; the sand dune still covers the rear half. Digging for  $1d4 + 1$  turns will reveal that the head is a statue in the round with nothing attached to it and only a line of pillars behind it. But there is one surprise: the rear of the head is carved into a human face. The image is that of a bald man, with golden eyes. The face looks uncannily like Korgunard.

The multifaceted eyes on the front of the sculpture are skillfully constructed from transparent slabs of purple glass. Every facet is intact, but all have been dimmed by the scouring effects of blowing sand. It is

possible to tell that there is a hollow space behind each eye, but nothing more.

The dais is a magical trigger for the stone head. A round the base of the dias appears an unusual-looking series of slash marks. This is the written version of a lost thri-kreen dialect, which thri-kreen PCs can puzzle out, if they make an Intelligence check. It reads: "When the age of the Great One is come, make ye a joyous light."

Stepping on the dais, even lightly, activates the eyes, causing them to shoot forth bright beams of purple light that extend for hundreds of feet. The lights shift around like searchlights sweeping the sky. The beams of light are harmless, caused by a modified *light* spell. They were intended as signals.

There are 900 facets on each eye, each one producing a beam of light. Breaking even one pane of glass causes the eye to explode into hundreds of shards that will do  $3d6$  damage to anyone standing within 60 feet of the head. (The explosion has a 15% chance of causing the second eye to explode). An explosion ruins the offerings inside that eye. A broken eye will not





produce any more beams of light, even though 3d10 of the 4 X 4 inch, curved panes of purple glass that made up the facets will still be intact. These might be sold to merchants as curiosity pieces. Each weighs half a pound.

Activating the beams of light or causing one of the eyes to explode will alert Shammu to the PCs' presence; she will mount her cloud ray and attack in 1d4 rounds. The correct way to open either of the eyes is to tug back on one of the antennae on the top of the statue's head. The appropriate eye will then open with a pop. Inside can be found offerings for "the Great One who is to come."

**Right eye:** Potion fruits, kept fresh by a *permanency* spell: *potion fruit of extra healing* (orange); *potion fruit of fire resistance* (red apple); *potion fruit of flying* (nectarine); *potion fruit of longevity* (pomegranate); *potion fruit of diminution* (three cherries, each one reduces person to half size); *potion fruit of invulnerability* (lime).

**Left eye:** *ring of wizardry* (gold band, with raised silver wings); *ever-full bag of seeds* (see *New Magic Items*, Pg. 96).

Upon encountering the PCs, Shammu will attack, attempting to capture as many as she can in her net of entrapment. She uses psionics and attacks by her cloud ray to kill the rest. If the PCs put up a stiff fight and appear to be getting the best of her, she will attempt to flee on her cloud ray to the Dragon Crown Mountains. If only able to travel a short distance, she will use the psionic ability *Send Thoughts* to warn her masters about the PCs. At the DM's discretion, Shammu may continue to shadow the PCs and report back to the Order.

If captured, Shammu will remain loyal to the Order, no matter what threats are used. She would rather die than reveal its secrets. She will psionically resist any efforts to probe her mind for information. But should the PCs find a way to wrest information from Shammu, they will learn that she reports to a mediator named Arvego. She will have a clear mental image of Arvego (encountered by the PCs in previous ad-

ventures), and some knowledge of his abilities. She knows that Arvego is one of the chief lieutenants of one of the six "Cerebral Masters" of the Order, who specialize in the Telepathic discipline. She has an idea that he is directly involved in activating the psionic-dampening artifact, but has no solid information.

Shammu also knows about Bokum, the dwarven mediator psionist who is operating somewhere in the Hinterlands. She has a clear mental picture of him, knows he is working with the thri-kreen, and has been told his work is not to be interfered with. Otherwise, the only other thing that the PCs will learn is that Shammu is carrying one of the crystals, given by the Order, to protect its members against the effects of the psionics-dampening device.

## The Tohr-kreen's Camp

(See Map Book pg. 25)

One of the three encounters that precede this section (*Crazed Thri-kreen*) will have provided the PCs with directions and/or a guide to get them to a spot known by the thri-kreen as "the Circle." (See Map Book pg. 24) It is located in the heart of the scrub plains, about 10 miles from the foothills of the Dragon Crown Mountains. Regardless of the direction the PCs travel that day, the DM should arrange to have the PCs approach the Circle from the south.

If the PCs are accompanied by thri-kreen, and are helping to carry the bodies of thri-kreen killed in previous encounters, they will be allowed to pass to the edge of the Circle (but not into it). If the PCs ended the *Crazed Thri-Kreen* encounter on neutral or friendly terms with Klox-ick the thri-kreen lieutenant, but did not travel here with the thri-kreen scouts (or collapsed on the desert while attempting to carry bodies), Klox-ick will have arrived here ahead of them. She will have warned the thri-kreen gathered near the Circle that the PCs are coming, but will be angry if the PCs left any bodies behind. The PCs will only be attacked if they act in a threatening manner. Unfortunately, due to the limited Intelligence of the thri-kreen, even a friendly act might now be interpreted as a threat.



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If the PCs are approaching the Circle without any warning (if Klox-ick did not survive to report back to the tohr-kreen psionist), they will be challenged by 2d10 thri-kreen fighters of various levels as soon as they approach within one mile of the Circle. They will be killed or captured, unless they say they have come to see Chax-chik. Then they will be escorted to the tohr-kreen psionist's camp at "A" on the map.

When the PCs are within one mile of the Circle, read the following:

*Walking across the scrub lands you pass between two buttes that rise up perhaps 100 feet on either side. Ahead you see a line of pillars, spaced about 50 feet apart, flanking what remains of a flagstone road. In places, the road has retained its original width of about 250 feet, but most of the road has crumbled away or been buried by blowing earth and sand.*

*Moving closer, you can see that the pillars are carved from white stone, and are perhaps 60 feet tall and fluted. The top of each has been carved as a head. Every other pillar ends in a thri-kreen head, while the others are topped by the carved heads of*

*male and female humans. Each appears to be a portrait, since no two are alike. Some heads are weathered beyond recognition, others well-defined. A few pillars have fallen and shattered into rubble.*

*To the left of the road is a crevasse 50 feet deep, which leads into a narrow cave in the butte beside you. You see a few fields of thorny cacti and another butte about 50 feet high. To the right are large and small buttes, 75 feet and 30 feet high, and more fields of cacti. A sand dune has formed against the butte to your immediate right.*

*At the end of the road, about a mile ahead of you, a huge crater forms a perfectly circular depression in the plain. Like the road, it is surrounded by pillars, which demarcate a complete circle around its rim. The floor of the crater slopes gradually, and is dotted with large white objects.*

*A white, multi-domed building sits at the end of the road, perched on the crater's rim. Between the spot where you stand and the pillar-ringed depression, hundreds of thri-kreen move restlessly back and forth. Several are carrying the bodies of dead thri-kreen toward the crater. Here and there, one has slipped into*





*a frenzy and hacks out its rage at a cactus, or tears great furrows in the sand with its claws. Others are talking in tight, tense groups. Weapons are everywhere; some in orderly stacks, others scattered and broken. Several young thri-kreen scamper around, apparently untended. The little ones range in height from 2 to 4 feet. Two are locked in fierce combat; as you watch, one kills the other—and then itself.*

The crevasse to the west of the flagstone road leads into a narrow fissure. From inside this cave issues a trickle of clear water.

The crater has rarely been seen by any but thri-kreen. Those who do see it seldom live to tell of it, for the thri-kreen jealously guard this holy place.

The crater is approximately two miles in diameter, perfectly round, and is about 500 feet deep at its lowest point. If the dirt and sand that have drifted into it over the centuries were scraped away, its floor would be as smooth as the inside of a bowl.

The thri-kreen have no knowledge of how the crater was formed, or by whom. They know only that it is very ancient. For centuries, they have been placing their dead inside it. The bodies are carefully lined up, packmate beside packmate, with the heads in the direction of the setting sun. Here, the sandy, yellow exoskeletons of the mantis warriors bleach white under the hot desert sun.

Every thri-kreen, even those hatched outside the Hinterlands, has heard of "the Circle," the final resting place for all mantis warriors. However, some thri-kreen (including thri-kreen PCs) do not realize it is an actual location on Athas. These few thought "the Circle" was just another word for "heaven."

Anyone who has ever encountered thri-kreen knows that the mantis warriors always carry away their dead and injured. But few realize that the dead are, whenever possible, carried here to the Circle, because the thri-kreen believe that those placed in the Circle will one day be born anew.

This belief springs from the fact that the thri-kreen also use the Circle as a place to lay their eggs. A thri-kreen will place her eggs inside one of the exoskeletons that cover the floor of the circle. Here, the young will

have shade when they hatch, and here, it is believed, the young will absorb one of the souls of the dead. (A thri-kreen hatched outside the Circle is thought to have an infantile, unformed soul).

Every 100 feet of travel through the crater will result in an encounter with 1d10 thri-kreen larvae.

**Thri-kreen Larvae:** AL CN; AC 5; MV 9; HD 1 + 3; hp 7 each; THAC0 19; #AT 5 (claw and bite); Dmg 1/2d4 (-4) (claw) plus 1/2d4 (bite); SD immune to charm person/mammal, hold person; SZ T (1'-2½' long); ML fanatic (17-18), XP 65 each

A thri-kreen's eggs are about 6 inches in diameter, and are dun in color. A thri-kreen hatched in the Circle spends the first year of its life there, only scurrying out of the Circle to quench its thirst at the spring in the bottom of the crevasse or to hunt the wild z'tal who come to the crevasse to drink. Growing rapidly, the thri-kreen larvae molt twice in their first year of life, growing a new exoskeleton each molt.

During this time, the young thri-kreen will occasionally come into contact with adults coming to leave their dead or to lay eggs. Toward the end of the first year (if they are not eaten by the adults first), the young thri-kreen will be accepted by the adults, and begin to wander and hunt with them.

While a thri-kreen normally has to fight to establish its place in the dominance order, those thri-kreen deemed reincarnations of past members of a pack are given special status. To test if young thri-kreen are indeed reincarnations of dead pack members, three items will be placed in front of the youth. If the item that once belonged to the dead person is picked in three separate tests, a reincarnation is declared.

The thri-kreen "encamped" here at the Circle are members of the army being built up by the tohr-kreen psionicist Chax-chik. She has come to this spot to recruit, due to the large numbers of thri-kreen being killed in recent battles against the inhabitants of the Forest Ridge. Gradually, Chax-chik has built up converts to her cause. In a day or two she plans to assault the Order's stronghold.

Here in the lands adjacent the Circle, the chance of



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the thri-kreen going into frenzy is reduced to 15%. If frenzy occurs, it should only affect a small percentage of Chax-chik's troops, so that enough thri-kreen are left for the final battle scene.

### Chax-chik

Tohr-kreen Female Psionicist

26th Level

Chaotic Neutral

Str 16 Int 15

Dex 18 Wis 19

Con 17 Cha 16



hp: 48

AC: 3 (can range to -1 if using +4 defender sword)

#AT: 5 (4 claw, 1 bite) or 3 (2 weapon, 1 bite)

THAC0: 9

**Dmg:** 1d6 (-4) (claw) plus 1d6 + 1 + poison (bite) or 1d8 +4 (+2 kyorkcha) or 1d10 + 1 (gythka plus Strength bonus) or 1d10 + 1-5/3d6 + 1-5 (defender two-handed sword +4, plus Strength bonus).

**Psionic Summary:** PSPs 380

**Disciplines:** Telepathy, Psychometabolism, Metapsionics, Clairsentience

**Sciences:** Appraise, Aura Sight, Complete Healing, Domination, Ejection, Empower, Energy Containment, Fate Link, Life Draining, Mass Domination, Metamorphosis, Mindlink, Mindwipe, Object Reading, Precognition, Probe, Psionic Blast, Psychic Clone, Psychic Surgery, Sensitivity to Psychic Impressions, Superior Invisibility, Switch Personality

**Devotions:** Absorb Disease, Adrenalin Control, Attraction, Aversion, Awe, Biofeedback, Body Control, Cannibalize, Cell Adjustment, Combat Mind, Conceal Thoughts, Contact, Danger Sense, Displacement, Ego Whip, Empathy, Enhanced Strength, ESP, Gird, Heightened Senses, Hive Mind, Identity Penetration, Invisibility, Know Direction, Know Location, Life Detection, Martial Trance, Mind Bar, Mind Thrust, Post-Hypnotic Suggestion, Prolong, Psionic Inflation, Psychic Crush, Psychic Messenger, Radial Navigation, Repugnance, Retrospection, Send Thoughts, Sight Link, Spirit Sense, Stasis Field, Telepathic Projection, Truth Ear

**Defense Modes:** M-, TS, MB, TW, IF.

**Equipment:** Two chatkchas, gythka, +2 kyorkcha (-3), shield, metal, two-handed defender sword +4, wand of metal and mineral detection, chime of opening, eight potion fruits (in residence). Jump 70' forward or 30' up, dodge missiles on a roll of 11 or better (d20), paralyzing bite (victim must save vs. paralyzation at -4 or be paralyzed 2d6 rounds; if save unsuccessful must save vs. poison or take 20 pts damage).

Chax-chik resembles one of her smaller thri-kreen cousins. She looks like a praying mantis, and has a chitinous, sandy yellow exoskeleton. She is larger than a thri-kreen, nearly 12 feet tall, and more than 14 feet long. She weighs more than 450 pounds. To humanoids, her faceted, purple-black eyes seem inscrutable, but an insectoid will see the wisdom and worry they hold.

Chax-chik spent many years wandering alone through the desert, gathering the wisdom of many races. Her collection of writings would impress even the scholar-slaves of Nibenay. Learning from many different teachers, she honed her psionic abilities. One of these was a thri-kreen. In learning from him, Chax-chik came to realize that the more aggressive, "less civilized" thri-kreen were worthy friends.

Until recently, Chax-chik was on the verge of being accepted into the upper levels of the Order as an aide to Pharistes, one of the cerebral masters. Then came the coup, in which a handful of the Order's psionists took control and turned on the Psionatrix, a powerful artifact that will eventually blanket all of Athas in psionic interference.

Soon after the Psionatrix was activated, the thri-kreen of the Hinterlands began to act strangely. Instead of hunting prey, the packs began to turn on the intelligent creatures of the Forest Ridge. At the same time, they began killing each other—pack against pack, packmate against packmate. Soon, the frenzy will sweep up the more resistant tohr-kreen.

Before the artifact was switched on, Chax-chik was given a crystal and told it would allow her to maintain her psionics. Testing it, Chax-chik found that, while humanoid psionists did indeed now need a crystal to perform psionics, her own psionic abilities were unaf-





fectured by the artifact. Without the crystal, however, she felt a buzzing in her mind that made her irritable and quick to lash out at others.

Chax-chik realized that the unusual behavior of the thri-kreen was directly attributable to the effects of the Psionatrix. She demanded crystals be made for each thri-kreen, but this was met with laughter and derision by the upper levels of the Order. She stole two crystals and was forced to flee for her life.

Chax-chik thought she would have time to study the crystals and learn how they were manufactured, but the Order has given her no time. Its emissaries have been close behind her every step of the way, merciless in their efforts to eliminate this "rogue" and put a stop to her "psionic heresy." Now, Chax-chik has turned to other tactics. Her plan is to assemble the thri-kreen packs into a huge horde that can storm the Order's stronghold and take the crystals that can end the madness.

Using her gem-cutting proficiency, Chax-chik split two of the crystals she had with her, cutting each into six shards. Keeping the intact crystal herself, she distributed the shards to 12 trusted lieutenants, each a pack leader. They are now immune to frenzy, but they lead very unstable packs of thri-kreen who could slip into frenzy at any time.

**Thri-kreen Lieutenants (12):** F8; AL N; AC 5; MV 18; HD 8; hp 57 (-12); THAC0 13; #AT 5 (claw and bite) or 2 (gythka and bite); Dmg 1d4 (-4) (claw) or 1d10 (gythka +4 strength), plus 1d4 + 1 (bite); SA paralyzation; SD immune to *charm person/mammal, hold person, dodge missiles*; SZ L (11' long); ML fanatic (17-18), XP 1,395. Each wears a crystal shard that prevents it from being affected by frenzy.

**Thri-kreen, mature adult (40):** AL CN; AC 5; MV 18; HD 6+3; hp 31 (-40); THAC0 13; #AT 5 (claw and bite) or 2 (chatkcha); Dmg 1d4 (-4) (claw) plus 1d4 + 1 (bite) or 1d6 + 2 (-2) (chatkcha); SA paralyzation; SD immune to *charm person/mammal, hold person, dodge missiles*; SZ L (9' long); ML fanatic (17-18), XP 1400.

**Thri-kreen, young adult (80):** AL CN; AC 5; MV 18; HD 4+3; hp 22 (-80); THAC0 15; #AT 5 (claw and bite) or 2 (gythka and bite); Dmg 1d4 (-4) (claw) or 1d10 (gythka +2 strength) plus 1d4 + 1 (bite); SD immune to *charm person/mammal, hold person*; SZ L (8' long); ML fanatic (17-18), XP 270.

**Thri-kreen, young (180):** AL CN; AC 5; MV 18; HD 3+3; hp 16 (-180); THAC0 17; #AT 5 (claw and bite) or 2 (gythka and bite); Dmg 1d4 (-4) (claw) or 1d10 (gythka) plus 1d4 + 1 (bite); SD immune to *charm person/mammal, hold person*; SZ M (7' long); ML fanatic (17-18), XP 175.

**Thri-kreen, child (40):** AL CN; AC 5; MV 9; HD 2+3; hp 12 (-40); THAC0 17; #AT 5 (claw and bite); Dmg 1/2d4 (-4) (claw) plus 1d4 (bite); SD immune to *charm person/mammal, hold person*; SZ S (2½'-5' long); ML fanatic (17-18), XP 120.

The PCs will be taken directly to Chax-chik's residence, a six-domed structure near the rim of the crater. On the way, any PCs who understand the thri-kreen language may overhear the following bits of conversation from the thri-kreen: "Do you hear that buzzing in your head? It's the buzzing that is making us kill each other. It's the Order. Join us, packmates! Join our assault on the Order before we are driven to our deaths! We will crush the humanoids like larvae!"

When the PCs approach the crater, read the following:

*The thri-kreen lead you up the flagstone road that leads to the crater. As you get closer to the rim, you can see that the crater is filled with thousands of skeletons of dead thri-kreen. All have been laid out so that their heads are facing the setting sun. Now and again, you catch a glimpse of tiny thri-kreen, none more than a foot in length, scampering between the skeletons.*

*Just 20 feet from the edge of the huge crater stands a cluster of white domes, apparently made of dried mud. There are six domes, grouped in a circle. Each is about 50 feet in diameter and 70 feet high. They are seamless, without doors or windows.*



## Pack Frenzy

The domes are the temporary home of Chax-chik, the tohr-kreen psionacist. Built in the style of the distant tohr-kreen city from which she hails (located far to the north of the Ringing Mountains), the domes are made of mud bricks, smoothed with a layer of white lime. One way to enter these six rooms is through holes at the centers of three of the domes. (Thri-kreen can easily scramble up the sides using small notches that serve as handholds. Humanoids require a Dexterity check to climb or take up to 7d6 damage in a fall). A pole with cross bars (a ladder) leads from the four-foot-wide hole in the ceiling to the floor.

The rooms can also be entered through three doors that lead into the courtyard at the center of the domes. The domes are grouped so close together that there is no space between them; climbing into the courtyard thus also requires a Dexterity check. The walls are 3 feet thick and require 1d4 +2 turns of heavy pounding (sure to attract the attention of the thri-kreen) before they give way.

**Dome E:** The thri-kreen escorts will roughly push the PCs onto the top of Dome E, telling them that Chax-chik waits inside. When the PCs have climbed into the dome, read the following:

*You climb down a ladder into a round room, approximately 50 feet in diameter. There is one round "door," about 5 feet in diameter and made of some sort of stiffened hide, set 2 feet above floor level. The walls of the room are covered in hexagonal niches, each about 1-foot wide. This "honeycomb" extends from just above floor level up to where the walls start to curve inward to form the dome, at about the 50-foot mark. The room is noticeably cooler than the air outside (or warmer, if at night).*

*There are a variety of items stored in the niches, one item per hole. A quick glance reveals full waterskins, corked bottles, stone heads that have been salvaged from broken pillars, globes of kank honey, bowls filled with nuts and tubers, plates of dried meat, and a censer filled with smoking incense that is filling the room with a sweet smell.*

The room is a reception area, and characters are free to eat and drink as they please. The corked bottles contain klick-win, a sickly-sweet wine made from fermented flowers (a tohr-kreen speciality). The smoked meat is lizard, although thri-kreen may tease PCs by telling them it is dried elf flesh.

In 1d4 rounds, a thri-kreen lieutenant will enter through the door leading to the next dome. It speaks common and will brusquely tell the PCs that Chax-chik "doesn't like to be kept waiting." Then it demands that they follow it to Dome A.

**Dome F:** On the way, PCs will pass through Dome F. This room is lit by a cluster of 100 glowing globes attached to the ceiling. Each is a wax globe (stolen from a nearby wezer burrow) that contains water; a few have been punctured with tiny holes and are dripping glowing water. They have been turned into a source of illumination through a *light* spell by the 1st-level thri-kreen priest whose job it is to tend the plants in this dome.

The room is filled with growing things. A thick carpet of grass covers the floor, and vines grow up the honeycombed walls. Small plants creep out of every niche, filling the air with the scent of flowers. Two thri-kreen (the 1st-level priest and a young thri-kreen) are tending the plants, snipping off dead flowers with tiny silver scissors.

At the center of the room is a half-pillar, obviously one that once stood along the flagstone road or around the lip of the crater. The portrait head on top of it is of a bald man with commanding eyes, it looks uncannily like Korgunard.

**Dome A:** From the next room, the PCs will hear the murmur of human voices. When the thri-kreen leading them opens the door, read the following:

*The hide door opens and you look into another dome, this one illuminated by the light that streams through a round opening in the ceiling. Sitting near the center of the room is a larger version of a thri-kreen, its sandy-colored body painted in brilliant colors. A large crystal hangs about its neck on a thong.*



You realize this must be the tohr-kreen psionist Chax-chik. Flanking it are four of the mantis warriors, armed with gythkas, and with chatkchas stuffed into pouches at their waists. Smaller crystals, shards really, hang on thongs around the necks of each. Lying on the floor at their feet is a badly wounded thri-kreen, fluids seeping from the gashes that cover its body. As you enter the room, one of the thri-kreen jabs it harshly with a gythka.

But it is not the tohr-kreen, nor the thri-kreen bodyguards, nor even the victim on the floor that holds your attention. Instead, your gaze is drawn to a group of humanoids standing a few feet behind Chax-chik. With a sinking feeling, you recognize the Urikites who first betrayed you to the giants and then tried to steal the treasure of Haakar.

At the same moment, the Urikites recognize your party. There is a moment of stunned silence, and then one of them steps forward. "These are the ones you were hoping would aid you in your war?" the Urikite asks scornfully. "They will only betray you to the Order. Kill them now, before they sink a dagger in your back!"

The entire group of Urikite NPCs will be present; Thorvadarak, Ulreg, Chtek Ch're, Dokala, and Jerrid, as well as two replacement NPCs: Jikx, a female halfling ranger (and her two rasclinn); and Wardo, a male human templar.

### Wardo Keshan

Human Male Defiler/Templar

12th Level/5th Level

Neutral Evil

Str 14      Int 19

Dex 14      Wis 17

Con 13      Cha 11

hp: 27

AC: 7 (+3 ring protection)

#AT: 1

THAC0: 17

Dmg: 1d4+3/1d3+3 (+3 dagger) or 1d4+1/1d6 + 1 (sling bullets) or 1d3/1d2 (blowgun dart)



**Equipment:** Blowgun and 10 darts, +3 metal dagger, sling and 20 bullets, ring of protection +3, wand of fire, boots of levitation.

**Psionic Summary:** PSPs 25

**Wild Talent:** Post-Hypnotic Suggestion; Mindlink; Contact

**Defiler Spells:** 1) Alarm, Armor, Identify, Sleep; 2) Alter Self, Bind, Invisibility, Knock; 3) Dispel Magic, Haste, Protection from Good 10' Radius, Wizard Lock; 4) Charm Monster, Detect Scrying, Dimension Door, Minor Globe of Invulnerability; 5) Chaos, Cone of Cold, Domination, Passwall; 6) Death Spell.

**Templar Spells:** 1) command, detect magic, detect poison, pass without trace, remove fear; 2) charm person/mammal, enthrall, find traps, hold person.

Wardo Keshan is a tall, thin man with midnight-black skin, piercing eyes, and hair that hangs down in long, thin braids. He dresses in a black, knee-length shirt with long sleeves, loose black trousers, and a white cape (his badge of office as a Urikite templar).

His most striking feature, however, is kept carefully concealed by his clothes. On those extremely rare times when Wardo is caught unawares, and is not fully covered by clothing, the viewer can see fantastic, flowing writing, all in white, that covers the front of his arms, his chest, and the front of his legs. The writing will seem to be upside down, but there is good reason for this; these tattoos are Wardo's spell "book." Short of flaying the skin from his body, no one can ever take it from him.

Of course, any intelligent person who has time to study the tattoos will learn their real nature. Wardo, however, is quick to dispose of anyone who even gets a glimpse.

As a defiler, Wardo focused on those spells that allowed him to manipulate or incapacitate others, to gain entrance to forbidden places, and to punish those who tried to thwart him. In the back of his mind was always the desire to become a templar and serve his own interests while serving Hamanu. And so, having reached a certain level of expertise as a defiler, Wardo became a templar of Urik, forsaking further advancement in the arcane arts. He now studies tem-



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plar spells that accomplish the same ends, and is particularly fond of reversing his remove fear spell.

The sensory effects that accompany Wardo's defiler spells include a tiny puff of dark smoke that rises from the target, and the distant cawing of crows.

Wardo's wild talent for planting post-hypnotic suggestions has helped him to succeed as a templar. He might therefore be expected to have an interest in preventing the Psionatrix from blanketing Athas in psionic interference. But when it comes down to it, Wardo will likely decide that he can accomplish the same end by different means, through defiler and templar magic.

### Jikx

Halfling Female Ranger

11th Level

Chaotic Good

Str 17 Int 16

Dex 15 Wis 14

Con 17 Cha 9



**hp:** 89

**AC:** 6 (+1 studded leather breastplate and one arm guard)

**#AT:** 1

**THACO:** 10 (+1 to hit with sword or wrist razor or sling)

**Dmg:** 1d6 + 4/1d8 + 4 (+3 metal short sword plus strength) or 1d4 + 1 (wrist razor plus strength) or 1d4 + 1/1d6 +1 (sling bullets).

**Equipment:** +1 studded leather breastplate, arm guard, +3 metal short sword, sling and 30 bullets, wrist razor, oil fruit of slipperiness (peach), bag of devouring, dust of disappearance. MS 86% HS 70%.

**Psionic Summary:** PSPs 60

**Wild Talent:** False Sensory Input; Mindlink; Contact.

**Priest Spells:** 1) magical one, elemental bonding; 2) dust devil.

Jikx is a muscular halfling with unkempt, straw-colored hair and an almost feral look in her eye. She wears a breastplate studded with silver, and is seldom

seen without her wrist razor and facial warpaint (a whited-out face with alternating red and black streaks across it).

Jikx has taken as her species enemy the dreaded nightmare beast. Several years ago, one of these creatures wiped out her village. Jikx watched in horror as her twin sister Jankx was disintegrated psionically, then felt the full force of the monster's *ego whip*. The attack called forth Jikx's latent psionic power (*false sensory input*) and the monster "saw" Jikx also "disintegrate." She lived.

Suffering from residual guilt, Jikx swore she would avenge her village. Wandering away from the Forest Ridge, she became a ranger, gradually acquiring skills that would help her track down and kill a nightmare beast. In time, Jikx became one of the halfling mercenaries employed by Urik.

Jikx may travel in a mixed-race group, but as the sole survivor of her village, she insists upon maintaining its halfling customs. She will eat only with her left hand. She always insists that "food" (any opponent she or her companions kill) be divided up according to seniority, regardless of whether anyone else wants to eat it. She also flicks a drop of water over her left shoulder before drinking, sings warbling halfling ballads under the light of a full moon, and steadfastly refuses to bathe.

Upon learning what the Order is up to, Jikx will utterly refuse to have the psionics-dampening artifact destroyed. Instead, she will seek ways to have its power boosted, so that it dampens the psionics of animals, as well. This will finally give her a chance to actually kill a nightmare beast and claim revenge for her sister and her village.

Jikx refuses to believe that she has any psionic abilities whatsoever; the ability that manifested itself during the nightmare beast's attack was something that "just happened."

Jikx's constant traveling companions (followers) are her two rasclinn. She admires them for their seeming immunity to psionics. The two have accepted her as pack leader, and will follow her anywhere.



**Rasclinn:** AL N; AC 2; MV 36; HD 4; hp 18 (-2); THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4; SA rage; SD poison immunity, *tower of iron will*; SZ S (3' at shoulder); ML average (10); Psionics: special.

The encounter in Dome A focuses on roleplaying skill, as the Urikites and PCs each attempt to persuade Chax-chik to do away with the other group. The Urikites will make all kinds of outlandish claims about the PCs, including: "They have come here to steal the skulls of your dead to sell as helms!"; "I once saw (PC's name) crack open a nest of thri-kreen eggs and devour every one!"; and "Ask them about the test! Ask why the halflings did not eat them alive!"

If the PCs helped Kloxx-ick, she will stand up for them, but that is not enough to sway Chax-chik.

The tohr-kreen psionist has no time for these humanoid squabbles. Her lieutenants have just captured a spy sent by Bokum, the dwarven psionist who is massing a rival thri-kreen horde that is poised to attack. Chax-chik is busy using her psionic abilities to pry information from the spy. As soon as she finds out where Bokum's forces are, she will attack. Her own horde is getting restless at having to remain in one spot for so many days. A few of them have already drifted away.

The Urikites arrived here a few hours ago. Chax-chik questioned them only briefly, but long enough to decide that they may prove useful in battle. She feels the same way about the PCs.

Chax-chik should come across as a blend of sophistication and savagery. She is well read, artistically inclined, knowledgeable about the world and its peoples, and normally inclined to read poetry, sip klick-win, and create delicate sculptures out of precious stones. Her temporary home here in the desert reflects these genteel pursuits. But like all of her people (and the thri-kreen she now leads) she has a body that is built for deadly combat. The upcoming wars against Bokum's forces and then against the Order itself are completely occupying her mind. She will prove utterly ruthless in her quest for victory. In fact, while the PCs and Urikites look on, she will psionical-

ly glean the last bit of information from the spy and then order him killed.

If the Urikites and PCs try to fight one another, Chax-chik will order the groups separated. Either the PCs or the Urikites will be pushed out into the courtyard by the our lieutenants. If more muscle power is needed to keep her guests in line, Chax-chik will use her psionics. As a further backup, 1d4 mature adult thri-kreen will come in through the roof per round to quell any disturbance (which could lead to a frenzy).

**Dome B:** A buzzing whine emerges from the open door of this room. Inside are eight thri-kreen children who are humming loudly as they rock back and forth, occasionally touching their heads to the floor. As the PCs watch, one will become insubstantial, seeming to dissolve into a ghostlike smoke that will float out through the wall. Another young thri-kreen will suddenly stop rocking, and will concentrate on a small bowl of water that suddenly begins bubbling furiously. A third will watch a chatcha as it orbits the room in a jerky path. At the end of its circuit, the chatcha plunges into a small lizard that has been tethered on the floor, severing its head.

These young thri-kreen, none more than five years old, are learning to develop their psionic wild talents under Chax-chik's direction. This school room is filled with a variety of props upon which they can test their abilities.

**Dome C:** This "kitchen" is where Chax-chik's meals are prepared. At any time, 1d6 young adult thri-kreen will be preparing meals here.

The room's honeycombed walls are filled with meats (fresh and dried), raw vegetables, baskets of fruit, and bottles of klick-win. Like the thri-kreen, Chax-chik eats raw flesh, but unlike them insists it be seasoned by having spices pounded into it. A typical tohr-kreen dish will be elaborately prepared, usually consisting of meat ringed with ornately sliced fruits and vegetables (none of them cooked), served on an elaborately glazed platter and accompanied by klick-win (sometimes "watered" with blood) in tall, thin glasses.



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Tohr-kreen “table manners” include eating with one’s fingers (snipping off choice morsels with one’s mandibles and dropping the remainder back on the plate or bowl) and drinking the klick-win in one gulp (mandibles make sipping impossible). Dessert typically consists of candied larvae. These are dyed, and are the color and shape of jelly beans, but wiggle about in the bowl. Because the tohr-kreen are always in motion, meals are eaten while moving around the room, making polite conversation with one’s dining companions while servants carry around platters of food. The tohr-kreen has succeeded in converting the eating habits of its thri-kreen lieutenants; thri-kreen usually eat huddled around their kill, tearing off chunks in accordance with their dominance order in the pack.

**Dome D:** This is the tohr-kreen’s private study. Its door is not locked, but is guarded at all times by one of the tohr-kreen’s lieutenants.

Inside, a lantern hangs from the ceiling. In the honeycomb niches in the walls, the tohr-kreen has stored 3d30 gems that she has been experimenting on in her attempt to develop crystals that will counter the effects of the Psionatrix.



The niches also contain her eight potion fruits: *potion fruit of animal control* (pear); *potion fruit of dragon control* (a dark purple grape); three *potion fruits of extra healing* (oranges); *potion fruit of human control* (plum); *potion fruit of invisibility* (mango); *potion fruit of speed* (lemon). Other niches hold 2d8 humanoid texts. (Use the Sage Fields of Study and Special Knowledge Categories charts in the *Dungeon Master’s Guide* to determine subject matter. Texts will be written in either a human, elvish, dwarvish, halfling or giant dialect.)

On an oddly-shaped table at the center of the room (designed for a tohr-kreen to work at while standing) are a flask of poison; several translucent, thin sheets of hide “parchment” on which have been written war poems in the tohr-kreen language; gem-cutting tools; a stylus; and a vial of ink.

### Keeping the PCs Busy

Bokum and his army will attack the day after the PCs arrive at the tohr-kreen’s camp, catching Chax-chik by surprise. Until this happens, the PCs can be kept busy in a number of different ways. Below are some suggestions, to be used as the DM sees fit.

- **A tohr-kreen feast:** The PCs (and possibly the Urikites as well) are invited to dine with Chax-chik and her lieutenants in Dome A. The Urikites have already experienced a tohr-kreen meal, and know how to conduct themselves according to tohr-kreen “table manners.” They attempt to make the PCs look like boorish fools. But then Jikx bursts into the room, followed by only one of her rasclinn, demanding to know where the other one is. Suddenly, she “recognizes” the meat on one of the platters as her pet, and begins screaming. Chaos ensues. Later, the missing beast comes trotting in from the courtyard.

- **A grudge match:** One of the Urikite NPCs will challenge “the champion” of the PCs to a fight. The stakes: establishing a dominance order among the PCs and NPCs that will determine with whom Chax-chik will hold a private audience. At Chax-chik’s insistence, this will be held in the center courtyard of the tohr-kreen’s residence, so that it does not trigger a



frenzy in her army. The Urikites are likely to choose the half-giant gladiator Ulreg or Chtek Ch're the thri-kreen fighter (if either is still alive).

- **A thieving expedition:** Chax-chik will separate the PCs and the Urikites by instructing them to camp on either side of the flagstone road. She will instruct her warriors to keep the two parties apart. Despite the fact that they are being watched by unsleeping mantis warriors, PC thieves might like to try their hand at raiding Dome D, Chax-chik's study. Or they may wish to try stealing from the Urikites. Of course, the Urikites might have the same idea!

- **A private audience with Chax-chik:** One of the PCs is chosen (possibly as a result of winning the grudge match) to converse privately with Chax-chik in Dome F, the conservatory. If a series of Charisma checks are made (one per topic) Chax-chik may reveal details of the raids she plans to make on the Order's stronghold and on Bokum's forces, information drawn from her experiments on how the crystals function, and how she became a rogue psionist.

Chax-chik may also provide the names of other rogue members of the Order; the weaknesses of the Order's stronghold in the Dragon Crown Mountains; and on the functioning of the Psionatrix. She knows that Pharistes, the male human psionist and Master Telepathist in the Order, is the author of the plan to suppress psionics.

She may also reveal what she has learned from the spy about Bokum. The dwarven psionist is passing himself off among the thri-kreen as an avangion. Using his psionic abilities, he showed them his "true form" -a winged form that approximated that of an avangion. His thri-kreen followers now refer to him as "the Great One," and believe he is a messiah who will rejuvenate the Hinterlands. At the end of the conversation, if the PC makes a Charisma check on percentage dice, Chax-chik may even extend an invitation to visit her, "Once this business is behind us," at her home in the tohr-kreen city that lies to the north of the Ringing Mountains. She will give directions and will present the PC with an amulet that will serve as an introduction to the tohr-kreen.

## The Battle Is Joined

A day after the PCs arrive at Chax-chik's camp beside the Circle, a rival horde attacks, under the command of the dwarven psionist Bokum. The timing of the attack is up to the DM, but the direction is not: Bokum's horde will attack from the south, trying to back Chax-chik and her warriors against the crater, knowing they will be reluctant to do battle on the holy ground of the Circle.

### Bokum

Dwarf Male Psionist  
24th Level  
Lawful Neutral  
Str 15      Int 17  
Dex 13      Wis 16  
Con 16      Cha 9



hp: 78

AC: 3 (full suit +1 *hide armor* plus *boots of speed*)

#AT: 2

THAC0: 11

Dmg: 1d4 + 1 (*chatkcha*) or 1d10 (*gythka*, *melee*) or 1d6 + 2 (*gythka*, *thrown*).

Equipment: +1 *hide armor*, two *chatkchas*, *gythka*, +2 *metal short sword*, *obsidian throwing axe*, two +1 *obsidian throwing daggers*, *ring of regeneration*, *boots of speed*, *stone of good luck*.

Psionic Summary: PSPs 278

Disciplines: *Psychokinesis*, *Telepathy*, *Clairsentience*, *Psychometabolism*, *Psychoportation*

Sciences: *Adrenalin Control*, *Clairaudience*, *Clairvoyance*, *Complete Healing*, *Create Object*, *Detonate*, *Disintegrate*, *Domination*, *Life Draining*, *Mass Domination*, *mindlink*, *Molecular Rearrangement*, *Precognition*, *Probe*, *Project Force*, *Telekinesis*, *Teleport*, *Teleport Other*

Devotions: *Aging*, *All-Around Vision*, *Animate Shadow*, *Awe*, *Ballistic Attack*, *Biofeedback*, *Body Weaponry*, *Carapace*, *Cause Decay*, *Combat Mind*, *Conceal Thoughts*, *Contact*, *Control Body*, *Control Flames*, *Control Light*, *Control Sound*, *Control Wind*, *Create Sound*, *Danger Sense*, *Dimensional*



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Door, Ego Whip, Identity Penetration, Inertial Barrier, Inflict Pain, Insect Mind, Know Direction, Know Location, Levitation, Molecular Agitation, Molecular Manipulation, Poison Sense, Send Thoughts, Soften, Teleport Trigger, Time Shift, Time/Space Anchor

**Defense Modes:** M-, TS, MB, TW, IF.

Short and muscular, Bokum has golden eyes and a perpetually grim expression. (Those who know him say he only smiles when putting an enemy to death.) He wears a black leather cap that fits tightly over his bald head and tight-fitting, glass-and-leather goggles as protection against the blowing sand.

Originally from Tyr, Bokum worked long and hard to rise through the ranks as a psionist aide to one of King Kalak's top military commanders; his focus then was to help form a disciplined, fearless force for his king. In this capacity, he learned the peculiarities of the thri-kreen, who served as the tireless shock force of the commander's troop.

Just as Bokum completed his focus, the revolution came and Kalak was killed. Retribution against those loyal to Kalak followed swiftly. Fleeing the city with the mobs at his heels, Bokum struck out over the Ringing Mountains and through the Forest Ridge, putting as much distance as he could between Tyr and himself. In time, he came to the Hinterlands, where he established a rapport, of sorts, with the thri-kreen that inhabit the stony barrens by using his Insect Mind psionic ability.

Despite having fled civilization, Bokum has not forgotten his obligations to the Order. As a "mediator" for the Order, he has recently been given the special task of searching out and destroying those thri-kreen and tohr-kreen psionists who are unaffected by the psionic-dampening field.

Using his Carapace, Insect Mind and Combat Mind psionics, Bokum found a thri-kreen pack, defeated its leader in one-on-one combat, and took control of the pack. Now, he is using his Endurance psionic ability and his natural dwarven strength to keep up to the rapid pace of the thri-kreen as he builds an "army." Armed with a crystal that protects

his psionics from the effects of the artifact, he is about to pit his army against that of the tohr-kreen psionist Chax-chik. Unfortunately, the Psionatrix is slowly driving his "soldiers" crazy and Bokum is uncertain whether they are still truly under his control.

Because he is currently pursuing his focus, Bokum gets a +1 bonus to his saving throws and a +2 (+10%) bonus to his proficiency rolls. While Bokum knows how to handle both the gythka and chatkcha, he has trained his army in many "humanoid" weapons, hoping this will give them an edge when going against opponents unfamiliar with these weapons. His numbers are superior to the army of Chax-chik, but many of his soldiers are younger. His thri-kreen lieutenants are each armed with two metal, two-handed swords; the swords of the younger thri-kreen are obsidian.

**Thri-kreen Lieutenants: (15)** F8; AL CN; AC 5; MV 18; HD 8; hp 57 (-12); THAC0 13; #AT 5 (claw and bite) or 3 (two-handed sword and bite); Dmg 1d4 (-4) (claw) or 1d10 (-2) (two-handed sword +4 strength), plus 1d4 + 1 (bite); SA paralyzation; SD immune to *charm person/mammal, hold person, dodge missiles*; SZ L (11' long); ML fanatic (17-18), XP 1,120.

**Thri-kreen, adult (60):** AL CN; AC 5; MV 18; HD 5 + 3; hp 25 (-60); THAC0 15; #AT 5 (claw and bite) or 2 (chatkcha); Dmg 1d4 (-4) (claw) plus 1d4 + 1 (bite) or 1d6 + 2 (-2) (chatkcha); SA paralyzation; SD immune to *charm person/mammal, hold person*; SZ L (9' long); ML fanatic (17-18), XP 975.

**Thri-kreen, young adult (100):** AL CN; AC 5; MV 18; HD 4+3; hp 21 (-100); THAC0 15; #AT 5 (claw and bite) or 2 (awl pike polearm and bite); Dmg 1d4 (-4) (claw) or 1d12 (awl pike polearm +1 strength) plus 1d4 + 1 (bite); SD immune to *charm person/mammal, hold person*; SZ L (8' long); ML fanatic (17-18), XP 270.





**Thri-kreen, young (220):** AL CN; AC 5; MV 18; HD 3 + 3; hp 16 (-220); THAC0 17; #AT 5 (claw and bite) or 3 (short sword and bite); Dmg 1d4 (-4) (claw) or 1d6 (-2) (short sword +1 strength) plus 1d4 + 1 (bite); SD immune to *charm person/mammal, hold person*; SZ M (7' long); ML fanatic (17-18), XP 175.

When the battle begins, the PCs and Urikites should be in close proximity. Both should be outside the domed residence, preferably a few hundred feet from it, and there should be dozens of thri-kreen around them. They might be having another meeting with Chax-chik and her lieutenants (and still be trying to convince her to do the other party in). They will almost certainly still be arguing.

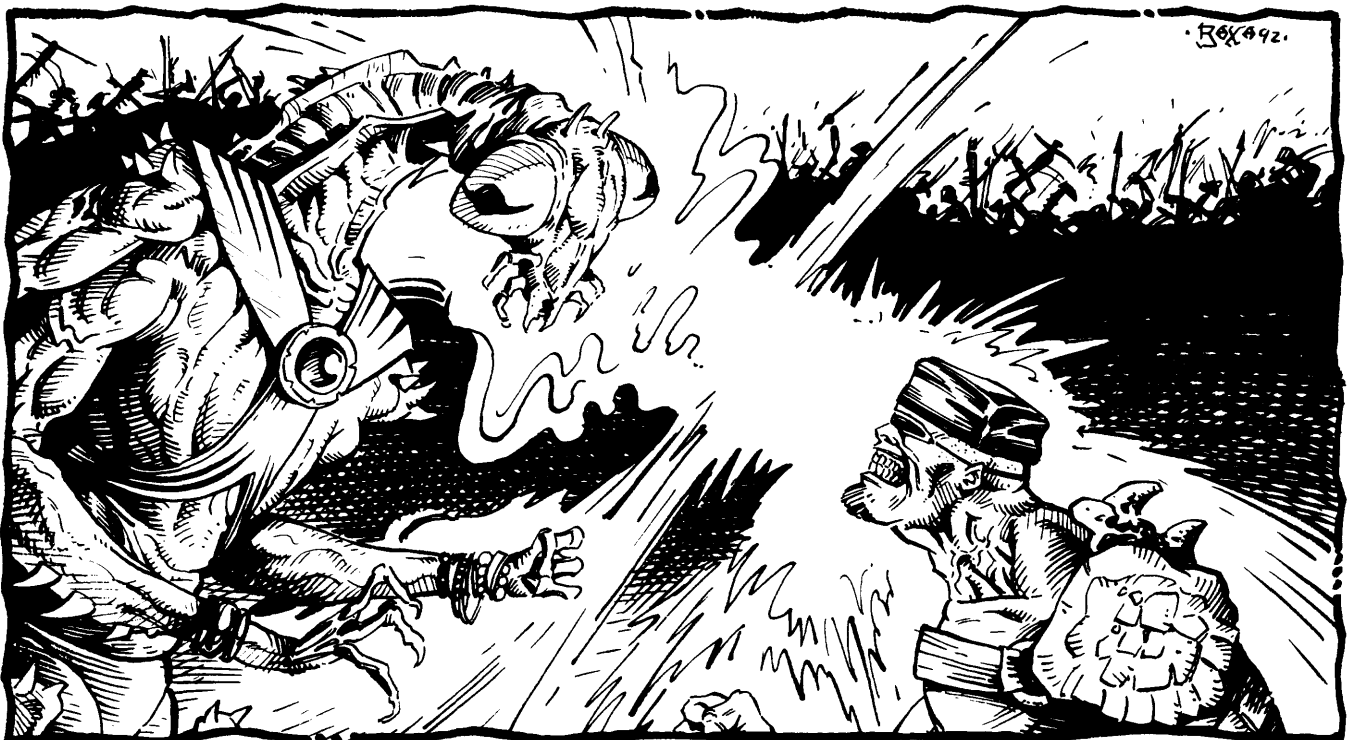
When Bokum and his horde attack, Chax-chik's thri-kreen will snatch up their weapons and immediately begin the battle. Chax-chik will urge both the PCs and the Urikites to assist her, reminding them that her army, if victorious today, would be a formidable ally against the Order. She then rushes off, surrounded by 1d4 of her lieutenants, to meet Bokum in

head-to-head psionic combat.

The PCs and Urikites, left to their own devices, may at first begin to fight each other. But there is little time to do more than exchange a blow or two. In moments, the battle has engulfed them.

At first, the PCs and Urikites are only being attacked by Bokum's forces. But then the inevitable happens: both armies of thri-kreen go into frenzy. The once-friendly warriors of Chax-chik turn on the humanoids—and on each other. A bloodbath ensues. There is simply no time for the PCs and Urikites to fight each other. They must fight together, against the combined thri-kreen hordes, to survive.

The DM need not play the battle out blow by blow. Indeed, this clash between armies would better be settled using BATTLESYSTEM™ rules. Instead, the DM should give the players a feel for the battle by describing the overall mayhem as thri-kreen go into frenzy and kill each other. Meanwhile, each PC should be kept busy by having to contend with 1d6 attacking thri-kreen of various ages per round. (As soon as one frenzied thri-kreen falls or turns to attack a fellow thri-kreen in a frenzy, other attackers rush in





## Pack Frenzy

to take its place.) These attacks can be rolled individually by the DM, and damage tallied.

At the same time, the DM can describe the similarly-embattled Urikite NPCs. A few descriptions of thri-kreen attackers being killed by weapon and spell, and Urikites staggering from their wounds should set the scene. Soon, the press of battle begins to separate the PCs from the Urikites.

Keep the combat going until the PCs have lost a number of hit points. At this point, only 1d4 thri-kreen per round will be attacking each PC still standing. Read the following:

*While the thri-kreen hordes swirl in battle around them, Chax-chik and the dwarven psionicist Bokum stand rigid, locked in psionic combat. They are no more than 200 feet away from you, but it is impossible to break away from the thri-kreen that keep mobbing you, and dozens of frenzied mantis warriors lie between you and the psionicists.*

*At first, Bokum staggers. Then his hands rise clawlike before him as he flings a psionic attack at Chax-chik. It is the tohr-kreen's turn to stumble. Unlike Bokum, she does not rise, sinking gradually to the ground. With a keening whine, the thri-kreen around her realize their leader is dead. But her final attack has left Bokum unable to gloat over this victory. He stands listlessly over her corpse.*

### Concluding the Battle

At this point, the Urikites will find a clear space in the thri-kreen ranks and will make a break for it. They may flee across the Circle, or through the gaps between the crater and the buttes to the east or west. Whichever direction they take; they escape.

Meanwhile, the thri-kreen continue to attack the PCs (1-2 per PC still standing), making pursuit impossible. The PCs may, however, be able to fight their way through to capture Bokum. This should prove relatively easy, since Chax-chik's final attack has rendered him a babbling idiot. PCs may be able to learn a few fragments of information about Bokum's past, or about the Order, by probing what remains of his

mind or by listening to his rambling—but little of this will prove useful.

The battle finally ends. As the dust settles, the PCs will see that the two thri-kreen hordes have all but wiped each other out. There will be, at best, 2d20 survivors (various ages) from either army. At the DM's discretion, Klox-ick may be among them. All of the survivors have been shocked out of frenzy by the defeat of their leaders.

If the PCs attempt to rally the surviving thri-kreen, a Charisma check on percentage dice is required. (Thri-kreen PCs need roll only 1d20.) A successful check means the thri-kreen become followers of the PC, and can be used as cannon fodder in the next adventure.

### Concluding the Adventure

When the battle has ended, the thri-kreen survivors will begin to lay out their dead in the Circle. This will be a time-consuming process requiring 1d4 + 1 days. At this time, aware that the Urikite NPCs have escaped, the thri-kreen will send out a small group to hunt them down and kill them, to ensure that the location of the Circle remains a secret. (The Urikites will escape, since they will appear again.)

Bokum will be recognized as a false messiah and (if dead) will be left to rot where he fell. Otherwise, the survivors will insist on a slow, painful death for him.

The body of Chax-chik will be laid in a place of honor at the center of the Circle. Her home will be sealed with all of the items in it left in place, waiting for her next incarnation.

The PCs can attempt to talk with the survivors, but will only find them willing if they make a Charisma check (and then only briefly and curtly).

If the PCs attempt to enter Chax-chik's home or explore the Circle itself, the thri-kreen survivors will attack. (The thri-kreen will still be irritable from the effects of the Psionatrix, which are stronger than before. There now is a 50% chance of them going into frenzy in any battle situation.) Otherwise, if the PCs remain in the vicinity of the Circle, they will be ignored by the thri-kreen until the mantis warriors have



finished laying out their dead, at which time they will attack without warning.

If the PCs leave before this, a hunting party of 2d4 thri-kreen will sent out on their trail once the dead have been laid out; the thri-kreen are confident they can catch up with the PCs who must "wait" (sleep) each day. They will pursue the PCs across the scrub plain, but will turn back once the PCs reach the Dragon Crown Mountains, due to the increasing effects of the Psionatrix.

The task of laying out their dead completed, the survivors of the two armies will lay aside their past differences, and will form into new packs. These will then resume the hunt, as before. They will take what weapons they need from those scattered across the battlefield, and may even take a souvenir or two from the tohr-kreen's residence as a memento.

The PCs' next destination is the Dragon Crown Mountains. To reach the foothills of these mountains, the PCs will need to cross about 10 miles of scrub plain. There will be only random encounters on this portion of the journey.

## New Magical Items

### Ever-full Bag of Seeds

XP Value: 1,500

This small leather pouch has a drawstring top, is dyed green, and has a pattern of leaves embossed onto it. The pouch will feel empty, but any preserver wizard, non-templar cleric, or druid reaching inside will draw forth a single seed. This seed, even if planted on barren, stony ground, will grow into a tree of life in four weeks.

An avangion can draw an unlimited number of seeds from the bag. Lesser preserver wizards, druids, and non-templar clerics can draw a total of 1d10 seeds before the bag stops working for them. (At this point it functions for that character as it would for characters of another class.) Each seed drawn from the bag will grow into (roll 1d10): (1) oak tree; (2) apple tree; (3) redwood tree; (4) maple tree; (5) willow tree; (6) fir tree; (7) pine tree; (8) cherry tree; (9) cedar tree; (10) birch tree

Any other class reaching into the bag will draw out only a handful of non-magical seeds. If planted in fertile ground, watered and tended, these will grow into (roll 1d6): (1) grass; (2) small cactus; (3) berry bush; (4) vegetable; (5) flowers; (6) vine

### Ring of Coolness

XP Value: 1,000

This green jade ring is similar in function to the *ring of warmth*, except that it protects against the heat of the desert sun. It will protect its wearer from the effects of heat, even when the wearer is fully exposed to the sun and wearing heavy armor. It provides restoration of heat-sustained damage at the rate of one hit point of damage per turn. It also increases saving throws vs. heat-based attacks by +2, and reduces damage sustained by -1 per die.

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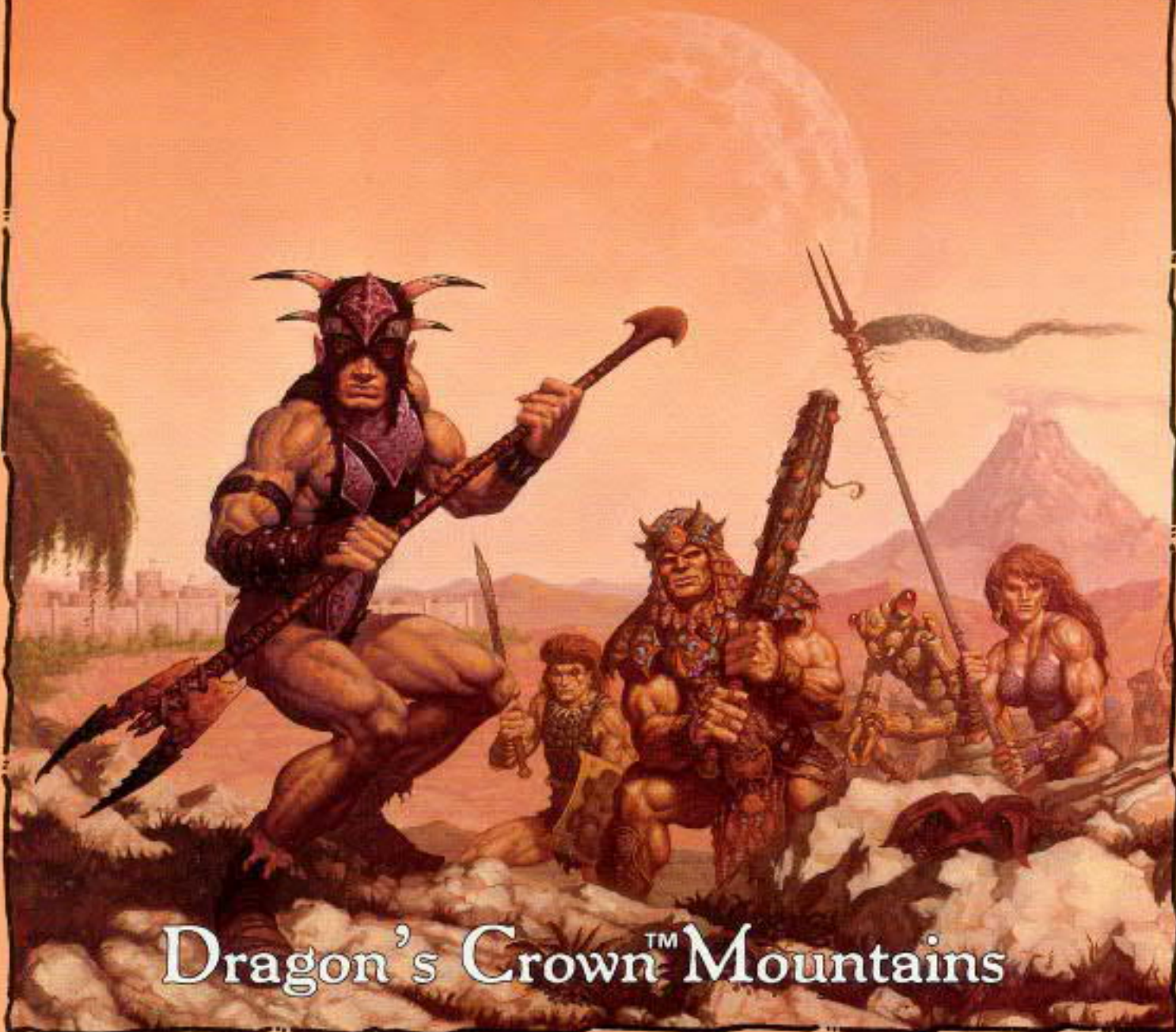
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Advanced Dungeons & Dragons  
2nd Edition

# DARK • SUN

W O R L D

ADVENTURE



Dragon's Crown™ Mountains

**Advanced Dungeons & Dragons**<sup>®</sup>  
2<sup>nd</sup> Edition



## Dragon's Crown™

### Book Three: Dragon Crown Mountains

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# Book Three: Dragon Crown Mountains

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## Part Seven: Dragon Crown Mountains

Hidden within the forests of the Dragon Crown Mountains is the ancient fortress of Dasaraches. Once the last refuge of the Wind Mages, Dasaraches now serves as a secret stronghold of the Order. In its highest tower the Psionatrix radiates its deadly field over the world of Athas. Powerful guardians, both psionic and magical, watch over the mystical gem.

*Dragon Crown Mountains* is the climax of the Dragon's Crown adventure. The player characters will complete their journey across the Hinterlands and must find their way through the natural maze of the Dragon Crown Mountains. In the jungles surrounding Dasaraches, they will encounter the rebel members of the Order preparing to attack Pharistes and his followers. With the help of the rogue psionists, the player characters should infiltrate the palace and complete their mission.

If the PCs manage to take any shortcuts (for example, skipping their side trip to the Forest Ridge in Part Five) the attack of the rebel psionists occurs whenever the PCs arrive. The Urikites still appear in the chamber of the Psionatrix, but the DM should be sure to keep track of any deceased NPCs.

### Previous Events

At this point in the adventure, the players should have all the information they need. In Part One, they learned that the psionic interference originated in the Hinterlands and was caused by a mystical gem known as the Psionatrix. In Part Two, they discovered that the Order was responsible. In Part Four, Haakar told them of the fortress Dasaraches and how they could destroy the Psionatrix. In Part Six, they learned that internal dissent has split the Order.

At the conclusion of Part Six, *Pack Frenzy*, it should be clear to the PCs that they should head for the Dragon Crown Mountains to try to destroy the Psionatrix. If the players remain lost, try a commun-

ication from Korgunard's spirit or from Desverendi to get them back on track.

### Overview

The adventure begins as the player characters flee the thri-kreen battlefield. They will now complete their crossing of the Hinterlands (*The Last Miles*), and try to find their way through the Dragon Crown Mountains. During their journey, they must survive an ambush by Arvego (*The Dragon's Maw*). Once they reach the hidden interior of the mountains, the PCs will discover their path blocked, (*Brambles and Ridges*). Beyond the badlands lies the Silent Forest (*The Silent Forest*).

In the Silent Forest, the player characters gain new allies (*A Friend in Need*). The rogue psionists ready themselves for a final assault on Dasaraches (*Council of War*). The Players characters will learn that Pharistes has prepared an unusual defense against the attackers (*On the Bridge*). From there, the fate of Athas is in their hands as they storm the fortress of Dasaraches (Dasaraches).

### Beginning the Adventure

The player characters end Part Six in the Hinterlands, a few day's travel from the Dragon Crown Mountains. They will probably be in poor shape after fighting their way out of the thri-kreen battle. Before you begin this part of the adventure, you may want to give the PCs an opportunity to rest and regain strength. On the other hand, time is pressing, so you should encourage them to move on as soon as they are able.

Should the characters drag their feet, you can arrange for a large hunting party of 20 to 30 thri-kreen to come after them. You can safely assume that the thri-kreen led by Bokum will defeat the tohr-kreen's horde after a long day of hard fighting. When the mantis warriors finish with each other, they will remember the human captives who fought their way free and set out to find them. As you referee this last



## Dragon Crown Mountains

portion of the Dragon's Crown adventure, remember that the climax is rapidly approaching. The members of the Order who follow Pharistes engage in open warfare with the rogue Order members. The Urikites press forward in one last sprint to reach the palace Dasaraches before the PCs do. All the players of this story are rushing together for the confrontation in the ancient fortress of the Wind Mages.

Try constantly to heighten the importance and terror of each encounter from here on. The characters are rapidly approaching some very dangerous territory and they will play a crucial part in deciding the fate of Athas. Make certain the players appreciate this. Keep them scared and excited. Each step they take towards the Dragon Crown Mountains should fill the characters with wonder and terror.

### The Last Miles

The Hinterlands is the region beyond the Ringing Mountains. The player characters will have to cross the stony barrens and scrub plains of the Hinterlands just to get to the Dragon Crown Mountains. The adventurers will begin this portion of their travels at the point marked on the Hinterlands map.

The travelers will be able to see the Dragon Crown Mountains from about 40 miles away. The mountains are a rugged range of steep-sided peaks surrounded by an apron of broken foothills. The peaks are dark and jagged. When the PCs get to within 10 miles of the mountains, you should refer to the inset on the poster map, which shows the mountain range in greater detail. You should use the inset map to track the characters' movement on the Dragon's Crown until the PCs reach the Silent Forest.

Run this portion of the adventure as an overland journey. The player characters may or may not be mounted. In either case, use the overland movement rules in the DARK SUN™ *rules book* and the DUNGEON MASTER'S™ *Guide* to referee the

trek. If the players decide to push their mounts or force march on foot, remember to apply the appropriate penalties.

Keep track of the characters' supply situation. There is an excellent chance that they will have been forced to leave some of their pack and canteens behind when they flee from the battle with the thri-kreen. Food in the form of game abounds in the scrub plains of the Hinterlands, but water is as scarce here as it is anywhere on Athas. Desert survival makes a DARK SUN campaign; make certain that the players remain conscious of how difficult and dangerous the journey is for their characters.

Random or diversionary encounters should not play as great a role in this part of the adventure as they did earlier on. Since the story is moving toward a conclusion, you should not dilute the increasing tension with a number of side-show encounters. However, a few encounters with dangerous Athasian predators will help to set the mood for a desert journey. You can select one or two appropriate encounters from Part Eight, *Desert Perils*, or you can use the random encounter charts from the *Monstrous Compendium*, DARK SUN appendix.

### Travel in the Mountains

When the PCs reach the Dragon Crown Mountains, they must find a pass through the peaks. The mountains are high and steep enough to be virtually impassable on foot, and walking or riding characters will need to use one of the numerous passes marked on the map to get through. You should strictly enforce the high terrain costs for moving across the mountains since it is tedious work that most characters are not used to.

The inset in the poster map shows the terrain surrounding the mountains. It is possible to cross the open peaks, but darkened peaks are simply too high and steep to be crossed. Flying in the mountains is dangerous; the contrary winds halve normal flying speeds.



### The Dragon's Maw

This encounter occurs whenever the PCs are deep in the crossing of the mountains. Since Arvego is a powerful telepath, it is relatively easy for him to check on the party's progress by reading the minds of the non-psionist characters. He will move to intercept them and to recruit allies along the way. As the PCs reach this encounter, Arvego has assembled a force of five braxat to attack them.

Refer to page 25 of the Map Book for a map of the encounter area. If Arvego and his allies achieve surprise, they will conceal themselves behind the rocks and leap out when the PCs get to point 'X'. Arvego will prepare for the fight by levitating up to a safe ledge overlooking the battlefield and using his Martial Trance devotion.

If the PCs are not surprised, they notice the braxat and can avoid the ambush. If the PC's actually surprise Arvego, they come across the psionist and his allies setting up the ambush. Arvego has a good idea of where the PCs are most of the time, but he is not omniscient, and the adventurers have a chance of sneaking up on him.

*The sun is high overhead, beating down on the rocky wastelands that surround you. Behind you, the broken foothills fall back down to the yellow plains surrounding these mountains. This pass is rugged going, but it seems that it will take you through the mountains. Streaked with sweat and covered with small cuts and abrasions from your scramble up this rocky defile, you almost don't notice the hulking shapes that rise silently before you. Hissing in anger, massive reptilian creatures with rough shells rapidly approach your party, heavy spiked clubs at the ready. You recognize them as braxat, horrible predators of the desert!*

During the fight, the braxat will try to close to melee as quickly as possible. Normally they would use their formidable psionic powers, but they have

learned of the effects of the Psionatrix field. Arvego will stay out of sight and launch psionic attacks at the PCs. He prefers to Ego Whip, to Dominate, or to make Post-Hypnotic Suggestions. If he comes under direct physical attack, he will Teleport or Dimension Door away from the fight.

The braxat are under Arvego's mental influence and will fight to the death. Arvego will flee if confronted with the possibility for melee combat. Arvego's stats and abilities appear in Part Two.

**Braxat (5):** AL NE; AC 0; MV 15; HD 10; hp 49 each; THAC0 11; #AT 1; Dmg 2d4 + 10; SA Breath Weapon, psionics; SD hit only by magical or steel weapons; ML 20 (mentally influenced).

Arvego has made the braxat believe that the PCs are a horrible threat which must be destroyed. They will use their acid breath at any opportunity. While they fight, the braxat shout insults and threats at the PCs in the braxat language, referring to them as "killers of young" and "nest robbers." Characters who can communicate with the braxat mentally or in the braxat tongue may be able to persuade the attackers that they are innocent. If any PC attempts to do this, allow the braxat a saving throw vs. magic to break the psionist's implanted suggestions.

The braxat carry a few personal treasures with them in various pouches or packs. Each one has 2-12 sp, 3-12gp, and 1-3 gems on their person. In addition, one braxat carries a *fruit of healing*, and another one carries a *ring of water walking*.

The PCs will be able to continue their journey through the mountains once the braxat have been defeated or reasoned with. If the PCs are defeated, their only hope of survival is to flee the field. Arvego has no particular wish to kill them, but he does want to be certain that they will not bother him again.

A search of the ambush site will uncover a day-old campfire and a small ceramic coin. The features of King Hamanu of Urik are stamped on the coin.



## Dragon Crown Mountains

### Brambles and Ridges

The great basin enclosed by the Dragon Crown Mountains contains a maze built by the wizards of Dasaraches. As the adventurers descend out of the mountain passes, they will find that several miles of wind-scoured badlands stand between them and their goal.

*At last you are working your way down again. The mountains have a great bowl-shaped valley in their center, now spreading before you as far as the eye can see. A dark blot of green leaps to your eye from the center of the valley—the legendary forest of the Dragon's Crown? It is only a few miles away now, across a series of razor-backed ridges.*

*Your attention turns to the badlands separating you from your goal, and your heart sinks. The ridges are nearly impassable, scoured into sharp and twisted shapes by the wind. The tunnel-like gulches or ravines that separate the ridges are choked by thick, dark brambles with long thorns. It seems the last few miles of your journey will be hard going. As you turn away, the fierce wind rises again, raising a pall of dust over the badlands.*

Refer to the inset map showing the Dragon Crown Mountains. Deep, rocky gulches crisscross large areas of the badlands between the mountains and the forest. In effect, these winding ravines form a maze for any person traveling on foot.

The ridges separating the gulches are wind-scoured into bizarre, sharp-edged shapes. They are extremely difficult to scale, and only thieves or characters with the mountaineering proficiency may climb them. Crossing from one gulch to another over the intervening ridge takes 1d3 + 1 hours if the PCs have characters who can scale the canyon walls.

It is next to impossible to travel along the ridges, they are broken and extremely rugged. The wind has scoured the stone into a variety of strange, sharp

formations. Each hour of travel along the ridges allows the PCs to advance 200-800 yards.

For each hour the PCs spend either crossing a ridge or attempting to proceed along its spine, each character must roll a saving throw vs. death or suffer a climbing mishap. A mishap results in 1d6 to 3d6 damage unless the character makes a saving throw vs. Dexterity. Obviously, cutting across the ridges is hard and dangerous work.

Travel along the gulch floors is no easier. Dense thickets of razor-sharp bramble cover the gully floors. Characters will be reduced to a speed of one-half mile every hour—the brambles have a MP cost of 6 under the overland movement rules. Anyone trying to move more rapidly through the brambles suffers damage equal to their base Armor Class every turn. In addition, fast-moving characters must make a saving throw vs. paralyzation or become entangled by the bables, sustaining 1d6 damage. Entangled characters can free themselves in 1d4 + 2 rounds, but take 1d6 damage during each round they work to free themselves.

The PCs may be tempted to try flying over the badlands to get to the forest. The builders of Dasaraches prepared for that eventuality by binding to service a number of air elementals to act as guardians for their fortress. The wizards commanded the elementals to leave travelers on foot alone, but to defend the sky fiercely. Any flying creature in the inner valley suffers attacks by 1d3 air elementals every turn until it is forced to land. The elementals ignore anyone within 20 feet of the ground, so it is possible for someone to fly along the gulches, staying above the brambles while remaining beneath the elementals' notice.

**Air Elemental, Standard:** AL N; AC 2; MV 36(A); HD 12; hp 55 each; THAC0 9; #AT 1; Dmg 2-20; SA form whirlwind; SD +2 or better weapon to hit; ML 16. Air elementals receive a +1 bonus to hit and inflict +4 damage to flying enemies.

## Dragon Crown Mountains



You may insert an encounter or two with Athasian creatures in the brambles and badlands. Rasclinn, so-ut, and wild kanks all live in the badlands, although they are few and far between.

Once the player characters have threaded their way through the maze, they will find themselves confronting the Silent Forest. The ridges suddenly end, and the dense bramble of the gulches becomes isolated patches and thickets of thorns. The forest rises from the badlands in a sheer, dark wall of vegetation that seems to be watching the intruders.

### The Silent Forest

When the player characters reach the border of the forest, read the following description to them:

*The knife-edged ridges and bramble-filled gulches of the badlands suddenly die here, flattening in to level ground. A cool breath of wind appears, soothing you. It is rich with moisture. Only a few hundred yards away, the forest looms, dark and silent, watching you.*

*The trees and lush verdure of the jungle are noticeably cooler and wetter than the surrounding badlands. You can only see a few dozen yards through the beautiful growth. The only sounds that come to your ears are the whispering of the wind in the upper branches and the occasional drip of water from the broad leaves. You notice that, oddly, there are few signs of any kind of animal life.*

The forest is thick, and makes for tough going, but the shade and water it provides more than make up for the extra effort of finding a path through the trees. No animals, and very few insects, live within the bounds of the forest. The silence is quite unnerving after a time.

One of the reasons the forest on the Dragon's Crown Mountains is so still is the large number of carnivorous and poisonous plants. Every time the PCs move from one square on the map to another, use the

table below to determine if they encounter any dangerous plants. Some PCs may spot these plants before the party walk into danger. Druids, halflings of any class, and any character with a survival proficiency in forest/jungle have a 1 in 3 chance of spotting the danger. The conditions are cumulative, so a halfling druid with forest survival automatically detects any dangerous plants in the forest.

Any plant detected before its attack cannot achieve surprise and the PC's may avoid it by detouring around.

<b>1d8</b>	<b>Encounter</b>
<b>1-3</b>	No encounter
<b>4-5</b>	Dew fronds
<b>6-7</b>	Strangling vines
<b>8</b>	Blossom killer

Dew fronds attack one random PC, lashing out to try to hit with their barbed leaves. A randomly encountered dew frond has d8 + 2 Hit Dice.

**Strangling vines** attack 1-2 random PCs. Randomly encountered vines have d4 + 1 Hit Dice.

**Blossomkiller** is one large plant that attacks 1d4 PCs. Other PCs are considered to be outside the plant's area.

Do not overuse the carnivorous plant encounters: at this point the players should be anticipating their assault on Dasaraches. These encounters are introduced as explanation for the palace's isolation. Surrounding your stronghold with deadly plants is a good way of deterring visitors, and the PCs should appreciate this without becoming distracted by it.

**Dew frond:** AL N; AC 11-Hit Dice; MV 0; HD varies; hp varies; THAC0 15 or less; #AT 1; dmg 1-6; SA Blood drain; SD nil; ML nil.

**Strangling vines:** AL N; AC 5; MV 0; HD varies; hp varies; THAC0 19, 17, or 15; #AT 1; dmg 1-10; SA Strangulation; SD nil; ML nil.



## Dragon Crown Mountains



**Blossomkiller:** AL N; AC 9; MV 0; HD 9; hp varies; THAC0 11; dmg 1-6; SA Paralysis; SD nil; ML nil.

These encounters continue as long as the PCs move around in the forest. When they reach the center box marked on the map, the attacks of the carnivorous plants cease. Play *Unexpected Allies* any time after one or two plant attacks have occurred, but before the PCs reach the central area designated on the map.

### Unexpected Allies

The psionics of the Order who oppose Pharistes' rule are now gathering in the Silent Forest to attack Dasaraches and destroy the Psionatrix. In this encounter, the PCs come across two of the rogue psionics in need of some assistance and gain some very valuable allies.

It is important that the PCs decide to back the proper side. The players are probably excited and

anxious to bash any psionics they see. Do not let them leap in with blades flashing! Encourage the players to wait and to watch. The players should not feel forced to accept an alliance to continue the adventure, but you should make it very hard for them to walk away from this opportunity.

*As you continue towards the heart of the jungle, you hear sounds of fighting suddenly erupt from somewhere in front of you. Relying your weapons and creeping closer, you come across a small clearing in the forest. A pair of weathered travelers in dusty cloaks are desperately fighting off the attacks of two tall monstrosities made of pieces of insect chitin. A third, shaven-headed, man in a short tunic of fine white cloth stands behind the insect horrors, seemingly directing their movements. No one appears to have noticed you. Even as you watch, the chitin creatures strike down one of the travelers, who falls with a piercing cry. The other traveler obviously can't last much longer.*

## Dragon Crown Mountains



The man in the white tunic is Barrach, a member of the Order, and one of the defenders of the palace. He has taken control of two chitin golems from the armory of Dasaraches and is using them to attack two rogue psionicists, Mara and Shardivan. Mara has just been knocked unconscious by one of the golems, and Shardivan is trying simply to avoid their attacks long enough to use one of his own psionic abilities.

Immune to psionic powers of the telepathic or psychometabolic disciplines, the golems resist the rouges' attacks. Barrach is also pressing Shardivan with a psionic attack, which Shardivan can only defend against while he tries to escape. The diagram on page XX of the Map Book shows the layout of the fight.

If the PCs stand by and do nothing, Shardivan will fall in three rounds. Barrach will then direct the golems to put the two rogues to death. If the PCs intervene, throw them into the fight with the appropriate side. If they back Barrach, they should do in Shardivan in short order, but Barrach will then turn on the PCs. If the PCs side with Shardivan, Barrach will fight until he is badly hurt, and then he will try to escape. Shardivan will be grateful to the PCs, especially if any PC tends to Mara while the battle with Barrach and his golems rages.

**Chitin Golem (2):** AL N; AC 6; MV 3; HD 3; hp 57, 42 (injured); THAC0 11; #AT 1; dmg 2-20; SA poison; SD Spell immunities, psionic immunities, hit only by +1 or better weapon; ML 20.

### Barrach

Male Human Psionicist

24th Level

Neutral

Str 8      Int 15

Dex 16     Wis 18

Con 14    Cha 13

hp: 62

AC: 1 (*leather +3, ring, dexterity*)



#AT: 1

THAC0: 11 (+2 to hit with staff)

Dmg: 1d6 + 2 (*staff +2*) or 1d4/1d3 (*steel dagger*)

Psionic Summary: PSPs 325

Primary Discipline: Psychokinesis

Sciences: Appraise, Clairvoyance, Create Object, Detonate, Disintegrate\*, Domination, Metamorphosis, Mindlink, Molecular Rearrangement, Probe, Project Force, Shadow Form, Summon Planar Creature, Superior Invisibility, Telekinesis, Teleport.

Devotions: Adrenalin Control, Animate Object, Animate Shadow, Astral Projection, Aversion, Ballistic Attack, Body Equilibrium, Conceal Thoughts, Contact, Control Body, Control Sound, Control Wind, Create Sound, Danger Sense, Dimension Door, Dimension Walk, Displacement, Ego Whip\*, ESP\*, Id Insinuation, Inertial Barrier, Invisibility, Levitation, Martial Trance, Mind Bar, Molecular Agitation, Molecular Manipulation, Psionic Blast, Psionic Sense, Reduction, Sight Link, Spirit Sense, Synaptic Static, Teleport Trigger.

Defense Modes: All.

\* Power scores raised by +1 per asterisk.

Equipment: *Leather armor +3, ring of protection +2, staff +2, light crossbow, 12 steel-headed quarrels.*

Barrach serves as a loyal member of the Order in the service of Pharistes. He prefers to rely on his psychokinetic powers, and will attempt to use his Project Force, Disintegrate, or Detonate abilities. He may also use Summon Planar Creature at the beginning of a fight to even the odds. Barrach is not stupid and will surrender if he feels that his life is threatened, but he will try to escape or to use his telepathic powers to warn Pharistes of the intruders.

Barrach is a small, plump man in white robes. He shaves his head and possesses a quiet, calculating demeanor. He supports Pharistes' agenda but he



## Dragon Crown Mountains

may feign a change of allegiance if he thinks it will help him to escape or to foil the rogues' plans.

### Mara of the Endless Sands

Male Human Psionicist

23rd Level

Neutral (Good)

Str 11 Int 17

Dex 14 Wis 13

Con 15 Cha 15

hp: 70

AC: 3 (bracers)

#AT: 1

THAC0: 11 (+3 to hit with sword)

Dmg: 1d6+3/1d8+3 (iron *short sword* +3) or 1d4/1d4 (light quarrels)

Psionic Summary: PSPs 338

Primary Discipline: Clairvoyance

Sciences: Animal Affinity (Giant Scorpion), Appraise, Aura Sight, Clairaudience, Clairvoyance, Disintegrate, Domination, Energy Containment, Life Draining, Mindlink, Object Reading, Precognition, Probe, Psychic Surgery, Telekinesis, Teleport.

Devotions: Absorb Disease, All-Round Vision, Awe, Ballistic Attack, Body Control, Body Equilibrium, Cell Adjustment, Combat Mind, Contact, Control Flames, Convergence, Danger Sense, Dimension Door, Displacement, Ectoplasmic Form, Ego Whip, ESP, Feel Light, Identity Penetration, Intensify, Invisibility, Know Direction, Know Location, Levitation, Mind Thrust, Poison Sense, Psionic Inflation, Radial Navigation, See Sound, Soften, Spirit Sense, Splice, Teleport Trigger.

Defense Modes: All.

Equipment: bracers of defense AC 3, scarab of protection, fruit of extra healing, iron *short sword* +3, light crossbow, 12 iron-headed quarrels.



Mara is a tall, bony man with a narrow face and sharp features. He is a very intuitive and perceptive person who carefully weighs his words before he speaks. Mara feels that his extensive clairvoyance and precognitive powers constitute a great responsibility which he should not take lightly.

In combat, Mara prefers to attack psionically, while using Displacement and Dimension Door to keep enemies at range. If necessary, he will try to Dominate or Disintegrate tough opponents. Mara was Ego Whipped by Barrach at the beginning of the encounter. He is at 15 hp, and recovers in 4 rounds.

### Shardivan

Male Dwarf Psionicist

26th Level

Neutral (Good)

Str 14 Int 14

Dex 12 Wis 18

Con 21 Cha 14

hp: 81

AC: 0 (*hide armor* +3, shield, ring)

#AT: 1

THAC0: 11 (+1 to hit with hand axe)

Dmg: 1d6+1/1d4+1 (bone *hand axe* +2)

Psionic Summary: PSPs 357

Primary Discipline: Psychometabolism

Sciences: Animal Affinity (kirre), Clairvoyance, Complete Healing, Detonate, Domination, Ejection, Empower, Energy Containment, Life Draining, Metamorphosis, Mindlink, Precognition, Probability Travel, Probe, Project Force, Psychic Crush, Psychic Surgery, Shadow-form, Split Personality, Telekinesis, Teleport, Teleport Other.

Devotions: Absorb Disease, Adrenalin Control, Animate Object, Astral Projection, Aversion, Awe, Ballistic Attack, Biofeedback, Body Control, Body Equilibrium, Cannibalize, Cause Decay, Cell Adjustment, Chameleon Power, Conceal Thoughts, Contact, Control Body, Convergence, Danger





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Sense, Daydream, Dimension Door, Dimension Walk, Ego Whip, Empathy, Enhancement, False Sensory Input, Gird, Heightened Senses, Inertial Barrier, Invisibility, Know Location, Lend Health, Levitation, Mind Over Body, Molecular Agitation, Psionic Blast\*, Psionic Sense, Radial Navigation, Reduction, Spirit Sense, Teleport Trigger, Time Shift, Time/Space Anchor, Wrench.

**Defense Modes:** all.

\* Power Score raised by +1 per asterisk.

**Equipment:** Braxat *hide armor* +3, shield, *ring of protection* +2, bone hand axe +2, *fruit of flying*.

Shardivan is a small, weathered dwarf with a leathery, seamed face and an easy smile. An optimistic person, he avoids talking down to people. He is also a very talented psychometabolist, and prefers to rely on those powers in combat. His favorite tactic is combining Adrenalin Control and Animal Affinity to become a fearsome fighting machine.

At the time the PCs arrive, Shardivan is down to 58 hp, and is fighting off a psionic attack from Barrach while looking for breathing room to initiate his Adrenalin Control power.

Once Barrach flees or dies, Mara and Shardivan will thank the PCs. The rogue psionics wish to end the psionic interference and are prepared to destroy the Psionatrix if necessary. They would prefer to keep the gem intact and hold it for later use. The rogue psionics do not know the PCs, but once the PCs identify themselves and drop a couple of names, the psionics will recognize the characters as potential allies. If the PCs simply turn on them, the two psionics will teleport away.

*The battle ends with a sudden silence as the last of your enemies falls. The dwarven traveler you aided kneels by his companion, a tall human. In a moment, the man's eyes open, and he sits up. The dwarf turns to face you, and smiles. "Thank you for*

*your assistance, friends," he says. "Barrach and his ancient horrors were nearly the end of us. Are any of you hurt? Can we be of any help to you?"*

Shardivan is grateful to the PCs, but at the moment, he does not know who they are, or where they place their allegiances. He assumes another of the rogues brought them to assist. Shardivan has several questions for the PCs: Who are you? Why are you here? Who sent you?

Shardivan will try to enlist the PCs' help if they tell him they are here to end the psionic interference field. If the PCs mention Korgunard, Shardivan will explain the avangion's death. If the characters demonstrate any reasonable knowledge of the Order, the Psionatrix, or Dasaraches, Shardivan's estimation of them will rise accordingly. Shardivan is willing to answer most questions the PCs might have. He can reveal the following information:

The Order has split over use of the Psionatrix and the murder of Korgunard. Pharistes, the Cerebral Master of Telepathy, rules the Order now.

Pharistes plans to leave the Psionatrix activated indefinitely. By suppressing psionics over Athas, only the Order will survive as a psionic influence.

Pharistes ordered the murder of Korgunard because the avangion had learned too much. The Order assembled to attack him, but the rogue element refused to help.

Shardivan will also give psionic PCs shards of crystal which enable full access to psionics, should the PCs have none already. The dwarf would like the PCs' assistance, but if they are reticent or unwilling to help, he will not press the issue. He will warn the other rogue psionics preparing to attack to stay out of the PCs' way, recognizing that they share a common cause whether the characters are willing to admit it or not.

If the PCs seem implacably hostile, Shardivan and Mara will simply flee by the most expedient means. As above, they will warn the other rogues to stay out of the way, and let the PCs get themselves



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killed trying to tackle the Order alone.

Once the PCs have agreed to assist Shardivan and Mara, the psionics will join the party. They will permit magical or psionic interrogation to establish their loyalties, since they feel the Order's recent actions deserve some suspicion on the part of the ordinary folk of Athas. The psionics will quietly examine the party in turn.

Once Shardivan and Mara join the party, they will be able to guide the PCs to Dasaraches. When the party reaches the shores of the lake, they will be able to rest for several hours while the other rogue psionics make their way to the camp. The rogues have fought their way through the outer defenses and are preparing to attack Dasaraches itself in the next encounter, *Council of War*.

### Council of War

In this encounter, the rogue psionics of the Order will plan their attack on Dasaraches. The player characters will be introduced to more of their allies and will discover how they can help in the assault on the ancient fortress. *Council of War* is intended to be a role-playing encounter that will allow the players to feel like they are directing events instead of simply responding to them.

*Throughout the evening, more of the mysterious travelers arrive. They represent almost every thinking race on Athas. Most are human, dwarven, or elven, but there are a few muls, halflings, and thri-kreen as well. Without exception, the travelers are men and women of calm, confident serenity. A few have brought allies as well, skilled warriors or competent preservers, to help in the fight.*

*You are treated well by the powerful psionics, many of whom stop to thank you for your assistance. As twilight falls over the silent forest, the psionics gather together around a small campfire and motion you near. They fall silent, and in your mind you feel a tingle of their presence.*

The rogue psionics are all mindlinking with each other to avoid vocalized speech, which can be overheard through Clairaudience or Sound Link. Their conversation runs along the following lines:

- **Tayra, female human clairsentient:** "I have seen grave danger in tomorrow's battle. Many of us will die, as will many of our brothers in Dasaraches. Mark my words: if we attack Pharistes, half of us will not see the sun set tomorrow."

- **Chk'tk'cha, thri-kreen telepath:** "My people die by the thousands in the plains and deserts beyond these mountains. My life is of no account when weighed in that balance. Whatever the cost, we must try."

- **Ariach, human psychokineticist:** "I have no wish to die tomorrow, but I agree with Chk'tk'cha. We cannot allow Pharistes to remain the sole tyrant of the Way on Athas. He wishes to remake the world in his image. Tell me, what would that world be like?"

- **Ushegara, female dwarven telepath:** "I have never shied away from a fight in my lifetime, but this talk of killing sickens me. These are our brothers we speak of. Never has the Order been thus divided."

- **Priath the Old, human, Cerebral Master of psychometabolism:** "Pharistes has begun his own personal agenda. By our ancient laws he is now a renegade, and any who stand with him are renegades as well. His life is forfeit."

After some more argument and debate, the psionics agree that they must attack Pharistes and destroy him. The rogues plan to attack Dasaraches at dawn, teleporting and dimension dooring into the fortress in one all-out attempt to locate and de-



stroy the Psionatrix. The psionics will ask the PC's to join the assault and assign them task of defeating any obstacles or physical guardians.

Allow the PCs to contribute to the planning if they desire. The psionics suggest that the PC's should consider the front gate, as they think Pharistes' forces will be scattered throughout Dasaraches to defend against psionics teleporting into random places in the fortress.

If the PCs bring up the subject of destroying the Psionatrix, the rogues will simply ask them to wait on any action until members of their company arrive. The rogue psionics would prefer to keep the Psionatrix intact, but are reluctant to mention this. They do not believe that the PCs will be the first to arrive in the Psionatrix chamber and thus are unconcerned with the PCs' plans.

The rest of the evening passes without event. The psionics maintain a watch over the camp, and the player characters will be able to rest, to relearn spells, and to recover hit points and psionic strength points. Most of the rogue Order members are de-

cent enough people, who are willing to talk with PCs seeking them out. The psionics will not discuss details of the Order's agenda, membership, or locations of other Order strongholds.

If asked, a psionist might estimate the number of Pharistes' followers at about 30. However, they also know that Dasaraches contains a number of magical traps and guardians that probably have been activated by Pharistes. The psionics point out the chitin golems and the elementals over the badlands outside the forest as examples.

## Moving to the Attack

Early in the morning, the camp awakens, and most of the psionics and retainers begin preparing for battle. Mara and Shardivan join the player characters. Before dawn, the group moves to the foot of the bridge to Dasaraches, while other groups of attackers disperse to different locations.

If your players have come up with a plan that they insist on following, do not force them to attack over





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the bridge. Skip *On the Bridge* and allow them to continue to *Dasaraches*, but inform them of Pharistes' defense ploy just before they enter the fortress.

### Pharistes' Defense

Of course, Pharistes and his followers know that the rogue psionics are going to attack. Pharistes has decided to disable the crystals screening out the Psionatrix field, thus neutralizing all psionics. When the attack begins, the crystal shards shielding their possessors from the Psionatrix field will burn out and turn black. All psionics relying on the crystals—the Order members, the rogue psionics, and any player characters—will be fully affected by the Psionatrix field. Only Pharistes will escape the effect, and he must remain in contact with the Psionatrix to avoid the inflation of psionic costs.

Pharistes is willing to deprive both sides of psionic access because he controls the ancient defenses of *Dasaraches*. With psionics neutralized, his followers outnumber the renegades and also have the advantage of numerous magical traps and guardians to defeat the renegades. Pharistes will wait for the majority of the renegade psionics to teleport into the fortress before he destroys the crystals, thus catching his enemies in a deadly and efficient trap.

As the psionics of both sides fall back to the primitive but effective tactics of physical combat, the player character warriors and mages will emerge as the renegades' only hope for victory.

### On the Bridge

(See Map Book pg. 27)

This encounter signals the beginning of the assault on *Dasaraches*. The player characters are moving to the attack when Pharistes destroys the crystals enabling psionic use under the Psionatrix field. The PCs must fight off a powerful water drake while their allies recover from the stunning blow.



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*The morning is cool and still, with wisps of mist clinging to the dark waters of the lake and veiling the opposite shore. During the night, you moved to the foot of an ancient stone bridge that spans the lake. The fortress of Dasaraches gleams red and gold in the rising sun.*

*The ancient wizards' keep is a circular structure, with high, inward-slanting walls. Several concentric walls are staggered back from the outer walls of the keep, and a single spire of white stone rises from the main body of the fortress. Dasaraches sits on a jungle-covered island in the dark lake. The bridge is made of several dozen low stone arches, about ten to fifteen feet above the surface of the water. Its pavement is cracked and old, with wiry weeds growing between the stones, though it seems to be in sturdy condition. Mara and Shardivan, the psionics you aided earlier, are with you.*

*Suddenly, you feel the feather touch of another presence in your minds. "Good luck, my friends," it says. "Commence the attack!"*

As the PCs advance across the bridge, Mara keeps up a running commentary on the progress of the assault. He reports the successful teleportations of a number of the attackers, as well as the progress of several flying psionics. When the PCs are roughly halfway across the bridge, disaster strikes.

*As you continue over the bridge, all the psionics in your party suddenly stagger and collapse. The crystal shards they carried blacken and char before your eyes. In the distance, you hear cries of dismay and the clash of weapons. The psionics begin to climb back to their feet, but, before they are fully recovered, a great mass of water appears over the party and deluges you!*

All the psionics in the group are stunned and disoriented for 1-3 rounds by the destruction of the crystals that shielded them from the Psionatrix field. The field now affects them fully, quadrupling the strength point cost of any devotion and halving the

psionics' power scores.

In the meantime, a water drake under Pharistes' direction attacks the party. Pharistes mastered the beast several days ago against the possibility of a renegade attack. The water drake begins the fight by using its special Gate power to summon a 30 foot sphere of water over the party. In addition to the normal damage caused by the falling water, any person failing their saving throw must make a check against their Dexterity at -2 or be swept over the side of the bridge and into the lake.

After using its Gate power, the water drake attacks with its powerful bite and claws. It will attempt to bite any creature in the water first, seeking to drag the victim under. If the drake hits, it will take its victim to the bottom of the lake and drown them there (normal drowning rules apply) while worrying them with its jaws.

When there are no more live creatures in the water, the drake will lunge out of the water once every two rounds to try to claw and bite at creatures on the bridge. It will ignore anyone who reaches either shore. If the drake hits a person on the bridge with its bite, that person must make a bend bars/lift gates roll or be dragged off the bridge and into the water.

**Water Drake (1):** AL N; AC -1; MV 12, Sw 15; HD 20; hp 140; THAC0 5; #AT 4; Dmg 1-8+10/1-8+10/4-24/3-30; SA bite/swallow, elemental, psionic, Tail Lash; SD Psionic; SZ H; ML 20.

The player characters will not be attacked again until they reach the fortress itself. However, you should keep them on edge by reporting cloud rays or rocs circling above the fortress, or by having the PCs encounter a couple of corpses. They will hear occasional shouts and screams in the distance as the attacking party approaches the fortress.

If asked about the destruction of the crystal shards, the renegade psionics will shrug and observe that Pharistes must have done it. They also



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report that they are now fully affected by the Psionatrix field and cannot access psionics.

### The Fortress of Dasaraches

The Wind Mages, an ancient order of preservers which fought against the rise of defiling magic, built Dasaraches several thousand years ago. They used powerful magic in the construction of the fortress, and despite its extreme age it is still in good condition. The island of Dasaraches is covered by thick, verdant jungle. Winding paths in poor repair crisscross the forested island with ancient cobblestone pavements, cracked and overgrown with weeds.

#### Outer Walls

The outer wall stands 50 feet high, sloping slightly inward. A thief trying to scale the wall will find it to be a smooth, cracked, and dry surface. The top of the wall is 10 feet wide, and has no parapet or crenellations of any kind. The slanting wall has a run of 5 feet to its rise of 50, so the inside edge overlooks an inwardly cut drop of 50 feet.

One gate pierces the outer wall. Directly opposite the gate, on the other side of the outer wall, sits a large circular window of *glassteel* 10 feet in diameter and 20 feet from the ground. The window looks in on area 27, the Great Hall.

Flying characters can cross the outer wall anywhere they choose. They can land in the Great Court or on the Upper Terrace, area 23.

#### The Great Court

The majority of the area enclosed by the outer walls of Dasaraches is an open courtyard or common. This area is mostly covered by dense forest, and features a number of winding paths that lead to various structures in the Great Court. The most prominent edifice in this area is the colossal Citadel rising behind the trees.

The Citadel is roofed over on levels One and Two, and partially open at the Upper Terrace on level Three. Levels Four through Seven are also roofed. It is nearly 75 feet to the roof-level of level Two, and fully 100 feet to the Upper Terrace. From the Great Court, the Citadel appears as a mighty walled keep, with the same kind of inward-sloped walls. The Spire can easily be seen from any point in the Great Court.

The Great Court is protected by 1d3 air elementals who attack any flying or levitating creature more than 20 feet above the ground of the Great Court. The elementals arrive 0-2 (d3-1) rounds after an airborne creature appears over the outer walls. Air elementals receive a +1 bonus to hit and inflict +4 damage to flying enemies.

**Air Elemental, Standard:** AL N; AC 2; MV 36(A); HD 12; hp 55 each; THAC0 3; #AT 1; Dmg 2-20; SA form whirlwind; SD +2 or better weapon to hit; ML 16; XP 7,000.

#### Key to the Fortress

The majority of the rooms and passages of Dasaraches are not individually described here. When the player characters enter and search an area without an individual description (i.e. any unnumbered room on the map), use the *Room Features* below to randomly generate a couple of interesting characteristics.

Unless otherwise noted, the ceilings stand about 13 feet high within the Citadel, and the interior walls are made of 6-inch thick stone blocks, covered by a cracked and peeling ancient glaze. Floors are thickly covered with dust, and occasional small rodents, insects, or lizards live in lightly trafficked areas. Areas used by the psionics of the Order have generally been restored to their original condition and are obviously inhabited.

Doors are wooden, with bronze hinges and handles. Unused doors generally are rotten and stuck,



but the Order restored or replaced many of the doors in the areas they use.

## Room Features

The table of room features below will provide the DM a quick method for individualizing the various empty rooms that PCs may enter during their exploration of Dasaraches. Roll a d6 and consult the *Room Contents* chart, and then roll the appropriate number of d12s on the *Features* chart.

## Room Contents

1d6 Result:

- 1-3 Nearly empty; one room feature.
- 4-5 Abandoned; 1d4 room features.
- 6 Wrecked; 2d3 room features.

## Features

1d12 Result:

1. **Tapestry/painting/mural** (rotten, soiled, or fallen.)
2. **Weapon** (dagger/sword/axe/bow, may be intact, bent, or broken.)
3. **Corpse** (bones/body/skull, may be bare, mummified, or recent.)
4. **Blankets/pallet/rug/carpet** (rotten, chewed, soiled)
5. **Bed** (cot/bunk/grand, may be wrecked, splintered, burned, or intact.)
6. **Desk** (small/large, may be wrecked, splintered, burned, or intact.)
7. **Chair** (bench/stool/armchair, may be splintered, burned, wrecked, or intact.)

8. **Cabinet** (cabinet/bookshelf/case, may be splintered, wrecked, or intact.)

9. **Lamp/Chandelier/Brazier/Sconce** (fallen, wrecked, or rusted.)

10. **Container** (Sack/bag/jar/vase/pack, may be ruined, torn, empty, or full.)

11. **Small animal** (insect/spider/snake/rat, may be dead, half-eaten, or nesting.)

12. **Miscellaneous wreckage** (old coins/ ashes/ broken bottles/holed kegs/etc.)

This list should be sufficient to individualize any undescribed room the player characters explore. Use your imagination and feel free to play with the results to tailor the room to your tastes.

## 1. The Grand Gate.

*The fortress Dasaraches rises above you, its walls raked inward. Directly in front of you is the only gate in the fortress walls, a circular portal 20 feet in diameter. A single disk of rune-carved bronze rests within, rolled slightly to one side, revealing an opening about 2 feet wide. Through the opening, you see an overgrown garden or forest within the walls of Dasaraches.*

*The bronze gate features a single sunburst emblazoned in its center. The body of a human female lies in the gate, half in and half out. The hilt of a knife emerges between her shoulder blades. You hear nothing; the silence is ominous.*

The gate consists of a single piece of bronze 2 feet thick. When open, the disk rolls aside into a groove within the outer wall. The body is that of a psionicist loyal to Pharistes; after inspecting the corpse, Mara or Shardivan will identify her as a woman named Iniga. The dagger is an obsidian *dagger* +3.



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When the PCs enter the fortress, read the following text to them:

*The outer wall of Dasaraches encloses a large courtyard or garden area. Straight ahead of you, the inner walls rise above a small forest of trees and overgrown walkways. A couple of white marble buildings can be glimpsed to the left and the right in the courtyard. About 30 feet away, you see the body of a small wiry elf. He has been dragged to the side of the path in a smear of blood. The stillness is broken by a low, menacing growl. Crouching beside the elf is a powerful, catlike creature with bloody jaws and an evil glow in its eyes.*

The catlike creature is a kirre, brought here to help guard the fortress. The elf teleported into Dasarached and surprised Iniga, killing her. Pharistes' destruction of the crystal shards left the elf with no defense against the enraged kirre.

The kirre is angry, but it just wants to be left alone. It will growl and snarl for several rounds, then seize its prey and retreat into the thickets off the path. If any PC attacks it or approaches within 20 feet, it will drop the elf and charge instantly.

**Kirre (1):** AL N; AC 7; MV 15; HD 6 + 6; hp 43; THAC0 13; #AT 7; Dmg 1-4/1-4/1-6/1-8/1-4/1-4/1-6; SA Psionics; ML 14; XP 650.

A search of Iniga's body reveals a pouch with 8 gp, 35sp, and 40 cp. She has a ring of bone worth 35 sp, and a fruit of healing. The elf's body has two gems worth 20 sp each, a bone short sword, and a pair of fine inix leather boots worth 20 sp.

### 2. The Gatehouse.

*A small building of stone stands against the wall just inside the gate. A single door of bronze-banded wood leads within, and a small circular window beside the door peers darkly out at the path. The door hangs slightly open.*

This building consists of three rooms. The outer room is a large sitting area, with a small, dust-covered table, two splintered chairs, and a great capstan mounted in the floor near the outer wall. The capstan is geared to the bronze gate-disk, and opens and closes the gate. It requires a Strength of 21 or better to operate, and closes the gate in two rounds. Two human-sized characters with sufficient Strength could cooperate and cut the time to one round.

The capstan is manned by a squat, powerful rock golem. The golem's only purpose is to manipulate the capstan, and it ignores all intruders. If the golem is attacked, it will defend itself, but it will not leave the immediate vicinity of the capstan. The golem is commanded through the use of a silver and obsidian command scepter. The scepters can be found in different places throughout Dasaraches.

The other rooms of the gatehouse once served as the living quarters for the gatekeeper. There is a scattering of ruined furniture and several smashed bottles here, but nothing of any value.

**Rock Golem (1):** AL N; AC 4; MV 6; HD 10; hp 65; THAC0 11; #AT 1; Dmg 2-20; SA knock-down; SD special; ML 20; XP 3,000.

### 3. Stables.

*An ancient building of weathered stone leans against the outer wall here. It is in poor condition, and sections of its tiled roof have collapsed in several places. Ivy and other creeping plants grow over its cracked walls. An old, musty smell lingers in the air.*

This was once a small stable maintained here for visitors and couriers. The large, sliding doors made of rotten old wood are secured only by a rusted hasp. Inside, there are a number of stalls with nothing but heaps of dirt and debris where the straw fodder once lay. Two open areas at either end of the stall served as tack and harness areas, and a few decayed saddles and broken bits still hang from



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rusted hooks on the walls. The whole stable is dank and foul-smelling.

Huddled in the corner of one of the stalls is a small human skeleton with crushed legs. In its bony fingers it clutches a scepter of copper with a turquoise inset. The scepter commands the air elementals that guard Dasaraches, and can be used to summon or dismiss them. This power can be revealed by a successful *identify* or *legend lore* spell. The scepter can only command air elementals already bound to the service of Dasaraches, and the air elementals cannot be ordered beyond the Dragon Crown Mountains.

### 4. Ancient Fountain.

*The paved path you have been following to the Citadel suddenly widens into an open court. The center of the court is occupied by the wreckage of a great fountain. The fountain includes four nymph-like creatures around its perimeter who face the image of some forgotten ancient deity in the center. The central piece is missing an arm, and various other chips, dents, and cracks mar the rest of the fountain. A weed-choked pool of stagnant water now fills the old fountain to overflowing.*

On the north side of the fountain a stocky male halfling slumps against the rim, clutching a severe wound in his chest. Mara and Shardivan recognize him as Xaxachtel, a psionist loyal to Pharistes. Xaxachtel is in a bad way, reduced to only 2 hp out of his normal 55. He has no wish to resume the fight and the PCs will easily be able to finish him off, if they really want to.

If the PCs speak to Xaxachtel, he will remain neutral in his conversation. He realizes that there is no point in antagonizing them, and, if asked, will tell them a little of what might be waiting inside. If the PCs tend to his injuries-or heal him, Xaxachtel will tell them that Pharistes and the Psionatrix are waiting in the top room of the spire.

Xaxachtel is through fighting for today, and is convinced that Pharistes was a fool for allowing the Order to be divided. All he wants to do at this point is shake the dust of Dasaraches from his sandals and return to his home in the Forest Ridge. If asked, he will tell the PCs that a renegade psionist named Yarian wounded him. He is not given stats here because the PCs may easily dispatch him while Pharistes is blocking access to psionics.

### 5. Guesthouse.

*A small cottage lies beneath the thick growth of trees and bushes here. A small stone path leads from the main path up to its doorway. The door itself is gone, and the windows gape open, black and empty. You can make out black charring around the doorway and windows, evidence of some long-ago fire.*

There are four smaller rooms within the guesthouse. All are littered with a debris of ruined furniture, including mildewed pieces of tables, chairs, bookshelves, and chests. Most of the fragments are so old that they crumble at a touch. A few pieces of pottery and glass lay scattered about.

In the large bedroom to the left of the doorway, a few splintered bones lie by one wall. An ancient, rusted hauberk of chainmail lies over the bones. Beneath the hauberk lies a steel-hafted *mace* +2, protected against the years by its enchantment. A gem worth 300 sp is hidden in a secret compartment in the mace's haft.

### 6. Servant's Quarters.

*A large stone building with a number of empty windows runs along the fortress wall, here. It is in terrible condition, with large sections of roof missing and no furnishings or fittings such as doors or window frames left intact. The creepers and brambles of the courtyard have claimed this ancient ruin for their own.*



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The west common room of the servant's quarters (area A on the map) is open and overgrown, with no roof remaining. It has become the home of an old and large poisonweed plant. Halflings, druids, and characters with a survival proficiency in the forest have a cumulative 1 in 3 chance of spotting the plant before they trigger its attack.

**Poisonweed:** AL N; AC 8; MV nil; HD 10; hp 51; THAC0 nil; #AT 1; Dmg 1-6; SA poison; SD special; ML nil; XP 2,000.

The individual bunkrooms of the servants' quarters are in terrible shape. The overgrown wreckage filling this building obscures all but the vaguest outlines of ancient furnishings. A number of human skeletons with moldering, splintered bones can be found scattered through the rooms of the servants' quarters. At location B, the skeleton of an ancient warrior in bronze plate mail lies with an iron short sword through the gorget. Buried in the debris, by the warrior's right hand, lies a steel *battle axe* +3.

The east common area is littered with the splinters of several wooden tables and benches. The roof still stands, but there is a large hole in the center. Several skeletons, including one in bronze plate mail, lie here unburied, but there is nothing else of interest.

### 7. Mages' Forum.

*The dense forest ahead seems to have grown over and around some ancient ruins. As you approach, you can make out battered columns of white marble that support an open-sided colonnade. The roof is exquisitely decorated with carved runes and bas-relief, but the weathering of centuries has taken its toll. In the center of the semi-circular colonnade stands a stone platform, its blocks cracked by the winding roots of the trees.*

This area is guarded by two halfling fighters who

were recruited to help defend Dasaraches. The halflings wait on the roof of the colonnades at the points marked 'X'. From there, they each can cover the area beneath the other colonnade. The colonnades are 14 feet tall, and a human character would need assistance to climb up to the roof. Thri-kreen can easily jump to the rooftop, and half-giants can boost a character up or scramble up themselves in one round. If a half-giant tries to climb up, the roof will give way and all characters on top will suffer 2-20 hp damage in the fall.

**Halfling Fighters (2):** F8; AL N; AC 1 (hide armor and Dexterity 21); MV 6; hp 68, 57; THAC0 7 with bows or 13 with swords (Dexterity 21, Strength 17, bow specialists); Dmg 1d6+1 (arrow) or 1d6 (bone short sword); ML 15; XP.

The halflings have 12 steel-headed and 12 bone arrows each, and an ample supply of natural Type D poison (onset 1-2 minutes; strength 30/2-12.) They wait while intruders enter the open court, and then open fire. They will try to shoot as many different individuals as possible to maximize the effects of their poisoned arrows.

The halflings are intelligent and courageous fighters. They will not fight to the death, but once reduced to 10 hp or less, they will try to escape into the forest, harassing the party with missile fire. Neither warrior carries anything of value beyond his weapons and armor.

### 8. The Citadel Gates.

*The path leads to the gates of the citadel, towering overhead. The gate is a disk of bronze, emblazoned with ancient runes and symbols. It occupies a circular doorway, and is recessed about 2 feet into the wall. The gate is green with the verdigris of age.*

The gate is identical to the outer gates of Dasaraches, except that this one is closed. The disk of

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bronze is 2 feet thick and 20 feet in diameter. There are enough projections and handholds on the surface of the disk to permit an attempt to roll it aside. This would require a total of 90 Strength points. Once open, a total of 30 Strength points is required to hold it open. Spells like *passwall*, *disintegrate*, *stoneshape*, or *dimension door* can all circumvent the gate as well.

When the PCs get through the gate, read the following:

*Uncounted years have destroyed the grandeur of this hall. The proud banners, flags, and tapestries that once decorated its walls are rotten and faded. Several have fallen to the floor as their fastenings decayed. A large 40-foot wide bas-relief occupies the wall opposite the gate, showing a group of robed sages or scholars. Several doors lead out of this room.*

*Five hulking skeletons in the remnants of ancient chain mail stand at the ready around the room. A squat, powerful dwarf stands behind them, dressed in armor of rasclinn hide. In one hand he holds a scepter of iron wound with copper wire. He holds a wicked axe in the other hand. Beside the dwarf, a slim human woman in leather armor waits as well. As you enter, the human woman nods to the dwarf. "Slay them!" he bellows. The skeletons advance!*

**B'rohg Skeletons (5):** AL N; AC 5 (armor remnants); MV 12; HD 6; hp 28 each; THAC0 16 (bone weapons); #AT 2 weapons; Dmg 4- 16 -1 (size H bone morningstars); SD special; ML 20; XP 650.

**Thugarr:** Dwarf F9; AL NE; AC 2 (rasclinn hide armor +2); MV 6; hp 101; THAC0 12 (+6 to hit with iron battle axe +2; Strength 19, specialist); #AT 2; Dmg 1-8 + 11; SD +5 on saves vs. poison or magic; ML 16.

**Shalia:** Human Ps22; AL N; AC 2 (studded leather +1, Dexterity 18); MV 12; hp 62; THAC0 9 (+4 to hit with arrows +2); #AT 2 arrows or 1

weapon; Dmg 1-8 +2 (12 sheaf arrows +2) or 1-6 (iron short sword); SA psionics; ML 10.

Shalia's psionic abilities are not detailed here because they are currently inaccessible. If you decide she will attempt to use psionics anyway, use Mara's statistics and ability scores (see pg. 10). Shalia will hang back and shoot at spellcasters while Thugarr wades into the fight. The b'rohg skeletons are four-armed, and each carries two huge bone morningstars.

Should Thugarr be reduced to 10 hp or less, he will try to retreat or to surrender. Shalia is very shaky right now because she cannot access her psionics, and she will flee after the first serious wound she takes.

Thugarr carries a pouch containing 4 gp, 22sp, 36 cp, and three gems worth 50 sp, 25 sp, and 10 sp. Shalia has a *scarab of protection*, a *fruit of flying*, a *fruit of invisibility*, and a *fruit of extra healing*. She will not hesitate to use them.

The chamber marked "A," off to the side of the entry hall contains a capstan and locking device for the main gate. A powerful rock golem waits silently, standing by the capstan. It will take no note of the PCs unless they attack it. The golem can be commanded by a silver and obsidian scepter.

**Rock Golem (1):** AL N; AC 4; MV 6; HD 10; hp 65; THAC0 11; #AT 1; Dmg 2-20; SA knock-down; SD special; ML 20; XP 3,000.

### 9. The Kitchens

*This chamber is not in the state of disrepair that characterizes much of Dasaraches. The tiled floor has been painstakingly repaired, and new pots, pans, and other cooking implements hang by the clean counters. A number of different cooking basics, such as salt, flour, and spices sit in jars along newly-installed shelves. A large hearth occupies one corner, but no fire burns there.*

The kitchen is well-stocked and kept in good repair, but most of the psionics do their own cooking



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of simple dishes; a large staff of cooks or servants would be inappropriate for them.

The door to the east leads to a pantry stocked with more supplies—jars of grain, dried meats and cheeses, and other foodstuffs as well as cleaning supplies. The south door leads to a narrow set of stairs descending to a large cellar. The cellar is not shown on this map, but it features a deep, clean well and a couple of enchanted cold rooms that act like refrigerators and freezers.

Beyond the high-quality rations here for the taking, the kitchens hold nothing of interest.

### 10. Retainers' Quarters.

*Unlike the other doors lining this hall, this door has been carefully rehinged and newly varnished. Within, the room features six comfortable bunks and several small tables and chairs. Obviously, this room has recently been inhabited.*

The Order has repaired several of the old wizards' quarters to serve the occasional guests or retainers psionicists might bring. This chamber is actually the residence of the Urikite party. The Urikites arrived in Dasaraches about three days ago, whereupon Pharistes psionically Dominated them. He recruited them to aid in the fortress' defense and stand duty in the chamber of the Psionatrix.

This refitted bunkroom contains a number of clues to the identity of its occupants. Each bunk has a trunk at its foot (unlocked) with a few of its owner's possessions. Most of the gear appears to be standard adventurers' equipment, but one trunk contains a pouch with 30 Urikite silver pieces, and another contains an obsidian knife of Urikite manufacture. Also, the trunk belonging to the Urikite templar contains a copy of the scroll of authorization mentioned in Part Six, *Pack Frenzy*.

Players stating that their characters pay particular attention to the clothes receive an Intelligence check on d20 to determine if the characters recognize anything belonging to a Urikite they know.

### 11. Refectory.

*A great table occupies the center of this reconditioned room. The floor is rich teak and the walls are tastefully decorated with new paintings. Flagon of water and wine sit on the table, and a number of solid, well-made chairs are drawn up to their places. This room has been cleaned and cared for, unlike some of the other chambers you have seen.*

*Slumped against the table you see the body of one of the renegade psionicists, a broad knife blade stuck in his chest. Sprawled nearby are two of his allies, a mul warrior and a wild halfling. There are no marks on their bodies, but they are quite dead.*

The psionicist and his allies were killed by several loyalists who ambushed them here at the beginning of the assault. Pharistes' contact with the Psionatrix enabled him to use his psionic powers to eliminate the mul and the halfling, while the loyalists overpowered the renegade the old-fashioned way.

While the PCs are investigating this room, or at any later point you feel is appropriate, Pharistes decides to launch an attack at them. He will use his Post-Hypnotic Suggestion devotion to convince two or three PCs that they will surely die if they remain in the fortress, and that they should try to escape with their own lives. If Pharistes makes his power score roll, the affected characters will be compelled to retreat. You can allow PCs a saving throw against spells (no dwarven bonuses apply!) to fight off their irrational fear, but ideally you should convince the players to role-play their fears. The effect can be countered by a Post-Hypnotic Suggestion, Psychic Surgery, or the activation of a psionic defense mode.

If Pharistes encounters any psionic defenses, he will spend 1-4 rounds attacking the psionicist with Ego Whips and Mind Thrusts, once he has breached their defenses. After that, he will turn his attention elsewhere to attack another renegade party.

Pharistes' stats appear on pg. 32. Note that his direct contact with the Psionatrix gives him virtually infinite PSPs.



## 12. Great Hall

Two magnificent staircases sweep up to a second-story balcony that encircles this grand chamber. A beautiful, clear crystal window 20 feet in diameter dominates this room. Opposite the window, a 15-foot high set of double doors leads into the interior of the fortress.

The marble floor and staircases have been cleaned and repaired. The walls are of bare, clean stone, their plaster coverings deteriorated long ago. Dasaraches' current owners have hung several new tapestries.

In the center of the chamber, you see the crumpled body of Ariach, the rogue psychokineticist, and a strange heap of shattered black stone. Standing around the room are three silent statues of black obsidian. As you enter, they stir and begin to move to the attack!

The three statues are obsidian golems, and the heap of rubble is a fourth one that Ariach detonated by a supreme effort. Their orders make them attack any creature entering who does not give a cer-

tain password. If the PCs have the halfling Xaxachtel with them and have treated him well, the halfling will use the password to keep the golems from attacking. An iron and copper scepter can command the golems not to attack, but only a copper and obsidian scepter can alter the golems' orders.

**Obsidian Golem (3):** AL N; AC 4; MV 6; HD 12; hp 65 each; THAC0 9; #AT 1; Dmg 4-40; SA special; SD special; ML 20; XP 9,000.

One golem per round will use its special fist-smash attack, while the others melee with any intruders. The golems have been ordered to guard this hall and will not pursue anyone outside of this area or up the stairs.

## 13. Processional Hall.

This is a long, grand hall leading to magnificent double doors at either end. Two smaller side doors enter as well. The hall comprises a series of pointed arches, with the highest point of the ceiling fully 18



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*feet overhead. Bronze sconces and braziers, and the tattered remains of a rich carpet still line the hallway. Most of the ancient dressings have been moved to the sides of the corridor, and now a narrow path of clean stone leads to the great doors.*

The doors at the western end of the hallway feature a massive sunburst emblem of beaten gold fitted onto a iron-framed door of varnished wood. The door obviously has been reconditioned. Beyond the ancient wreckage that litters the sides of the corridor, there is nothing of interest here.

### 14. Ruined Hall.

*Unlike the other common areas you have seen thus far, this great chamber has not been restored. Rotten tapestries sag along the walls, and rich carpeting has decayed into dusty piles of detritus on the floor. The pillars are chipped and cracked, and the ornate serpents that once entwined them are missing sections of their bodies. At least half a dozen ancient skeletons are scattered around the chamber. Suddenly, you hear someone sobbing in a corner.*

If either Barrach or Arvego has survived to this point, one of them is here. The psionist was affected by a powerful backlash through the crystal shard when Pharistes destroyed the screening devices. The psionist's mind has been severely damaged by the uncontrolled energies, and he ran here to hide. He is manic-depressive, and in his manic fits could easily try to kill someone.

If the PCs end up fighting this hapless soul, he attacks with a madman's strength, gaining +1 to hit and +2 on damage above and beyond his normal bonuses. Level-headed PCs will be able to coax him into answering questions. The psionist knows where Pharistes is and knows that he is drawing power directly from the gem. He can tell the PCs roughly which way to go to get to the tower, and will also babble about the "winding way in the dark," referring to

the secret staircase in area 15. The psionist can also explain the command scepters of the fortress.

The madman will refuse to accompany the party, and will attack berserkly if coerced.

### 15. Council Chambers.

*The massive doorway opens into a rough semicircle, the shape of a crescent moon. Several tiers holding ancient thrones descend toward an open area in the room's center. In the middle of the open floor, a pedestal holds a shining, fist-sized gem. Light dances in its facets. A circle of mystical runes on the floor surrounds the pedestal.*

*Behind the pedestal, several individuals stand gazing at the gem. A powerful half-giant warrior, a pair of human warriors, and an ancient balding man all snarl and draw their weapons. "Get them!" cries the old man.*

*The renegade psionists with your party surge forward, swords at the ready. "Quickly! Neutralize Pharistes before he can use the Psionatrix against us!" They hurl themselves into the melee!*

This is not the true Pharistes or Psionatrix. A clever defiler named Aryatu is waiting here to bait a trap. The half-giant and the human warriors are exactly what they seem to be, but the Pharistes look-alike is actually a summoned fiend. The fake Psionatrix is simply a big quartz crystal with a *light* spell cast on it. Aryatu is invisible, and plans to stay away from the fight until the right moment.

A magic circle confines the fiend masquerading as Pharistes, and until it is broken the fiend cannot leave. When any person mars the circle or steps over it, the fiend will escape from its confinement. The fiend desires principally to wreak havoc, after which it means to kill Aryatu for summoning it. The fiend remains loyal for 3-6 (d4+2) rounds before deciding to turn on Aryatu.

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**Human Fighters (2):** F7; AL N; AC 5 (braxat hide and shields); MV 12; hp 55, 47; THAC0 14 (+1 to hit, specialists); #AT 2; Dmg 1-8+3 (steel long swords, 16 Str, specialization); ML 14.

**Half-giant:** FG; AL N; AC 5 (*ring mail* +2); MV 15; hp 95; THAC0 15 (+3 to hit, Str 22, bone axe); #AT 3/2; Dmg 1-8+9 (bone battle axe); ML 14.

**Mezzoloth (Yugoloth, Lesser):** AL NE; AC -1; MV 15; HD 10+20; hp 79; THAC0 11; #AT 2; Dmg 7-12; SA spell-like powers; SD special; MR 50%; ML 14; XP 40,500.

**Aryatu:** De 14; AL NE; AC 3 (*bracers of defense* AC 5, *ring of protection* +2); MV 12; hp 33; THAC0 16 (+2 to hit with *staff* +2); #AT 1; Dmg 1-6+2 (*staff*); SA spells; ML 12. Spells in memory: *burning hands*, *color spray*, *magic missile* (×2), *wall of fog*, *blur*, *glitterdust*, *invisibility* (in effect), *web*, *dispel magic*, *fireball*, *lightning bolt*, *slow*, *suggestion*, *dimension door*, *fear*, *stoneskin* (in effect), *wall of ice*, *cone of cold*, *hold monster*, *teleport*, *wall of force*, *mass suggestion*, *prismatic spray*.

If you do not own the *Outer Planes Appendix*, you can substitute a tough mul fighter with a *hat of disguise* for the mezzoloth. Or, Pharistes and the Psionatrix could illusory, a *spectral force* cast by Aryatu. The defiler will hold back a round or two, waiting for some poor soul to wander within the mezzoloth's reach, and then attack spellcasters or psionicists in the rear of the party with heavy-damage spells. If Aryatu is seriously wounded in the fight, he will flee through the secret passage. The other warriors do not know the passage is there.

This room is use by the Cerebral Masters as a high council chamber. It is somewhat spartan in appearance, with simple stone benches and little decoration. The center seat contains a secret compartment with a silver and obsidian scepter and an iron and copper wire scepter.

The humans and the half-giant will fight bravely,

but they realize that they are only a diversion. If hard-pressed, they will attempt to surrender rather than die fighting. They are mercenaries of Draj, recruited by a high-ranking telepath of the Mediator circle. Each has 1-8 gp, 10-60 sp, 10-40 cp, and a few small gems worth 10-60 sp each.

### 16. Ancient Guardroom.

*The door to this chamber is made of iron plate, with a small grill or slit in the middle at human eye-height. Inside, you find a number of collapsed bunks, and a dozen or more skeletons. The chamber is musty and a thick layer of dust lies on every surface. You also see two figures here, wispy and indistinct. One appears to be a fallen warrior, lying among the skeletons, and the other is a beautiful young woman, cradling his head in her lap as she mourns. The woman glances up at you, and with a look of terror she vanishes. The spectral figure of the warrior disappears as well, leaving behind moldering bones.*

The warrior was one of the members of the garrison of Dasaraches when it fell. He and his companions were trapped in their guardroom and killed. The woman was his lover. They are only powerless apparitions now. If the PCs disturb the bones, the woman appears again and asks them to lay Morin (the warrior) to rest. Adventurers who attack the apparition will simply drive her off.

The apparition can describe any part of Dasaraches and tell the PCs of the secret stairway, but she cannot leave the bones of her lover.

### 17. Upper Hall.

*Great double-doors, emblazoned with the sun burst symbol of the ancient wizards' order, lead to a vaulted hall. Fading paintings and ruined gilding decorate the high ceiling. The floor is mahogany, but the years have destroyed its beauty. In the center of the room several bodies lie sprawled, including a red-robed mul, an elf, three human men, and a human woman. The*



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swords in their hands and the various wounds on the corpses attest to the violence of their demise.

A strong group of renegades teleported into this chamber, met by a number of Pharistes' guards. The red-robed mul is one of the Psiologists of Psychokinesis, a loyal Order member. The elf and the human woman are renegades. Two of the human men are fortress guards, dressed in mekillot hide armor, and the last man is a henchman of the woman renegade. A few arrows and thrown knives hang embedded in the walls or lay in the corners.

A search of the corpses turns up a silver and obsidian scepter (in the mul's robe), a jeweled ring worth 30 sp, 122 sp, and 15 gp; a steel short sword, an obsidian axe of *hurling* +3, two matched bone daggers with silver-wire hilts worth 25 sp each, a scroll with a crude map of Dasaraches, a *fruit of extra healing*, and a *fruit of speed*.

### 18. Menagerie.

*A large L-shaped room, this chamber once housed animals. A number of cages of various sizes are scattered about, many with small animal skeletons still locked inside. Several other cages have been knocked off their tables or stands and lie on the ground, their doors open. This room has not been reconditioned and is in poor shape. The cages are made from bronze-banded mekillot ribs, but with time many of the cages have grown brittle.*

A search through the cages turns up a number of different skeletons, ranging from tiny birds and beetle husks up to bones of the smaller great cats. All starved to death long ago. There is a human skeleton huddled in one corner, its bones apparently gnawed open and the marrow sucked out. There is nothing else of interest in this room.

### 19. Mage's Chamber.

*Passing several ancient, rotted doors, you come across one in good repair. It has been refinished and its hinges are new and shiny.*

*The chamber is comfortably decorated with an exotic rug and several beautiful lanterns. A small bookshelf to one side has several scrolls in it. On a table in the middle of the room, an ancient text is in the process of being restored.*

This is Aryatu's chamber. He guards the door with a *fire trap* spell, which will inflict 1d4+14 damage to any person passing through the door (a save vs. spells for half damage applies.)

Aryatu has a few personal effects. The scrolls are the defiler's spellbook, each guarded by *sepia snake sigils*, *secret pages*, and *fire traps*. The exact contents remain at the DM's discretion. A thorough search of the room turns up an ornate lantern worth 25 sp, a small coffer with 3 × 100 sp gems, 2 × 35 sp gems, 25 gp, an obsidian dagger, and an oak staff leaning against the wall with *Nptul's magic aura* cast on it.

### 20. The Library.

*Sunlight streams into this room through a great crystal window, 20 feet in diameter. This was once a great library—ornate stone niches cover the walls, still holding the remnants of wooden cabinets. Many of the books and scrolls once stored here are gone, but in places on the shelves you see ruined volumes that have rotted into uselessness.*

*Most of the shelves are still in their ruined state, but a few have been repaired, and new scrolls stand within reconditioned cabinets. A few tables have been repaired, and new banners hang from the walls. Two sweeping staircases lead up toward open doorways in the ceiling.*

*Half a dozen figures in ancient armor stand in the center of the room, their sunken eyes blazing with an evil light. Behind them, you see several robed*



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men. There are a number of corpses on the ground, people you recognize as renegades. One of the robed men steps forward, his hand raised. "Turn back, renegades," he says. "There has been enough killing today and I am sick of spilling blood."

The armored creatures are juju zombies, commanded by the iron and copper wire scepters. There are two human psionics, a dwarf psionics, and a female halfling psionics who is hiding behind a bookshelf. The PCs need not fight their way through this encounter; they have a chance to reason with the psionics, and if they are clever they may contest the loyalists' control over the juju zombies.

The loyalists would like to avoid a fight, and certainly are willing to accept the party's surrender. Should the PCs have any captive Order members with them, destroy or neutralize the juju zombies, or still have both Mara and Shardivan in good condition, the loyalists surrender if the PCs present convincing arguments to do so. Use your own judgement to decide whether the PCs deserve the opportunity to talk their way through this encounter.

### Sample dialogue:

- **Thiaman, human psionics:** "Some of the greatest minds on Athas have perished here today. We've no wish to see more deaths."
- **Gurrednek, dwarven psionics:** "I cannot allow the agenda to be overturned. Do not make me take up arms against you."
- **Juju Zombie:** "We cannot act against a bearer of the scepter of Shuvagaras."

To use the scepter, the bearer must present it and simply command the zombies. A command to stand aside or attack the psionics will create a conflict with their previous orders, and the zombies will remain neutral. Persuasive arguments to surrender might include guarantees of safety, carefully phrased threats, or an especially moving appeal to the loyalists' consciences.

If the PCs insist on doing this the hard way, the psionics will order the zombies to move to the attack, while drawing their weapons to back them up.





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The hidden halfling will use her blowgun from concealment to try to poison any especially dangerous opponents, such as half-giants or spellcasters. Any seriously wounded psionist will attempt to surrender or flee the fight. If needed, use Barrach's or Arvego's psionic abilities.

**Juju Zombies (6):** AL N; MV 9; AC 4 (ancient armor); HD 3+12; hp 30 each; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 3-12; SD special; ML 20; XP 975.

**Thiaman and Podoric:** Human Ps22; AL N; MV 12; AC -1 (*bracers of defense* AC 3, *Dexterity* 16, *ring of protection* +2); hp 69, 57; THAC0 10 (+1 to hit with steel *long swords* +1); #AT 1; Dmg 1-8+1 (*long swords*); SA psionics; ML 10.

**Gurrednek:** Dwarf Ps20; AL N; MV 6; AC 1 (*mekillot hide armor* +2, *shield*, *cloak of Arachnida*); hp 79 (Con 19); THAC0 11 (+3 to hit with iron *mace* +2); #AT 1; Dmg 2-7 +4 (*mace*, Str 18); SA psionics; ML 14.

**Ixichta:** Halfling Ps21; AL N; MV 6; AC 0 (*inix hide armor*, *ring of protection* +1, *Dex* 21); hp 60; THAC0 10 (+5 to hit with blowgun or bow); #AT 2 with blowgun or bow; Dmg 1 (blowgun) or 1-6+2 (*steel arrows* +2); SA poison, psionics; ML 15.

Ixichta uses a type O paralytic poison made from the jungle herbs in the forest around Dasaraches. She will wait in concealment to see what her companions decide to do. Each psionist carries 3-10 gp, 10-40 sp, and 10-40 cp.

### 21. Library Vault.

*The doors leading into this chamber are made of bronze plate. They fit against their jambs very tightly. Within, you find the wreckage of an ancient book vault. Dozens of wooden cabinets support only one rare volume each. Several cabinets are smashed open, their books removed, while other texts have suffered*

*irreparable damage over the encroaching years.*

The secret door in the northern corner of the room is concealed behind an old bookshelf. The various manuscripts here are, without exception, extremely valuable, but most have been nearly ruined by time. Some of the titles include elven histories, treatises on magic, and tomes describing the anatomy of dozens of species. One dust-covered book is a *Libram of Gainful Conjuraton* (for preservers) and another nearly-ruined scroll contains the defiler spells *acid storm*, *control undead*, and *mind blank*.

### 22. Psiologist's Quarters.

*Like several other rooms you have seen, this chamber shows signs of recent occupation. The door has been refinished with new hinges, and the furnishings inside are intact and dust-free. A small, hard bunk and an austere writing desk comprise the only furniture.*

This room is the home of one of the Psiologists of Metapsionics. She was killed defending Dasaraches, and her body lies on the Upper Terrace. The desk contains a few old scrolls, and pieces of parchment on which she has recorded her observations. One of her notes: "It is apparent that the Psionatrix does not augment psionic power, as Pharistes has informed us, but actually uses the forces of magic. While it is clear that the gem imitates and is controlled by mental powers, it is a magical artifact, and therefore beyond the Order's agenda."

There is nothing else of interest here.

### 23. The Upper Terrace.

*The stairs rising from the library emerge onto an open terrace. The central tower of the Citadel continues to rise from here. Two doorways lead within. Two roofed structures join the base of the Citadel, housing more rooms at this rooftop level. This*

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seems to be a garden area, with low shrubs and wandering, stone paths. Weathered statues stand here and there on the terrace.

A dozen bodies sprawl around the terrace, loyalists and rogues both. A terrible fight raged here, and the various weapons in the hands or bodies of the fallen attest to a brief and deadly melee. One figure remains standing, a powerful automaton carved of obsidian. Its hands are covered with blood. When it sees you, it stirs and moves to the attack!

The automaton is an obsidian golem. It is damaged and cannot understand the commands of the scepters. The last order it received was to "kill them all," and it continues to obey. In the fight, the golem went berserk and attacked anyone within reach. One of the psionics is still alive and feigning death to escape the attention of the golem. When the party engages the golem, the psionist leaps up and staggers towards the closest exit.

**Obsidian Golem:** AL N; AC 4; MV 6; HD 12; hp 80; THAC0 9; #AT 1; Dmg 4-40; SA special; SD special; ML 20; XP 9,000.

The fleeing psionist is a renegade named Ferith. He is a wiry elf in terrible shape, reduced to 3 of his 61 points. He is done fighting for the day, and would be very grateful for any help or healing the PC party can provide. Ferith is concerned with getting away from the golem, leaving the PCs to deal with it.

A search of the bodies reveals a total of 45 gp, 195 sp, 118 cp, gems worth 35 sp, 3 × 25 sp, 7 × 10 sp, and a *fruit of gaseous form*, *boots of levitation*, a bone *short sword of quickness*, a steel dagger, an iron-headed morning star, and 12 steel light quarrels.

### 24. High Mage's Quarters.

*This living area has been carefully restored to its*

*original condition. Beautiful hardwood panelling covers the walls, and a number of rich carpets cover the floor. The furniture includes a large desk, a bookshelf, a small table, and several chairs. Around the corner, a large bed and a roomy closet complete the comforts of this chamber. No one is here now.*

Pharistes uses this suite himself. While the furnishings are very comfortable, Pharistes is hardly addicted to creature comforts. The bookshelf contains several ancient histories and treatises on psionics. The desk is largely unused, but one drawer holds a few parchment notes addressed to Pharistes. A small chest underneath the bed contains 80 gp, 230sp, 110 cp, a bracelet worth 75 sp, a goblet worth 35 sp, a *fruit of extra healing*, a *fruit of flying*, a *fruit of vitality*, an *elixir fruit of health*, an *oil fruit of feather fall*, a *ring of shocking grasp*, a *wand of fire* with 15 charges, and an *obsidian dagger +4*. One of the psionic treatises is a copy of the scroll the PCs retrieved from the Black Sand Raiders.

### 25. Museum.

*This crescent-shaped room stands two floors high, the remnants of old banners and tapestries still clinging to the walls. A dual staircase leads up to a balcony that encircles the room. A number of trophies and displays fill the room, including magnificent, ancient paintings peeling from their canvas backing and suits of metal armor rusted in place. In one corner there are several great predators, lion and kirre, mounted on stands. This room looks as though it is rarely disturbed. The dust is thick, and the air has a very musty smell to it.*

This room is guarded by one of Pharistes' loyal bodyguards, a mul gladiator named Jerek. She is standing on the west edge of the balcony on the second floor, where she can cover the stairs across the room with her bow. Jerek remains fanatically loyal to Pharistes and will try to kill anyone who enters from the terrace. She will wait until a party member



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begins to climb the stairs, and then will announce her presence with a rain of arrows. She will continue to fire until she is engaged in melee, and will then move to put her back at the door leading into the tower stairs. Jerek's bow is customized to allow her to use her Strength bonuses.

**Jerek:** Female mul GI15; AL LN; AC -3 (rascinn hide armor, Dex 17, gladiator armor optimization, *ring of protection* +1); MV 12; hp 119; THAC0 6 (+6 to hit with bow, Str 18/33, Dex, point-blank range; +3 to hit with impaler); #AT 2 arrows or 5/2 impaler; Dmg 1-8+5 (arrows) or 1-8+7 (impaler, specialist); *ring of mind shielding*; ML 18.

Jerek has 16 steel-headed sheaf arrows for her longbow, and her impaler is iron-headed. She will fire at spellcasters or psionicists first.

A search of this room reveals a dust-covered weapons case containing a steel bastard sword of beautiful workmanship. The sword is not magical, but its jeweled scabbard is worth 40 gp.

### 26. The Tower Stairs.

*In the center of the museum's balcony, an alcove leads to a locked iron door in the central spire. The sunburst symbol of Dasaraches shines on the center of the door.*

*Inside, a spiral staircase leads up into the spire of the fortress. The tower stands several stories tall, and you can see an eerie blue light somewhere above. These stairs are ancient, but you can make out a number of footprints in the dust. Someone uses the stairs regularly.*

The door is locked, barred, and wizard locked as well. It is made of oak sheathed in iron plate, and is very strong. If the PCs are completely unable to open it, you may want to be generous and leave a key on Jerek's body.

The staircase winds up through three floors of the spire. Once these rooms may have been storerooms or laboratories, but now they are empty. All furnishings or debris have been removed, but the chambers have not been cleaned or reconditioned.

If you feel that your players have had too easy a time getting to this point, you may garrison one or more of the floors of the spire with loyal psionicists and tough guards. If your PCs are badly wounded and low on spells and other armaments, you may want to encourage them to find a safe place to rest a few hours, before trying to take on Pharistes. The floors of the spire will hold indefinitely against assault from above or below.

### 27. The Psionatrix Chamber.

*The stairs emerge in a large chamber at the top of Dasaraches' spire. Great windows of crystal look out over the jungles to the barren peaks of the Dragon Crown Mountains. The psionic vibration you have been feeling since leaving Tyr reverberates intensely through this chamber in powerful pulses. Directly in front of you, you see a strange, spiral tripod of white metal with a great, glowing gem suspended inside-the Psionatrix!*

*Then you become aware of the other figures within the room. Beside the Psionatrix stands an old, wiry human in the robes of a great psionic master. Flanking him are the Urikites who have dogged your steps since Hamanu's palace. Their faces are blank and unreadable. The old man glares at you for a moment, and then says quietly, "Fools! Did you think you could undo my life's work? I have mastered the Psionatrix—nothing can destroy me." He nods to the Urikites. "Kill these trespassers!"*

Pharistes has psionically Dominated the Urikite party. Unknown to the PCs, the Urikites used magic to transport themselves to Dasaraches after interrogating survivors of the pack frenzy. Pharistes easily caught them and they now serve him loyally.

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Any Urikites surviving Part Six, *Pack Frenzy*, will be here and will attack the PCs.

The Urikite fighters and templars will move forward to hold the top of the stairway, while mages, rogues, and psionics will stay back a bit to attack with missile fire and spells. The spellcasters will use single-target spells and try to avoid catching their fighters in area-effect spells, but if it becomes necessary they will not hesitate to *lightning bolt* or *fireball* everyone in the melee.

In the meantime, Pharistes will remain by the Psionatrix using his psionic abilities. Since he is actually touching the gem, he can circumvent the dampening effect and will make full use of his psionics. He first attacks any rogue psionics with the PC party. Assume it takes Pharistes two rounds per renegade to dispose of the PCs' psionics. When they are down, he will turn his attention to the PCs, using his abilities of Dominate, Id Insinuation, Ego Whip, Invincible Foes, and Post-Hypnotic Suggestion.

While Pharistes is in contact with the gem, he has an unlimited number of PSPs available to him. Pharistes will prepare for the fight by using Split Personality to double the number of actions he can take in a round. He will also have Displacement and Inertial Barrier active.

If a PC gets within 10 feet of the Psionatrix and rings the water hammer (a one-round action), the Psionatrix will immediately shatter. The backlash of psychic energies will instantly render any character within 20 feet senseless for 2-12 rounds unless a save vs. spells is made. Pharistes, since he is in contact with the gem, will be stunned for 4-24 rounds and automatically fails his saving throw.





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### Pharistes

Male Human Psionist

30th Level

Neutral

Str 13 Int 18

Dex 16 Wis 20

Con 14 Cha 17



hp: 73

**AC:** -4 (*bracers of defense AC 2, ring of protection +4*)

**#AT:** 1

**THAC0:** 6 (+4 with sword, +3 with sling)

**Dmg:** 1d8+4 (sword) or 1d4+3 (sling)

**Psionic Summary:** PSPs: 468

**Primary Discipline:** Telepathy

**Sciences:** Appraise, Aura Sight, Clairaudience, Clairvoyance, Complete Healing, Detonate, Domination\*\*, Ejection, Energy Containment, Mass Domination, Metamorphosis\*, Mindlink\*\*, Mindwipe\*, Probability Travel, Probe\*, Psychic Crush, Psychic Surgery\*, Split Personality, Superior Invisibility, Telekinesis, Teleport\*.

**Devotions:** Adrenalin Control, Astral Projection, Ballistic Attack, Body Control, Body Equilibrium, Catfall, Cell Adjustment, Chameleon Power, Chemical Simulation, Contact\*\*\*\*, Control Light, Control Sound, Danger Sense, Dimension Door, Displacement, Dream Travel, Ego Whip\*\*\*, ESP\*\*, Feel Light, Flesh Armor, Gird, Id Insinuation\*\*\*, Identity Penetration, Inertial Barrier, Inflict Pain, Invincible Foes, Invisibility, Levitation\*, Martial Trance, Mind Bar, Mind Thrust, Molecular Agitation, Post-Hypnotic Suggestion\*, Prolong, Psionic Inflation, Psychic Drain, Radial Navigation, Repugnance, Send Thoughts, Sight Link, Soften, Sound Link, Spirit Sense, Splice, Suspend Animation, Teleport Trigger, Time/Space Anchor, Truthhear, Wrench.

**Defense Modes:** All.

\* Power scores raised by +1 per asterisk.

**Equipment:** *bracers of defense AC 2, ring of protection +4 (+2 on saving throws), necklace of adaption, steel long sword +4, defender, sling of seeking +2, 20 lead bullets, fruit of growth, fruit of gaseous form, fruit of extra healing.*

Pharistes is a small, wiry man of about 70. He is in remarkable physical condition and appears no older than 50 or so. He is of dark complexion and possesses a dignified reserve and noble bearing. His eyes are dark and piercing. Pharistes is one of the six highest ranking members of the Order, holding the position of Master Telepathist. He is probably the most powerful and dangerous psionist on Athas.

Pharistes was born and raised a nobleman of Balic. As a youth he emerged as a talented student of the Way, and he turned his back on his inheritance to pursue his mental studies. He left Balic and adventured in the Tyr region and beyond, seeking more insight and knowledge. The Order began watching him more than 30 years ago and eventually asked him to join.

Pharistes is the author of the plan to suppress psionics. His long adventuring career showed him only sadness and misery throughout Athas, and the pain has marked him forever. He has given up on the world and truly believes that he can make Athas a better place by denying psionics to those who would abuse the power.

If Pharistes is seriously injured or incapacitated, he will attempt to escape by Teleporting or Dimension Dooring. He will try to take the Psionatrix with him. Once the gem is removed from its tripod, the psionic interference field ceases. Remember, Pharistes feels that his back is against the wall; his entire life has led to the scheme for suppressing psionics, and he will defend as long as it is even remotely possible that he might win. If Pharistes is defeated, he will even try to present reasonable arguments and justifications to explain to the PCs why they should leave the Psionatrix and its appa-

## Dragon Crown Mountains



ratus alone.

If Pharistes is stunned (i.e. the Psionatrix is shattered) he will lose control of the Urikites. Since they already regard the PCs as enemies, it will take them 1-3 rounds to even consider ceasing hostilities.

When the Psionatrix is shattered, read the following to the players:

*Holding the crystal vial high, you carefully tap it with the silver hammer. An incredibly sharp, clear tone rings forth! As it reverberates through the chamber, the pulses of the psionic interference slowly begin to match the tone of the water hammer. Suddenly, you are driven to your knees by the powerful harmonics as the two waves resonate—then the Psionatrix shatters into thousands of pieces!*

### Concluding Dragon Crown Mountains

With Pharistes defeated and the Psionatrix shattered, the PCs have accomplished their mission. The Order will withdraw from affairs on Athas for many years as they try to heal the split between loyalist and renegade and work to replace their losses. The renegades are grateful to the player characters, but after a while they will begin to wonder whether it is safe for outsiders to know so much about the workings of the Order. Within four to five days, the psionics will decide to wipe the memories of the adventure from the PCs' minds. Mara or Shardivan will warn the party in time for them to leave.

Psionics on Athas will return to normal almost instantly. It will take a few days for people to realize that the Way is now accessible again. The thri-kreen will lapse into a catatonic state for 1-4 days, and awake with full control of their faculties. The half-lings will begin to return to their forests.

King Hamanu of Urik will settle for the destruction of the Psionatrix, although he would have preferred to have its power for himself. The surviving

Urikites will not be anxious to return home after failing their warrior king. In Tyr, Agis of Asticles and King Tithian will be extremely grateful to the PCs and will hail them as heroes.

If you wish, Korgunard can contact the PCs from beyond the grave to congratulate them. Resurrecting the avangion could be a challenging follow up adventure for the PCs. Other follow-up ideas could include running any unplayed encounters in Part Eight, *Desert Perils*.

What happens if the players fail? All is not lost. The campaign will change drastically as psionics and psionic enchantments are lost forever. The sorcerer-kings of the Seven Cities, and the Dragon, will become far more vulnerable without their 10th-level magic. In one way, the success of Pharistes' plan will bring about a better Athas as the sorcerer-kings are overthrown over the years to come.

However, thri-kreen will be lost as a player character race. They will degenerate completely into bestial hunters. Great hordes will overrun large areas of the Tyr region, and the diminished power of the surviving sorcerer-kings may be the only thing capable of defending civilization from the berserk thri-kreen warriors. The world will change, but it will have plenty of opportunities for adventure!

You should consider a group experience point award for the PCs after they complete their mission and save Athas. A one-time award of 10,000 XP per character would be appropriate. You can increase or decrease this for excellent problem-solving and role-playing, as you see fit.



## Part Eight: Desert Perils

Some say the desert is a lonely place. Empty, bleak, barren. A place of sand, stone, and sun, where travelers are few and even the beasts avoid the heat of day. It is a place best crossed quickly, when traveling between the safe havens of town and oasis.

But appearances can deceive, and the deserts of Athas contain many surprises. Carnivorous plants lay in wait below seemingly empty expanses of sand. Fierce predators swoop down from rocky crags. Strange creatures which feed not on flesh, but on the energies of the mind, leaving babbling victims in their wake, lurk there. The desert only seems empty. A round any bluff or sand dune might lay the ruins of an ancient city or a temple to long-forgotten gods. A welcome spot of shade may prove to be the lair of a monster. A sparkling water hole may be a trap which lures the unwary to their doom. In the desert, even a chance meeting with an old friend might be fraught with danger.

### Overview

*Desert Perils* is a collection of random encounters and monster lairs, designed to be dropped into the Dragon's Crown adventure at any point. The adventures are intended as diversions and distractions only, and should not have a major impact upon the storyline of the main adventure, although certain encounters may tie in nicely with events in other sections.

Some of the encounters feature peripheral, non-player characters from previous DARK, SUN™ campaigns (*Freedom*, *Road to Urik*) that the player characters may have already met. While it is not absolutely necessary that the players have experience with these modules, since statistics for the NPCs appear within, the previous encounters will set the tone for these second meetings.

Most of the encounters may occur in any desert terrain type (salt flats, sandy wastes, scrub plains, stony barrens, or rocky badlands), though some specify terrain type, and others occur either in or at

the edge of the Sea of Silt.

There are two longer encounters, *The Dwarves of Hasken* and *Raid of the Apathetic Elves*, each of which is a mini-adventure in itself, three medium-length encounters: *A New Flotation Device*, *Gith Games*, and *A Friend in Need*. There is also a host of shorter encounters. Each encounter begins with a "Set Up" – two suggestions for introducing the encounter to the PCs.

*Desert Perils* serves to liven up what would otherwise be an uneventful journey through the wilderness or along a lonely strip of road. Some of the encounters will introduce beneficial NPCs who can continue the journey with the PCs, while others reintroduce old friends and enemies. Still others introduce players already familiar with Athas to all-new modes of transportation, combinations of monsters, and unusual situations.

### The Dwarves of Hasken

#### Set Up:

- The PCs are traveling along an unused road through relatively flat desert terrain, when ahead in the distance they suddenly see a bright red flash. Flame seems to leap up from the earth itself, then thick black smoke begins to pour into the sky in a dark pillar. The flame continues to burn for some time, glowing like a beacon both day and night and filling the air with a spreading haze of dark, heavy smoke.
- Traveling along an unused road through the desert, the PCs meet a group of three 1st-level clerics of the elemental plane of fire. When encountered, the clerics are out of food and water and are suffering from dehydration, though they insist on continuing. They say they are on a pilgrimage to a holy place, "where water itself is consumed by fire." They ask the PCs for help reaching their destination, and point toward a column of thick black smoke rising into the sky.





### Background

Dwarves are a persistent, stubborn race. Nearly 200 years ago, when he was just a young dwarf, Garok set out to find a new source of water for his village. The well was running dry, and without water the village of Hasken would cease to exist.

Enlisting the aid of a dwarven cleric of the elemental plane of water, Garok determined where a vast underground pool of water lay, waiting for his village to tap. Unfortunately, the water lay at a depth impossible to reach.

Garok made it his focus to develop a digging apparatus that could reach the supply of water. He experimented with several designs, and finally settled upon a screw-drill fitted with diamond heads, powered through the earth by mekillots, turning a massive wheel at surface level. He built two of these drilling rigs.

Unfortunately, wherever Garok drilled, his holes came up dry. Refusing any magical assistance (dwarves are non-magical by nature), he and a dedicated band of followers have continued to drill for 199 years—despite the fact that the village of Hasken is now only a tumbledown ruin and the road leading to it only a faint, untended trail.

The desert around the former village became littered with deep holes and pieces of cast-off drilling equipment. The task seemed endless. Yet as each new year began, the dwarves told themselves that this year, they would strike water at last, and Hasken would live again.

But “this year” may never come. Instead of striking water, Garok’s drills punctured a deposit of oil mixed with natural gas. At first, this “black water” simply sprayed from the hole, fouling the drilling equipment and spreading out across the work site. But then the oil fell on the roof of the cookhouse, where sparks from a blazing oven rose from the chimney . . . .

The resulting explosion catches the PCs’ attention in the first Set Up. By the time the PCs reach

the site, the fire will have been burning for six days. During this time, it has attracted a number of curious onlookers, whom the dwarves do their best to ignore as they continue to fight the fire and to recover their equipment.

### Approaching the Area

Because the fire shines across so many miles of flat desert, word of the sudden appearance of a flame from the ground spread quickly. Clerics of the elemental plane of fire began to flock to it, and, as word spread, the hucksters began to arrive as well. A total of 1d6 elemental flame clerics of various levels currently stay near the drill site, along with a dozen elves waiting on the outskirts of the disaster, selling all manner of religious baubles, trinkets, and false charms.

Along the road leading to the burning well, the PCs will pass elves who have set up makeshift booths or have spread out blankets to display their wares. Items for sale include: flame-shaped amulets made of “silver” and “gold” (most of which turn out to be tin or brass); jars of “holy mud” (sand mixed with gummy oil), which the elves guarantee will cure illness if rubbed on the body; icons from the “holy flame temple” they say once stood in Hasken (old wooden tavern and shop signs, inscribed in dwarvish, scavenged from the nearby ruins); mekillot steak and “flame wine” (cheap red wine with a resinous taste); and crude wooden carvings, intended to be thrown into the flame as offerings.

Other elven services include: tattooing with flame patterns, caricature drawings of pilgrims in front of the flame, kank rides around the site, and shelter in a wayfarers’ tent for 1 sp per day (per person).

The elves also have a limited supply of magic items for sale, although they only offer magic items to customers who have demonstrated the ability to pay. These items include: *ring of fire resistance* (50 sp); two scrolls of *protection vs. undead* (10 sp)



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each); and a brass *dagger +1 flame tongue* (treat as *sword +1 flame tongue*, except that initial damage is 1d4/1d3) with a flame-shaped blade (4,000 sp).

The roaring of the flame, one mile away, is loud enough that shoppers need to raise their voices to hear one another. Every now and then a shift in the breeze brings stinging, black smoke wafting over the hucksters' area, making it difficult to see, and leaving an ideal opportunity for thieves. The hucksters are busy constantly polishing and cleaning soot from the items they have for sale.

**Elves (3rd-Level Traders) (12):** Int: Avg; AL: N; AC: 7; MV: 12; HD: 3d6; hp: 12 (× 12); THAC0: 13; #AT: 1 (obsidian short sword, attacks at -2); Dmg: 1d6-1; SZ: M; ML: Steady (12); XP: 71 each; Treasure: 3d6sp, 4d10 sp, 10d10 cp each. (For information on the Trader class, see The DARK SUN™ accessory, *Dune Trader*.)

### Disruption of the Hucksters

A short time after the PCs encounter the elven hucksters, a rampaging mekillot will charge the merchants' area. Smearing with crude oil and still smarting from burns, this was one of the mekillots which escaped in the aftermath of the explosion (the elves are serving one of the dead mekillots as steak). This surviving mekillot has eluded its handlers ever since the explosion, and comes charging through, every so often, in a pain-blind rage.

**Mekillot:** Int: Animal; AL: N; AC: 7 (underside 7); MV: 7; HD: 11; hp: 62; THAC0: 7; #AT: 1; Dmg: 1d6; SA: swallow or crush; SZ: G; ML: Elite (14); XP: 6,000.

### The Drill Site

Garok and his remaining healthy followers, two dozen in number, have been working feverishly to

rescue their drilling equipment and to locate water with which to put out the fire and clean up the site. They have little time for anyone not willing to help them. They scorn the elven hucksters as "people who profit off other people's misfortune," and they keep an uneasy eye on the clerics who arrive. Garok fears that the latter will attempt to thwart the dwarves' plans to put out the flame, and thus he will be very cagey about discussing his plans to do so. He will instead say that the remaining drilling team continues its search for water "so that Hasken can be restored."

While most of the wooden components of the first drill (*ie*: its shafts and mekillot-driven wheel) have been consumed by fire, the metal fittings and the diamonds (worth 50 sp each) which stud the drilling bits may still survive. Fortunately, the drill was on the surface when the fire erupted, but now it lies near the heart of the inferno. Garok has seen four of his followers badly burned in attempts to recover the bits, and is debating the merits of asking for help. He hesitates to tell anyone about the diamonds, lest thieves make an attempt at his remaining drill.

Attempting to recover the 5d4 diamonds that survived the explosion at the first drill site will be tough. Covering the distance between safety and the spot where they lie takes 2d4 rounds-each way. Approaching the flame, a character will take 1d4 points of damage in the first round, 2d4 in the second round, 3d4 in the third, etc. The character will continue to take damage at the highest rate while picking up the diamonds that lie scattered beside the bit. The PC can only locate and pick up 1d4 diamonds per round. Retreating from the flame also takes 2d4 rounds, with damage diminishing each round. (Magical protection from such items as a *ring of fire resistance* or a *potion fruit of fire resistance* or from spells will reduce this damage, but will not negate it entirely, due to the exceptionally hot nature of the fire.)

In order to put out the fire, the dwarves are hard at work at a second drill site, hoping to strike water



with which to quench the flames. A wheel powered by two mekillots and 2d6 dwarves occupies the second site. The drill turns day and night: two alternate mekillots rest under a sun screen, cared for by 1d4 dwarven handlers. After an eight-hour shift turning the wheel, the dwarves switch mekillot teams.

Garok and a number of his followers live here, in three large tents. Fearful of an attack by the clerics or by raiders, they now all carry weapons.

**Garok (4th-Level Dwarven Fighter):** AL: LG; AC: 7 (leather armor); MV: 12; HD: 4d10; hp: 27; THAC0: 17; #AT: 1; Dmg: 1d8 (+2 strength); SZ: M; ML: Champion (15); XP: 168; Str 18; Dex 12; Con 14; Int 13; Wis 13; Cha 16; Treasure: iron-headed battle axe, *spade of colossal excavation*, *ring of dwarven influence* (treat as a *ring of human influence*, but only affects dwarves and boosts wearer's Charisma to 20 when dealing with that race).

**Dwarves (2nd-Level Fighters) (24):** Int. Avg; AL: NG; AC: 10; MV: 12; HD: 2d10; hp: 9 (× 24); THAC0: 19; #AT: 1 (stone hand axe, attacks at -2); Dmg: 1d6-1; SZ: M; ML: Elite (13); XP: 38 each.

### The Ruined Village of Hasken

Originally a village of about 300 people, Hasken's mud-brick walls have succumbed to the elements over the 183 years since its people left. The roofs of most of the buildings have fallen in, and everything of value disappeared long ago, when the original inhabitants moved away.

Since the explosion, the dwarves have set up a makeshift hospital in one of the intact buildings. Here, on cots and blankets, lie eight dwarves injured in the explosion and the attempts to recover the drilling equipment (2nd-Level Fighters, but with only 2 or 3 hp each, due to injuries). The dwarves

are looking for a cleric to heal their wounded, but the clerics who worship the elemental plane of fire have so far refused the dwarves service, saying the burns were divinely inflicted and so must serve as a form of penance. 1d4 healthy dwarves tend the injured.

There is little of interest in the ruined village, although diligent searchers may find a coin or two, hidden in a hole in a floor or wall, and forgotten when the inhabitants moved on. Otherwise, all easily portable furnishings were carried away. Only large fixtures remain (eg: a dusty wooden bar in the tavern, shelves in the warehouses, huge barrels in the brewery, and stone tubs in the tannery).

Garok and his followers will attempt to prevent any desecration of Hasken, which they believe will one day be reinhabited and restored. While most of the dwarves are busy at the remaining drill site, 1d6 dwarves patrol the streets, keeping a watchful eye on things as they shovel and haul away oil-soaked sand from the streets of Hasken.





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### The Followers of Fire

A number of clerics who draw their spells from the elemental plane of fire have been drawn to this area over the course of the last six days. Some stay in the tent set up by the elven hucksters, while others have set up camp in the few remaining intact buildings in Hasken.

A total of 4d4 clerics, including the three the PCs met on the road in the second Set Up, have come to worship at the "eternal flame." The PCs will meet a number of similar clerics if they remain at Hasken. DMs might include NPCs the party may have previously met.

The clerics who have come to Hasken will generally worship at the flame for 1d6 days before moving on. Those Level 5 and up will use their ability to ignore the presence of the element they worship, approaching the flame without taking damage, testing their faith in what appears to others a suicidal act. Those who do get burned are scorned as "unworthy of the fire."

If the dwarves do strike water and attempt to extinguish the flame, the clerics will immediately attack them. If the PCs assist the dwarves, the clerics will consider them enemies, and attack them without mercy.

**Clerics:** Level: 1d6; Int: Avg; AL: various; AC: 1d4 + 6; MV: 12; HD: as per level; hp: 1d8 per level; THAC0: as per level; #AT: 1; Damage: 1d4 (dagger) or 1d6 (sword) or 1d6 (arrow, often flaming); SA: spells; SZ: M; ML: Fanatic (18); XP: 55 (1st), 85 (2nd), 125 (Yrd), 175 (Gth), 235 (5th), 330 (6th); Treasure: 1d4 magic items each (levels 1-3) or 1d6 magic items each (levels 4-6), plus 3d4 sp, 5d6 sp, 8d10 cp each.

### The Dead of Night

By day, the disaster site seems peaceful enough. The dwarves work at their drill, the elves sell their trinkets to pilgrims and passersby, and the clerics per-

form their rituals in the presence of the "great flame." But when the sun begins to sink in the sky, the elves quickly pack up and all but the most fanatical pilgrims, who insist that "the power of the flame will protect us from those with the flaming eyes," take shelter within the ruined buildings of Hasken. The PCs can see many people stuffing their ears with wax. Only the dwarves continue their grim task, laboring on into the night at their drill.

The devout and the businessmen take shelter for good reason. At night, the five dwarves who died in the explosion rise from the dead to haunt the site of their unfinished quest. Prowling the pockmarked land that surrounds Hasken, they attack any non-dwarven character they encounter there.

Each night as they awaken, the banshees wail a cursed battle cry (*malediction*) and then set off to exact their revenge on the living. Even if reduced to dust by an opponent lucky enough to have a magic or steel weapon, the banshees return each night, without fail, appearing at sunset. They will continue to haunt the area until Garok and his crew finally find water.

**Banshee, Dwarf (5):** Int. Avg; AL: NE; AC: 0; MV: 12; HD: 2d10; hp: 7 (x 5); THAC0: 17; #AT: 1 (stone hand axe, attacks at -2); Dmg: 1d6-1; SA: Gaze, *malediction*, plus psionics; SD: steel or +1 or better weapon to hit; SZ: M; ML: Fanatic (17); XP: 190 each.

**Psionic Summary:** Level 7; Score 15; PSPs 110.

**Sciences:** Death Field; Shadow Form.

**Devotions:** Body Weaponry; Cause Decay; Chemical Simulation; Double Pain.

**Attack/Defense Modes:** -/IF,MB.

### A New Flotation Device

#### Set Up:

- Traveling beside or over the Sea of Silt, on a day with a mild wind, the PCs glance up into the haze-filled sky and spot a large object several miles away.



It appears to be a huge ball, bobbing lazily through the air, pushed by the breeze. As the wind blows it closer, the PCs can make out details. The "ball" is a large net enclosing several reddish and yellowish blobs. Below it hangs a wicker basket. There is movement within the basket, and then a face peeks over the side, and a voice hails the PCs.

- Traveling beside or over the Sea of Silt, on a day with a mild wind, the PCs glance up into the haze-filled sky and spot a large object about one mile away. It appears to be a huge ball, bobbing lazily through the sky on the breeze. Swooping around it are six large winged creatures. One plummets to the ground, shrieking in pain, but the rest continue to wheel and dive at the ball, attacking it. Gradually, the ball comes apart, pieces floating away from it. The winged creatures follow the floating pieces, while the ball falls faster and faster. Finally it hits the surface, landing on solid ground just at the edge of the Sea of Silt.

### Background

The "flotation device" the PCs see in the distance is the Athasian version of the hot air balloon. It consists of a large net, woven from extremely thin strands of giant-hair, which encloses 36 floaters. Below this, suspended from more giant-hair ropes, hangs a wicker basket just large enough to hold one person and a minimum of gear. (Total weight limit is 200 pounds.) The device is a prototype: nothing like it exists anywhere else on Athas.

Inside the basket stands the inventor of the flotation device, a human cleric named Takanna. A slender woman who worships the elemental plane of air, Takanna created the device to explore and study her element. It also proved useful for traveling across the Sea of Silt.

Takanna captured the 36 floaters inside the bag over the course of the last four years, collecting them from their nests when they were very young. (Her arms are criss-crossed with scars from their tenta-

cles.) She has held them in captivity ever since, feeding them on ferns, roots, and fruit gathered from the mudflats that border the Sea of Silt, and gradually taming them. They now respond to her calls—although they are likely to attack anyone else.

A 7th level cleric, Takanna has long ago given up a permanent home and now pursues a wandering existence, carrying only the bare essentials. Using her flotation device, she had explored many of the islands in the Sea of Silt. The treasures she has found in the ruins that dot some of the islands have provided her with the income she needs to continue her goal—the exploration of the upper reaches of the sky.

Having seen most of the islands from the air, Takanna can easily draw a quick sketch map of the basic features of most of the islands—or a rough map of their position in the Sea of Silt. But she will omit or claim to be unfamiliar with those islands that are a source of treasure, obviously wanting to keep them to herself.

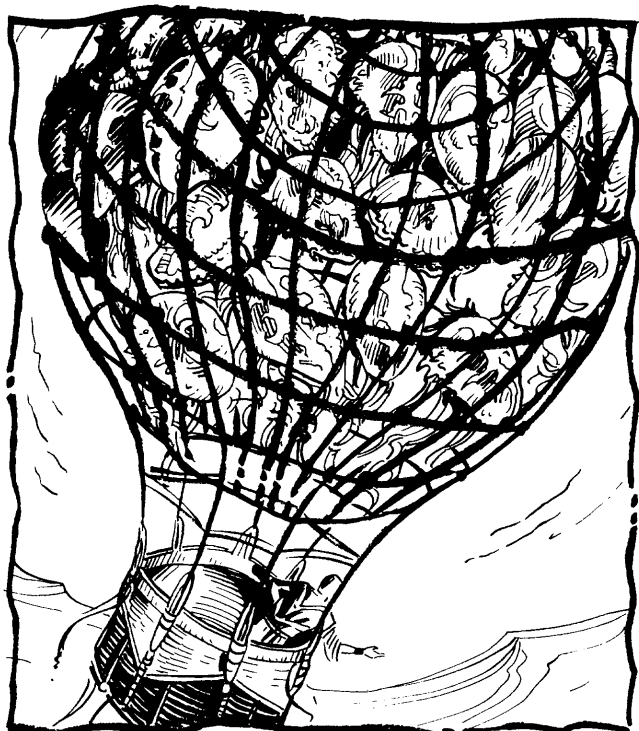
**Takanna (7th-Level Cleric):** Int: Supra-genius (13); AL: N; AC: 6 (+3 *ring of protection* and *Dexterity*); MV: 12; HD: 7; hp: 40; THAC0: 16; #AT: 1; Dmg: 1d3 + poison (blowgun), 1d8 (short bow and sheaf arrow); SZ: M; ML: Steady (12); XP: 1,020; Treasure: +3 *ring of protection*, *wand of magic detection* (95 charges), *wand of size alteration* (67 charges), *amulet of life protection*, vial of Poison type E (enough for 20 darts), 5d6 gems, 3d4 sp, 10d64 sp.

Clerical spells: 1) *animal friendship*, *cure light wounds*, *invisibility to animals*, *invisibility to undead*, *protection from Evil*; 2) *dust devil*, *enthrall*, *find traps*, *slow poison*, *speak with animals*; 3) *continual fight*, *cure disease*, *speak with dead*; 4) *protection from lightning*.

**Floaters (36):** Int: Low (6); AL: N; AC: 8; MV: Fl 12 (B); HD: 3; hp: 10 (× 36); THAC0: 17; #AT: 6; Dmg: 1d4; SA: paralyzation, psionics; SZ: S (3'



## Desert Perils



long); ML: Steady (11); XP: 420 each.

**Psionic Summary:** Level 3; Score 12; PSPs 70.

**Sciences:** Life Draining; Psionic Blast.

**Devotions:** Aversion; Double Pain; Psychic Crush; Mind Over Body; Mind Blank; Flesh Armor; Intellect Fortress; Chameleon Power; Life Detection; Displacement; Contact.

**Attack/Defense Modes:** PB, PsC/M-, IF

### Interaction with PCs

If the DM uses the first description listed in the Set Up, and the PCs do not appear to be immediately hostile, Takanna will shout down to them, asking if they would like to trade. If so, she will throw down a normal rope and ask the PCs to hang onto the end so that she does not drift away. (The flotation device is at the mercy of the wind; Takanna has no way to steer it.) A combined Strength of 30 will serve to hold the device in place. PCs may alternatively opt to tie the rope to some sort of tether or anchor on the ground. Takanna normally stops by

tossing out a grappling hook attached to a rope.

Takanna will be careful to keep the flotation device well out of bowshot of those on the ground. At the first sign of trouble or of spell casting she will cut the rope and drift away. If pursued, she will shoot arrows and poison darts.

If the PCs are friendly, Takanna will barter with them, offering gems in exchange for water, food and useful items of a lightweight nature. Since she weighs 100 pounds and the basket is currently carrying 50 pounds of gear, she will accept no more than 50 pounds of barter.

Takanna will gladly take on passengers, but will insist they subject themselves to reduction via her *wand of size alteration*. She will shrink any PCs wishing to travel with her to approximately one foot in size. At this size, she can easily handle them, should they attempt to take over the flotation device.

The flotation device will travel at the current wind speed, regardless of the terrain it is crossing. (If a storm blows up, Takanna finds shelter and waits it out.) Wind direction will be random. Roll 1d8: 1 is north, 2 is northeast, 3 is east, etc. There is a 75% chance wind direction will remain constant each subsequent day; if it changes, simply reroll for direction.

Takanna must feed the floaters once per day. She carries minimal food for them, instead relying upon their Mind Over Body psionics ability to keep them alive.

Due to the hydrogen which fills the floaters' gas bladders, Takanna avoids at any cost subjecting her floaters to flame or lightning. A flame attack will cause 6d6 of the 36 floaters to explode, for 1d8 points of damage per exploding floater to the occupants of the basket.

### The Razorwing Attack

If the DM uses the second description listed in the Set Up, the flotation device will have fallen prey to an attack of razorwings which renders it unusable.



The net bag will be tattered and ripped, several of the floaters will have escaped or been devoured by razorwings, and only 2d6 of the floaters in what remains of the net will still be alive. The basket will be bent, but whole.

If Takanna survived the crash, she will be frantically trying to round up the surviving floaters and secure what remains of the flotation device, which tumbles slowly along the ground, blown by the wind. She will have lost much of her treasure and magic items as the basket overturned upon landing, and she will have to search the desert for them. She will gladly accept whatever help the PCs provide.

If Takanna died in the crash, PCs will probably want to loot her body. In this case, her treasure and magic items will be in or near the basket in which her body lies. The remaining floaters, however, will attack the PCs. DMs might also add an attack by four razorwings, as they swoop in to prey upon the injured floaters, attacking the PCs in the process.

**Razorwings (4):** Int: Semi (3); AL: N; AC: 3 (flying) / 6 (hovering or grounded); MV: 3, Fl 30 (B), Glide 24 (E); HD: 4; hp: 21; THAC0: 17; #AT: 3; Dmg: 2-8/2-W 1-4; SA: surprise, 2x damage on a charge, psionics; SZ: M (8' wingspan); ML: Average (10); XP: 420 each.

**Psionic Summary:** Level 1; Score 11; PSPs 45.

Sciences: Flight (MV 30, 3 PSPs/rd.)

**Devotions:** Control Sound; Life Detection; Mind Blank.

**Attack/Defense Modes:** -/M-

## Merkinn the Magnificent

### Set Up:

- Ahead on the desert sits a brightly painted, kank-drawn cart. A tentlike tarp stretches over it to provide a little shade, and the cart itself perches up on blocks. Across the side of the wagon blaze the words "Merkinn the Magnificent." The bank is grazing at the end of a long lead. From under the

wagon comes a muffled hammering and an occasional curse. Several jars containing hurrum beetles line the side of the wagon. As the PCs approach, a half-elf crawls out from underneath the cart. Introducing himself as Merkinn, he offers a half-price performance in exchange for help, fixing the broken axle on his cart. If the PCs are reluctant, he offers to perform for one-quarter price, then one-eighth, then for free.

- The PCs are encamped, either in a village with an elf/ex-slave tribe, or with a group of NPCs. A little after sunset a brightly painted kank-drawn cart, rolls into camp. The words "Merkinn the Magnificent" across the side of the wagon announce to all the nature of the driver. As the cart comes to a stop, a half-elf hops out. Tossing the kank some fodder, he unlatches the side of the cart, which folds down into a counter. On it, he begins to set out stoppered jars, each containing a tiny hurrum beetle. "Step right up folks, and see the show!" he calls to the crowd. "For just eight ceramic pieces, your hidden powers will be revealed!"

### Background

Merkinn is a former slave who escaped bondage years ago and ran away to the village of Salt View. There, he discovered a wonderful new form of entertainment called "theater." (For detailed information on the ex-slaves of Salt View, see the DARK SUN™ accessory *Slave Tribes*.)

A loner by nature (as are most half-elves), Merkinn decided to put his own one-man act together and "hit the road." The performance resembles a classic hypnotist's act, and utilizes both the hurrums and Merkinn's extremely rare wild talent, *Psychic Surgery*.

During the act, Merkinn calls upon members of the audience who wish to have their hidden powers revealed. He asks them to select the hurrum which "feels right." He will then remove the beetle from its jar and place it on the person's forehead. Asking



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the person to “close your eyes, empty your mind, and concentrate on the humming,” Merkinn uses his Psychic Surgery talent to unlock that person’s previously unrecognized wild psionic talent. Merkinn performs well, with a practiced theatrical flourish.

Having revealed a wild talent, Merkinn will ask for payment. Here, he performs a test of trust, deliberately giving the person one ceramic piece too many in change.

Merkinn will then attempt to sell that person the hurrum, persuasively saying the beetle comprises an essential aid to concentration and development of the wild psionic talent. If the customer passes the test of trust and returns the ceramic piece, Merkinn will give the person an excellent price for the beetle—no more than 2d4 ceramic pieces. If the customer fails the test of trust, Merkinn will accept no less than 1d4 silver pieces for the hurrum. In addition, he may choose to use his thieving abilities to lighten that person’s purse—since the coin in it was likely obtained dishonestly!

**Merkinn (5th-Level Thief):** AL: NG; AC: 6 (Dexterity); MV: 12; HD: 5; hp: 20; THAC0: 18 (Dexterity bonus of +2 on missiles); #AT 1; Dmg: 1d4 (dagger) or 2d4 + 4 (+4 *dagger of throwing*), SZ: M; ML: Steady (12); XP: 190; Str 13; Dex 18; Con 14; Int 17; Wis 13; Cha 18; Treasure: +4 *dagger of throwing*, *slippers of spider climbing*, *hat of disguise*, 4d6 sp, 6d6 sp, 10d6 cp, gold ring set with gem (30 sp), silver earring (2 sp).

**Wild Psionic Talents:** Contact; Psychic Surgery; Telepathy. PSPs 20.

**Thieving Percentages:** PP 35; OL 45; RT 45; MS 35; HS 35; DN 15; CW 70; RL 0.

**Hurrum (48):** Int: Semi (2); AL: N; AC: 8; MV: 6 (12); HD: 1-1; hp: 4 (× 48); THAC0: 20; #AT: 1; Dmg: 1; SZ: Tiny (1”); ML: Average (9); XP: 15.

## A Thorny Problem

**Set Up:** (See Map Book, pg. 29)

- Climbing to the top of a slight rise, the PCs see, stretching away before them, a thicket of brambleweed. But instead of the usual random tangle of vines, this clump of brambleweed forms a carefully pruned maze. Arched tunnels cut through the brambleweed, running in perfectly straight lines, crossing each other at right angles. Most intriguing of all, at the center of the maze a fountain gurgles. The maze occupies an area several hundred feet wide and long, in a roughly rectangular shape. The PCs can see clearly through the vines, and there are no living creatures in the maze. But there are plenty of bleached bones, many of them humanoid!

- While staying in a tiny village, no more than a huddle of huts around a brackish, almost dry oasis, a frantic woman petitions by the PCs. “My child!” she cries. “He’s wandered into the maze! You are the only ones powerful enough to save him!” She leads the PCs to the brambleweed maze, and points at her little boy, a toddler who sits quite contentedly at the heart of the maze, dangling his feet in a pool.

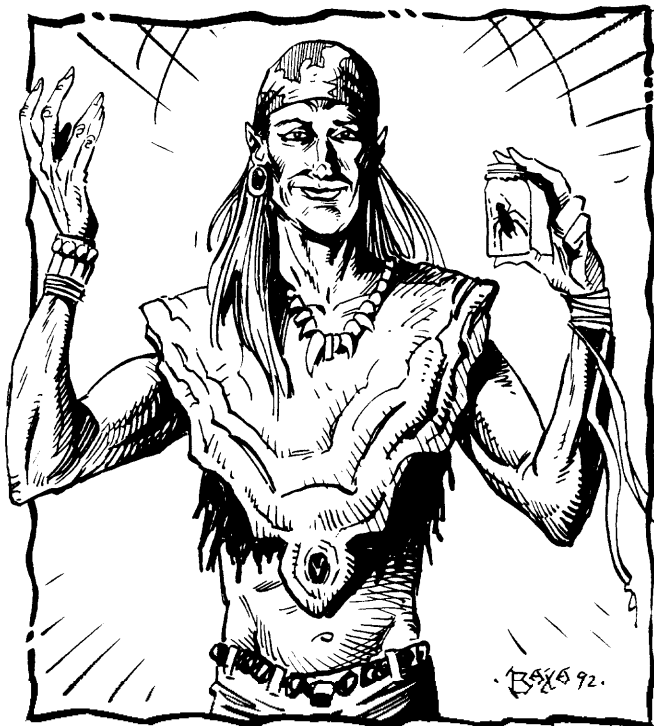
## Background

Nearly two centuries ago, a powerful druid chose to make this desolate spot her guarded land. An avid gardener, she built a stone fountain around a natural artesian well, and carefully pruned and tended the brambleweed that grew around it. Gradually, she shaped that brambleweed into a maze.

To protect what she had built, the druid called forth spirits from the elemental plane of water, creating a wood golem. Made primarily from pieces of dry brambleweed, the wood golem stands silently, all but invisible inside the maze, amidst the thick growth of vines.

The golem’s original instructions stated only to attack those who harmed the guarded land. While the druid was still alive, the golem performed this task admirably, allowing visitors to wander through





the maze and drink from the fountain at its center. But in the decades since the druid died, the elemental inside the golem has taken its own course. Now it attacks anyone who enters the maze. It stands perfectly still, appearing to be part of the wall of the maze, until an intruder ventures far inside, then it springs into action, inflicting hideous punctures with its many thorns.

If the DM uses the second Set Up, the boy has reached the center of the maze using his psionic wild talent Invisibility to slip past the wood golem. This ability is something the boy recently discovered. He uses it to avoid his parents when they are looking for him. Not wanting his mother to realize he has this ability, the boy will remain visible as she watches the PCs attempt to "rescue" him. But once the PCs close in, he will instantly vanish from their sight, using his wild talent. After running away, he will reappear elsewhere in the maze to wave to the PCs. He continues this "fun game" until caught.

**Wood Golem:** Int: Semi (2-4); AL: NE; AC: 6; MV: 6; HD: 8; hp: 47; THAC0: 13; #AT 2; Dmg: 2d8/2d8 (+d6 per attack due to brambleweed thorns); SA: spells; SD: immune to all priest spells from the "plant" sphere, and to spells cast by creatures with less than 4HD or experience levels; SZ: L (10' tall); ML: Fearless (20); XP: 3,000.

### Inside the Maze

The pathways that comprise the maze stretch 10 feet wide and stand 12 feet high at the highest point of the arched passage. Brambleweed forms a thick wall to either side, and is 5 feet thick above the walkways.

Using defiler magic will reduce large sections of the maze to ash. A defiler poses a sizable threat to the wood golem, which takes extra damage from defiler magic and which, if caught inside a defiler's sphere of destruction, will be destroyed instantly.

The wood golem, however, will use the brambleweed maze to its advantage. It will attempt to attack characters in such a way as to knock them into a section of the brambleweed, where they will take 1d100 points of damage from thorns. The wood golem knocks a character into the brambleweed only if it makes two successful attacks on the PC in any given round, and if the PC fails a Dexterity check on 1d20.

The 3 × 4-foot fountain contains nothing but cool, clear water, a treasure in itself. However, a careful search of the bodies of the unfortunates who died in the maze at the hands of the wood golem reveals the following:

- **Body A:** (human female) hide armor, badly torn by thorns; metal dagger; silver armband set with 1d4 small gems (60 sp); 1d20 cp, 2d6 sp, 1d4 sp; *oil fruit of fumbling* (banana).
- **Bodies B&C:** (dwarven male, mul male) 13 arrows (shafts have rotted but metal heads survive); silver ring (1sp); +2 *knife*, 5d4 cp; 1d4 sp.
- **Body D:** (human child) bone dagger; 1d4 cp.



### A Friend in Need

**Set Up:** (See Map Book, pg. 29)

- The PCs are camped in the desert. They awaken the next morning to the squalling sound of a crying child. They find a half-elf baby inside a tattered cloth wrap. The hastily scrawled note pinned to it reads: "You saved my life once, in the slave pits of Tyr. Now I ask you to save the life of my daughter. Werrick's Stalkers are close on my heels. Please keep Alishi safe while I return to rescue Tachandral. I will repay you with anything you ask. If I do not return, be sure to tell Alishi that both her mother and father were gladiators, people she could be proud of. Your friend, Lissan."

- The PCs have just crested the rise of a low hill when they see a battle on the desert below, some distance away. Three persons (two male muls and a female human), mounted on kanks, circle a woman. The woman fights them with a spear, though hampered by a bundle she holds in one arm. A fourth individual (a male half-giant) approaches in a wagon drawn by four kanks. The wagon is closed except for a barred door in one side. As the wagon trundles closer, two hands can be seen gripping the bars. A man's voice calls out from inside: "Lissan!"

Before the PCs have a chance to react, the woman falls to the ground. The warriors drag her to the wagon, force back the man inside the wagon with their spears as they open the door, and shove the unconscious woman roughly inside. As the wagon starts to move away across the desert, the bundle the woman dropped begins to squirm, and the PCs hear a baby's cry. The man shouts back through the bars: "No! Stop! That's my daughter! Don't leave her there to die! Alishi!"

### Background

The PCs first met Lissan in the DARK SUN™ *Freedom* module. A fellow slave, they rescued her when the gladiator Kanla was about to kill her in an argument over who would be the best partner for Tachandral—who in this encounter turns out to be an elven male. (If Lissan died in *Freedom*, the DM can simply change the name of the human female gladiator encountered here; it might be Kanla instead.)

Before the slaves in Tyr gained their freedom, a noble house in Urik bought Lissan and Tachandral as a matched, fighting pair. They lived in Urik for some time, fighting in the gladiatorial games. Then Lissan's new master learned that she was pregnant. He would allow her to have the baby, but once born, he would take the baby from her and sell it as prime gladiatorial stock, to the highest bidder.

Unwilling to lose their child, Lissan and Tachandral escaped, thinking they could return to Tyr, where slavery has been abolished. Alishi was born in the desert during their travels. But in the meantime, their master hired Werrick's Stalkers to hunt the pair down. As a punishment for their escape, he has ordered the death of Lissan's and Tachandral's child. (In the second Set Up, the warriors have left Alishi to die of exposure.)

This encounter should present the PCs with a unique problem: the care and feeding of a very young child while they track and/or plan a surprise attack on Werrick's Stalkers. If the DM uses the first Set Up, Lissan does not return for her baby. She has been captured and forced into the prison wagon with Tachandral.

If the DM uses the second Set Up and the PCs attack immediately, one of Werrick's Stalkers will race back to scoop up the baby, then will threaten to kill it if the PCs approach. Lissan will regain consciousness, and both she and Tachandral will shout at the PCs to back off. Little Alishi will be kept alive and used to prevent further attack by the PCs. As soon as the PCs break off pursuit, one of the Stalkers will kill her.



**Lissan (6th-Level Gladiator):** AL: N; AC: 3; MV: 12; HD: 6; hp: 57 (currently 2, due to injuries); THAC0: 15; #AT 1; Dmg: 1d2 (punch); ML: 18; XP: 472; Str 15; Dex 15; Con 16; Int 15; Wis 16; Cha 16.

**Tachandral (5th-Level Gladiator):** AL: LN; AC: 10; MV: 12; HD: 7; 44 (currently 4, due to injuries); THAC0: 16 (-1 for Strength bonus); #AT 1; Dmg: 1/2d4+1 punch plus Strength bonus); ML: Fanatic (17); XP: 310; Str 17; Dex 14; Con 16; Int 11; Wis 11; Cha 14; Wild Psionic Talent: Shadow Form. PSPs 24.

## A Shadow in the Night

There is a 75% chance that seeing his daughter in mortal danger will cause Tachandral to discover his wild psionic talent. He will use Shadow Form to escape from the prison wagon and attempt to contact the PCs if they are close enough. Unfortunately, he is unable to shift back into his corporeal form until

the spell ends after three rounds. While using his wild talent, the PCs might mistake him for a shadow monster and attack. He will not fight back, but will first check on his daughter, and then will beckon the PCs toward the spot where Werrick's Stalkers are camped, silently urging them to free Lissan.

## Werrick's Stalkers

The PCs can easily recognize the attackers in the second Set Up as members of Werrick's Stalkers by their distinctive hairstyle: shaved bald, except for two long braids, twisted together and decorated with bits of bone. These are a scouting party, sent out to capture Lissan and Tachandral while the rest of the Stalkers take care of other business. Unless stopped by the PCs, these four will rejoin the others in "Werrick House" within 3d4 days, and then will press on to Urik with their cargo.

The group travels by night and sleeps by day, trying to make the best time back to the main group of Werrick's Stalkers. At least one of the Stalkers will





## Desert Perils

be on guard duty each day, while the others sleep in tents. The guard will be wearing the *ring of invisibility* and carrying the +2 *metal shield*. There is only a 10% chance of any guard dozing off during a watch, in which case the PCs will hear snores, seeming to come out of thin air.

Between them, the four Stalkers have the following treasure, some of it taken from Lissan and Tachandral: *potion fruit of speed* (plum); +2 *metal shield*; *ring of invisibility*; 1 jar of *Keoghtom's ointment*; 5d6 cp, 5d4 sp, 2d4 gp, 1d4 gems.

**Doorub (Sth-Level Fighter):** AL: CN; AC: 8 (mekillot hide armor); MV: 15; HD: 5; hp: 54; THAC0: 13; #AT 1; Dmg: 1d6 + 7 (stone club); SZ: L (11' tall); ML: Champion (15); XP:; Str 13; Dex 14; Con 17; Int 3; Wis 8; Cha 3.

This half-giant fighter is Werrik's trusted lieutenant and bodyguard. He is overseeing the expedition to capture Lissan and Tachandral. Since he is too large to ride a hank, he is instead driving the jail-cell wagon.

**Kiiran (4th-Level Ranger):** AL: NG; AC: 6 (studded leather plus Dexterity bonus); MV: 12; HD: 4; hp: 27; THAC0: 17; #AT 1; Dmg: 1d6 (metal-headed spear); SZ: M; ML: Steady (12); XP: 176; Str 13; Dex 15; Con 15; Int 12; Wis 14; Cha 3. Ranger Abilities: HS: 25%; MS: 33%.

This human ranger has been using her tracking abilities to hunt down Lissan and Tachandral. She is also a skilled fighter and kank handler.

**Chowdlar and Roitan (6th-Level Gladiators):** AL: CN/CE; AC: 5 (hide armor plus hide shield); MV: 12; HD: 6; hp: 41 each; THAC0: 12; #AT 1; Dmg: 1d6 +7 (metal-headed spears plus Strength bonus); SZ: M; ML: Average (12); XP:; Str 13; Dex 12; Con 15; Int 7; Wis 8; Cha 6. Wild Psionic Talents: Attraction; Contact; Mindlink

(Chowdlar); Aversion; Contact; Mindlink (Roitan). PSPs: 72 each.

This nasty-tempered pair of identical twins fought as a perfectly matched pair in the gladiatorial pits of Tyr before escaping slavery three years ago and joining Werrik's Stalkers. They have an old grudge against Lissan and Tachandral, who beat them in a fight the muls still insist was rigged.

**Kanks (7):** Int: Animal (1); AL: N; AC: 5; MV: 18; HD: 2; hp: 8 each; THAC0: 13; #AT 1; Dmg: 1d6; SA: paralysis (Class O poison); SZ: M (7' tall); ML: Elite (14); XP: 35 each.

## A Village Destroyed

**Set Up:** (See Map Book, pg. 30)

- The PCs are following directions to Fedderston, a tiny salt-mining village (pop. 53) where they can spend the night at an inn. Arriving there at dusk, they find the village almost completely destroyed. Piles of rubble occupy the place buildings once stood, while other buildings have burned down to blackened, snoldering ruins. Only two buildings still stand: the Salt Works (which has a gaping hole where the front door used to be), and the Inn of the Thirsty Traveler. At the center of town, between these two buildings, the PCs find two dead banks, still harnessed to an overturned cart. Its cargo of metal shields has spilled from the cart; each shield is punctured with dozens of holes. From under the cart comes a groan . . . .

- The PCs are staying the night at the Inn of the Thirsty Traveler in Fedderston, a tiny village (pop. 53) near a salt flat. Just before dawn, a loud clattering sound in the street, outside their windows, awakens them. Looking out the window, they see an open cart drawn by two kanks. Rattling metal shields fill the cart to overflowing. Shields spill from the rear of the cart as the dwarf driving it whips his animals into a frenzied run. Then the PCs begin to



hear loud smashing and crunching noises, the sounds of buildings being ripped apart, and terrified screams. A so-ut stomps into view, shaking the debris of a ruined building off its back. It heads straight for the cart, and as the PCs watch in horror, kills the two kanks, tips the cart over trapping the driver underneath, and begins to rend the shields savagely.

### Background

Vastonic, the dwarven prospector, thought his luck had finally changed for the better. After months of fruitless searching for the fabled tomb of the ancient dwarven prince Klyrstar, he finally found what he was looking for—a vast cache of metal armor and weaponry.

Unfortunately, his cart would only hold so much. So Vastonic loaded it with what seemed to be the most saleable items: metal shields. Even more unfortunately, he chose to take with him one more piece of plunder: a fabulous diamond which is actually a cursed *jewel of attacks*.

The combination proved deadly. All through the return trip, monsters plagued Vastonic. The latest monster, a so-ut, hungers after his cargo of metal. Now it has chased him right into the heart of Fedderston.

### The Ruins of Fedderston

If the DM uses the first Set Up, the PCs have come upon the aftermath of this attack. The 10d4 surviving villagers of Fedderston fled with little more than the nightclothes on their backs when the so-ut struck, and have not yet returned. Those who were not so lucky were crushed in their beds. However, PCs who dig in the rubble will find 1d4 villagers who are injured and trapped in their homes.

Because the attack occurred near dawn, the so-ut only had time to smash its way into town and ravage the contents of the wagon before it started to feel sleepy. Now it is curled up, sound asleep, inside the

Salt Works, a building across the street from the inn.

The Salt Works has a jagged hole in one wall where the so-ut entered, but is otherwise intact. Inside the building, salt sits in piles everywhere. The Salt Works also contains hundreds of burlap sacks and milling equipment for crushing salt. The Inn of the Thirsty Traveler escaped damage and retains its normal complement of provisions, liquors and furnishings.

Since dusk has just fallen, the so-ut will awaken to renew its rampage within 2d4 rounds of the PCs entering the village. Any attack on the so-ut will wake it immediately.

If the DM uses the second Set Up, the PCs will see the so-ut in action and can attack it immediately. The three room inn where they stay will be one of the two buildings which survives the rampage. The majority of the villagers will be fleeing in panic due to the fear caused by the so-ut's charge, but a few will shout for buckets of water to extinguish their





## Desert Perils

burning homes. Others will desperately try to dig loved ones out of the rubble of Fedderston.

If the battle goes against the PCs, the DM should reserve the option of having the sun rise. The so-ut decides it is nap time, and smashes its way into the Salt Works across from the inn. There it will rest for the day, giving the PCs a chance to heal their wounds and plan a strategy. If attacked, the so-ut will immediately re-engage the PCs.

**So-ut:** Int: Semi (3); AL: CE; AC: -4; MV: 18; HD: 14+2; hp: 54; THAC0: 7; #AT 2 or 1; Dmg: 2d6/2d6 + special or 3d6; SA: fear, acidic poison, armor bite; SD: x damage from non-metal weapons, immune to psionics; SZ: H (15' long); ML: Fearless (20); XP: 10,000.

### Vastonic the Prospector

Whichever of the two Set Up options the DM uses, Vastonic will die before the PCs get a chance to question him thoroughly. When first found, he will gasp. "A huge monster . . . fangs . . . teeth . . . horrible. It followed me all the way from the oasis." His final, whispered words will be: "I found it, you know. The tomb of Prince Klyrstar."

If somehow revived from the dead, Vastonic will keep the location of the tomb to himself-sharing the information only with a dwarf who saves his life and who also makes a successful Charisma check on 1d20.

PCs will discover the *jewel of attacks* in a leather pouch, hanging from a thong around Vastonic's neck. The first PC picking it up will be cursed with it and unable to discard it. (Note: If PCs have encountered any of the crystals which offer protection against the Psionatrix of the Order, they might mistakenly believe this gem is one of that special sort.)

## Gith Games

**Set Up:** (See Map Book, pg. 30)

- Traveling through the desert, the PCs come across the ruins of what was once a moderately sized city (pop. 5000), abandoned centuries ago. Little remains but rubble and a few foundations, and there is certainly little of value in the ruins today. At one edge of town stands a natural rock slope carved into an outdoor amphitheater. On the half-circle of stone seats sit dozens of hunched, cheering figures which the PCs recognize as gith. There are close to 400 of the grotesque humanoids in all.

On the circular stage below the crowd, a thri-kreen and a b'rohng are locked in mortal combat. Other gith, armed with spears, surround two cages near the stage, one of which holds a kirre (being fanned by four gith), and the other of which holds a flailer. Two other cages remain empty. As the PCs stand watching this strange spectacle, a patrol of 2d6 gith surprises them.

- The PCs are traveling across the desert, and ahead they can see the low profile of a ruined, ancient city. Suddenly, from out of nowhere, 10d6 gith and 1 gith leader attack the PCs, using both psionics and weapons. But rather than killing the PCs, the gith seem intent upon separating one member of the party from the rest. They attempt to subdue rather than injure this individual, all but ignoring the others, though they will savagely attack any who try to stop them. Having finally captured their prey, they disarm and drive this PC across the desert to Ghoudri, 1d4 days away.

### Background

The ancient city of Ghoudri stood exposed to the elements for centuries. In fact, only scholars and sages can recall its name. Those travelers that do know of it know better than to explore the ruins, because Ghoudri is a meeting place for tribes of gith.

The four tribes of gith (Spear Stickers, Blood Drinkers, Mountain Terrors, and Chattering



Skulls—400 gith in total) the PCs encounter at Ghoudri have met here for decades to settle tribal scores. Rather than engaging each other in tribal warfare, however, the tribes have adopted the human practice of gladiatorial combat. Each tribe selects and captures a “champion” to represent the tribe. The winner of the combat becomes an honorary member of the tribe and earns 300 sp and 3 gems as a reward for valor. The tougher the champion, the more glory the tribe earns by capturing such a fierce gladiator.

### The Games Begin

In the first Set Up, the PCs have wandered into the ruined city of Ghoudri while the gladiatorial games are in progress. The gith patrol that surprises them will be hostile, but in actual fact will allow the PCs to attend the games if the PCs try to talk their way out of a battle. Having accepted this hospitality, should the PCs attack or menace any gith they will have to fight their way out through the 400 gith gathered at Ghoudri. The PCs will be treated as guests and seated near the gith leaders, in the seats closest to the action.

The first match will be between the thri-kreen fighting with two gythkas and the b’rohng fighting with two clubs and two spears. The winner of that fight will face the kirre. The winner of the second match will face the flailer. The DM can allow players to take the part of the monsters in the matches, if desired.

In the second Set Up, the Skull Smashers tribe chooses one of the PCs as its “champion.” The order of the matches will be the same, but the PC replaces the kirre, thus having to fight two matches. The PC can use any weapons, spells, or magic items.

If the PC “champion” tries to flee, the gith will attempt to drive their champion back into the circle with as few injuries as possible. The leaders will use their Teleport Other, psionic ability.

If the other PCs are watching and attempt to aid their friend in any obvious way (physical attacks or overt spell casting) the gith will attack them for meddling in the games. The gith leaders will spot less obvious meddling if any leaders make an Intelligence check on 1d20 (roll once per gith leader).

Finally, if the PC “champion” refuses to fight, the other contestants will have an easy kill. The gith might then forcibly select a new contestant from among the PCs (50% chance).

Technically, a win occurs when one of the contestants vanquishes the other, even if the defeated individual still lives. In actual fact, however, all fights are to the death. When a tribal champion loses, a gith leader has the right to decide whether to signal for the champion’s death by using the “crossed fingers” sign. The sign is given 90% of the time: defeated champions are very rarely allowed to “carry the tribe’s shame” to the outside world.

**Thri-Kreen, Adult:** Int: Average (9); AL: CN; AC: 5 (3 if using Displacement); MV: 18; HD: 5+3; hp: 27; THAC0: 15; #AT 5 or 2; Dmg: 1d4 (×4)/1d4+1 or 1d10/1d10 (gythkas); SA: paralyzation; SD: missile dodge; SZ: L (3’ long); ML: Fanatic (17); XP: 375. Wild Psionic Talent: Displacement. PSPs: 18.

**B’rohng:** Int: Low (7); AL: N; AC: 7 (10); MV: 15; HD: 5+3; hp: 20; THAC0: 15 (first two attacks with spears) 17 (next two attacks with clubs); #AT 4; Dmg: 1d6+10 (×4: two clubs, two spears); SA: special; SD: special; SZ: H (15’ tall); ML: Average (10); XP: 650.

**Kirre:** Int: Low (6); AL: N; AC: 7; MV: 15; HD: 6+6; hp: 37; THAC0: 13; #AT 7; Dmg: 1d4/1d4/1d6/1d8/1d4/1d4/1d6; SA: psionics; SZ: L (8’ long); ML: Very Steady (14); XP: 650.

**Psionic Summary:** Level 5; Score 15; PSPs 100.

**Sciences:** Project Force; Psionic Blast; Tower of Iron Will.



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**Devotions:** Awe; Contact; Id Insinuation; Intellect Fortress; Levitation; Life Detection; Psychic Crush; Soften; Thought Shield.

**Attack/Defense Modes:** PB, II, PsC/TS, IF, TW.

**Flailer:** Int: Average (7); AL: N; AC: 1 (underside 4); MV: 7; HD: 9+9; hp: 42; THAC0: 11; #AT 5; Dmg: 1d4/1d4/1d8/1d6/1d6; SA: back attack; SZ: S (4' long); ML: Elite (13); XP: 2,000.

**Psionic Summary:** Level 7; Score 13; PSPs 120.

**Sciences:** Aura Sight; Probe; Psionic Blast; Shadow Form; Tower of Iron Will.

**Devotions:** All-Around Vision; Body Equilibrium; Chameleon Power; Combat Mind; Contact; Danger Sense; Double Pain; Ego Whip; Inflict Pain; Mental Barrier; Mind Blank; Mind Thrust; Thought Shield.

**Attack/Defense Modes:** MT, EW, PsC/TS, MB, M-, TW.

**Gith (400):** Int: Average (10); AL: CE; AC: 8; MV: 10; HD: 3; hp: 15 (× 400); THAC0: 17; #AT 1 or 2; Dmg: 1d6-1 (obsidian spear) or 1d4/1d4; SA: springing; SZ: M (5' tall); ML: Steady (12); XP: 175 each.

**Psionic Summary:** Level 5; Score 16; PSPs 80 each.

**Sciences:** Project Force; Telekinesis; Tower of Iron Will.

**Devotions:** Animate Object; Animate Shadow; Ballistic Attack; Contact; Control Body; Control Flames; Id Insinuation; Mental Barrier; Mind Blank; Mind Thrust.

**Attack/Defense Modes:** II, MT/M-, TW, MB.

**Gith Leaders (4):** Int: Average (10); AL: CE; AC: 8; MV: 10; HD: 7; hp: 26 (× 4); THAC0: 13; #AT 1 or 2; Dmg: 1d6-1 (obsidian spear) or 1d4/1d4; SA: springing; SZ: M (5' tall); ML: Steady (12); XP: 175 each.

**Psionic Summary:** Level 5; Score 16; PSPs 80 each.



**Sciences:** Project Force; Telekinesis; Teleport Other; Tower of Iron Will.

**Devotions:** Animate Object; Animate Shadow; Ballistic Attack; Contact; Control Body; Control Flames; Dimension Walk; Id Insinuation; Mental Barrier; Mind Blank; Mind Thrust; Time Shift.

**Attack/Defense Modes:** II, MT/M-, TW, MB, IF

### For Whom the Bell Tolls

**Set Up:** (See Map Book, pg. 31).

- The PCs have been traveling through the rocky badlands or the foothills of the Ringing Mountains, and are camped in a narrow canyon, eating a meal. Secretly, the DM makes a saving throw vs spells for each PC. Those failing their saving throw clutch their stomachs and begin to look a little green. "The food's gone off," one will say. "I think I'm going to be ill," another adds. Excusing themselves, they walk, hunched over, around a bend in the canyon.

- The PCs are about to set off through an area of





rocky badlands or perhaps enter the foothills of the Ringing Mountains. Asking for directions, they discover a way through a narrow canyon. The directions include the warning to stick to the left-hand branch when the canyon forks. "The other way is much shorter, and faster, but nobody uses it these days. The ancient gods have reawakened. You can hear their temple chimes on the wind, sometimes, late at night. And after so many years asleep, the gods are hungry and demand sacrifice. Old Rolfus found that out, when he tried the right fork. All that was ever found of him was a few tatters of clothing and his gold tooth."

### Background

The canyon does indeed contain an ancient temple, but the god it once honored has been dead for centuries and will never be "awakened." The temple itself only survived the ravages of time by virtue of the fact that a natural cave forms the body of the structure, rising high into the face of a sandstone cliff.



While the furnishings of this place of worship have long since crumbled to dust, its main feature—a large bronze bell about 2 feet in diameter, cast in the shape of the god's bearded head—survived. Someone has recently hung the bell in the center of the room on a fresh piece of giant-hair rope.

In ancient times, those wishing to send their prayers to the god climbed a rope to this one room temple, said a prayer, and then rang the bell. The natural chimneys and fissures leading up through the ceiling of the temple conveyed the bell's tone to the clifftops above—and up through the heavens to the god himself.

Five belgoi recently discovered the ancient temple. They are using the vestigial magic of the bell to lure victims to their lair. Belgoi normally use small, hand-held bells to cast their spells; this larger bell gives them a greater range, allowing them to lure victims in from a safer distance.

### Into the Temple

Using the brass bell, the belgoi attempt to make Contact with the PCs and then to Dominate them. (The saving throw in the first Set Up was vs. Domination.) Lured out of camp or away from their party, the belgoi mentally force-march the PCs 200 feet along the canyon, to the base of the cliff housing the temple.

The entrance to the temple looks like a natural rock fissure, about 100 feet above the canyon floor. The belgoi toss down a rope ladder to their victims, and, still using Domination, force the PCs to drop their weapons and backpacks and climb the ladder. Once the victims are inside the temple and the Belgoi haul up the rope ladder, all five belgoi attack.

The floor of the canyon under the rock fissure is littered with bones—the debris of the belgoi's previous kills. PCs who survive to explore the bodies will find several pieces of useful equipment, and have a 50% chance of finding 1d4 metal weapons and a 20% chance of finding 1d2 magic items.



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The floor of the single room temple stretches more or less level for its entire 20 × 50-foot area. The walls come together to form a ceiling 50 feet above the floor. The bell hangs from a long rope, about 5 feet off the floor.

The only weaponry available to PCs inside the temple itself are the knobby wooden club used to strike the bell and the few bones the belgoi have yet to throw outside into the canyon. There is also a 10% chance that the belgoi have overlooked a knife which has fallen into a crack near one of the walls.

The bell is very valuable (50 sp for the metal alone) but also quite heavy (250 pounds). Transporting it will certainly slow the PCs down, unless they have a beast of burden.

**Belgoi (5):** Int: Low (7); AL: LE; AC: 7; MV: 12; HD: 5; hp: 22/23/17/21/20; THAC0: 15; #AT 2; Dmg: 1d4+2; SA: Constitution drain; SZ: M (6' tall); ML: Average (10); XP: 650 each; Treasure: 20 sp, 5 gems.

### A Bird in the Bush

#### Set Up:

While passing through a town, the inhabitants ask the PCs whether they have seen any sign of "Doxa the Windrider." They describe this individual as a human woman with long dark hair. She rides "a giant bird with wings so large they could enfold a house." The windrider, it seems, had promised to pick up a parcel at this village 12 days ago, but she did not arrive on time—though she is "always a day early." The villagers suspect foul play, and urge the PCs to keep an eye out for her and send word back if they learn that Doxa has been injured or killed.

- A few hours after setting out on their day's march, the PCs see a shape winging its way towards them. As it gets closer, they see it is an Athasian roc (50 feet long, with a wingspan of close to 100 feet). If PCs allow the rot to approach, they will soon see

that the bird has a saddle and bridle—but no rider. The roc lands cautiously about 200 feet away from the PCs and squawks. If they approach it, the bird hops along the ground, dragging its reins and calling. If the PCs ignore it and try to leave, it makes a short flight, lands in front of them, and repeats the performance. Eventually, the PCs will figure out that the roc is doing its best, in finest "Lassie" fashion, to lead them somewhere.

#### Background

Doxa the Windrider is a regular sight in these parts. She rides a beautiful brown rot which she raised from a hatchling and named Darkfeather. A true bond developed between the two, and the rot became utterly loyal to its mistress.

Doxa makes her living carrying packages and cargo from town to town. Her rot can carry up to 1,000 pounds, and can cross as much as 200 miles in a single day's flight. She rarely carries such large cargoes, however, preferring to specialize in moving small, highly valuable items quickly over large distances. She has gained a reputation for absolute dependability—and for confidentiality, never revealing what she carries.

Doxa's most recent parcel, a large, perfectly shaped, glossy black sphere, about 4 inches in diameter, was unlike any other she had ever carried. Doxa knows little about the orb, except that it in some way enhances spellcasting abilities and that it was originally from Tyr.

The orb is in fact one of those which King Kalak of Tyr would have used in his transformation into a dragon. While Tithian, Kalak's former templar who now rules Tyr, smashed most of the remaining orbs, a handful remain intact, attracting attention from various powerful and dangerous individuals. An example of how the orbs aid in the creation of magical devices appears in the DARK SUN™ novel *The Verdant Passage*; the preserver Ktandeo had an orb in his magical cane.



What seemed to be an easy delivery at an extremely high pay rate proved ultimately to be Doxa's undoing. The last owner, who sold the orb to a buyer in Urik and arranged for Doxa to carry it there, had angered a defiler in some way. This wizard cast a *curse* upon the orb that made its weight gradually increase. Although the orb remained the same size, it soon became too heavy for the rot to carry. Forced to land, Doxa could not complete her delivery, though she refused to leave such a valuable commodity unattended in the desert.

Doxa had the misfortune to be forced down beside a zombie plant. Unfamiliar with its dangers and exhausted from the difficult flight, she ate its berries. Now a slave of the plant, and addicted to its berries, Doxa remains trapped in this desolate spot.

### Defender of the Plant

If the DM uses the first Set Up, the PCs will see a large bush some distance ahead of them. Beside it slumps a huge bird, lying on the ground. As the PCs watch, the bird weakly struggles to its feet, spreads its wings, and attempts to fly. No sooner do its feet leave the ground, however, than it crashes back to earth.

Coming closer, the PCs can see that the bird is an Athasian roc, dark brown in color. It is saddled, and is unable to fly because its reins have been tied to the bush. After falling to the ground, the rot lies there fluttering, weakly watching the PCs approach. Over the eight days since Doxa landed, the roc has been able to drink; a small, bitter spring bubbles to the surface here. But it has had almost nothing to eat and is about to die of starvation.

If the DM uses the second Set Up, the rot leads the PCs to a large bush covered in bright red berries. PCs who have encountered a zombie plant before will recognize this bush if they make an Intelligence check on 1d20. The bird will stop about 100 feet away from the bush and refuse to go any closer.

When the PCs approach within 20 feet of the zombie plant, a dishevelled looking figure crawls out from underneath. It is a human woman, with long dark hair in a wild tangle, vacant looking eyes, tattered clothing, stained hide armor, and a metal sword and hide shield in hand.

Doxa the Windrider has been a slave of the zombie plant for eight days; during that time her intelligence has steadily dropped. Now only semi-intelligent (3), she will ferociously attack anyone or anything (even Darkfeather, in the second Set Up) that approaches within 10 feet of the plant. If the DM uses the first Set Up, Doxa accepts Darkfeather as a non-threatening part of the landscape and does not attack her mount.

The challenge for the PCs will be subduing Doxa without injuring her, convincing Darkfeather that they mean her no harm (the bird may attack those PCs it thinks harm its mistress), destroying the zombie plant and finding a way to restore Doxa's intelligence. PCs who attempt to ride Darkfeather without some sort of magical assistance will find her uncooperative in the extreme. She will try to shake them off and will otherwise behave like an untamed rot. (See "*Becoming a Roc-rider*" under the entry for Rot, Athasian; in the DARK SUN™ *Monstrous Compendium appendix*.) Characters with animal handling proficiency may, however, be able to get Darkfeather to accept them. A character thus accepted by Darkfeather may try to ride her. The PC must first make a successful Charisma check on percentage dice.

The orb Doxa was transporting is nowhere to be seen. If questioned, Doxa will only be able to mutter, "Dragon take orb. Dragon roll orb away."

The "dragon" which took the orb was in fact a fire drake. Attracted to the orb because it is a shiny object made from obsidian, which reminds the drake of its volcanic home, the monster rolled the orb away along the ground. The trail—a smooth furrow in the earth flanked by huge clawed footprints—leads plainly off into the distance.



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**Doxa the Windrider, 5th Level Fighter:** AL: CE (normally LN); AC: 4 (hide armor, shield, Dexterity bonus); MV: 12; HD: 5; hp: 53; THAC0: 15 (Strength bonus); #AT 1; Dmg: 1d8+1 (metal long sword plus Strength bonus); SA: *sword of wounding*; SD: immune to *charm*, *hold*, and *sleep* spells while under influence of berries; SZ: M; ML: Fearless (20); XP: 470; Str 17; Dex 16; Con 17; Int 3 (normally 11); Wis 11; Cha 3 (normally 15); Treasure: 10d10 sp, 20d10sp, 20d10 cp, jewelled dagger set with 1 gem, silver necklace set with 1 gem, *sword of wounding*, *dust of disappearance*, *Quaal*; *feather token* (bird).

**Darkfeather (Athasian Roc):** Int: Animal (1); AL: N; AC: 6; MV: 6, FL 48 (D); HD: 15; hp: 72 (8 due to starvation, if first Set Up is used); THAC0: 5 (3 with beak, due to bridle); #AT 2 or 1; Dmg: 3d6/3d6 or 5d6; SA: surprise, grip; SZ: G (50' long); ML: Steady (11); XP: 3,000.

**Zombie Plant:** Int: Semi (2); AL: N; AC: 7; MV: 0; HD: 3; hp: 16; THAC0: 17; #AT 0; Dmg: 0; SA: berries; SD: berries; SZ: M (6' tall); ML: n/a; XP: 120.

**Psionic Summary:** Level 3; Score 8; PSPs 20.

**Devotions:** Attraction.

### Tweaking the 'Dragon's' Tail

**Set Up:** (see Map Book, pg. 31)

• If the PCs have been through the encounter *A Bird in the Bush*, they begin this encounter by following the trail left behind by the fire drake rolling the obsidian orb Doxa the Windrider was transporting. The PCs may be following this trail without any information (if Doxa died) or they may have a minimal description of the monster and of the treasure it has claimed. If Doxa remains only semi-intelligent, she will describe the fire drake as a "dragon," and the orb as a "black ball," but will be unable to give further details. If she regains her

intelligence, she will give a detailed description of the fire drake, but will be cautious about revealing too much concerning the obsidian orb.

• Making their way toward an oasis, the PCs encounter a tribe of 25 elven herders (1st through 3rd-Level Fighters) leading 20 crodlus. The elves and their animals are thirsty, and are starting to dehydrate, but say they dare not approach the oasis because a dragon is nesting in the flowers." If questioned, the elves reveal the fact that wide patches of burnflowers ring the oasis (one hour away), though previously, once darkness fell and the burnflowers folded up, the oasis was safe. Now, however, a "dragon" sleeps there at night.

The tribe has already lost six herders and 10 crodlu to the beast, which they say "can call down fire from the sun itself." One faction of the tribe wants to press on without stopping for water. The other faction wants to try killing a crodlu, filling it with sharpened stakes, and leaving it as bait for the monster.





### Background

The "Brightflower Oasis" is a brackish pool of water no more than 30 feet wide, completely ringed by burnflowers. The burnflowers extend 10 feet beyond the edge of the pool, the equivalent of 15, 10 × 10-foot patches.

Any creature foolish enough to approach to within 50 yards of the burnflowers during the day faces 10d2 (× 15) points of damage; those who survive long enough to get to within 20 yards of the flowers take 10d4 (× 15) points of damage. But by night, once the sun goes down and the flowers fold their petals, the Brightflower Oasis is perfectly safe. In fact, the flowers provide a warm place to sleep for those wishing to avoid the cold desert night. Overnight visitors do face the terrifying possibility, however, of sleeping past dawn.

Five days ago, a fire drake returning to its lair from a hunting expedition decided to make this patch of burnflowers its temporary home. The oasis proved to be a fertile hunting ground. Now, any creatures who approach the Brightflower Oasis to draw water from it are likely to become the fire drake's next meal.

**Fire Drake:** Int: Animal (1); AL: NE; AC: -3; MV: 12 Jp 3; HD: 20+8; hp: 145; THAC0: 5; #AT: 4; Dmg: 1d10+10/1d10+10/3d6/4d8; SA: bite/swallow, elemental, psionic, tail lash; SD: psionic; SZ: G (25' long); ML: fearless (13); XP: 28,000; Treasure: *obsidian dragon's orb* (for a detailed description of dragon orbs, see the entry "Dragons and Magic" in the DARK SUN™ *Dragon Kings* supplement), 1d4 obsidian statues (50% chance per statue that it is set with 1d6 gems), 10d10 obsidian spear and arrow heads, 1d6 obsidian swords.

**Psionic Summary:** Level 15; Score 18; PSPs 150.  
**Sciences:** Energy Containment; Mass Domination; Mind Link; Shadowform; Telekinesis.  
**Devotions:** Awe; Contact; Control Flames; Control

Light; Displacement; Double Pain; Ectoplasmic Form; Ego Whip; False Sensory Input; Inflict Pain; Mental Barrier; Mind Bar; Mind Blank; Molecular Agitation; Psychic Crush.

**Attack/Defense Modes:** PB, MT/M-, MB, TW.

### Driving off the Drake

The fire drake is a formidable opponent, one quite capable of wiping out an entire party of PCs. The PCs are lucky in one respect, however. The drake has already used its ability to Gate in a sphere of fire from the elemental plane of fire, and will be unable to repeat this attack for another 13 days.

Unless the PCs have some heavy-duty magic items or spellcasting abilities which can even the score, the party should avoid engaging the fire drake in a direct attack. A stealthier approach (eg; using the elves' idea of a dead cordlu as bait, but perhaps poisoning it instead) might work better. The drake has only a 20% chance of taking any bait: it prefers to devour its meals while the food is still alive.

The PCs might attempt to drive the drake away, rather than kill it. They could most easily accomplish that objective by destroying the burnflower patch.

If the encounter with the drake goes badly for the PCs, they have one option for escaping intact. This fire drake is a collector of obsidian, and would gratefully accept as tribute a piece of obsidian fashioned into an intriguing shape. The drake will readily (90% chance) accept highly unusual objects (eg; an obsidian statue) in exchange for not devouring the PCs. The drake will only occasionally (10% chance) accept common objects (eg. spear heads) for someone's life.

**Burnflowers:** Int: Non (0); AL: Nil; AC: 10; MV: 0; HD: 15; hp: 60; THAC0: 17; #AT: 1,500; Dmg: 150d2 to 150d4; SA: heat ray; SZ: G; ML: nil; XP: 4,000; Treasure: *potion fruit of ESP* (tan-



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gerine), *potion fruit of extra healing* (orange), 15 gems, 17 cp, 28 bits.

### The Spoils

The burnflower patch, should the PCs clear or thoroughly search it, will reveal its treasure, which previously rested under its thick, tangled foliage. Burning the patch at night will destroy the potion fruits, however.

The fire drake keeps its treasure, obtained in its recent forays while nesting in the burnflowers, inside its nest, sleeping on it at night, and relying on the burnflowers to protect it by day. While the drake has no magical treasure, the obsidian dragon's orb it recently acquired aids in the manufacture of magical items. Until the orb is subjected to a *remove curse*, however, it will be difficult to transport. Currently the orb weighs 2,000 pounds.

About 4 inches in diameter (and thus perfect for setting in a staff), the obsidian dragon's orb allows the creation of a magical item with unlimited charges. The orb powers the magical item by drawing the life force from all living creatures in the same area as a 9th-level defiler spell would affect. Those within this area suffer 1d6 points of damage per level of the spell being cast by the magical item.

### A Deadly Oasis

#### Set Up:

- After traveling for some time through the desert, the PCs spot a small oasis ahead. It is no more than a shallow pond, perhaps 40 feet across and choked with weeds. But it is the only water the PCs have seen in several days. As they approach the oasis, one of the PCs spots a doglike creature, no more than 1-foot tall, slipping through the weeds. It seems to disappear suddenly, but perhaps this is a trick of the shimmering heat.

- Ahead on the desert, the PCs spot an oasis. Its waters look tempting, but a strange scene unfolds. A solitary erdlu is being pursued-almost herded-

by five tiny, doglike creatures (zhackals) who seem intent upon driving it toward the watering hole. The doglike creatures make no sound as they herd, but seem to work together as if they were silently communicating with one another. The erdlu, however, seem to have other ideas, and is trying to avoid the oasis and run the other way, back out onto the desert.

### The Oasis

The two Set Ups give the DM two options to the degree of difficulty of this encounter. If the DM uses the first Set Up, the PCs need only deal with poisoned water and a psionic attack by zhackals. If the DM uses the second Set Up, the PCs will also face the threat of a dune trapper. Dungeon Masters can, however, opt to have the zhackals drive the erdlu onto the dune trapper, where it is swallowed whole. The PCs will then know what they are facing, and can choose to attack or to leave.

If the DM uses the first Set Up, the water in the oasis has little value to travelers; it is poisonous (equivalent to Poison Type I). Although unlikely to kill higher-level PCs, the damage the poison inflicts causes severe pain.

Five zhackals have made this oasis their private hunting ground. When a creature approaches the oasis they use their psionic ability to become Invisible, and wait until the creature drinks. Then, when the creature begins to take damage from the poisoned waters, they become visible and move in, using their Ego Whip psionic ability in an effort to convince the victim that it is in fact going to die. The zhackals then feast upon the creature's emotions until it is dead. If the victim instead seems likely to recover, the zhackals resume their Invisibility and slip quietly away.

Having feasted, the zhackals will drag the corpse away from the oasis, so that their next victims have no clue to its dangers. Observant PCs (those actively searching the oasis) will see both drag marks,



which lead to the bodies of various animals, and zhackal pawprints, which look much like the prints of a tiny dog.

If the DM uses the second Set Up, the encounter takes place either in the sandy wastes or salt flats. There are no drag marks or animal corpses. The zhackals simply feast on the emotions of those characters sucked into the maw of the dune trapper, waiting in a ring just outside the limits of the plant/animal as it digests its meal.

**Zhackals (5):** Int: Low (6); AL: NE; AC: 7; MV: 18; HD: 1; hp: 8 (leader)/5/3/4/4; THAC0: 17; #AT: 1; Dmg: 1/2d6; SA: psionics; SD: psionics; SZ: T (1' tall); ML: Steady (12); XP: 175 (leader)/120 each.

**Psionic Summary:** Level 1; Score 12; PSPs 24 (leader has 34).

**Devotions:** Contact; Ego Whip; Invisibility; Mind Bar; Mindlink.

**Attack/Defense Modes:** EW/-.

**Dune Trapper:** Int: Animal (1); AL: N; AC: 10; MV: 0; HD: 16+3; hp: 78; THAC0: 5; #AT: special; Dmg: 10d4; SA: swallow, acid; SD: must dig out to attack; SZ: G (100' across); ML: n/a; XP: 19,000; Treasure: +3 *frost brand sword* (+6 vs fire using/dwelling creatures), *ring of invisibility*, 78 quarts water, 14 gems, 37 gp, 23 sp, 36 cp, 24 bits.

## Raid of the Apathetic Elves

**Set Up:** (See Map Book, pg. 32)

- The PCs are staying in the village of Leddemore. Just at dawn, the alarm is sounded: "To arms! To arms! The elves of Blueshadow are attacking! It's an elf raid!" A great commotion fills the street, but almost as soon as it begins, the attack ends. Several women, children and elderly residents of the village lie dead in the street, as do 10 elves. Clearly the elves come from the Blueshadow tribe, as each elf has the distinctive tribal mark: the left half of the body, the "shadow side," is stained blue.

A bald man with a long black moustache, who introduced himself to the PCs the previous evening "Lomar the physick," stoops over the battered body of a child. His features twisted with rage, he lifts the body in his arms and climbs onto an overturned wagon.

"Revenge!" he cries. "Revenge against the Blueshadow elves! We must wipe this scourge from Athas! Their camp lies just down the road, no more than half a mile away. I spotted it yesterday, on my way into town. Attack them now, brothers and sisters, and take your revenge! Who will join me in avenging the life of this innocent child?"

- The PCs have accepted the hospitality of a tribe of about 30 elves who make their living selling amulets and tokens. The "Blueshadows," (so named because they dye the left side of their body, the "shadow side," a vivid indigo) are merchants, rather than raiders—but there are many in these parts who believe that no elven tribe deserves trust. Still, the elves plan to stop tomorrow at the small village



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of Leddemore (pop. 250) where they hope to sell their wares.

There are those, however, who offer friendship. One such is "Lomar the physick," a traveler who offers his services to the elves one night. He heals one elf who has come down with a fever, mends the broken hand of another, and cures a child's cough. A dwarf, Nati, serves Lomar.

The next morning, the PCs awaken to a frantic elf, who announces that 10 members of the tribe have gone missing and the tribe "just doesn't care." Lomar and Nati seem also to have disappeared. Instead of the expected flurry of activity a disappearance would normally produce, the PCs are surprised to see the elves sitting listlessly on the ground, looks of complete apathy on their faces.

Before the PCs have a chance to figure out what is happening, angry voices ring out from the perimeter of the camp, and a mob of people from the village, armed with spears, storm in to attack the elves, who in their apathetic state do nothing to defend themselves.

### Background

Like many elven merchants, the Blueshadow elves make their living by selling black-market spell components and magical items. They pretend to be selling nothing more than cheap brass brooches and amulets. In recent years, they have specialized in the sale of magical amulets. These small, highly valuable magical items proved easiest to transport on foot. (Typical items the elves might offer for sale could include 1d4 of the following: *amulet of life protection*, *amulet of the planes*, *amulet of proof against detection and location*, *brooch of shielding*, *medallion of ESP*, or *medallion of thought projection*.)

In recent months, however, the Blueshadow tribe has begun to sell a powerful new magical item, a *brooch of obsidian shattering*. These brooches, shaped like tiny silver hammers, have the ability to shatter all obsidian within 120 feet of the wearer

when activated. To invoke the power of the brooch, one simply touches a chip of obsidian to the brooch, saying the word "shatter," in elven. Each brooch has 30+3d10 charges. The brooches prove especially effective in disarming opponents armed with obsidian weapons.

Word of this new magical item quickly reached King Hamanu of Urik. Since Urik earns its wealth from obsidian, and since this amulet could make obsidian weapons virtually worthless, Hamanu sent out his spies on a search and destroy mission. They soon learned that only the Blueshadow elves knew the secrets of manufacturing *brooches of shattering*, and that they were the sole distributors. No more than 30 of the brooches have been made, to date.

Hamanu ordered the tribe eliminated and the brooches destroyed. He sent in a trusted templar/psionicist to do the job.

The spy is in fact Puram, the spy the PCs met in the DARK SUN™ adventure *Road to Urik*. (If Puram died in that adventure, the DM can simply change the name of the spy.)







Puram has been living in Leddemore for three days, monitoring the elven tribe's movements. He has changed his appearance dramatically and is disguised as Lomar the physick. He has shaved his head and beard and dyed his moustache black. Only PCs who make an Intelligence check on percentage dice will recognize him.

On this mission, Puram is assisted by Nati, a 2nd-Level dwarven templar. The pair have hit upon a plan to have the inhabitants of a local village do their dirty work for them. First, using his *ring of human influence* (which can boost his Charisma to 20) Puram talked 10 elves into going on ahead of the tribe to the village. There, at dawn, he helped to provoke an argument between a handful of villagers and the elves. In the resulting melee, Puram first hid himself using an *obsurement* spell, then used his *spiritual hammer* spell to attack targets he knew would infuriate the villagers: women, children and the elderly.

Meanwhile, back in the elven camp, Nati released kip pheromones into each tent. When the villagers attack, all but 2d6 of the elves have succumbed to the apathy this pheromone produces. For the next hour, the elves will cease caring about anything, and will prove woefully easy for the villagers to slaughter.

**Elves (2nd-Level Traders) (80):** Int: Very (12); AL: N; AC: 7; MV: 14; HD: 2; hp: 7 (× 80); THAC0: 20 (+1 to attack rolls because using tribal weapons); #AT 1; Dmg: 1d8 (longbows with metal-headed sheaf arrows); SD: resistance to charm and sleep spells; SZ: M; ML: Steady (12) (2 when apathetic); XP: 46 each.

**Villagers (1st-Level Fighters) (150):** Int: Average (10); AL: N; AC: 7; MV: 12; HD: 1; hp: 7 (× 150); THAC0: 20; #AT 1; Dmg: 1d8-1 (obsidian-and bone-tipped spears); SZ: M; ML: Elite (14); XP: 17 each.

### The Villagers Attack

DMs should take note of where the PCs camp, in relation to the elven tents. If they accept the hospitality of the Blueshadows and stay inside an elven tent, the PCs must make a saving throw versus poison or suffer the effects of kip pheromone (Dwarves gain a +4 bonus to their saving throw). If camped in their own tent or separately from the elves, there is only a 50% chance that Nati also uses the pheromone on the PCs.

After inciting the villagers to attack the elves, Puram will slip to the back of the mob. If confronted by the PCs, he will attempt to convince them that he was trying to stop the attack on his elven "friends."

During the villagers' attack on the elves, both Puram and Nati will be busy collecting as many of the *brooches of obsidian shattering* as possible, while pretending to aid the wounded. They will either destroy the brooches with a *wand of negation* or toss them into a *bag of devouring*.

**Puram (8th-Level Templar/8th-Level Psionicist):** AL: LE; AC: 6 (*bracers of defense*); MV: 12; HD: 8; hp: 35; THAC0: 16; #AT 1 (metal club); Dmg: 1d6; SA: spells, psionics; SD: spells, psionics; SZ: M; ML: Elite (13); XP: 1175; Str 15; Dex 13; Con 14; Int 13; Wis 15; Cha 16; Magic Items: *bracers of defense*, *ring of human influence*, *wand of negation*.

**Psionic Summary:** PSPs 100.

**Disciplines:** Clairsentience; Psychometabolism; Psychoportation.

**Sciences:** Clairaudience; Complete Healing; Life Drain; Precognition; Teleportation.

**Devotions:** Aging; All-Around Vision; Body Control; Body Weaponry; Chameleon Power; Combat Mind; Danger Sense; Dimension Door; Double Pain; Dream Travel; Poison Sense; Spirit Sense; Teleportation Trigger; Time Shift.

**Defense Modes:** IF, MB, TS, TW, M-.

**Templar Spells:** 1) *command*; *cure light wounds*;



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*pass without trace; remove fear.* 2) *fire trap; hold person; obscurement; spiritual hammer.* 3) *cure disease; locate object; speak with dead.* 4) *protection from good, 10' radius.*

**Nati (2nd-Level Templar):** AL: LE; AC: 8 (+2 *ring of protection*); MV: 12; HD: 2; hp: 11; THAC0: 20; #AT: 1; Dmg: 1d4+1 (+1 metal dagger); SA: psionics; SD: spells; SZ: M; ML: Steady (12); XP: 50; Str 3; Dex 14; Con 12; Int 13; Wis 16; Cha 12; Magic Items: *bag of devouring, dagger +1, ring of protection +2.*

**Templar Spells:** 1) *detect poison.*

**Wild Psionic Talent:** Contact; Mindlink; Phobia Amplification. PSPs: 60.

### The Aftermath

The PCs will face the question of whether or not to allow the villagers' attack on the Blueshadow elves to proceed. If the attack goes ahead (the PCs may even mistakenly join in) all but 2d12 of the elves will be slaughtered and their tents and possessions will be burned. The Urikite templar and his dwarven henchman will destroy all of the *brooches of obsidian shattering*. Then, Puram and Nati will make good their escape, taking with them one of the elves for questioning by Puram's superiors.

The challenge for the PCs, if they try to stop the fight, will be to avoid bloodshed on either side—and this will prove difficult, with the villagers angry at the elves and the Blueshadow tribe ready to take revenge, once the apathy wears off, for the death of 10 members at the hands of townsfolk. Exposing Puram and Nati as the spies they are might resolve the conflict effectively.

If the PCs succeed in preventing a battle, award them XPs equivalent to the number of lives that might otherwise be lost in battle (3,680 if all 80 elves live; 2,550 if all 150 villagers live). The elves will present 1d4 *brooches of obsidian shattering* to the PCs as a reward, in addition to 2d4 gems.

It will be clear to PCs, however, that none of the Blueshadow elves has the spellcasting abilities necessary to create such an item. Despite their gratitude, the elves will not reveal the source of the new magical item. DMs might care to make the search for the maker of the brooches a starting point for future adventures. Certainly Puram will attempt to learn the source of this new magic.

### Psionic Pests

#### Set Up:

- Traveling along a road or trail, the PCs come across a halfling woman resting in the shade of a ragged tent. Sitting with her chin on her fist, she appears to be concentrating intently. Lines crease her forehead and she is tapping her free hand against her knee impatiently. In the dust in front of her lies a stick; she has used it to draw a rough circle in the dirt with a smaller circle inside it. "Mud," she mutters. "It has something to do with mud." The PCs are almost upon her before she notices them.

She looks up at them, startled, then introduces herself as Cassine. Pointing at the lines in the dirt, she asks, "Does this mean anything to you?" Whatever the PCs answer, the woman responds, "I didn't think so. If only I could remember . . ."

- The PCs are traveling near the Sea of Silt. Looking up, they see an unfamiliar object sailing through the sky towards them. It looks like a carpet, seemingly flying of its own accord. Two figures sit on it.

As the PCs watch, the flying carpet comes to a halt some distance away. A brief struggle ensues, and one of the figures plummets from the carpet, thrown to its death. But instead of dropping to the ground, the figure drifts slowly down to the shore as the carpet speeds away.

Pressing on to the spot where the figure landed, the PCs discover a halfling woman. She dusts herself off, then introduces herself as Cassine. She readily responds to questions, but can give only



vague answers. Some examples:

**Q:** "Who was that?"

**A:** "She was a woman of the . . . I forget."

**Q:** "Where did you come from?"

**A:** "Across the Sea . . . No. From the mountains of . . . The Dragon . . . I don't really know."

**Q:** "Who are you?"

**A:** "My name is Cassine and I'm a . . . I'm not sure."

## Background

Cassine is a high-level psionist of the Order—but one who has temporarily forgotten many of the details of who she is and what she is doing here.

One month ago, Cassine went out as a spy to learn the secrets of a group of villichis (powerful female psionists who live in remote convents). The reason: like normal psionists, the villichis are also being affected by the Psionatrix, the psionics-dampening device of the Order. The Convent of Resonant Thought, where Cassine went, was in fact sending out envoys to learn what the Order was up to.

Secretly, without Cassine's knowledge, the Order turned her into a weapon by infesting her with cerebral parasites. The Order asked her to carry a sealed stone box, filled with the parasites, to the convent; one by one they escaped and attached themselves to her. She now is infested with 20 of the creatures.

Equally unfortunately for Cassine, the villichis discovered her identity. She was Mindwiped—to such a degree that she now no longer realizes she is a psionist—let alone a 24th-level member of the Order! Most importantly, Cassine no longer remembers the location of the villichis convent. The circle within a circle she draws is a clue, however. The convent lies on an island in the Sea of Silt with a volcanic crater at its center, filled with bubbling mud. Cassine has no idea what the symbol represents.

Cassine herself presents no threat to the PCs.

She is instead an intriguing puzzle. Psychic Surgery will reveal parts of the puzzle—but to retrieve all of the information she has lost, Cassine must undergo the process several times.

Instead, the cerebral parasites Cassine carries pose the biggest threat to the PCs. No one will detect the parasites unless they make an active search. Even then, only a *cure disease* spell or Abstinence From Psionics casting can eliminate the deadly pests.

Before the villichis Mindwiped Cassine, the cerebral parasites fed copiously on her PSPs. But now that she is no longer using her psionics, they are looking for new hosts . . .

**Cerebral Parasites (20):** Int: Non (0); AL: N; AC: nil; MV: nil; HD: nil; hp: nil; THAC0: nil; #AT 0; Dmg: 0; SA: psionic; SD: only affected by *cure disease*; SZ: T (flea-sized); ML: nil; XP: 35 each.

**Psionic Summary:** Level 1; Score 18; PSPs unlimited.

**Sciences:** Probability Travel.

**Devotions:** Ectoplasmic Form; Immovability.

**Attack/Defense Modes:** -/-.

**Cassine (24th-Level Psionist):** AL: LN; AC: 6 (hide armor); MV: 12; HD: 9+30; hp: 62; THAC0: 9; #AT 1; Dmg.; SA: none (normally psionics); SD: none (normally psionics); SZ: S (3 x' tail); ML: Unsteady (7); XP.; Str 13; Dex 3; Con 14; Int 13; Wis 16; Cha 10; Magic Items: *ring of feather falling*.

**Psionic Summary:** PSPs 30 (normally 252).

**Sciences:** Aura Sight, Clairaudience, Clairvoyance, Complete Healing, Disintegrate, Domination, Election, Fatelink, Mindlink, Probability Travel, Probe, Psionic Blast, Summon Planar Creature, Superior Invisibility, Telekinesis, Teleport, Teleport Other, Ultrablast

**Devotions:** Acceptance, All-Around Vision, Astral Projection, Attraction, Awe, Biofeedback, Cause Decay, Contact, Convergence, Daydream, Dimen-



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sion Door, Dimension Walk, Dream Travel, Ego Whip, ESP, Ethereal Traveler, Feel Light, Feel Sound, Identity Penetration, Inertial Barrier, Invisibility, Know Direction, Levitation, Life Detection, Molecular Agitation, Molecular Manipulation, Poison Sense, Psychic Crush, Psychic Drain, Send Thoughts, Soften, Sound Link, Spirit Sense, Synaptic Static, Teleport Trigger, Time Shift, Time/Space Anchor

**Defense Modes:** all.

Note: Until healed from the effects of the Mindwipe, Cassine will not remember how to use her psionic powers. When she meets the PCs she has just 30 PSPs. After each night's sleep, these points will increase normally, to her maximum.

### Silt Runner's Revenge

**Set Up:** (See Map Book, pg. 32)

- The PCs are traveling along a 20-foot wide sandstone "beach" beside the Sea of Silt on a calm day. To the left of the PCs is a rocky bluff, so steep it almost makes a cliff, rising 200 feet in the air. A series of small caves about halfway up its height dot its surface. Beyond the caves, the bluff curves away in a bend, obscuring the beach ahead.

The PCs hear some sort of commotion, and soon they can discern its source: a giant has climbed the bluff, and is reaching into one of the small caves. Above, at the top of the bluff, a number of small, lizard-like humanoids dart back and forth. They are hurling spears down upon the giant, who bats the weapons away contemptuously.

The creatures at the top of the bluff disappear for a moment, and the PCs hear a rumbling sound. A huge rock appears at the top of the bluff, teeters there for a moment, and then plunges down. The boulder strikes the giant, knocking her from the bluff. The giant plunges down, roaring with pain and rage.

- The PCs are traveling a mile or so inland of the

Sea of Silt when they spy a group of creatures running toward them. After a moment or two they can make out details: a lone elf, running at top speed, barely eludes 10 silt runners. One of the lizard-like humanoids casts a spear, and the elf falls. But the silt runners spot the PCs, realize they no longer hold the 3-1 advantage in numbers they prefer, and make a break for it, running at top speed.

By the time the PCs reach the elf, he is dead. Searching his body, they find little of value, since in his attempt to outrun the silt runners, the elf cast away almost all of his equipment. Such treasure as remains includes a metal dagger, 1d10 cp, 1d6 sp, 1d4 sp, and a gold brooch in the shape of a spoked wheel (a ship's wheel, but the characters will not recognize it as such) studded with eight gems. A creased and sweat-stained letter rests in one of the elf's pockets. The top and bottom parts of the letter are torn away, but the middle part reads:

*. . . I found it at the base of a high bluff that rises up from a narrow sandstone beach. You will know the spot by the caves in the bluff; be wary of these and make certain they are empty before proceeding with the salvage operation, for here the silt runners come to lay their eggs.*

*You will see the structure when the wind conditions are just right. On certain days the wind strikes the cliff, curls around, and actually blows the silt back, exposing the sea bottom. It is a peculiar-looking building, shaped with a point at one end, and with the remains of what could be giants' spears on the roof, all made of wood hard as stone.*

*I was only able to search a small portion of the structure before the winds shifted again. But, I suspect the structure still contains treasure . . . .*



## Background

The shallow caves in face of the bluff have served for years as the nesting ground for silt runners. Recently, however, a plains giant discovered the caves, and she has been raiding them for eggs, a favorite food. The silt runners are doubly insulted by this attack, as the giant's facial features resemble an elf's. The silt runners especially hate elves.

But the smaller humanoids stand ready to take their revenge. Deciding to beat the giant at her own game, the silt runners have prepared an ambush of eight large boulders, which they can lever down from the top of the bluff. Each can deliver 2d8 damage, and will knock off any attacker who does not make a Dexterity check on 1d20. Any falling creature will also take 10d6 damage from the 100-foot drop to the rocky beach below. Any creature venturing up the bluff will likely suffer the same attacks the giant did.

Just offshore, hidden by the slit lies an ancient wooden ship. Its wood has petrified, but there is a gaping hole in its side which allows easy access. The ship only appears when the wind is just right, perhaps one day out of any given month.

## A Fiendly Giant

If the DM uses the first Set Up, the silt runners got a lucky shot. Their boulder and the resulting fall did 65 points of damage to the giant, leaving her with just one hit point. Groggy and staggering, she presents an easy target to the 12 silt runners who rush to the attack with wooden clubs. The 13 runners at the top of the bluff hurl wooden spears.

Unless the PCs kill all 25 silt runners, the survivors will rush off to gather 3d6 more members of their tribe, who will pursue and harass the PCs, especially if the party contains any elves.

Having rescued the giant, the PCs will gain an instant ally. Introducing herself as Inanna, the giant will happily transport the PCs across the Sea of Silt, or share the silt runners' treasure with them. She

will not, however, journey inland with the party. She knows nothing about the ship nearby.

**Giant, Athasian (Plains):** Int: Low (6); AL: CG; AC: 5; MV: 15; HD: 16; hp: 66; THAC0: 5; #AT 1; Dmg: 2d8+14; SA: hurl rocks; SD: resistant to psionics; SZ: H (25'tall); ML: Champion (15); XP: 8000.

## A Sunken Treasure

If the DM uses the second Set-Up, the bluffs and the beach lie about a half day's journey away from the spot where the elf dies. Unless the PCs have some means to descend the bluff, they will need to approach along the beach. The silt runners will be hiding, waiting to ambush anyone approaching the caves.

The dead elf was one of three friends who set out to salvage the wreck. The elf's companions are dead, but the PCs will not encounter their bodies. The three had barely made a start on the salvage when the wind shifted, halting their work. Then, unluckily, the silt runners arrived at the site to check on their eggs, saw the elves, and immediately attacked.

If the PCs defeat the silt runners and decide to salvage the wreck, they must wait several days (6d6) for wind conditions to be just right. The ship lies in 35 feet of silt, its deck about 10 feet below the surface. Once the winds expose the wreck, they will hold for only 1d6 hours. PCs remaining inside the wreck run the risk of suffocation from the rising silt.

However, the ship does not serve as the focus of this encounter. Rather, the ship is a lure to bring the PCs into the silt runner ambush. The silt runners have long since picked over the wreck (the gems in the cave came from it), but a diligent, dangerously long search could turn up 1d4 pieces of gold or silver jewelry, and 2d4 gems. There is a 25% chance that the PCs find a single magical item, its own magical properties having protected it from the ravages of time.



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The plains giant does not appear in the second Set-Up, but she can show up, especially if the PCs decide to wait for the winds to expose the sunken ship. Her reaction depends entirely on the PCs reactions to her. For instance, if the PCs ignore her, she will simply raid the caves for eggs. If the PCs attack her, she will fight ferociously.

**Silt Runner Leader:** Int:Low (7); AL:CE; AC:5 (shield); MV: 48; HD:4; hp: 20; THAC0:19; #AT 3 or 1; Dmg: 1d3/1d3/1d3 or 1d6 (bone club w/ metal spikes); SZ: M (5' tall); ML: Average (10); XP: 120.

**Psionics Summary:** Level 1; Score 10; PSPs 24

**Sciences:** Clairaudience

**Devotions:** Combat Mind; Radial Navigation; See Sound

**Attack/Defense Modes:** +/-TS

**Silt Runner Guards (3):** Int: Low (7); AL: CE; AC: 6 (shield); MV: 48; HD: 3; hp: 15; THAC0: 13; #AT 3 or 1; Dmg: 1d3/1d3/1d6 or 1d6 (bone club); SZ: S (4' tall); ML: Average (7); XP:65.

**Psionics Summary:** Level 1; Score 10; PSPs 24

**Sciences:** Clairaudience

**Devotions:** Combat Mind; Radial Navigation; See Sound

**Attack/Defense Modes:** +/-TS

**Silt Runners (21):** Int: Low (7); AL: CE; AC: 7; MV: 48; HD: 2; hp: 12; THAC0: 13; #AT 3 or 1; Dmg: 1d3/1d3/1d6; or 1d6-2 (wooden spear or club); SZ: S (3' tall); ML: Average (8); XP:35

**Psionics Summary:** Level 1; Score 10; PSPs 24

**Sciences:** Clairaudience

**Devotions:** Combat Mind; Radial Navigation; See Sound

**Attack/Defense Modes:** +/-TS

Total silt runner treasure on the bodies: 75 cp, 225 bits. Treasure in the caves: 21 gems, 20 sp, 400 cp.

## New Magical Item

### *Brooch of Obsidian Shattering*

This magic brooch takes the form of a small silver hammer and is of elven manufacture. It contains up to 60 charges, and must be activated by being touched with a piece of obsidian (which turns into dust) as the elven word "shallackan" ("shatter") is spoken. These brooches will shatter all obsidian within 120 feet of the wearer when activated. The brooches are especially effective in disarming opponents armed with obsidian weapons.





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# Heat Lightning

William W. Connors

“Do we have any chance at all, Kachka?”

“With most of our crew dead, Overmaster?” clicked the tohr-kreen. “I do not think so. With luck we might repel the next thri-kreen attack, but there are only nineteen of us left, so I doubt we can even manage that.”

For a moment, Overmaster Illix was silent. A single bead of sweat rolled down his mahogany forehead and into his one remaining eye. He blinked reflexively, but didn't notice the stinging irritation. Illix and his crew had left their home in Draj some three weeks ago on what was supposed to be a routine patrol of the regions near Raam. They were due to turn back toward home in two days. Thanks to the thri-kreen, it looked like they would never complete their mission.

With a mumbled curse, Illix took a few short steps across the bone floor beneath him and looked through the circular portal at his dying command. The great korinth stretched out ahead and around him, its dark grey shell looking like an outcropping of volcanic rock in the midst of the yellow desert. It was often difficult for Illix to think of the creature as a living thing and not some immense vehicle. After all, from his perspective, in a chamber carved out of one of the great spines that projected some twenty-five feet above the 75-ton korinth, there was no sign of life.

Kachka, whose mental link with the korinth's insignificant mind allowed him to feel the injuries that the beast had suffered, as well as direct its actions, reported that it was badly hurt. Korinths were perfect war beasts because of their great size and almost absolute resistance to pain and injury. Still, there were limits to the abuse that even these behemoths could withstand, and this one had passed that point.

Sadly, however, Illix knew that the creature would never have the chance to recover. The thri-kreen ambush had left most of his crew dead. The wizard, Coatilax, had done his best to support the troops. He had unleashed spells so powerful and deadly that vast patches of the sand tracts around the korinth were scorched into glass. Coatilax's might was not to be trifled with, but even the most powerful wizard can find his energies depleted. In the end, the waves of thri-kreen had overwhelmed the korinth and its magical protector. Illix wished that Coatilax had survived the attack. He would have liked to thank the old man for his

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## Heat Lightning

tremendous, if futile, efforts.

In the end, the thri-kreen had failed as well. His valiant crew, heroes all, had fought the insectoid raiders as they swarmed up the Korinth's shell and into the catacombs that were carved within. For a hundred yards in every direction, the sand was dotted with the brown exoskeletons of the attackers. Here and there, badly injured thri-kreen tried to drag their wounded bodies clear of the battlefield, only to be finished off by one of a surviving handful of archers. The last count had shown that only nineteen of his crew remained alive. Still, their morale was unbroken and Illix was certain that their loyalty to the sorcerer-king was absolute.

At that thought, Illix chuckled to himself. *Even if they were to desert, where would they go? We're sixty miles from home, with nothing but burning sand to subsist on until we get there. Raam is closer, only about thirty miles away, but going there would mean capture and slavery, at best. Neither option is too pleasant.*

"I sense that the thri-kreen are making their final preparations," came the chattering, emotionless voice of the tohr-kreen. "I believe that we will be under attack again within the hour."

Illix cursed. He could not believe that a routine patrol had turned out this way. Only once before had the thri-kreen dared to attack a korinth, and that was many years ago. He frowned at the memory of Overmaster Tectalik's ill-fated expedition. Illix and three other korinth commanders had spent nearly two months looking for the lost beast but found no sign of it. The only logical assumption, they decided, was that it had been utterly destroyed by thri-kreen. Now Illix was to have the honor of following Tectalik in the dishonorable roll of those who had lost their commands to the savage insects.

He looked at Kachka and frowned. The tohr-kreen had long been his friend, and yet he could read nothing of the creature's thoughts from its chitinous face. He tried to sort out his options and found that it was not difficult. There were none.

Illix motioned to an older man who was going over a neat collection of maps at a small table in the corner. He was slender but not gaunt and had a look of shrewdness in his hawklike face. Although his dress did not clearly

set him apart from the rest of the korinth's crew, he was a man to be treated with great respect, even by the Overmaster. His name was Akalla, and he was a moon-priest, one of the templars of Draji. It was his place to see that the interests of the sorcerer-king were protected at all times and that no act of treason was contemplated by the korinth's crew or commander.

Illix turned to him and tried to force a comforting smile. He reached out his hand and placed it on the older man's shoulder. He knew that Akalla had held a position of some importance prior to his assignment on the korinth. The move to Illix's command was certainly a demotion of some magnitude. In a lesser man, this might have been cause for bitterness and resentment. Akalla, however, had shown himself to be beyond such things. He had served Illix loyally as any man or woman in the crew.

"We've served together for almost three years now, Akalla, and you have always followed my orders well. There is one command, however, that I had hoped never to give you." Akalla's face dropped. He sensed what was coming. "Outfit the crew for expedition; we are leaving the korinth. We'll head due south, away from the thri-kreen."

For a moment, Akalla seemed about to object. The templar was proud and determined, Illix knew. To him, this must seem like the greatest of defeats. Still, he knew his duty. He saluted and turned to carry out his orders. Illix's dry voice stopped him in his tracks.

"One last thing, Akalla. Find four volunteers. They'll remain behind to resist the raiders. With luck, this will convince the thri-kreen that they have utterly destroyed us. Tell the volunteers that their families will receive double compensation."

Akalla could not answer. He merely nodded, his back still to the Overmaster, and began to descend the ladder into the chamber below where the crew was gathered.

"Kachka," said Illix, "destroy the beast and let's get out of here." The tohr-kreen obeyed, sending out a brief pulse of psychic energy that instantly killed the mighty korinth. There was no turning back now. Illix was trusting his life, and the lives of his command, to the infamous mercies of the Athasian desert and its dark sun.



"I don't think you understand me, Overmaster," complained Milique.

At first, Illix did not answer. He stood with his back to the healer, listening to her words but not seeming to hear them. On the far horizon, the bloated sun touched the rippling edge of the desert sand and splashed vibrant shades of violet, pink, and blue across the western sky. Slowly, he turned around to face Milique.

"I understand, Milique," he said at last in a reluctant voice, "and I do not dispute your claims. You warn me that three of our company will be dead within a day if we do not stop to tend them. Caring for the injured is your job, and you do it well. However, we have very little water on which to travel. If we don't keep moving south, making for the trade route, those three will be only the first to die. Without food and water, none of us will survive to see the pyramids of Draj again."

Now, Milique was silent. This was true. She knew it. Illix was a good soldier and an even better leader. He placed the lives of his men above his own. If there were any option but to continue, he would take it. Still, she had the healer's heart. Her family had carried the burden of empathic powers for generations, and she was but one link in a great chain of tradition. She could not stand the thought of failure in her appointed task. If the wounded men died, it would hang forever on her soul, just as the lives of all those who died fighting the thri-kreen did. She knew that the same weight burdened Illix.

"By your will, Overmaster," she answered weakly. The pain of the injured hung about her as she turned to go. She began to erect her mental barriers, blocking off the suffering of her companions, then dropped them again. *Illix cannot simply shut them out of his mind*, she thought. *Am I so weak that I cannot carry the same burden that he does?*

"Wait a moment, Milique."

The healer turned. At first, she thought that Illix might have changed his mind. Then she saw that it was not the Overmaster who had spoken. Akalla was trotting across the sand toward them. In his hand, he held a tattered roll of parchment.

Behind the fatherly templar, she could see the rest of the fifteen worn and exhausted survivors sprawled out in

the sand. One was fanning himself, as the heat of the day began to subside, while another took a conservative pull from his waterskin. The rest just lay still, conserving their energy and enjoying the break in their trek across the desert.

Akalla stepped up to Illix and knelt down. He unrolled the parchment on the desert sand, revealing a faded and ragged chart. Judging from the bleached pigments, Illix guessed that it must be five or six years old. "I think I have found an answer to our problem!" he said jubilantly. Illix knelt down to take a closer look at the chart. "When we left the korinth, I grabbed all the charts of this area that I had and brought them with me. This one is quite old, as you can see, and it shows a small oasis about a day's march south of here."

"It's not on the more recent charts?" Milique asked, "Why would that be?"

"There are many possibilities," responded Illix. "Most probably, it ran dry."

"What good does a dry oasis do us?" the healer asked.

Akalla smiled at her naivete and reminded himself that this was her first voyage aboard a korinth. "Sometimes, an oasis that has run dry will recover if left unused for long enough. If we're lucky, there'll be at least a small pool waiting for us there."

"That's wonderful!" Milique cried.

"At least it's a chance," said Akalla.

"It's our only hope," said the Overmaster.

The last of the sun's swollen disk vanished behind the horizon as Illix gave the order to resume the march. He had explained to the survivors that they were heading for an oasis shown on Akalla's charts. He hadn't told them that there was a good chance it would be an empty hole, as dry as the sands around them. The veterans among them would know; the new recruits didn't need to.

"Oltoluque," Illix called to the burly mul who commanded the surviving warriors, "I want you and your troops to fan out ahead of us in a wedge. As we move toward the oasis, we're likely to run into trouble. I don't want us all caught off guard if something big starts stalking us."



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The mul turned to look at his commanding officer. For a moment, he seemed to be thinking carefully, clearly he was uncomfortable about something. "Perhaps I should remain with you, Overmaster. If something were to slip past our scouts, you would be left undefended."

Illix motioned toward Kachka. The insect tilted his head slightly to look at Oltoluque. "With Kachka near me I am hardly undefended," Illix replied.

"Perhaps it would be better if you were," said the mul, looking up at the tohr-kreen with obvious distaste.

"What are you implying, Oltoluque?" demanded the Overmaster sharply.

"Do you forget that it was his kind that attacked us in the desert? How can we be certain that he will not turn on you as well. Indeed the circumstances of the ambush are more than a little suspicious, Overmaster. Many of us think that we were betrayed. If that is the case, can you think of a better suspect than . . ."

Oltoluque's words were cut short by the sharp crack of Illix's backhanded slap. The mul's head snapped to the side from the force of the blow, but he seemed to feel no pain from it.

Illix's voice hissed out, carrying with it the stern tone of authority and the deadly warning of a coiled snake. "Your words show your-ignorance, mul. If it weren't very likely that we are all going to die out here, I'd have you executed for such insubordinate talk. As it is, I am willing to forget your words and blame this incident on the madness of the desert sun."

"Is it madness to fear for the survival of our company?" roared Oltoluque. The muscles in his neck tightened with rage. For a second, he and Illix stared at each other in silence. Then the mul seemed to reach an important decision. He straightened up to his full seven and a half feet of height. "If you will not concern yourself with a possible threat to the survival of this expedition, I shall. In the name of the mighty Tectuktitlay, I demand that you give up your command so that I might lead us to safety."

Illix cursed under his breath. He should not have lost his tempter. To most people, there was no difference between the barbaric thri-kreen who had destroyed their vehicle and noble tohr-kreen like Kachka. Indeed, many

people did not believe that the tohr-kreen were anything but a myth. Oltoluque's suspicion was understandable, especially given his lower social status and, hence, more basic education.

Now, because of his quick temper, Illix had brought about a rift in his command. Oltoluque was perfectly within his rights to issue the challenge, and Illix could not refuse it without relinquishing his command. Further, if he didn't stand up for the tohr-kreen, it was likely that the insect would be torn apart by the paranoid fools as soon as Oltoluque took command.

Illix said nothing. He nodded his head to show that the challenge was accepted. The other survivors formed a circle, roughly twenty yards wide, around the combatants. Both men removed their weapons and most of the robes they had worn to shield them from the ruby rays of the daytime sun.

To someone unfamiliar with the two combatants, the match would have looked grossly unfair. The mul stood fully a foot taller than Illix and had muscles that seemed to have been carved from a great block of bronze. The Overmaster, while by no means a weak man, was simply not in the mul's league. But Illix had been challenged before. The very fact that he was still alive showed that he was far from helpless.

Akalla stepped into the middle of the circle. As a templar, one of the moon priests of Tectuktitlay, the sorcerering who ruled Draj, it was his place to insure that no act of treason took place in Illix's command. Duels of this nature, though uncommon, did occur. There was a strict code of conduct to be followed, and it fell upon Akalla to see to it that the challenge was fought fairly. "Oltoluque has made challenge!" he called to the company. "In the name of Tectuktitlay, who raised our city from the sands of the desert and made its lands more fertile than any other on Athas, I say that this duel must be fought at once!"

"Akalla," called Kachka in a clicking voice, "this should be my battle, not the Overmaster's. It is I who have been insulted by the young warrior. It is my honor and place among the expedition that has been questioned. I call upon you to stop this challenge and command that the battle which is mine be fairly granted me."



Illix was shocked. He new the tohr-kreen far better than any other man on Athas. Indeed, Kachka and he shared a common past that assured their lifelong devotion to each other. The Overmaster knew that Kachka was no warrior. In fact, Illix would not have been able to say with certainty whether the tohr-kreen or Milique had the softer heart. After all, the healer was accustomed to seeing pain and suffering which Kachka had often admitted made him sick. For him to intercede at this point was a sign of his great loyalty to Illix.

Illix stepped forward. "The fight is mine, Kachka," he said in a solemn tone. The tohr-kreen cocked his head to looked down at his friend. With a rippling of his thorax that might have been the equivalent of a shrug, he stepped to the side and was silent.

Akalla raised his arms above his head and spoke in a thunderous voice that one would not have expected from the lean moon-priest. "In the name of Tectuktitlay, divine ruler of Draj, a challenge for command of this expedition has been made and accepted. Before the assembled company and under the all-seeing eyes of Tectuktitlay, let the combat begin!"

The mul charged at Illix like a runaway chariot. At the last second, the overmaster spun to the side and kicked behind him. In any other circumstance, he would have aimed his foot at Oltoluque's kneecap in an effort to cripple his opponent. With things as they were, however, he couldn't afford to do that. Instead, he landed the blow in the middle of the warrior's shin. It would leave a colorful bruise but do no permanent harm.

As Illix had hoped, the impact threw Oltoluque off stride and caused him to lose his balance. With a spray of sand and an explosive loss of breath, the mul went down. Illix completed his lateral move and threw himself onto his opponent's back. He knew that he could never defeat Oltoluque in a straight contest of strength and had no intention of allowing their duel to become one. As he landed, he lashed his right arm around the mul's throat.

When he tried to anchor the hold with his left hand, however, the warrior shot an elbow back at the Overmaster. Illix would have been hard pressed to say that the

blow had come from an unarmed man. Indeed, the rush of pain that raced along the entire left side of his body could not have been worse had he been struck by a stone war hammer. The blow sent him staggering back from the mul, who sprang to his feet and whirled about.

For a second, Illix lost consciousness. When he awoke, his head was pounding with pain and his vision obscured by splotches of darkness. He saw that Oltoluque was almost upon him and jacked a foot into the air. The towering warrior sprang forward, his full weight landing on the Overmaster's leg. Something in Illix's knee popped and another twinge of pain, minor compared to the burning in his side, rippled through his body.

Ignoring the pain, Illix pushed up with his leg. The mul's dive was not halted, but his path was deflected slightly. Amid a cheer of surprise from the bystanders, the mul crashed into the desert sand a second time.

Illix was on him at once. He slipped his arm around Oltoluque's throat and anchored the hold with his free hand. He tightened his grip, cutting off the mul's precious air. Three more savage elbow jabs crashed into Illix's body, but his hold was strong enough to resist them. The final blow was feeble compared to the first ones, but Illix felt certain that it had been enough to break at least one rib. Then his hold overcame the warrior, and Oltoluque's body went limp.

Illix released his grip and stood up slowly. There was silence among the spectators. Something was bothering them, and Illix knew what it was.

Akalla was the first among them to speak. He stepped forward and placed a firm hand on the Overmaster's shoulder. "By combat you have proven yourself, Illix. As agent of Tectuktitlay, I congratulate you and reaffirm your right to command us."

Between wheezing breaths, Illix managed to nod. "All praise to Tectuktitlay," he gasped. He knew what Akalla would say next.

"Overmaster, custom dictates that Oltoluque has forfeited his life by challenging you. Will you not complete the ordeal of combat as it is intended?"

"No, Akalla, I will not," said Illix in the most commanding voice that he could muster. A murmur of alarm rippled through the onlookers. "We are all in deadly



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peril here, traveling through hostile terrain with few supplies and the potential of attack at any moment. I say that we cannot afford to have any warrior slain by our own hand. There may well be a time in the future when Oltoluque's sword saves us I will not face that time with only his memory."

Akalla was clearly surprised by this, but he recognized the wisdom of the Overmaster's words. He also saw that this was a moment of great peril. If the other survivors took this as a sign of weakness in the Overmaster, he would certainly be challenged again. In his current condition, he would be unlikely to survive. With both Illix and Oltoluque dead, it was almost certain that the expedition would succumb to the terrors of the desert. Thus, the templar knew that he must speak quickly, before someone could step forward to demand that tradition be kept.

"The Overmaster is right!" cried Akalla. "Tektuktitlay will commend him for his wisdom when we return to Dral. Let us give thanks that we are led by so discerning a man.

For a second, the others seemed unconvinced, but the invocation of the sorcerer-king's name, by one of his own moon-priests, was not to be taken lightly. If Akalla supported the Overmaster, there could be no doubt that his actions were correct. A ragged call of approval for Illix ran through the company. It built swiftly into an outright cheer that ended when Milique stepped forward to tend the injuries of the two men.

A soft wind blew across the desert and carried the delicate odor of flowers and herbs to the worn and weary men and women of Illix's command. The scent was invigorating, and the sight of the oasis was more welcome than anything Illix could imagine. Certainly, they were still several hours away from this enclave of life, but already they could see that it was as lush as any oasis to be found on Athas.

As they drew nearer to the water hole, it became even more wondrous. A wide, circular pond spread out at the base of a long, rounded hill. At the center of the pool, a churning waterspout reached into the air, marking the location of the generous spring that brought life to this corner of the dying world. A rolling savannah of golden

grasses stretched out around the pool, swaying gently back and forth in the slow breezes that crept into the oasis from the desert around it. The hill, which was on the far side of the pond, was wooded with a thick tangle of short, squat trees. Vines stretched back and forth like the web of some great spider, and colorful birds fluttered to and fro among the branches.

The morale among Illix's followers was utterly restored when the oasis came into view. Even Oltoluque, who had spent the majority of his time since the failed challenge sulking and glowering at Illix, allowed a smile to cross his face. Unconsciously, they all picked up the pace of their march and were fairly rushing toward the oasis when Illix called for the company to halt.

This was clearly an unpopular order, but the survivors obeyed. Milique seemed about to object, no doubt on the verge of voicing her concern for the wounded, when she saw that something was troubling the Overmaster. She stepped forward to speak with him as the others fanned out to assume their normal defensive positions. As she reached Illix, he held up a hand to silence her unasked question and called to Akalla and Kachka. The healer stood quietly by, waiting her turn to speak, as the Overmaster discussed the situation with his closest advisors.

"Akalla," he began, "your chart showed that this place would be nothing more than a brackish watering hole. At best, we hoped to find a way to replenish our stores and move on. Is there any reason that we should find so lush and splendid a place as this?"

The templar paused for a moment before answering. He looked across the last few miles of sand to the sprawling oasis and seemed about to offer a theory. Then, with a stern look falling across his face, he turned back to Illix and shook his head.

"I thought so," grimaced the Overmaster. He shifted his attention to the tohr-kreen. "Kachka, tell me what you can sense about this place. I don't want us walking into a trap."

The insect stepped forward. It sank into a trance and spread its consciousness out before it. Delicate tendrils of mental energy reached forward, coming at last to the edge of the oasis.



As Kachka's formidable mind probed into the unknown, Milique considered the situation. Certainly, she thought, there was good reason to suspect a trap. So perfect a find in the desert was almost always cause for alarm. Still, what choice did they have?

Milique closed her eyes and looked into her healer's heart. She felt the pain and suffering of the injured, and pushed it aside. She searched deeper. At first, she sensed the faintest tremors of deception. Something was not right, though she could not say what.

Then Milique found the pain. It crashed in upon her mind with unstoppable force. The very sands beneath them seemed to be full of an anguish that she could not identify. There was an elemental agony here more powerful than any that she could have imagined. The suffering of the wounded, the subtle hints of deception, the concern of Illix for his command, were all swept away.

The healer staggered, trying to break off the mental contact with this alien presence. Everything went dark for a moment, then she was free. The agony was gone. It had found some other channel to explore, some more direct pathway to expression.

It had found Kachka.

Milique cried out a warning and threw herself at the Overmaster. The sudden impact caught him off guard, and the two of them toppled to the sands. Akalla sprang back in surprise. For both men, that was all that saved their lives.

The tohr-kreen whirled about with a howl of rage. It swept a powerful arm through the air, catching the temple on the side of the head. Akalla spun about, let out a cry of pain, and fell to his knees. Had the blow been better aimed, he was certain that his neck would have been shattered. As it was, he found himself fighting to maintain consciousness as the giant insect moved in for the kill.

Before the tohr-kreen could strike a second time, Oltoluque sprang into action. He vaulted over the sprawled bodies of Illix and Milique, and slammed into the tohr-kreen's side. The weight of the mul was too much to counter, and the insect was knocked from his feet. In a smooth, rolling follow-through, Oltoluque tumbled away from tohr-kreen and landed squarely on his feet.

"You see!" he roared. "The insect has betrayed us!"

Illix could not believe his eyes. Certainly he could not have misjudged the tohr-kreen. For many years, the two had been as close as any pair of brothers could be. When he saw the normally flat and emotionless features of the insect's face, however, he knew the truth. Kachka's countenance was one of unmistakable pain and madness.

Oltoluque's warriors were quick to follow their leader into battle. Before the tohr-kreen could regain his feet, half a dozen burly warriors fell upon it. As Kachka thrashed and snapped at its opponents, Oltoluque stepped toward it. The mul reached over his shoulder and drew a bulky bone axe forward. Few men would have the strength to lift the great weapon, let alone wield it, but it looked almost weightless in the mul's hands.

For a moment, Kachka seemed to acquiesce. It stopped struggling and fixed its gaze on the great warrior. Then the tohr-kreen unleashed a stream of psychic energy at Oltoluque. The mul, however, was ready for this attack and his formidable mental defenses were already in place. Oltoluque deflected the attack, but it came with more power than any psionic challenge he had ever faced before. He grimaced with pain, and a pounding headache gripped his skull. The attack passed, and Oltoluque raised his weapon. "You have failed, traitor, now you will die!"

"No!" cried Illix, getting to his feet.

The mul stopped. He turned to look at the Overmaster, hate and disbelief burning in his eyes. "Overmaster, can you deny that the creature has turned on us?"

Before Illix could answer, Milique sprang up and stepped between the two men. "Its mind is not its own. There is some great power here, I have felt it. It has driven the tohr-kreen mad with its rage and anger."

Oltoluque cursed. He twisted his grip on the weapon and brought the flat of the blade down on the insect's skull. There was a loud cracking sound as the exoskeleton buckled under the impact. The tohr-kreen, who had begun to struggle again, fell still.

Milique rushed forward and knelt beside Kachka. Her fingers probed the wound and her empathic power reached carefully out. She sensed its pain, felt its mad-



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ness, but pulled back before the madness could lash out at her again. She turned to face Illix and force a faint smile to her face. "It lives, but I cannot say how bad the injury is."

Akalla stepped beside Illix and placed a firm hand on his shoulder. "We have no choice, Overmaster. We must make camp here. Whatever the danger, we must face it so that our wounded can be treated."

"I know," mumbled the Overmaster, "but if I must choose between death in the desert, or in the midst of that garden, I suppose I'll pick the oasis."

"But I must!" cried Milique.

"I forbid it," responded Illix.

"I've done everything I can for it with traditional healing. If I don't use my gift of healing, it may die."

"I understand that," said Illix, looking down at Kachka's bandaged skull. The light inside the tent was poor, but the coolness of it was refreshing after days in the hot sun. "You know as well as I do that healing it will require a deep level of psychic contact. I can't allow you to risk your mind until we know what happened to Kachka."

Milique flushed with anger. She was about to continue her protests when Illix placed his dark hands on her shoulders. He forced a weak smile to his face. "Do what you can, Milique, but we're in a dangerous situation here and I can't risk the loss of our only healer. I know this is hard for you. I know that you can't help but feel its pain. But I must insist."

Milique lowered her head. She nodded, but could not speak. Illix wondered if she knew how much he shared her agony.

Illix turned and stepped out of the tent. He expected the scorching crimson rays of the sun to attack him at once, but was pleasantly surprised to notice that the day was cooler than it had been. He cocked his head back, noting, with some disbelief, the rare sight of a tenuous cloud formation hanging above the oasis. If things had been less serious, he would have smiled at the kindly omen of fertility. Instead, his only thought was that the clouds would burn off long before they could carry any of the oasis's life giving water to the parched deserts beyond.

Illix's momentary thoughtfulness was interrupted by the lumbering arrival of Oltoluque. Since their duel, the mul had been no more, nor less courteous to his Overmaster than military tradition required. He stood at rigid attention until Illix bade him to speak.

"The sentries are in place, Overmaster," said Oltoluque in a clipped, stern voice.

Illix nodded. "Very well, come with me and we'll inspect them."

As they walked around the perimeter of the camp, Oltoluque said nothing. When the last position had been checked, Illix gave his approval.

Oltoluque had done an efficient job in establishing a secure camp. They were positioned in the sweeping savannah that blanketed the north side of the oasis. One side of the camp was bordered by the bubbling, clear water of the oasis. Care had been taken to leave a wide space between the edge of the camp and the crescent shaped forest that ran around the oasis and covered the rise south of the water. There was no danger of an ambush, for any enemy would be spotted long before reaching their enclave.

"Well done, Oltoluque. We ought to be safe enough here," said Illix. He saw that something about the security of the camp was bothering the mul. "What is the problem, Oltoluque?"

"We have a secure perimeter, Overmaster, but it won't do us any good."

"Why is that?"

"Because the real enemy is inside our camp," hissed the mul.

Illix whirled. His first thought was to strike the mul again, but his wisdom overcame his rage. In a controlled voice, the Overmaster answered Oltoluque's comment.

"You refer to Kachka?"

"You know I do," sneered Oltoluque.

"Go on, you clearly have more to say about the matter."

Again, the warrior hesitated before speaking. Then he allowed his thoughts to cascade forth with an almost unchecked fury. "How can you allow that creature to stay among us? It tried to kill us once; it will try again! I cannot believe that you haven't ordered it executed for its



betrayal. Clearly, it brought the thri-kreen raiders down on us. Who knows? They might be on their way here!”

Again, Illix felt his temper rise. If Oltoluque was allowed to continue speaking like this, as he undoubtedly did when Illix wasn't around, morale among the warriors would be utterly destroyed. There seemed to be only one course of action.

“Oltoluque, I'm going to tell you something that none of the others knows, not even Akalla. Perhaps it will help you to understand why Kachka can't possibly be a traitor.”

The mul rolled his eyes. He was a physical man, not someone prone to debate or conversation. Clearly, the idea of listening to what was no doubt going to be an inspirational anecdote did nothing for him.

“Several years ago,” Illix began, “I was assigned to command a unit of erdlu riders. We were sent east out of Draj. Reports had come in that a large number of thri-kreen were massing south of Bitter Well. Our orders were to ride to the oasis, then turn south. We were to gather intelligence about their numbers and plans. It seemed a routine task, and none of us thought too much about it as we drew near to Bitter Well.

“Suddenly, the savages attacked. We were outnumbered ten to one, and it wasn't long before most of our unit had been killed. I was taken prisoner, being the highest ranking of the survivors, and everyone else was slaughtered.

“I spent the next few days in the hands of their tribal inquisitor. It was a master at inflicting pain. During my time in its custody, I lost my left eye. I don't remember how, but I'm sure it hurt like hell. I don't even remember if I told them what they wanted to know.

“When the inquisitor was done with me, I was thrown into a pit at the center of the village. As they drew a heavy wooden grate across the hole, the insects mocked me, chattering that I would be killed the next morning. Given the condition that I was in, it didn't seem likely that I would live long enough to attend my own execution. As I lay on the rocky floor of the pit, a large shadow fell across me. I opened my remaining eye and saw the towering figure of Kachka above me.”

“He was to be your executioner?” asked Oltoluque,

clearly becoming interested in the tale despite himself. At that comment, Illix chuckled.

“Not at all. It was a prisoner like I was. You may have noticed that Kachka's back is laced with fine cracks. They had broken its carapace and applied burning embers to the delicate tissues underneath. I can't imagine how much that must have hurt, and Kachka says that no human could have endured it and remained sane.”

“I don't understand. Was it a criminal?” asked Oltoluque.

“It seems that Kachka had been living among the thri-kreen for several months. It didn't care for the savages, but found them an interesting study. Its people, the tohr-kreen, are far more civilized than the desert raiders you and I know. Kachka learned that the thri-kreen were going to ambush a military patrol near Bitter Well.”

Oltoluque looked surprised. “That was your unit?” he asked, already certain what the answer would be. Illix nodded and continued his story.

“Kachka demanded that they give up their plan, but the savages didn't listen to him. In the end, when he threatened to warn the riders before the ambush could be sprung, they turned on him.”

Illix thought back to that dark night so many years ago. As he told the warrior his tale, part of his mind relived the escape. He remembered how the two had worked together, breaking a small opening in the grate that covered the pit. He could still hear the clicking gasps of pain coming from Kachka he scampered up the tohr-kreen's fractured back and pulled his body through into the moonless night. Every movement brought with it a surge of pain. It was all he could do to avoid falling into unconsciousness. It took all his strength to move the grate off the hole.

Once the way was clear, the tohr-kreen had pulled itself up. Normally, such a creature could easily have launched himself into the air to a height twice that of the pit, but Kachka had been abused just as badly as Illix.

The two of them crept out of the thri-kreen village. Twice they were challenged by sentries, and twice the tohr-kreen lashed out with its mind to destroy them. They moved out into the night, leaving the certain death of the thri-kreen village for the probable death of the





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Athasian desert.

It took them a week to reach Draj. The last day of the journey, Illix dragged the body of the tohr-kreen through the sparse grassland that ringed the city. The burden had been too great for so wounded a man, and Illix's strength had given out. He had fallen and lost consciousness, certain that he would not wake up. When he opened his eyes, he was in the Temple of Healers in Draj. He was home and, more importantly, alive.

"When I recovered," concluded Illix, "I asked that Kachka be brought to me. We talked for a long time, and when the insect left it called me *kaluchmak*. It translates into our language as *clutch-mate*."

"Clutch-mate?" asked Oltoluque, "What's that?"

"It means that Kachka and I are sworn to be loyal to each other until the end of time. It could no more betray me and my command than Akalla could turn against the sorcerer-king he worships."

"Perhaps now you will see that Kachka has no more love of the thri-kreen than you or I. It thinks of them as savage animals. If anything, they are a shame to it, for it knows that they are its distant kin."

For a long moment, Oltoluque was silent. As a warrior, he certainly understood the bond that could form between men who had been through great hardships together. Still, he could not drive the image of the thri-kreen attack from his mind. Even his steel nerve had trembled at the horror of that moment.

Illix turned away from the mul and left him to his thoughts. For the moment, at least, Oltoluque seemed pacified, but Ill' knew that this wasn't going to be the end of his troubles with the young officer.

Illix sprang to his feet, throwing off the canvas blanket he had been sleeping under. The echoes of the explosion hadn't yet died out. He grabbed the steel sword that marked his rank and sprang out of his tent.

It was still dark outside, the eastern horizon was starting to brighten with the light of the coming dawn, but a band of shimmering stars was still visible to the west. Illix saw no sign of immediate danger in the darkness. Suddenly, a blinding wall of azure light slammed into him. He threw an arm up to protect his night vision just as he

heard the crack of another loud explosion.

Then he saw the truth. The sky above the oasis was blanketed with thick, bulbous clouds. Dim flashes of color, accented by occasional bursts of blinding lightning, sprang from cloud to cloud in the faint light of the sunrise. The air was thick with moisture, but no rain had fallen yet.

"Have you ever been in a thunderstorm?" asked Milique, stepping up quietly behind him.

"Once," said Illix. "A long time ago. I was escorting a team of diplomats to a meeting with a tribe of halflings on the forest ridge. The storm didn't last long, but it was one of the most incredible sights I've ever seen."

"I've never seen one before, but I've heard stories. I suppose we all have, but they can't do it justice. There's something wondrous about the whole thing."

Illix found himself admiring the sensitivity of the healer. To him, everything was either an enemy or an ally. In her mind, however, there was an artistry in all things. He looked again at the clouds, trying to see in them the elegance that Milique perceived.

Before he could say whether his experiment had succeeded, the quiet of their conversation was interrupted by Oltoluque. He came trotting forward, holding a slender bone spear in his hands, and asked to speak to the Overmaster.

"Two of the men are missing."

"What happened?" Illix asked, his mind utterly abandoning any interest in the clouds or the storm brewing overhead.

"After the perimeter was established, I sent a team to scout the woods on the far side of the oasis. They should have been back an hour ago, but there is no sign of them. I was about to head out myself and see what I can find of them."

"I'll come with you," said Illix. Oltoluque made no sign of protest.

"As will I," said Akalla, coming out of his tent.

"I think not," said the Overmaster. He stepped nearer to the templar and said, in a voice too low for Oltoluque to hear, "I want you here. I don't trust any of the mul's warriors near Kachka. You take charge and keep everything under control. We'll be back as soon as we can."



Akalla nodded and stepped back, Illix turned away from him. "Milique, we may need your skills. Get your healing kit and come along."

It took the young woman only a few minutes to get ready for the journey. Illix spent the time worrying about his injured friend, and watching as the whistling Oltoluque sharpened the tip of his spear.

Stepping through the thick forest, Illix cursed at the vines that seemed to coil about his feet like snakes. The change from the pleasant grasses on the other side of the oasis was quite marked. There were no cool breezes in this place, only an oppressive heaviness in the air. Insects buzzed to and fro, horrible creatures that bit, stung, and drew blood.

By the time they started into the woods, the sun had crept above the horizon. The clouds overhead were worrying Illix, they were as dark and ominous as any the Overmaster had ever seen, but that wasn't the problem. The thing that bothered Illix was the strange shape of the cloud formation. They were hanging directly above the oasis in a large, circular formation. While the oasis and the lands around it were cloaked in somber darkness beneath the storm, the crimson rays of the sun scorched the desert beyond just as they did every day. Each flash of lightning that roared above the trio reminded Illix of the supernatural danger that hung over their heads.

"Let's make for the top of the hill," ordered Illix. "If we don't find a trace of them up there, we can begin to circle back down until we do."

Milique nodded. Oltoluque said something in response. Whatever it was, however, Illix would never know, because the deafening roar of another clap of thunder smothered his words.

As they neared the top of the hill, the forest became thicker, the trek became harder, and Oltoluque was forced to use his bone sword to chop through the foliage. When they reached the crest of the hill, Illix noticed that Milique looked winded.

"You can sit down and take a rest, Milique. Oltoluque and I will fan out and try to find the missing men."

"There's no need for that," said Oltoluque, "I believe I have found them."

Illix and Milique moved quickly to the mul's side. They saw that he had found a circular hole, roughly a yard wide, that had been cut into what appeared to be a hollow rock outcropping. Vines clung to it, but they had been hacked away with a sword.

"I don't believe it!" gasped Illix.

"Nonetheless, here it is," said Oltoluque.

"Here what is?" asked Milique.

"Don't you recognize it?" said Illix.

"It's a window carved into the shell of a giant animal" said Oltoluque.

"This isn't a natural hill," said the Overmaster. "We're standing on the back of a buried korinth."

It took them only a few minutes to fashion three crude torches from the debris around them in the forest. When that was done, Oltoluque brought out his tinder box and got them burning. When the last one was lit, Illix stepped to the portal and climbed through.

As the others followed, he looked around the worn chamber beyond. The floor was covered with an inch or so of sand and dried leaves, making it easy for him to see the tracks made by his men. They had entered this chamber, which had housed a look-out when the korinth was still alive, and crossed to the access hole cut in the floor. Below was the command deck, and that was, no doubt, where the men had gone.

The trio followed the trail. As Illix stepped toward the ladder, Oltoluque grabbed him by the shoulder. Illix was surprised, cursing himself for letting his guard down. He spun about, ready for combat, but found that Oltoluque wasn't threatening him.

"I should go first, Overmaster. We don't know what's down there."

Illix's pride told him to refuse, but he knew that Oltoluque was right. It was foolish for the head of the expedition to place himself in such danger when there was a more capable warrior present. Illix nodded and the mul stepped forward. He vanished through the hole in the floor and, after a few seconds, called for the others to follow him.

"The command crew," said Oltoluque, motioning to the half dozen skeletons sprawled around the chamber.



## Heat Lightning

Numerous weapons, mostly fashioned from bone and obsidian, lay scattered about. One wall of the command deck was obscured by a pile of sand that had poured in through the forward portal. A skeletal hand extended from beneath, clutching a rusted steel sword in its bony grip.

Illix moved quickly to the sword and drew it from its owner's lifeless grip. He held the hilt near the sputtering light of his torch and cursed with wonder when he saw the insignia that was set there. Without a word, he turned and tossed the weapon to Oltoluque. The mul examined the sword as well, and his eyes widened in surprise.

"Tectalik," he whispered. As the mul spoke the name of the Overmaster whose korinth had fallen to the thri-kreen so many years ago, his voice carried a sound of fear and worry, as if the very mention of the name was enough to bring some curse down upon them all. From Milique's expression, it was clear that even she understood the importance of the name.

Illix nodded. He knelt down beside the nearest of the skeletons and looked it over carefully. There were no broken bones or signs that the man had died in combat. Indeed, none of the others bore marks of violence either. "These men didn't die at the hands of thri-kreen," said Illix.

Oltoluque looked briefly around the room, taking special care to examine the weapons and what remained of the crew's clothing. "None of these men died in battle, Overmaster, at least not with anything corporeal. None of their weapons are broken or nicked, and their clothes are not torn or punctured. Whatever killed them didn't do it by force."

Milique closed her eyes and opened her heart to vibrations in the bodies. She felt the overwhelming hate and evil of the oasis, but avoided contact with it. Instead, she focused on the dead and tried to feel the faint resonations in them. "These men drowned," she said at last.

"Drowned?" said Oltoluque.

"How is that possible?" Illix wondered aloud.

"I don't know," said the healer, "but that's how the korinth died too. I can sense it."

"This doesn't make sense," said Illix. "We're almost seventy miles from the spot where Tectalik's korinth was

supposed to have been ambushed." For a time, the trio was silent. Then Illix moved toward the ladder. From here, it extended up to the lookout's station and down into the vehicle's interior. "We're going to Tectalik's cabin. I want to find his orders and learn what he was doing here."

On the way, they found Illix's missing crewmen. There was no doubt about how they had died. Their features were bloated and puckered as only a drowned man's can be. Their weapons were drawn and ready, but they clearly hadn't been used. Curiously, there was no sign of water in the area. The walls were bone dry and looked as if they hadn't seen the slightest trace of humidity in years.

"What exactly are we looking for?" asked Milique as Oltoluque threw a massive shoulder against the door that would admit them to Tectalik's room. The leather hinges ripped like paper, and the door splintered under the impact.

"Some manner of strongbox," said Illix. "The orders he was given at the start of his mission will be in it. Whatever he was commanded to do, I'll bet it wasn't the routine patrol we were told about when we went to search for him."

It didn't take long to find what they were looking for. In a secret compartment, cut into the floor beneath the folding bunk, Illix found a bone tube. He drew it out and looked at it. The end, a simple screw top, was fastened into place. Illix found no evidence of a locking device, but he suspected that the tube was magically sealed. The Overmaster attempted to pry the cap off, but it was useless.

"Let me try," said Oltoluque, and Illix tossed the tube to him. The mul took a moment to get a solid grip on it, then tried to snap it with all his might. There was a sharp crack, almost as loud as the thunder had been at the camp, and the cylinder broke cleanly in half. The mul pulled a slender roll of vellum from one half of it and handed it to Illix.

As the Overmaster took the scroll and unrolled it, Milique leaned near to see what was written there. As a healer, she was one of only a few non-templars in Draj who was legally permitted to know the secret of reading.



Oltoluque, having neither the healer's unique gifts nor the Overmaster's rank and status, would have to trust his companions to tell him what was written on the scroll.

"It's just gibberish," said Milique.

"No," answered Illix as he read, "it's in code. Every time we get a special assignment, the orders are encrypted. This particular cipher is used only for matters of the utmost secrecy."

"Then you know what it says?"

Illix nodded but didn't answer. His face froze in alarm as he finished reading the orders. With a loud curse, he crushed the aged scroll—which promptly crumbled into dust—and allowed the debris to fall through his fingers.

"Oltoluque, do you still have Tectalik's sword?"

"Of course".

"Bring it, we're heading back to camp."

Akalla's concern was clearly written on his face as Illix and his companions stepped into the camp. "Any sign of them?" he asked.

Illix said nothing. Instead, he swept his arm forward in great arcing blow. His fist struck the templar solidly and sent him sprawling to the sand. Milique gasped, and the rest of the survivors looked on in surprise. Before the moon-priest could recover enough to say anything, Illix dropped the rusted sword beside him.

Akalla sat up. He looked at the weapon with some confusion, then a strange look came over his face. Clearly, he understood at once the origin of the blade.

"You knew about this place!" roared Illix. Murmurs of confusion spread among the survivors at this accusation.

"What are you saying?" asked Milique.

"The coded orders that we found instructed Tectalik to bring his korinith to this very place. They made mention of an experiment that he was to conduct. Tell me what it was all about, Akalla."

Oltoluque stepped forward, he held his spear ready but seemed uncertain as to what was going on. "How would Akalla know about Tectalik's orders?" he asked.

"He signed them," said Illix plainly.

Akalla drew himself back to his feet, watchful of another blow from the Overmaster. Then, after several sec-

onds of uncomfortable silence, he nodded.

"Yes," he said, "I knew about this place. When word came to me that the oasis was about to run dry, I became concerned. We had planned to build a fort here, a place from which we could launch attacks against the sorcerer-queen of Raam. She has long been a bother to the mighty Tectuktlay, and we saw this as a chance to destroy her. Without the oasis, however, no fort could survive here.

I came up with a plan that might save the oasis. Overmaster Tectalik was sent to this place with a cargo of slaves, prisoners of the war with Raam, and a number of powerful wizards. All of the slaves were to be executed and their life energy magically transfused into the spirit that lived at the heart of the spring.

"Yes, the plan was simple enough, but we never heard from Tectalik again. The experiment had failed. No follow-up mission could be made, for fear that word of the matter would reach Abalach-Re upon her throne in Raam. My superiors decided that, to protect themselves from reprisals, they must find a scapegoat. I was the one they chose. I was disgraced in the Order of the Moon Priests and reduced in rank. A few months later, I was assigned to your command."

Milique looked about. Her eyes were wide with awe. "Of course" she cried. "Tectalik and his crew didn't fail. At least, not utterly. They succeeded in flooding the place with mystical power but failed to predict the effect that it would have on the spirit of the oasis. The creature, if you can call such a thing that, couldn't cope with its new power. It was wracked with pain so great that it could no longer control itself. I can feel it all! They infused the spirit with so much life energy that it was driven insane.

Illix's arm shot forward. He locked his hand around the throat of the templar. "So you decided to come back and check things out for yourself?" Akalla gasped an affirmation. "You arranged for the thri-kreen to attack us, didn't you?" Illix relaxed his grip only enough to allow a reply.

"There was no other way for me to investigate the fate of Tectalik," Akalla said. The military command would hear nothing of a second mission five years ago, and they



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have had no reason to change their thinking since then. Instead, I made certain that the insects knew our route and that they were assisted in making the ambush exactly where and how they did. I knew that you would be forced to leave the korinth, and that you would have no choice but to head south. You would have done the same yourself, if you were in my position."

Illix refused to answer, half out of fear that the templar might well be correct. Instead, he thrust the templar away. Two of Oltoluque's warriors caught the tumbling body. "Oltoluque, bind him!" ordered the furious Overmaster. "When we return to Draj, he'll be tried for treason."

The mul stepped forward but stopped short as the sound of Akalla's mocking laughter filled the air. "I don't think so, Illix. I act on behalf of the sorcerer-king himself. My goals are his goals. In his name, I relieve you of your rank and your command. I am Overmaster now.

"Not while I live!" cried Illix. "You betrayed my trust and brought death to my crew. If you want to claim command of this expedition, you will have to do it by challenge. Oltoluque was brave enough to face me. Will you?"

Illix didn't expect Akalla to charge at him as Oltoluque had. The templar was more likely to hang back and use his magical abilities in the duel. For his part, Illix didn't plan to give his enemy time to weave his magic.

As soon as Oltoluque gave the sign to begin, Illix threw himself at the templar. To Akalla, this looked much like the opening move Oltoluque had made against Illix in the desert. Akalla had expected this and jumped quickly back to avoid the attack.

Illix, however, had anticipated the templar. He landed four feet in front of Akalla, tumbled forward, and snapped up with his legs to deliver a brutal kick to the templar's chest. To his credit, Akalla was not caught wholly unprepared. He fell back, absorbing much of the blow, and landed in a sitting position. Before Illix could follow through, the templar made a magical sign with his left hand and spoke an ancient word of power.

Not knowing what to expect, Illix braced himself for

anything. At least, he thought he had. He expected some sort of pain or physical assault. Instead, a flash of blinding light erupted from Akalla's fingers. The Overmaster threw his arm up to shield his eyes, but he was too late to block the spell.

Illix blinked rapidly, trying to drive out the splotches of color that obscured his vision. He saw the shadowy shape of Akalla moving forward, but not clearly enough to protect himself. A pair of blows, one to his abdomen and one to his jaw, sent Illix to his knees. As he struggled to draw breath into his burning lungs, the templar delivered a spinning kick to the side of his head. Illix was thrown sideways and landed on his back. The next thing that he felt, other than the pain that ripped at his body, was the solid pressure of Akalla's foot on his windpipe.

Illix's vision had begun to return. He could see the smile on Akalla's face now. There was regret in his eyes. "I truly liked you, Illix. You've been a good officer and a fine friend. I'm sorry that it's my lot to end your life."

"Not as sorry as I am," gasped Illix. Akalla smiled at the Overmaster's humor and began to apply slow pressure to his throat.

Suddenly, the templar staggered and toppled forward. Illix rolled clear, thankful that Akalla had lost his balance at such a fortunate moment. He came up on one knee, ready to hurl himself at his enemy, when he saw that it wouldn't be necessary.

Akalla was dead. A crescent-shaped throwing weapon, one of Kachka's deadly *kyorkcha*, was imbedded at the base of his skull. The needle-like spikes on the edges of the weapon had buried themselves in his neck, severing his spinal cord.

For a second, Illix was delighted that his friend had saved him from death. Then he thought of the situation, and knew that it was not right. The tohr-kreen was a creature of honor and would never interfere in a challenge duel, even if he had regained both consciousness and sanity.

As cries of alarm rippled through the onlookers, Illix turned and saw his clutch-mate. The insect lumbered out of the tent it had been resting in. A flash of lightning shattered the sky and spilled blue light down upon the camp. Although Illix had always found it impossible to



see any expression in Kachka's face, he perceived now an absolute emptiness in the creature's eyes.

Milique saw the emptiness too. She opened her mind and touched, as lightly as she could, what remained of the tohr-kreen's soul. Instantly, a wash of anger and agony exploded upon her. For an second, she felt as if she were one with the oasis. She could remember the coming of Tectalik and his korinth. She felt the blood of the executed slaves pour into her flesh and the rush of burning energy that had brought. Milique clutched at her temples, cried out in pain, and forced up her mental blocks as swiftly as she could. Her last thought was one of protection and xenophobia. Intruders were coming into her body again. They must be destroyed. The waters would kill them, as they had killed all the others.

Another burst of lightning ripped across the sky. In its freezing light, Illix saw Milique staggering away from the scene. Her eyes were unfocused, her mind shattered by the agony she had exposed herself to. He saw the tohr-kreen standing like some maniacal god with its four arms stretched out to the oasis.

Suddenly, Illix was pushed roughly aside. Oltoluque bolted past him, sending the Overmaster stumbling to the side. As the mul sprang into a great leap with his spear raised above his head, Illix saw something unlike anything he had ever seen before. As if in answer to the tohr-kreen's outstretched arms, a wide column of water sprang from the oasis. It shot through the air, curling around the company like a great arm, and crashed in upon them.

Illix felt his feet being pulled from beneath him by the water. He clawed at the soil, trying to resist the impossible current that pulled him toward the oasis. He heard the choking screams of the others as they were pulled beneath the surface of the water and drowned. Water began to fill his nose and mouth, he choked and gasped for breath, but half of what he drew into his lungs was water.

Suddenly, something curled around his wrist and snapped his tumbling movement to a stop. Illix found himself being pulled swiftly against the current. His head broke clear of the water, and he labored to draw vital air into his lungs. He saw Milique standing some

distance away, shaking her head in an effort to clear her battered mind.

The grip on his wrist was released, as the last of the water swept past Illix's feet. He turned his head and saw that it had been Oltoluque's hand that had pulled him from the water. The mul's spear was half buried in the ground, and he had used it to anchor himself against the draw of the current.

Without a word, the mul turned away from Illix and charged the tohr-kreen. He bent his legs as if to spring at the insect, then came in low when Kachka tilted back to receive the attack. Oltoluque lunged with the spear, cracking the insect's exoskeleton and driving the weapon deep into its body. He drew the weapon out, but before he could strike again, two of Kachka's arms locked onto his wrists and Oltoluque found himself yanked into the air. The tohr-kreen's other pair of arms clamped down on his ankles.

Illix turned his head away before the insect applied its strength to the mul. He heard Oltoluque's cry of agony, as his arms and legs were torn from his body. If he was lucky, Illix thought, he was already dead. The idea that he might still be alive was too horrible for Illix to stand.

Suddenly, a shadow fell across his body. He turned quickly and saw that the tohr-kreen was towering above him. With a howl of rage, Kachka reached for Illix.

From somewhere nearby, the Overmaster heard someone call his name. He took a second, looked away from Kachka, and saw Milique. She was half-dazed, but had recovered enough to see what was happening. With an uncertain toss, she sent his gleaming sword tumbling through the air toward him.

Illix caught the weapon and kicked upward. His feet crashed into the tohr-kreen's chest. The blow lacked enough force to drive the insect back, but it did halt its progress. The Overmaster took advantage of the situation and pushed himself away from the tohr-kreen. He brought the sword around in a slashing attack. It caught the creature in the soft tissue of his upper right shoulder, sinking in deep between plates of his exoskeleton.

Before Illix could pull his arm back and strike again, Kachka's lower right arm shot out and locked itself around his throat. With its three working arms, Kachka



## Heat Lightning

raised Illix high into the air and hurled him away. He crashed through one of the tents and felt a sharp pain in his calf. Wincing, Illix looked down and saw a splinter of bone jutting out through the flesh of his leg. He tried to turn, but a horrible pain spread out from his back.

As the tohr-kreen turned toward him, Illix considered his situation. He was all but helpless. The wounds he had received caused him so much pain when he moved that he might as well have been paralyzed. Further, he was unarmed. His sword still protruded from Kachka's shoulder, its steel blade having delivered a severe but hardly mortal wound to the tohr-kreen.

Then Milique was at his side. She touched him on the forehead and warmth spread over his body. The pain eased, but she lacked the energy to do more for him.

"Milique," he gasped, "there's still a chance." She looked confused but said nothing. "Kachka didn't kill me like it did Oltoluque. It had me in the same grip and could have torn me apart, but it held back for some reason. Somewhere inside, it still knows me. Kachka knows I'm its friend. It must be trying to throw off the spirit that's controlling it."

"Kachka will never do it," she said. "I've felt it. It's too strong."

"If you can help it, maybe it can. Reach out with your mind. Give it the strength of your *healer's heart*."

In the weeks that he had known her, Milique had proven herself to be reliable and capable. She had a talent for healing unlike any that he had ever seen. In the last few days, however, she had proven herself to be brave as well. Now, the fact that she did not protest, but simply closed her eyes and obeyed, only confirmed his estimation of her character.

Milique's outer calm, however, could not disguise the horror that she felt. She had tasted the agony and hatred that filled Kachka's mind. Still, she reached inside and dropped her mental defenses. Instantly, the spirit of the oasis tore into her mind. She pushed out with her essence, fighting against the madness that pressed against her.

Then she saw it, a spark of flickering light in the dark horror of the spirit's agony. She moved her thoughts toward the light and reached out with her gift of healing. It

was Kachka's spirit. With each second, however, it grew weaker and weaker.

She tried to force her way through the madness to make contact with it. With every bit of energy she could muster, Milique poured her spirit into the effort. Then, just as she felt the edges of Kachka's mind, the spark died and she almost screamed in frustration.

Milique's consciousness snapped back into her body. She saw the nightmarish shape of the tohr-kreen spring at her, the image frozen in mid-air by a blinding stroke of lightning. The healer cried out in horror, certain that her death was only seconds away, when the smoldering body of the insect fell to the ground before her. She blinked. The afterimage of the lightning flash was still visible, as was the twisted, ghostly shape of the tohr-kreen. Her eyes could still see the stroke of electricity that snaked from the clouds above to touch the metal sword projecting from its shoulder.

She fell to her knees. Illix lay beside her on the sand where he had fallen unconscious, overcome by his injuries. Milique sat and lifted the Overmaster's head onto her lap. She heard his rasping breath and closed her eyes. Timidly, she touched his temples, lowered her psychic defenses, and felt his pain. He would live.

As she expected, none of the agony and madness that had permeated the oasis remained. The tortured spirit had died with the body it had possessed.

Milique looked around her. The spring that had been the heart of the oasis was gone. Without the supercharged spirit to sustain it, the entire place would soon be swallowed up by the shifting sands of the desert, as should have happened years ago. Milique could not help but mourn the loss of such a magnificent place.

A delicate ripple of lightning rumbled through the sky. Milique tilted her head back and looked upward. A cool, pure rain began to fall. It seemed to wash away the weariness that had settled upon the healer, and even the unconscious Illix seemed to be comforted by its delicate kiss.

*It won't last, she thought, good things on Athas never do.*





# Dragon's Crown™ Map Book

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# The Psionatrix Acomedicia

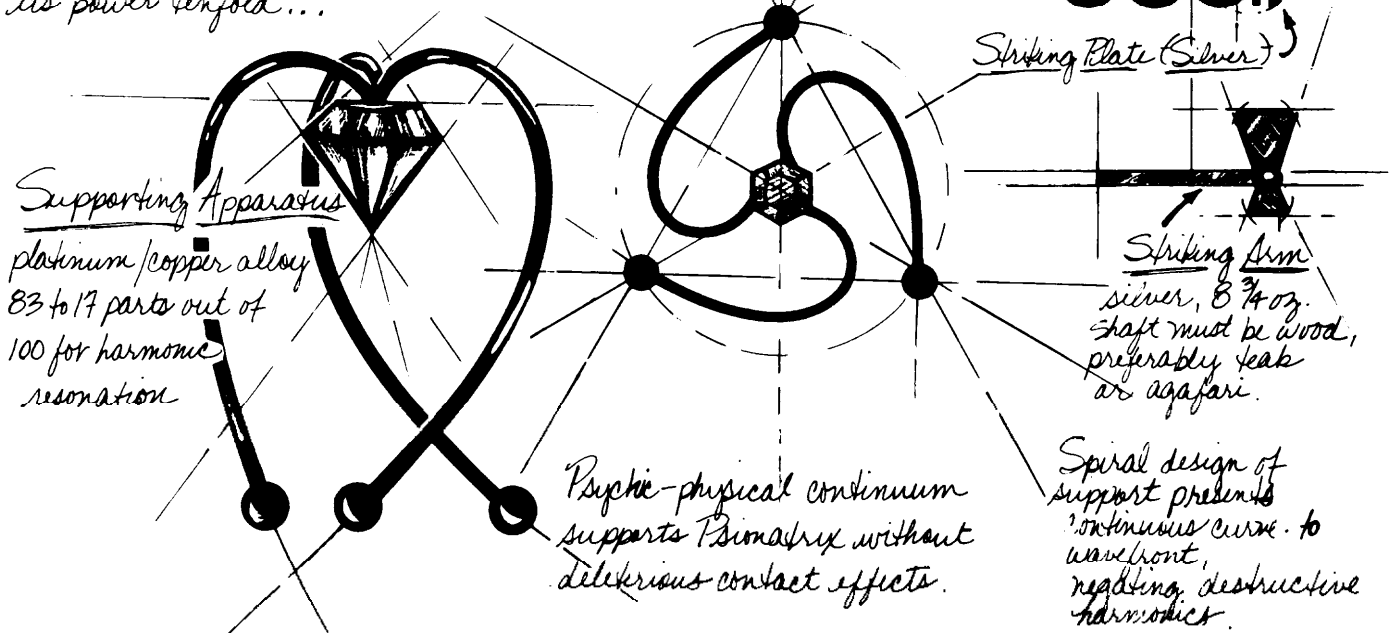
...It is theoretically possible to create a psionic matrix within a physical containment vessel. Such a psionatrix would require a crystalline matrix (found in many minerals, particularly gemstones) and numerous enchantments. Magical energies could be tapped and converted directly into psionic power, creating a receptacle capable of providing an infinite amount of mental energy...

...First, a gemstone (preferably flawless diamond, the perfect mineral, whose clarity symbolizes the clarity of mind and purpose inherent in the study of the way) must be made and perfectly cut. Any prime number of facets can be cut - avoid the powers of two or the psionic resonations would result in catastrophic failure of the crystalline matrix...

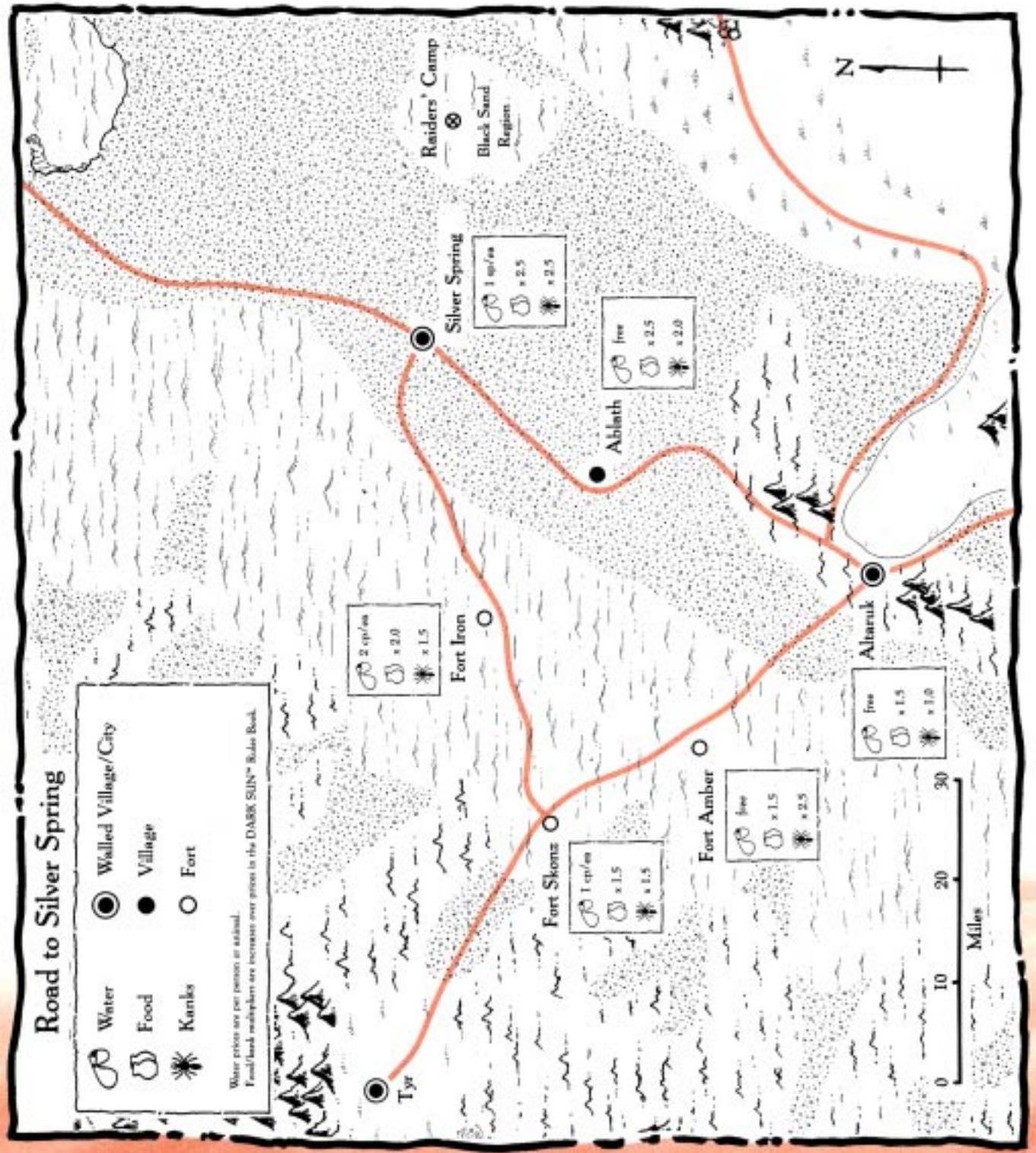
...The anti-conjurer Hadis Thumakal of Dasaraches has constructed a prototype of the device and plans to build a larger and more powerful model. A working Psionatrix would be a potent weapon against the psionic enchantments of the foul defiler lords who rise now to destroy us...

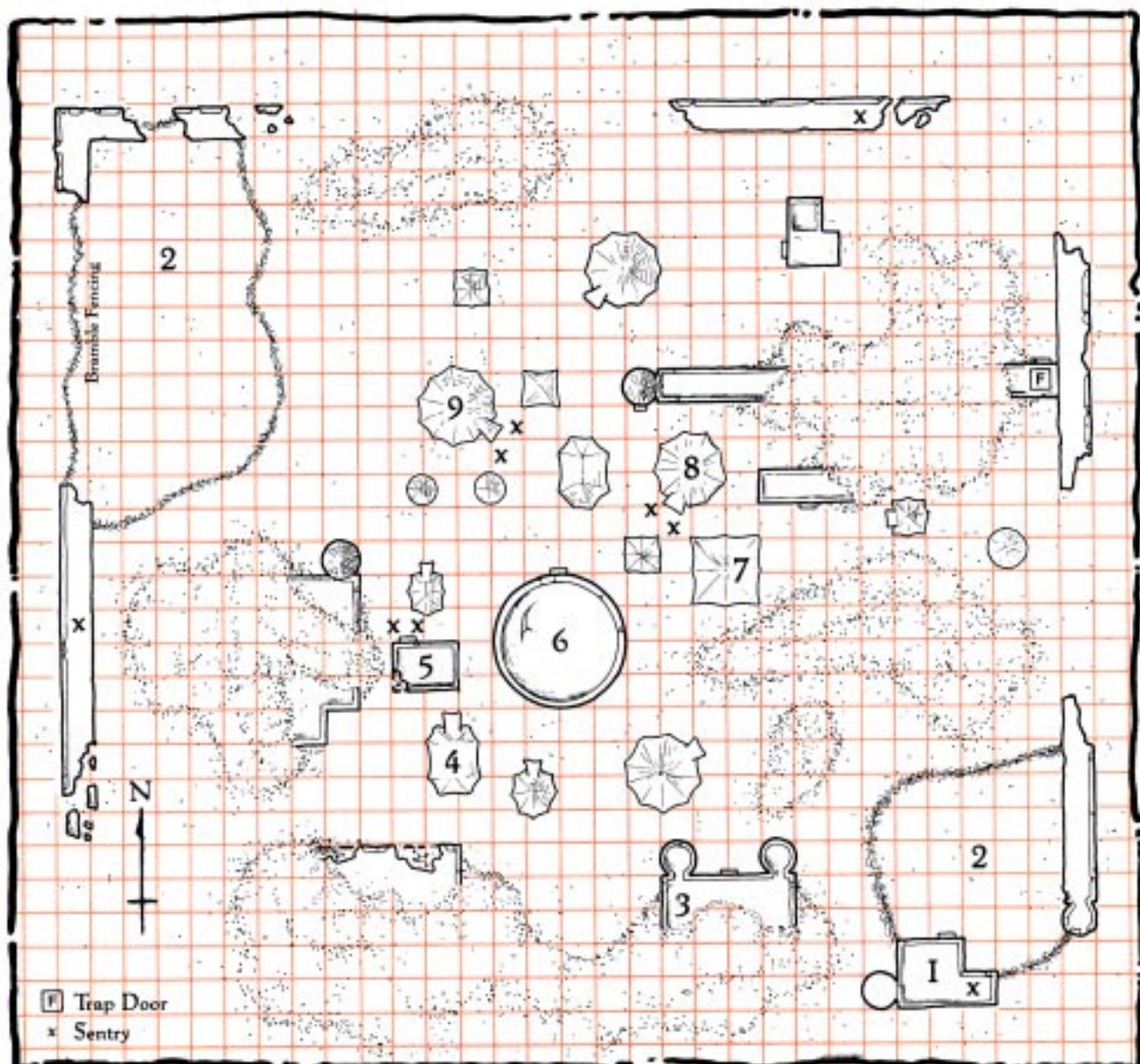
...A critical weakness must be manufactured, so that we may destroy the Psionatrix in the event of its capture. The clear tone of a perfect crystal with the proper fluid level within is both subtle and powerful...

...An amplifying apparatus could, by resonating properly with a suspended Psionatrix, increase its power tenfold...







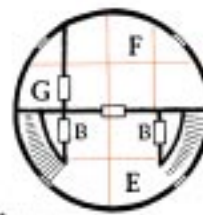
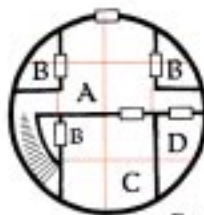


F Trap Door  
 x Sentry

### Camp of the Black Sand Raiders

One square = 10 feet

- |                   |                    |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| A Entry Hall      | E Foyer            |
| B Closets/Storage | F Fevil's Quarters |
| C Basement        | G Library          |
| D Storeroom       |                    |

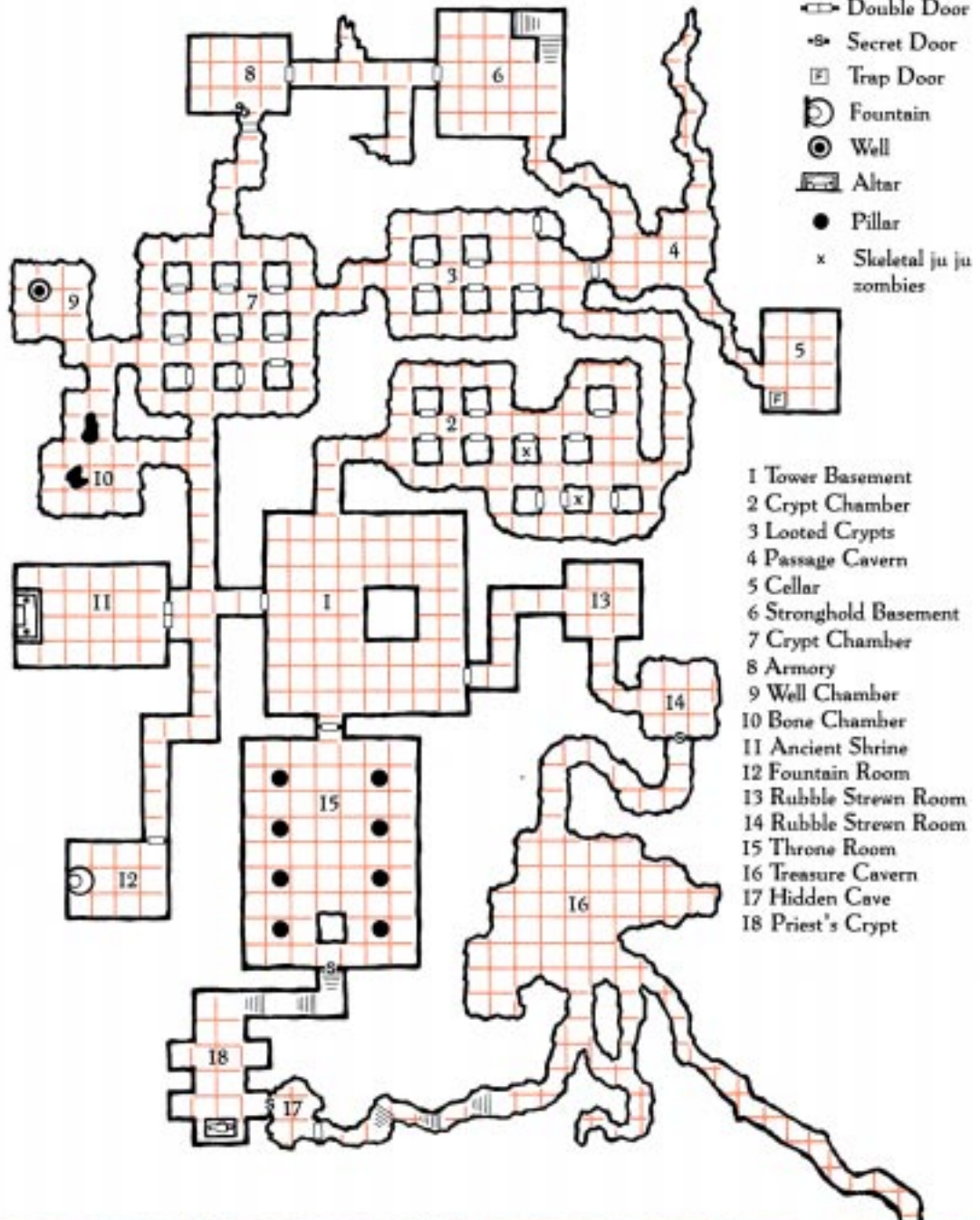


Fevil's Tower



## Beneath the Black Sand Camp

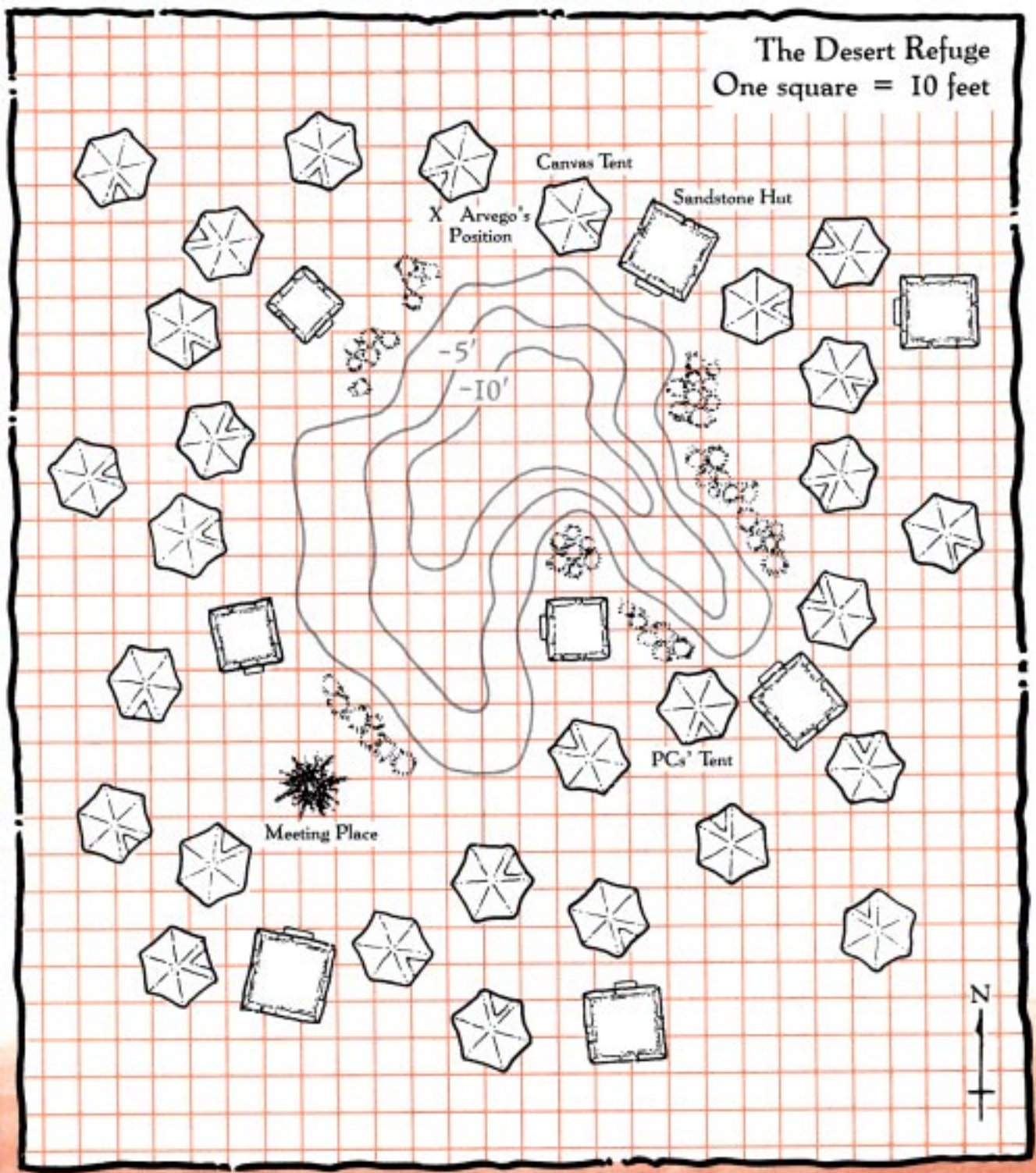
One square = 10 feet





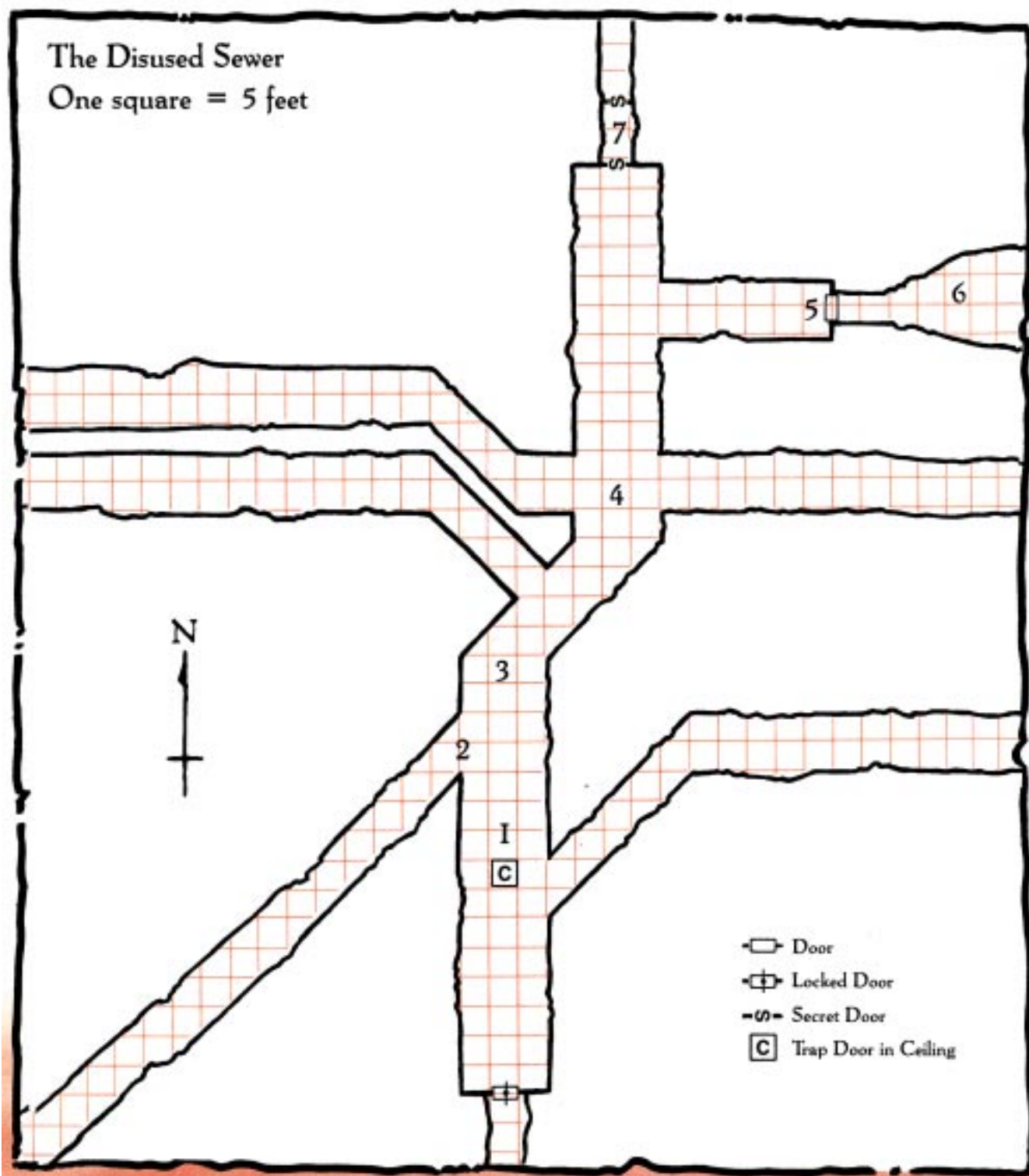
# The Desert Refuge

One square = 10 feet





The Disused Sewer  
One square = 5 feet

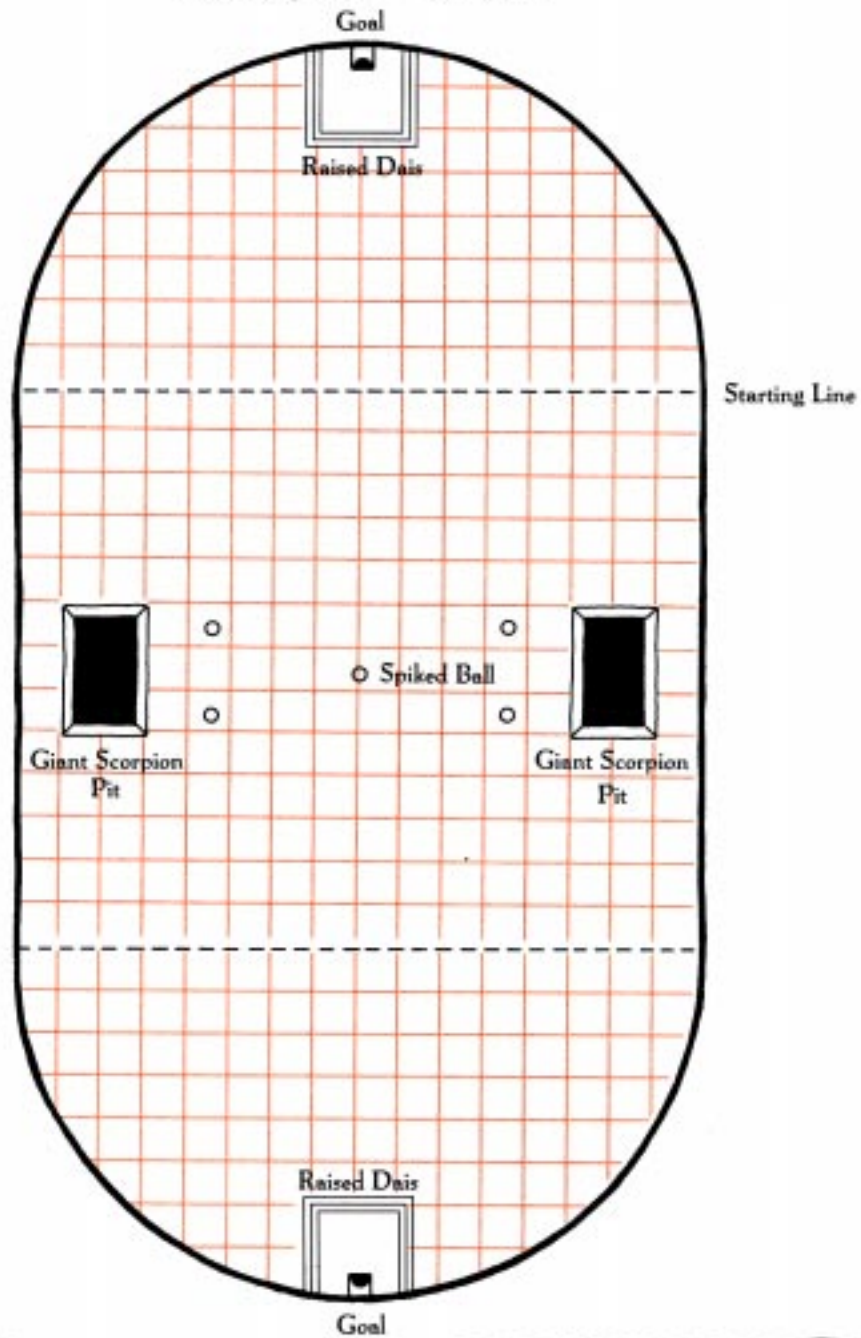






# Death Ball Arena

One square = 10 feet

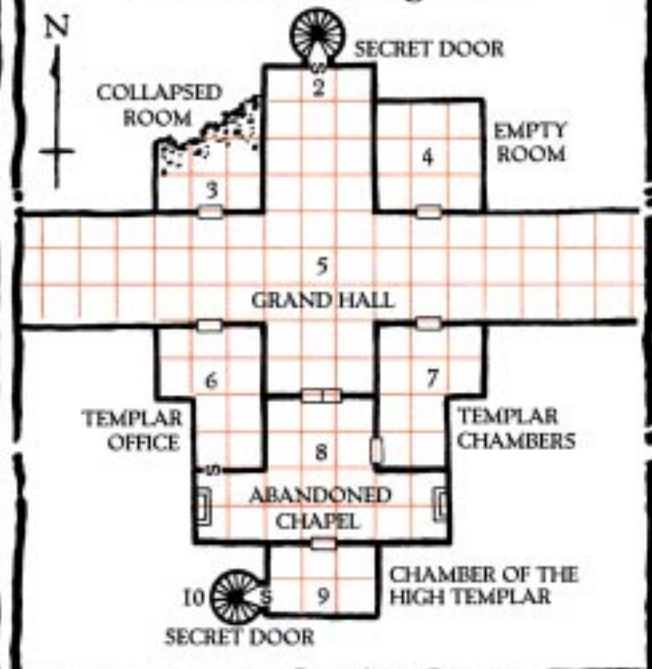




### Abandoned Cellar Level

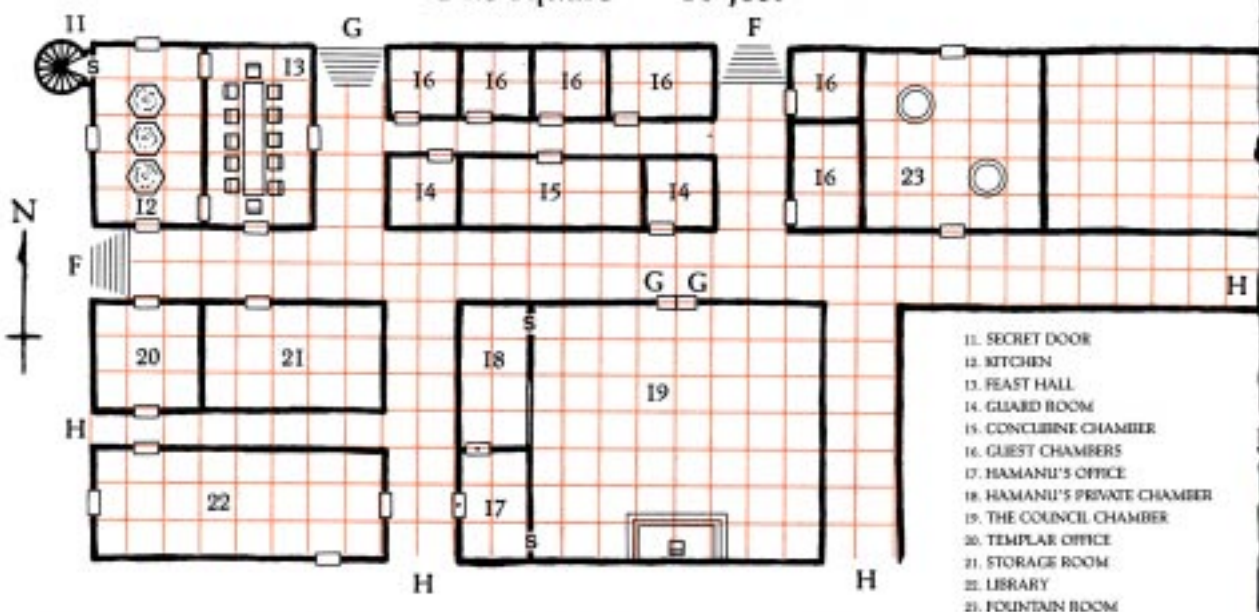


### Abandoned Wing Level



### Hamanu's Palace Guest Area

One square = 10 feet



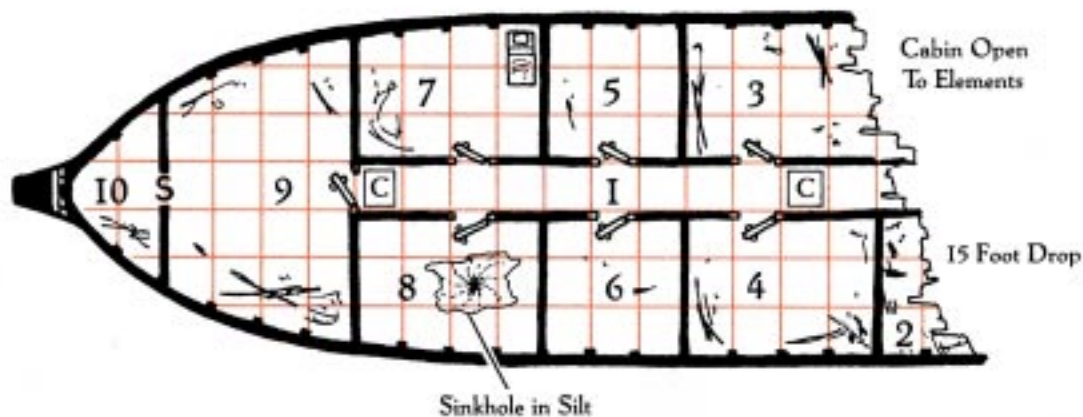
- 11. SECRET DOOR
- 12. KITCHEN
- 13. FEAST HALL
- 14. GUARD ROOM
- 15. CONCLAVE CHAMBER
- 16. GUEST CHAMBERS
- 17. HAMANU'S OFFICE
- 18. HAMANU'S PRIVATE CHAMBER
- 19. THE COUNCIL CHAMBER
- 20. TEMPLAR OFFICE
- 21. STORAGE ROOM
- 22. LIBRARY
- 23. FOUNTAIN ROOM



## Ghost Ship

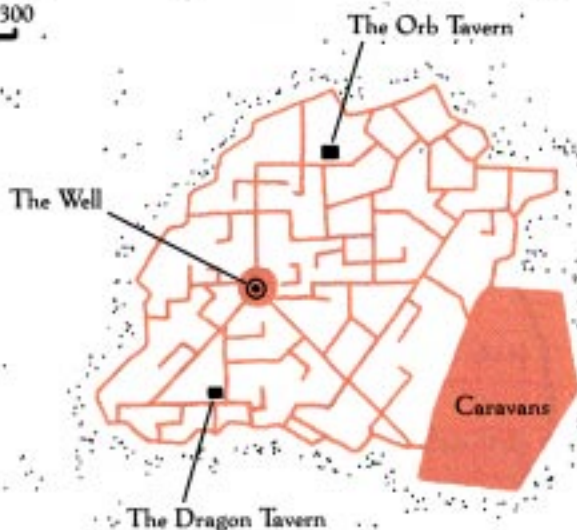
1 Square = 10 Feet

- |              |                   |                 |
|--------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1 Access way | 4 Crew Cabin      | 7 Main Hold     |
| 2 Wreckage   | 5 Captain's Cabin | 8 Secret Store  |
| 3 Store      | 6 Galley          | 9 Forward Hold  |
|              |                   | 10 Secret Store |



## Bitter Well Street Map

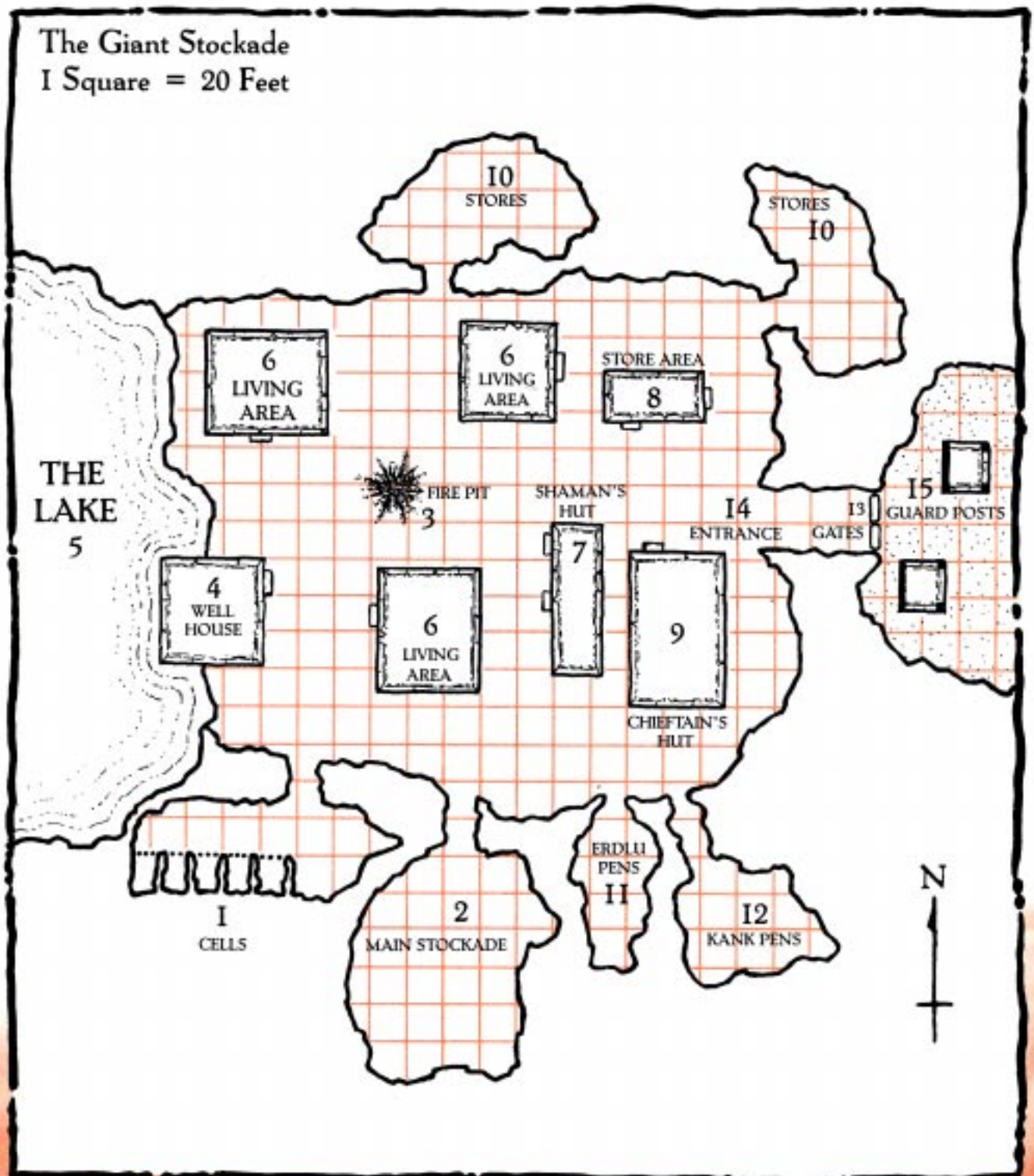
0 100 200 300  
Feet





# The Giant Stockade

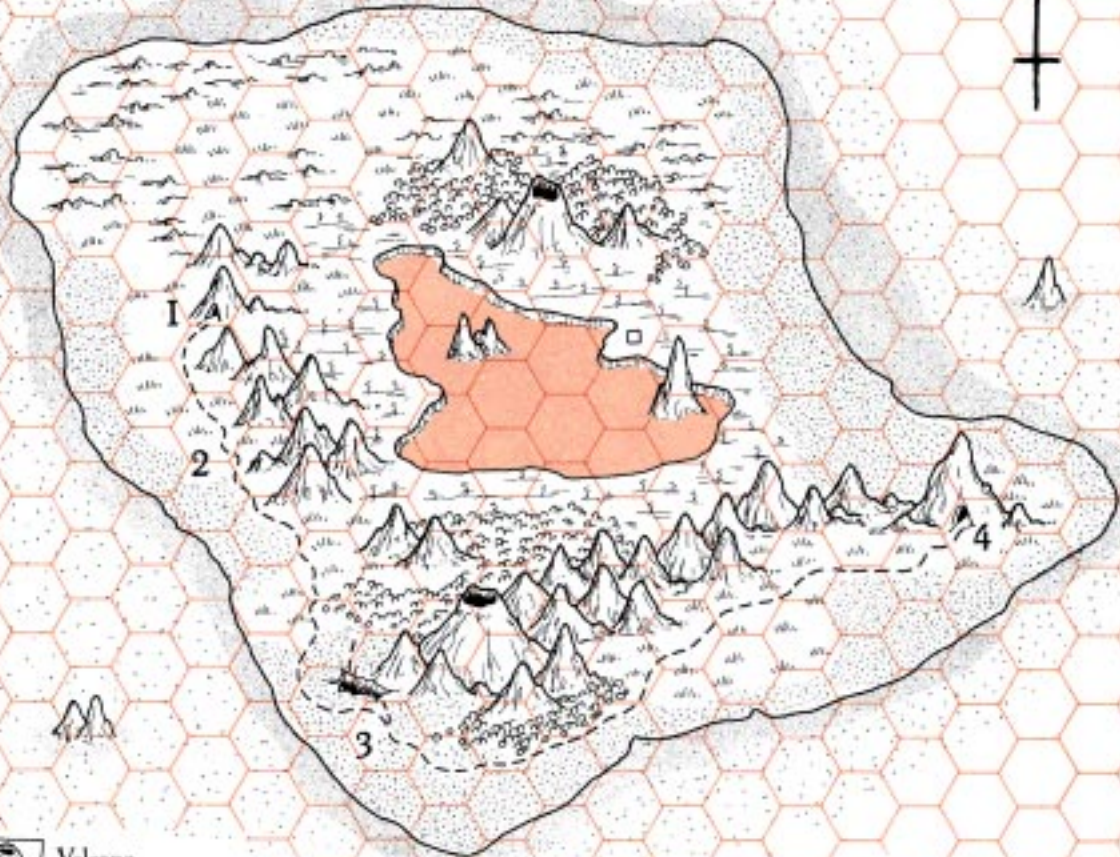
1 Square = 20 Feet





# Dhuurghaz

1 hex = 1.5 miles



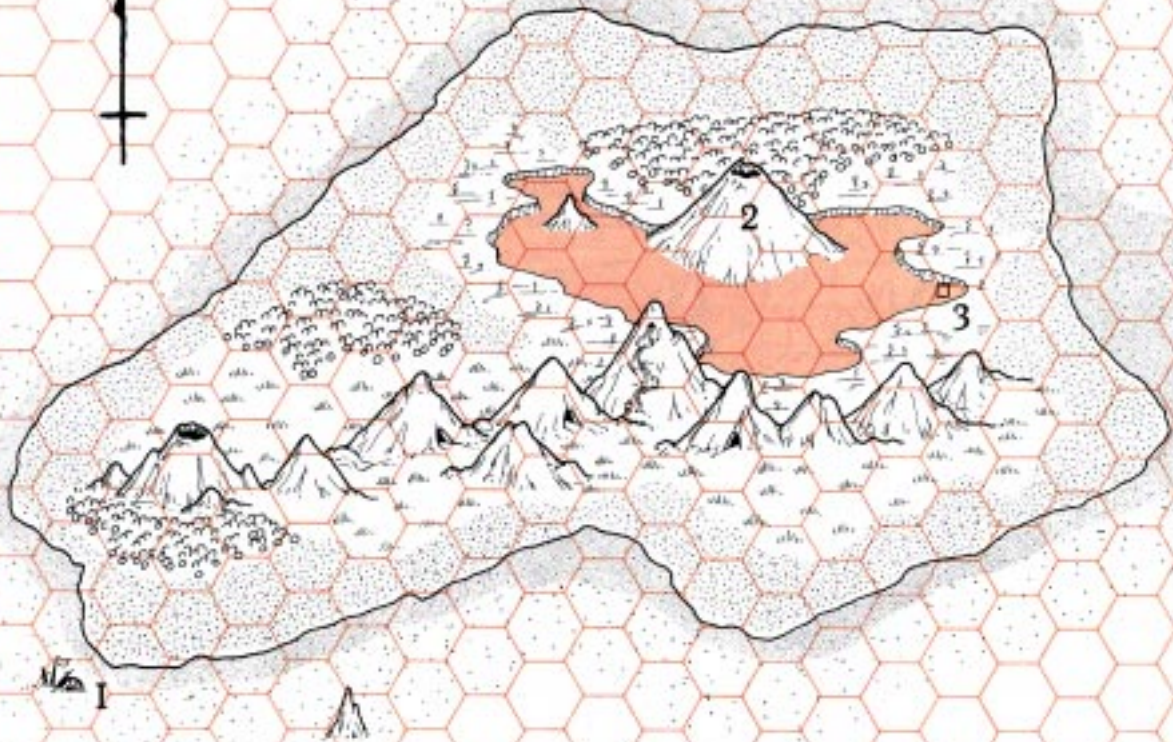
- |  |                |  |                 |
|--|----------------|--|-----------------|
|  | Volcano        |  | Cave            |
|  | Mountains      |  | Path or Trail   |
|  | Rocky Badlands |  | Ruins           |
|  | Smoking Lands  |  | Silt ≤ 5' Deep  |
|  | Scrub Plains   |  | Silt ≤ 15' Deep |
|  | Stony Barrens  |  | Silt > 15' Deep |
|  | Boulder Fields |  |                 |
|  | Lava Sea       |  |                 |

- 1 Cave of the Wolfhead Clan
- 2 Erdlu trail
- 3 Ravine of the Clan Tor
- 4 Cave of the Clan Bagg



Avegdaar

1 hex = 1.5 miles



- |   |                |   |                 |
|---|----------------|---|-----------------|
|  | Volcano        |  | Spring          |
|  | Mountains      |  | Cave            |
|  | Rocky Badlands |  | Ruins           |
|  | Smoking Lands  |  | Silt ≤ 5' Deep  |
|  | Scrub Plains   |  | Silt ≤ 15' Deep |
|  | Stony Barrens  |  | Silt > 15' Deep |
|  | Boulder Fields |   |                 |
|  | Lava Sea       |   |                 |

1 The Pyrus and The Hesper

2 The Reunion

3 The Stockade

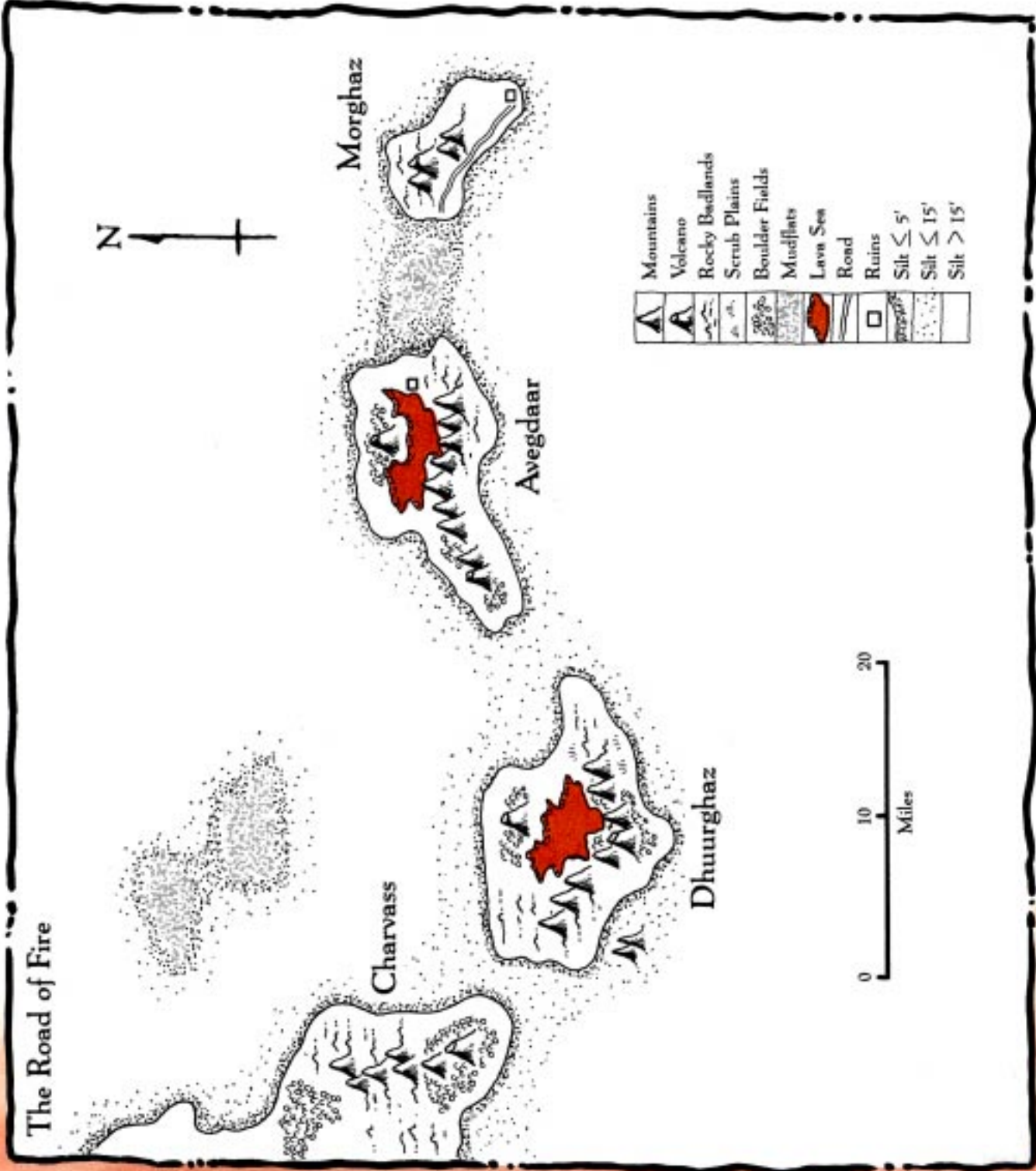


# Morghaz

1 hex = 1.5 miles



- |                     |                |                 |
|---------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| 1 The Mudflats      | Mountains      | Road            |
| 2 Merck's Road      | Forest         | Ruins           |
| 3 The Parade Ground | Rocky Badlands | Silt ≤ 5' Deep  |
| 4 The Lookout Tower | Scrub Plains   | Silt ≤ 15' Deep |
| 5 The Forge         | Stony Barrens  | Silt > 15' Deep |
| 6 The Ramparts      | Mudflats       |                 |
| 7 Akarable          | Ramparts       |                 |

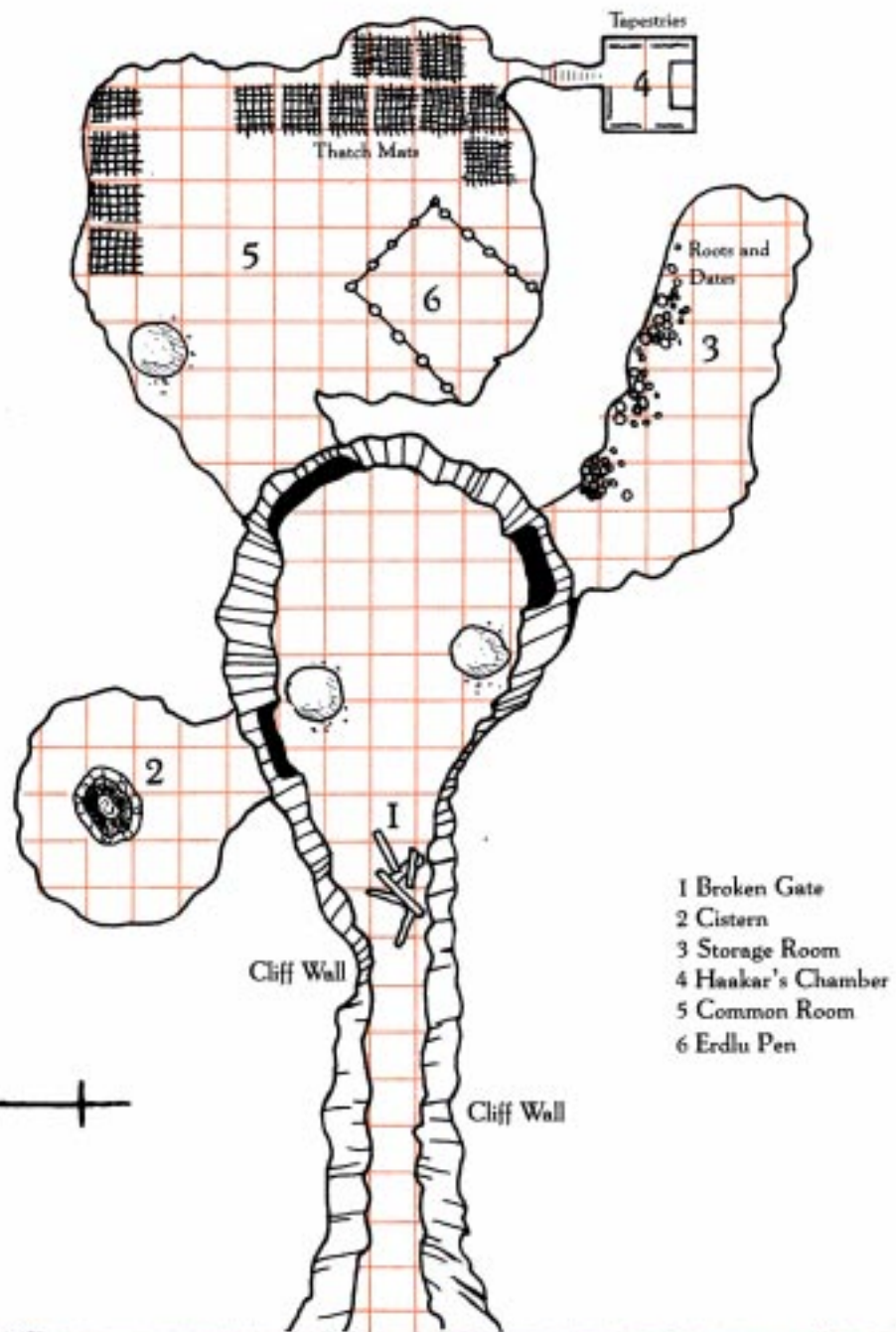


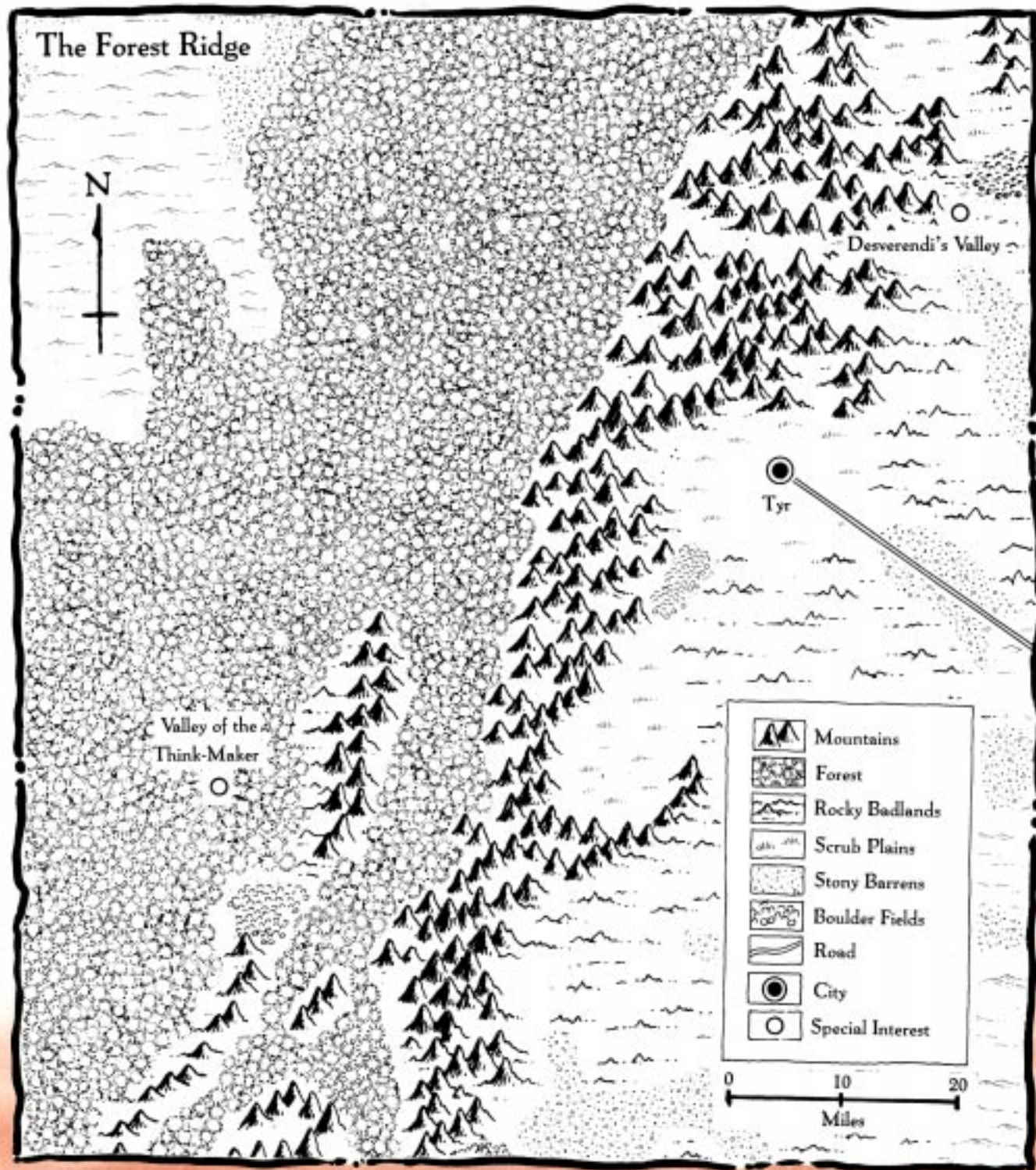


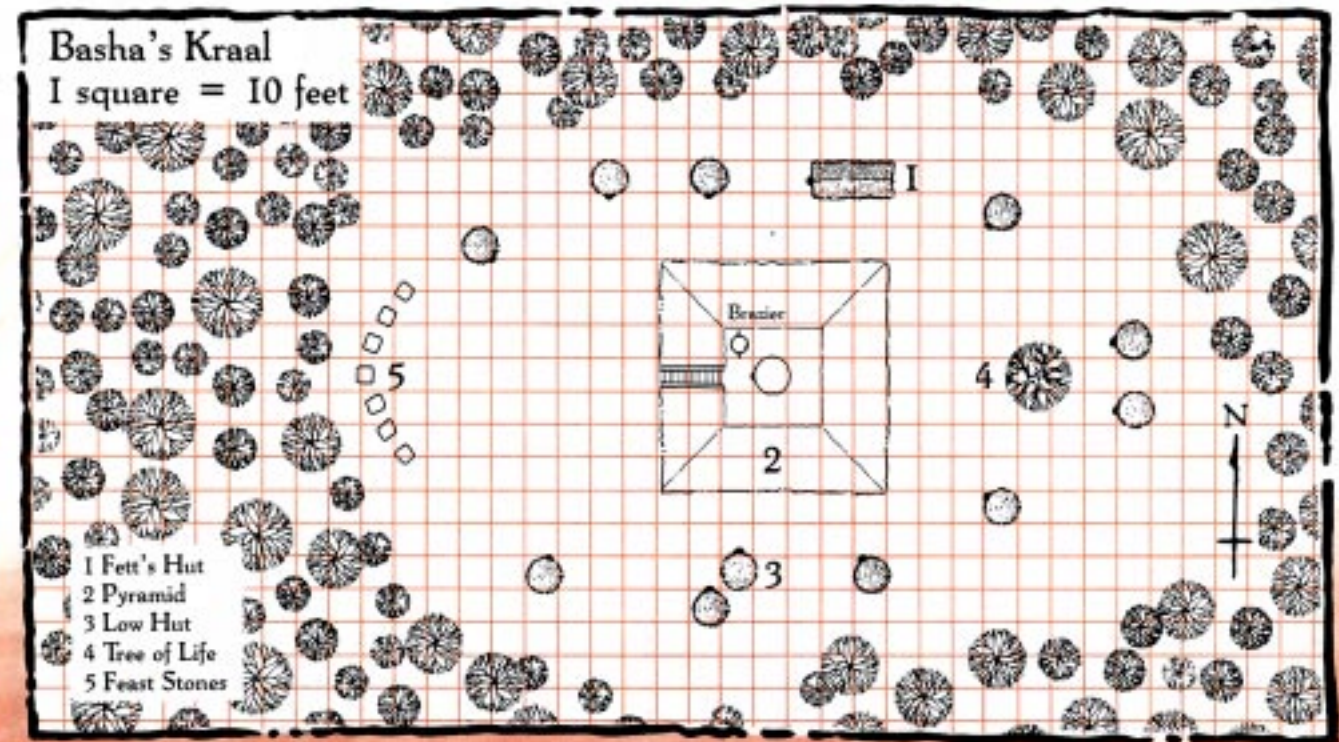
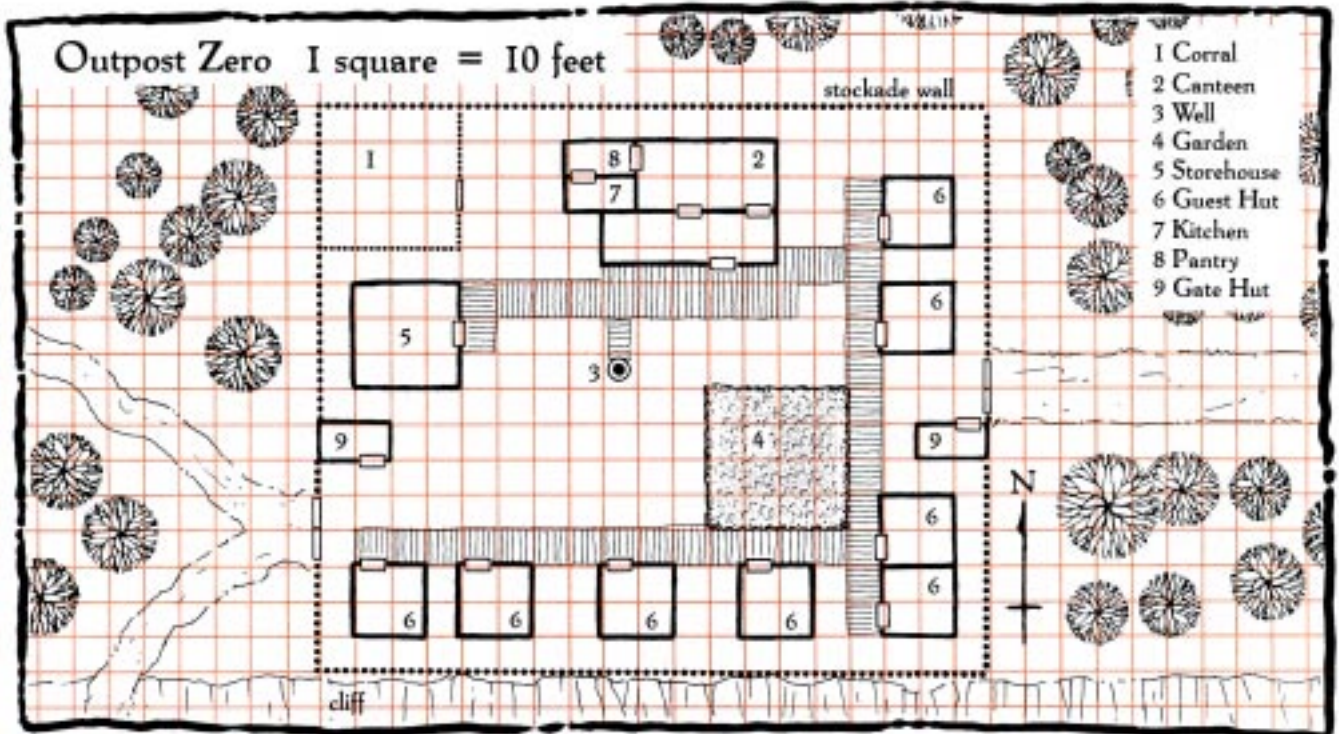


# The Cave Of The Clan Tor

One square = 10 feet







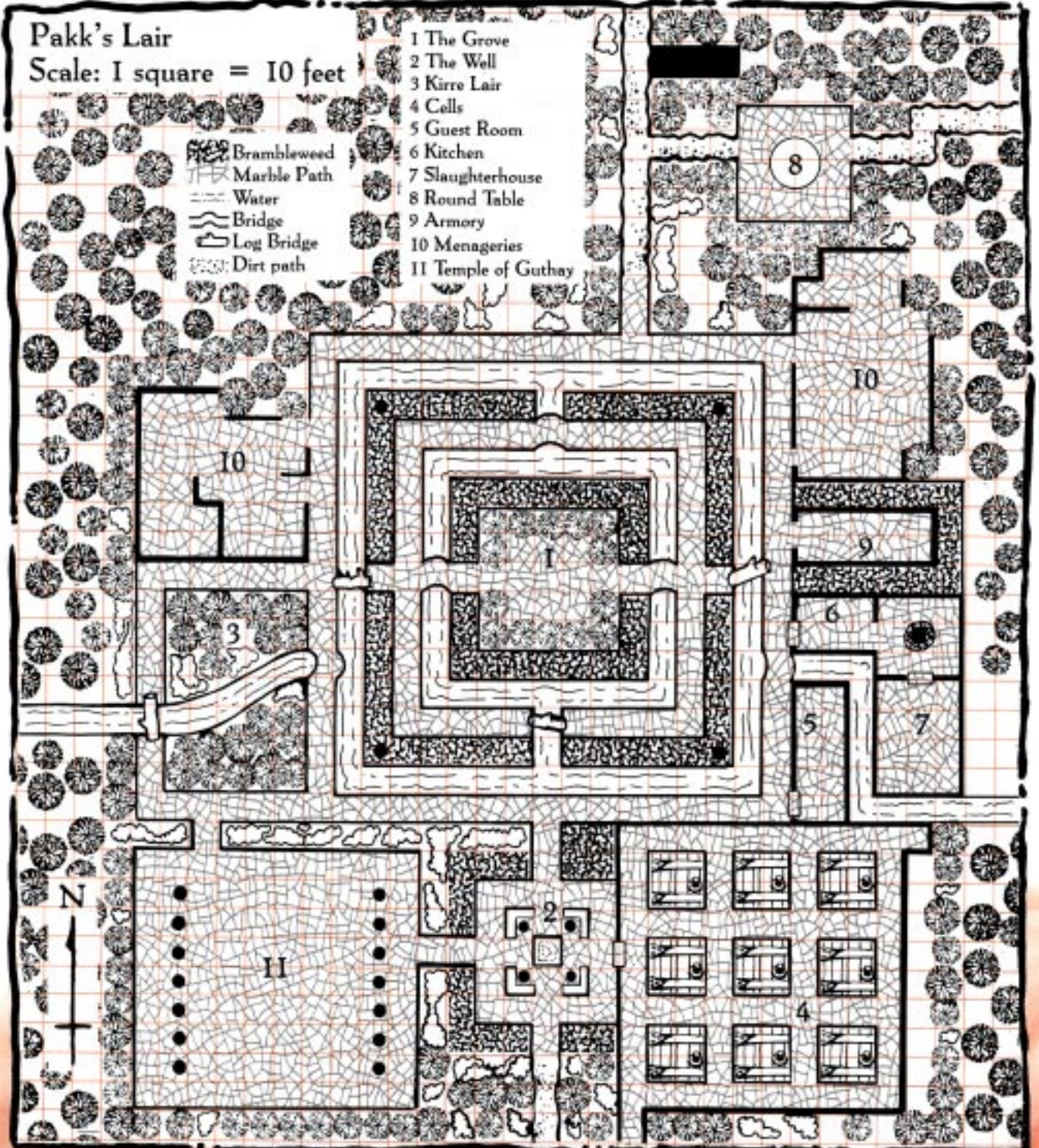


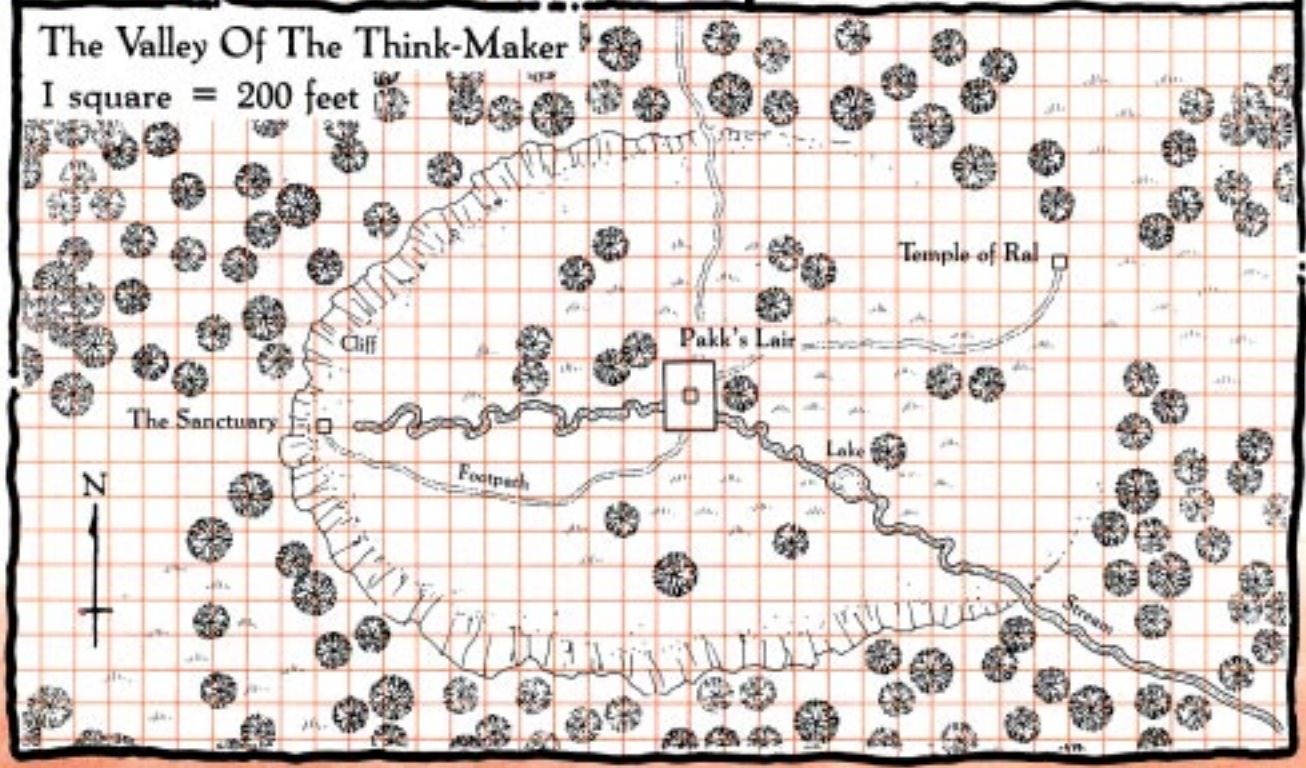
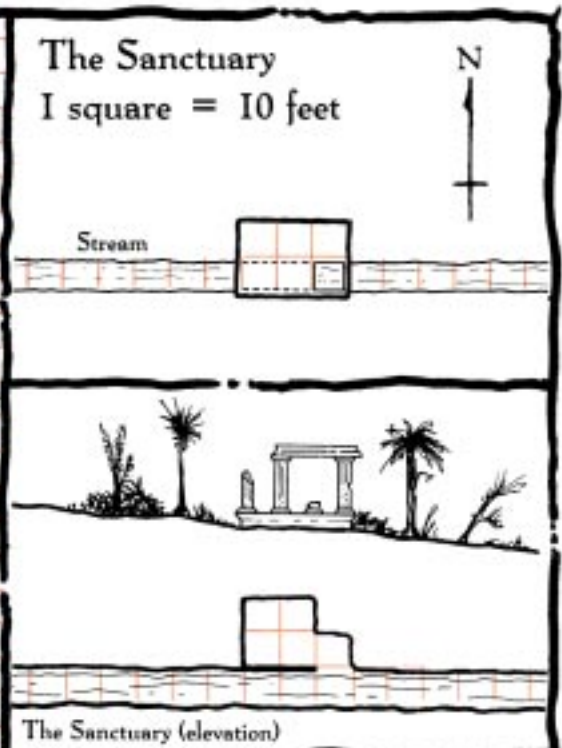
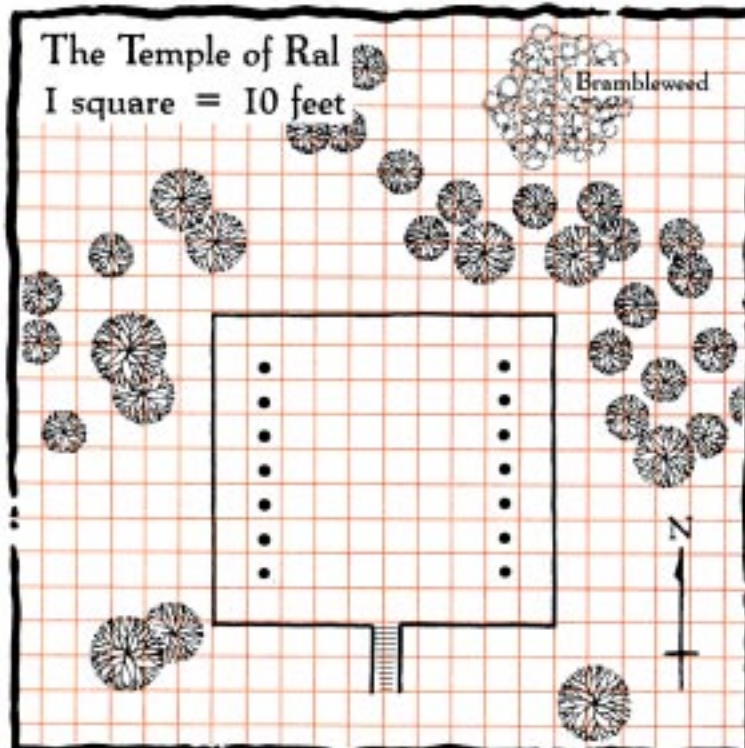
# Pakk's Lair

Scale: 1 square = 10 feet

- Brambleweed
- Marble Path
- Water
- Bridge
- Log Bridge
- Dirt path

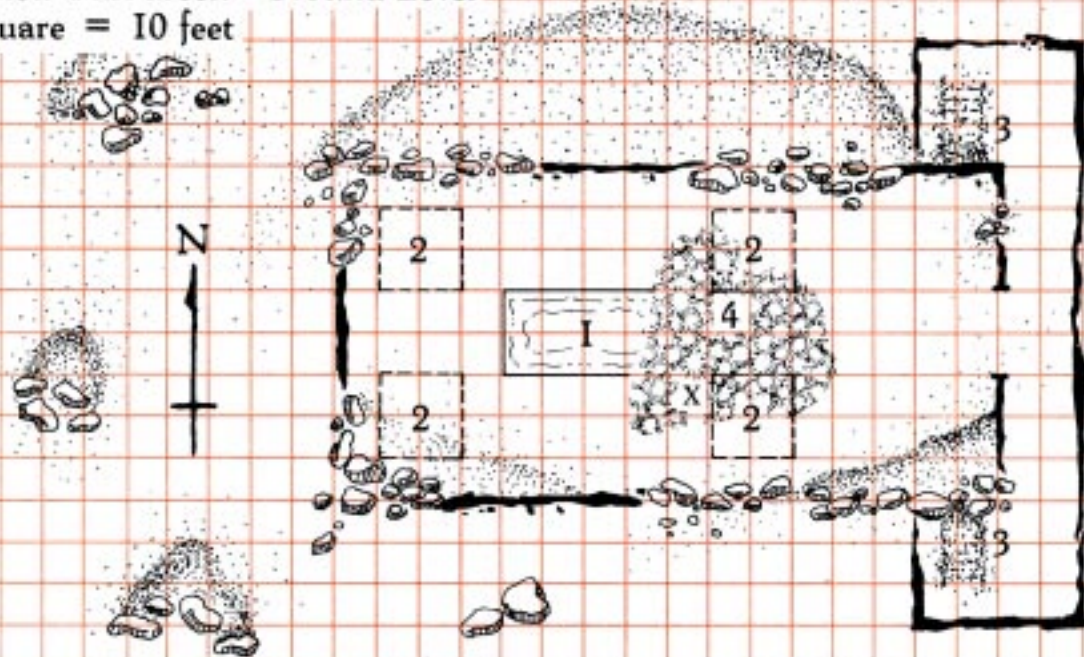
- 1 The Grove
- 2 The Well
- 3 Kirre Lair
- 4 Cells
- 5 Guest Room
- 6 Kitchen
- 7 Slaughterhouse
- 8 Round Table
- 9 Armory
- 10 Menageries
- 11 Temple of Guthay





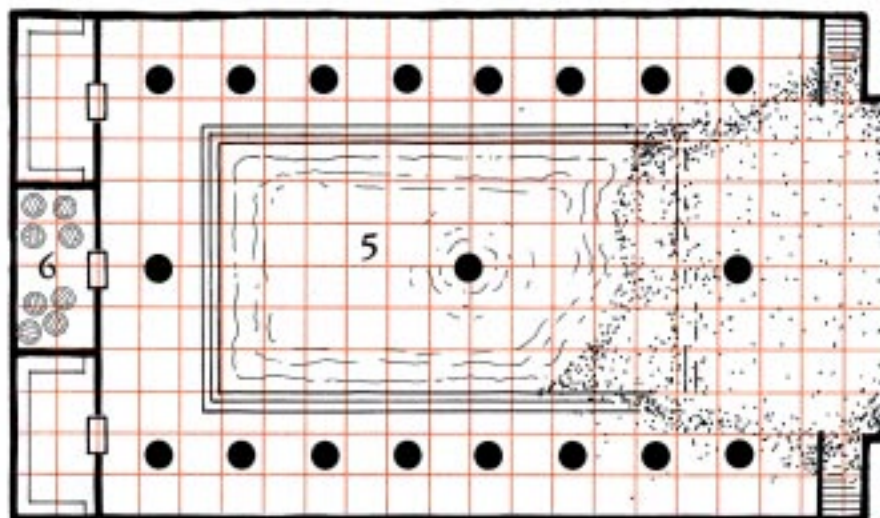


Crazed Thri-kreen Ground Level  
 1 square = 10 feet



Crazed Thri-kreen Underground Level

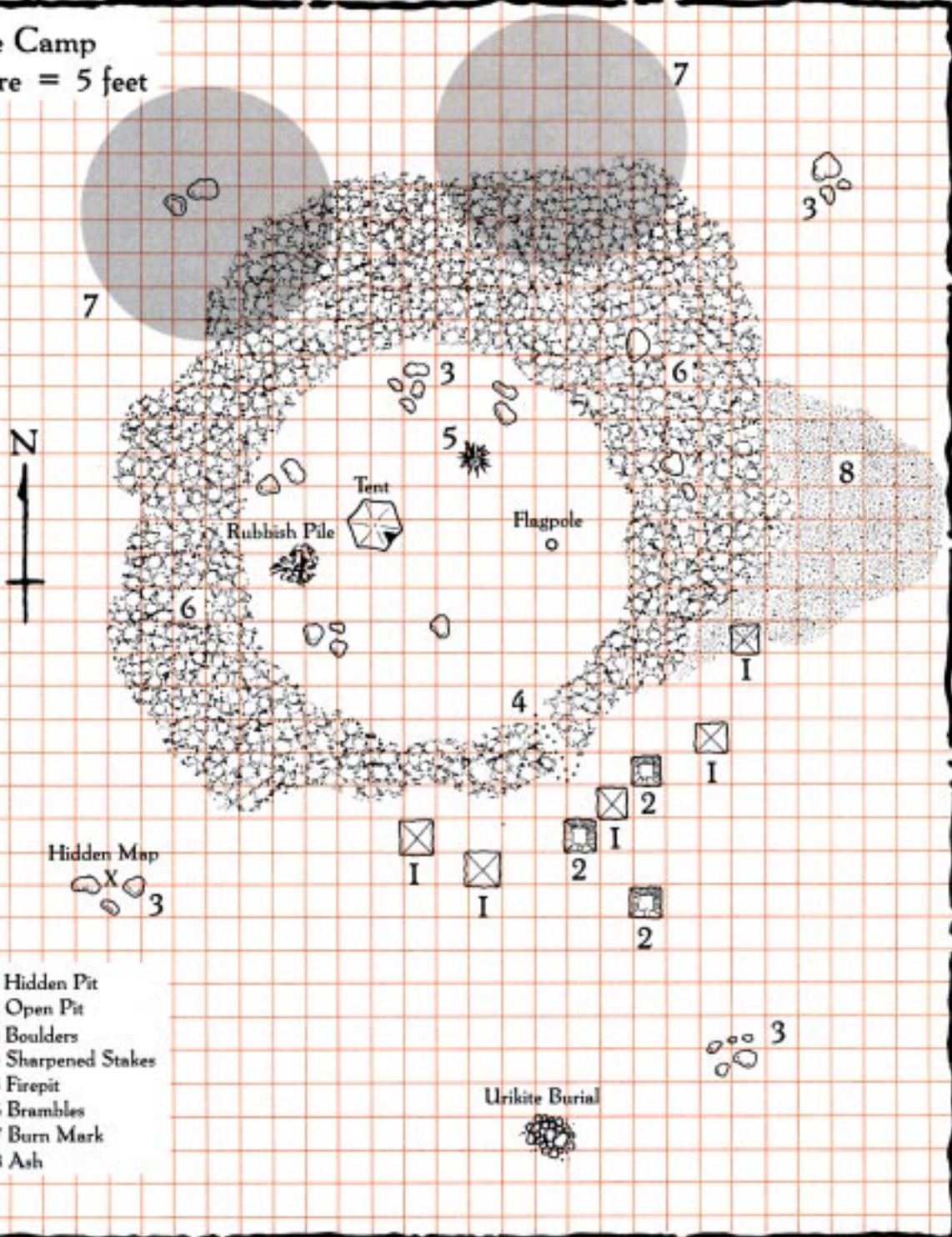
- 1 Pool
- 2 Skylight in floor (hidden by dirt)
- 3 Depression
- 4 Vegetation
- 5 Water
- 6 Barrels





# Urikite Camp

1 square = 5 feet



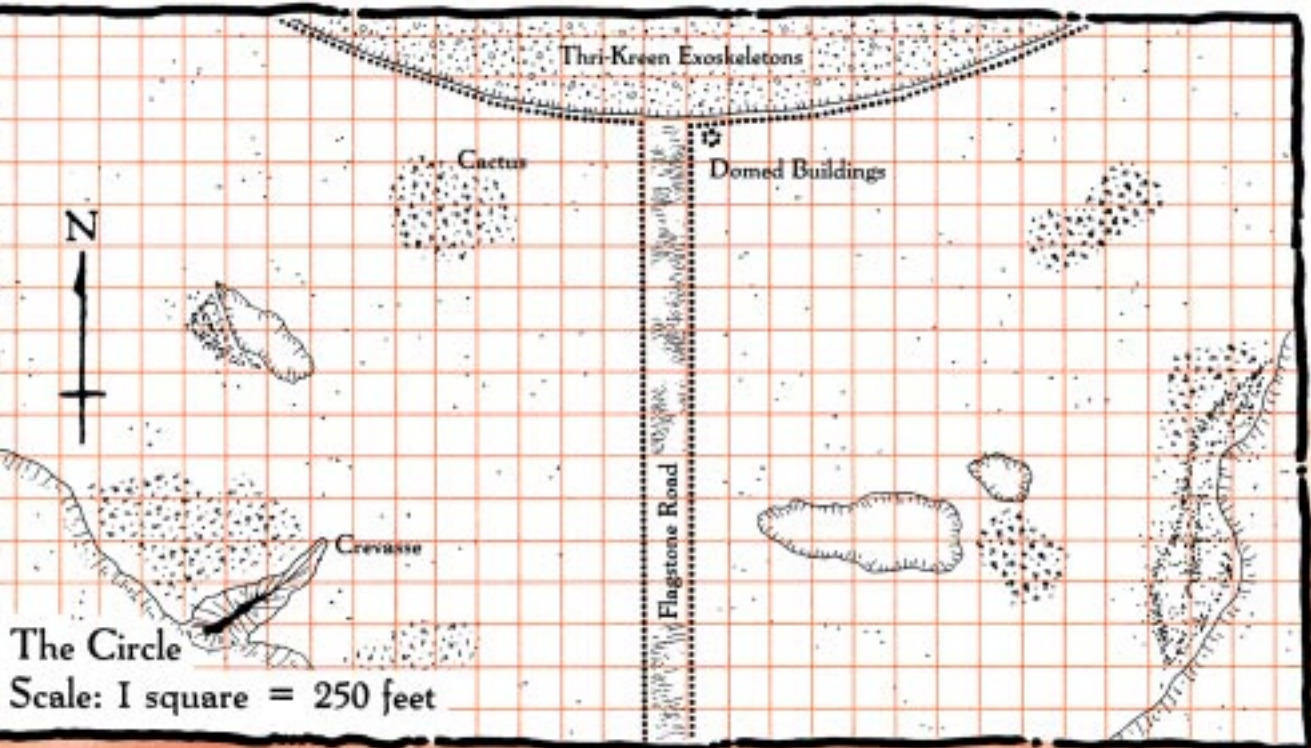
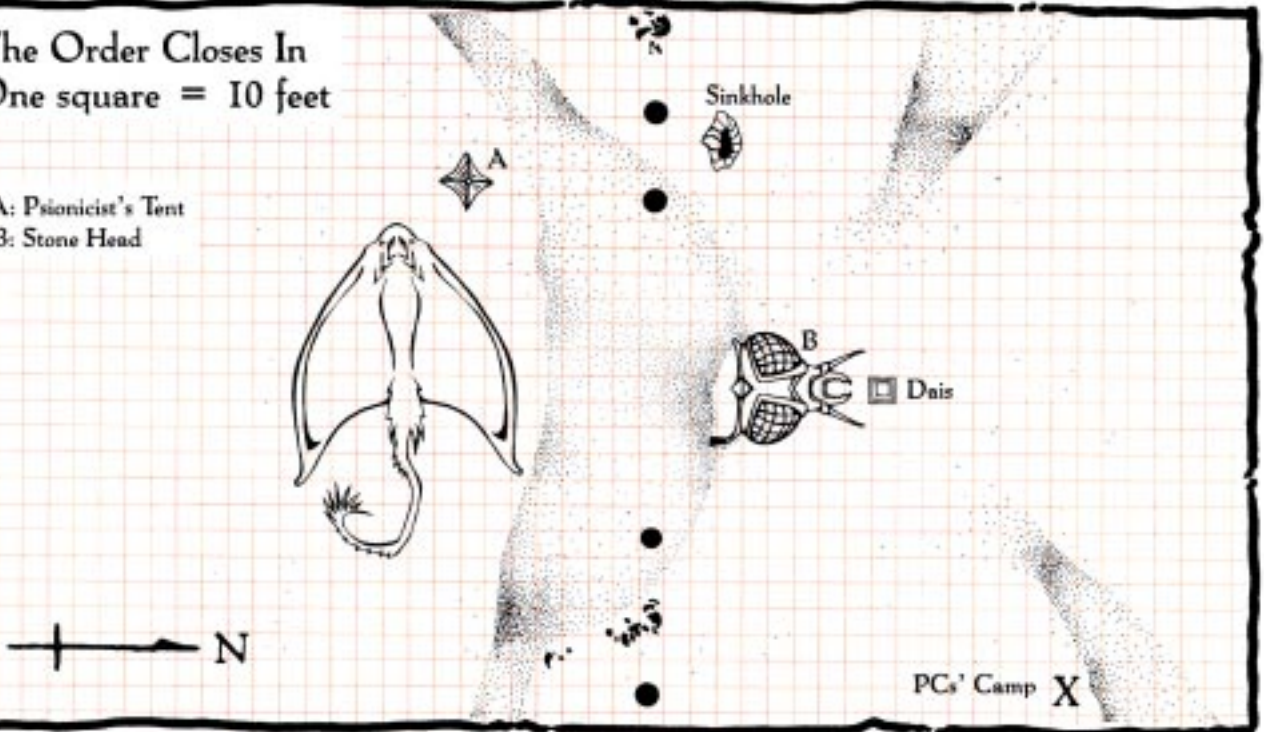
- 1 Hidden Pit
- 2 Open Pit
- 3 Boulders
- 4 Sharpened Stakes
- 5 Firepit
- 6 Brambles
- 7 Burn Mark
- 8 Ash



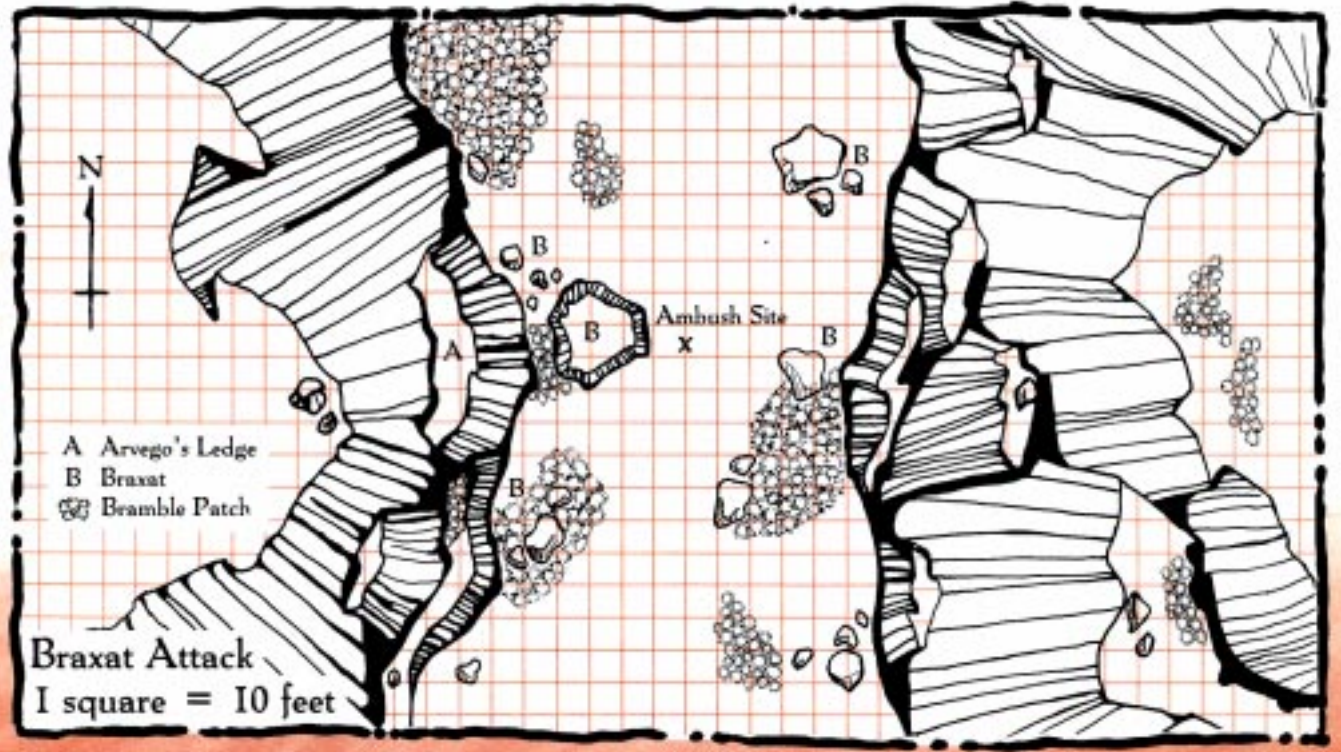
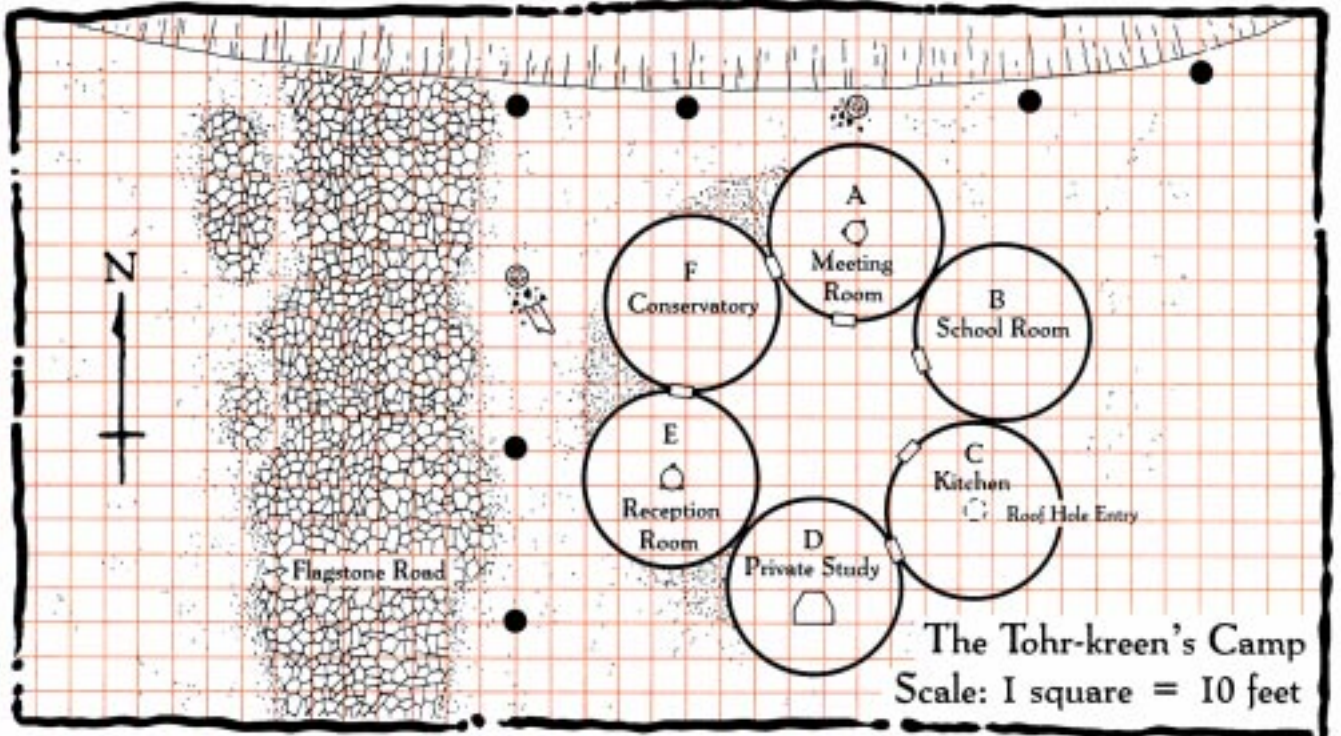
### The Order Closes In

One square = 10 feet

- A: Psionicist's Tent
- B: Stone Head







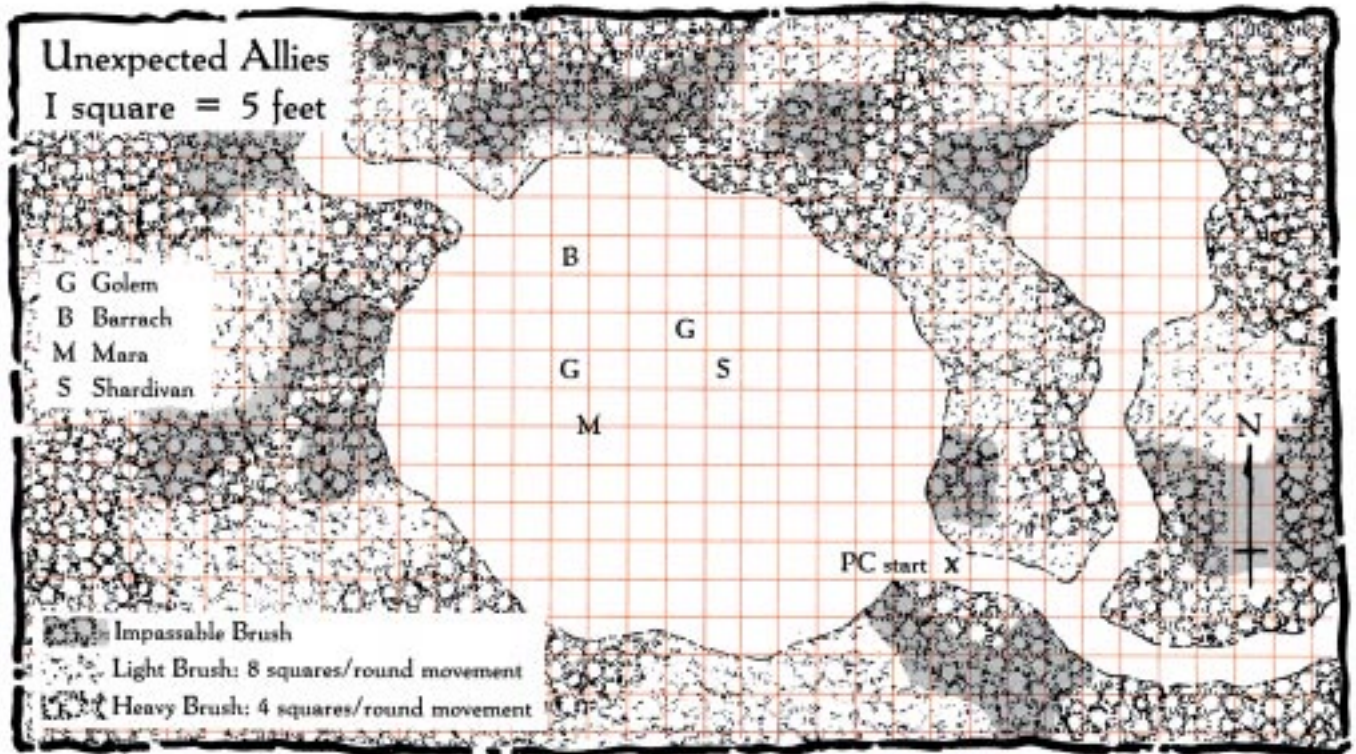


## Unexpected Allies

1 square = 5 feet

- G Golem
- B Barrack
- M Mara
- S Shardivan

- Impassable Brush
- Light Brush: 8 squares/round movement
- Heavy Brush: 4 squares/round movement

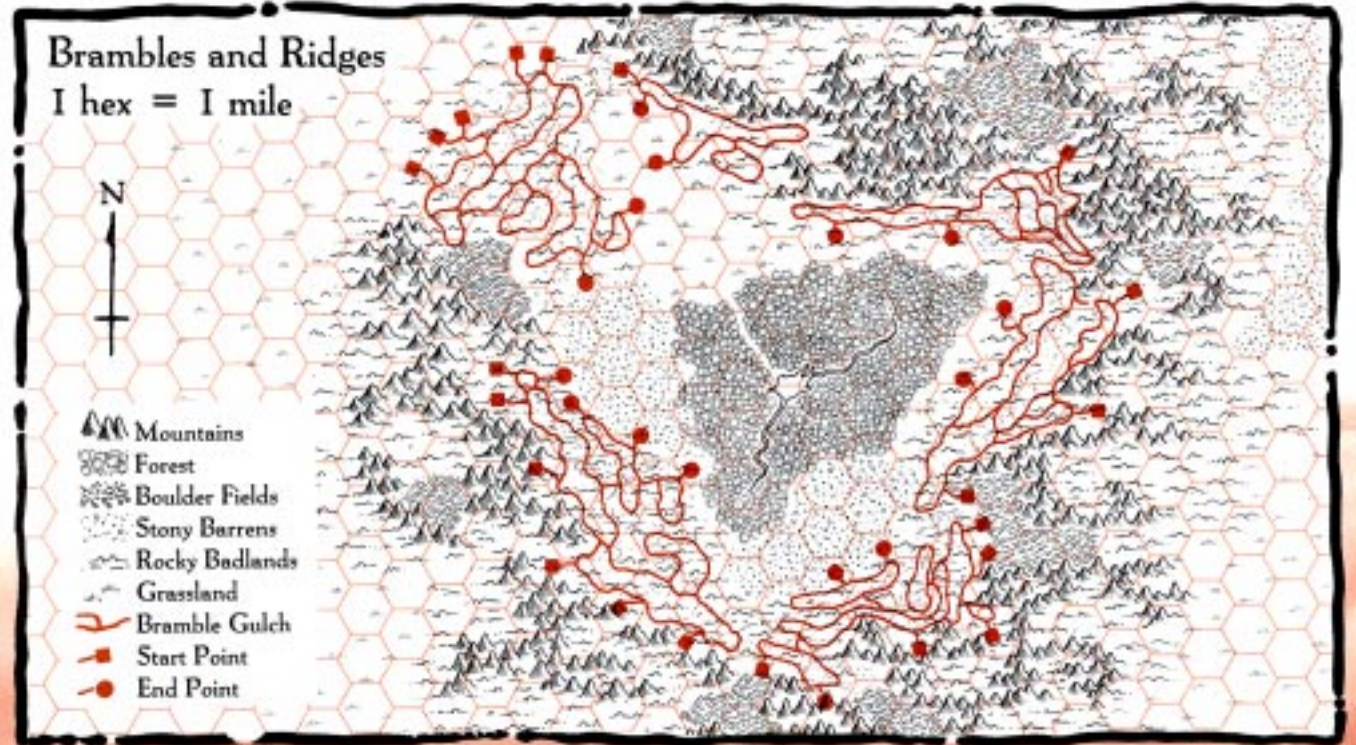


## Brambles and Ridges

1 hex = 1 mile



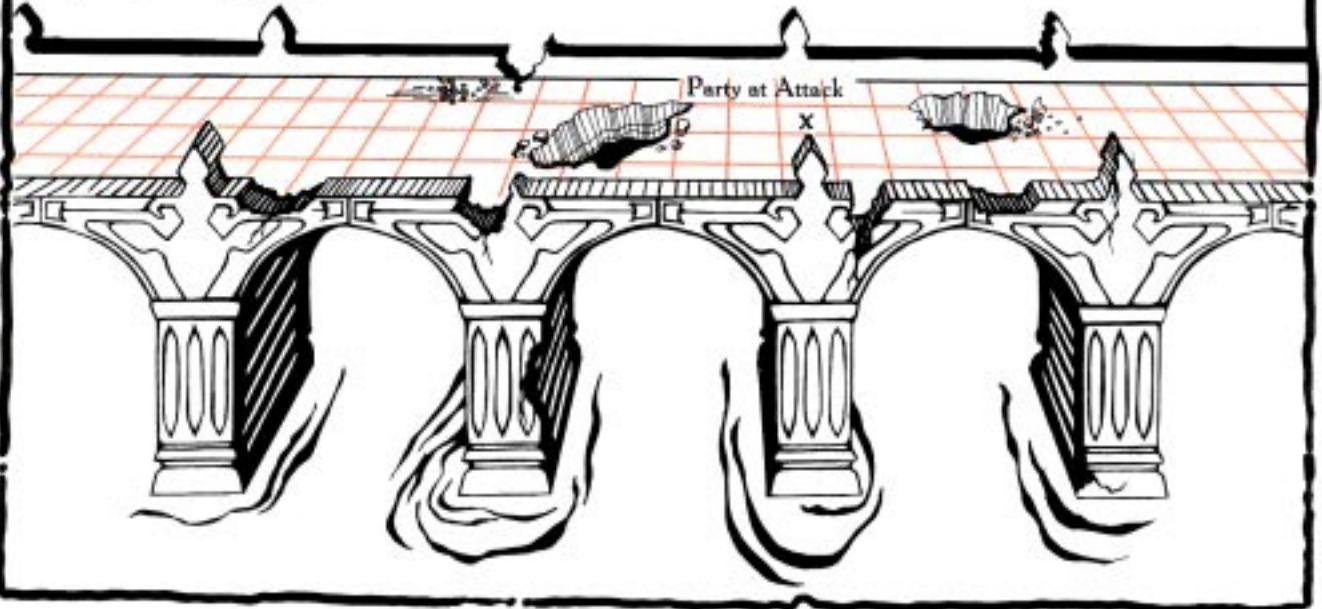
- Mountains
- Forest
- Boulder Fields
- Stony Barrens
- Rocky Badlands
- Grassland
- Bramble Gulch
- Start Point
- End Point






### The Bridge

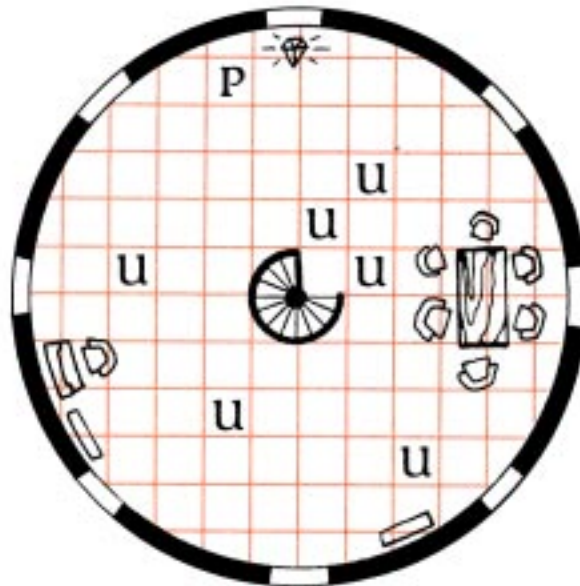
1 square = 5 feet



### The Psionatrix Chamber

1 square = 5 feet

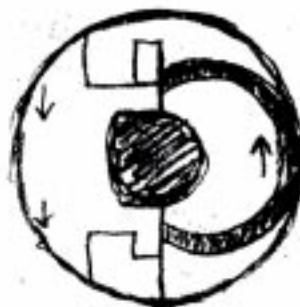
-  Psionatrix
- P Pharistes
- U Urkites





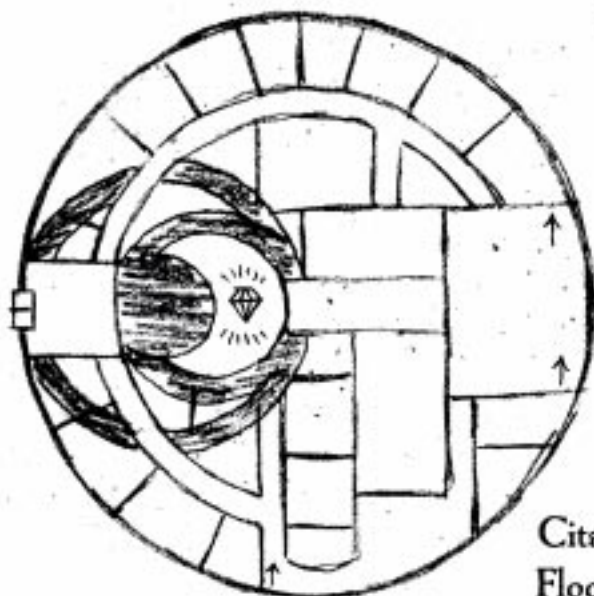
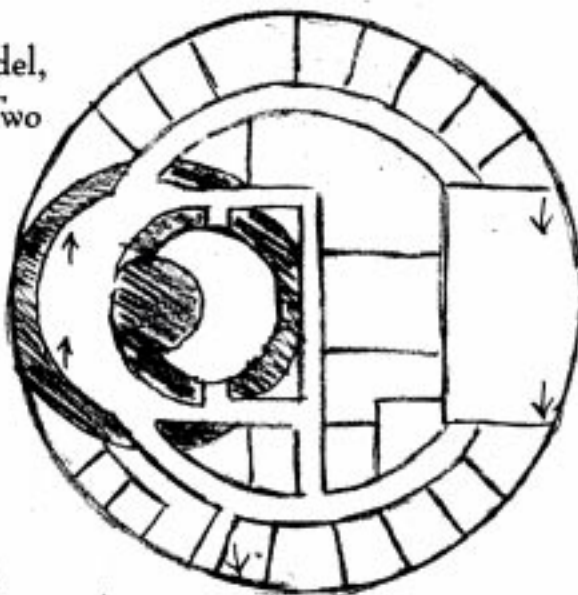
## Renegade Psionist's Map

↑ Stairs Up  
↓ Stairs Down



Citadel,  
Floor Three

Citadel,  
Floor Two

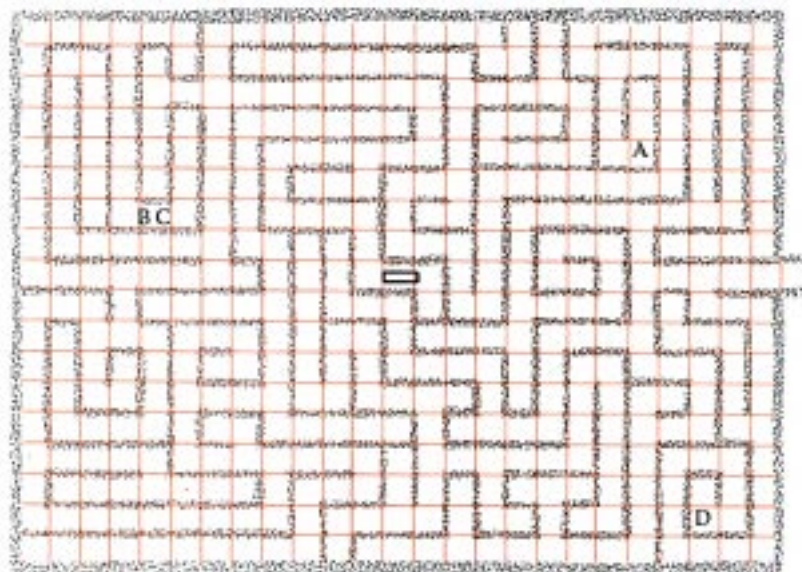


Citadel,  
Floor One



### A Thorny Problem - The Maze

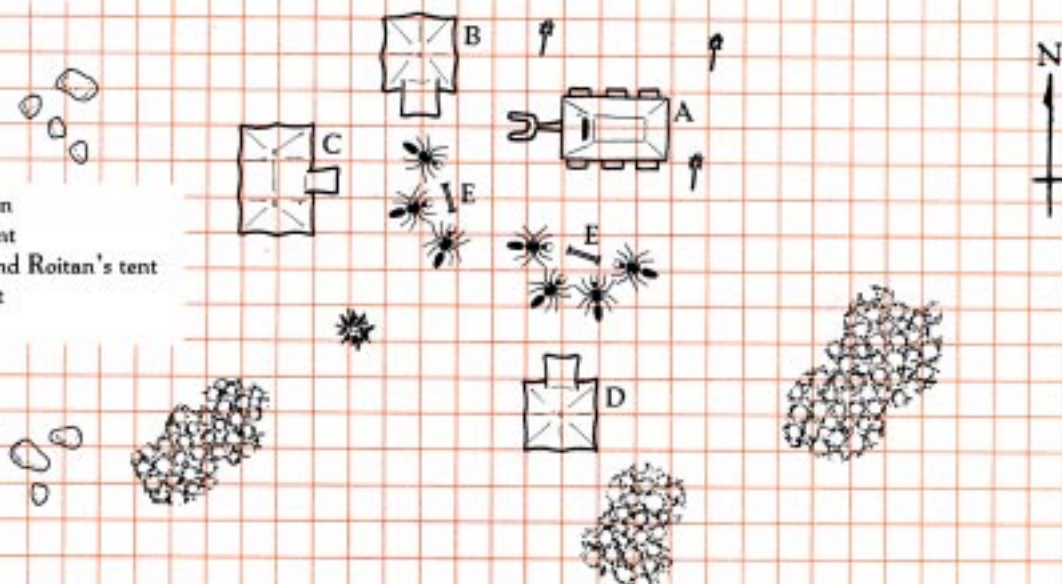
1 square = 20'



### A Friend in Need, Stalker's Camp

1 square = 5'

- A Prison wagon
- B Doorub's tent
- C Chowdlar and Roitan's tent
- D Küiran's tent
- E Kanks

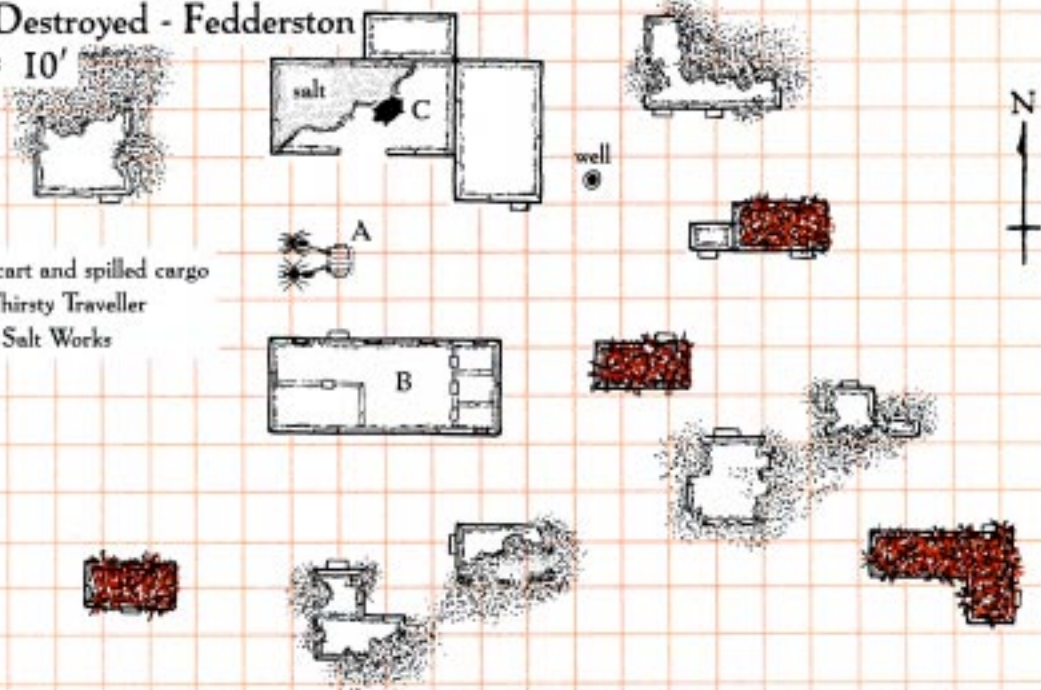




## A Village Destroyed - Fedderston

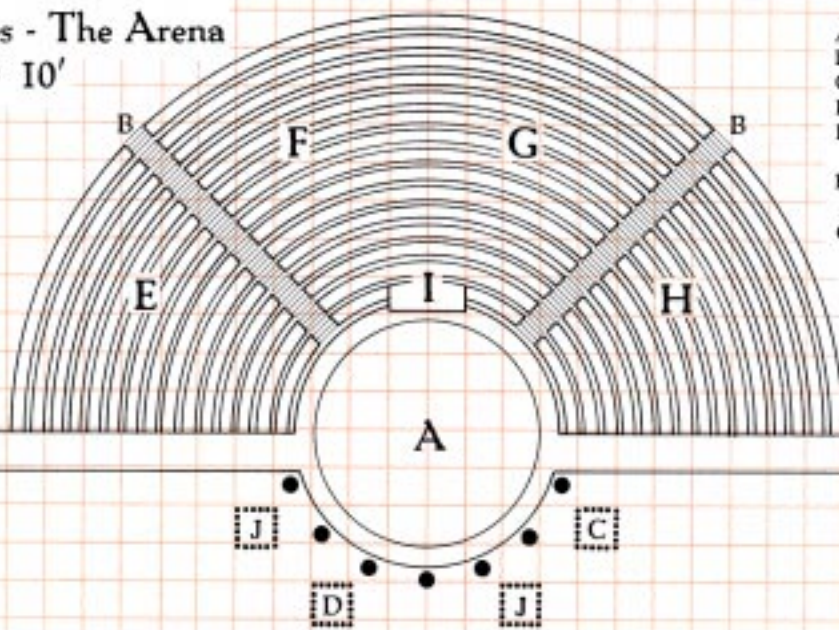
1 square = 10'

- A overturned cart and spilled cargo
- B Inn of the Thirsty Traveller
- C soot inside Salt Works



## Gith Games - The Arena

1 square = 10'



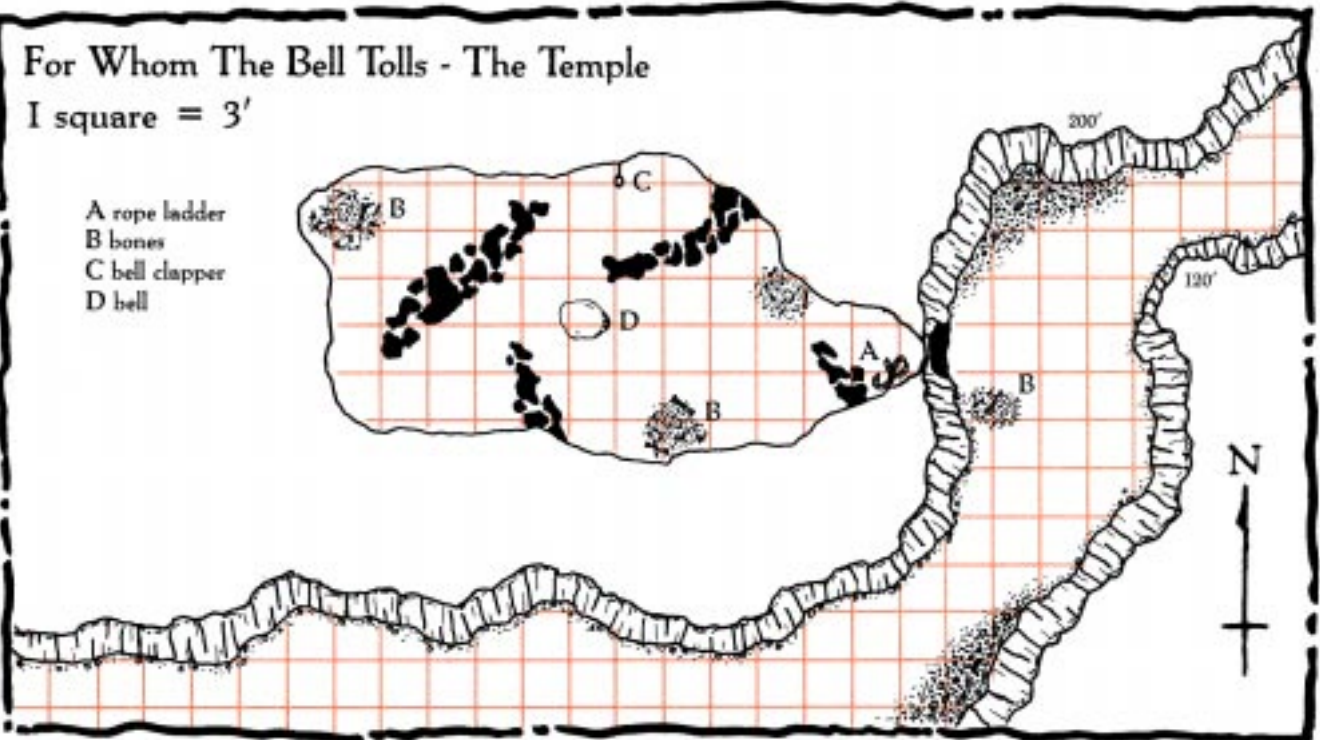
- A thi-kreen fighting b'robq
- B stairs up to seats
- C kiree in barred cage
- D flailer in barred cage
- E Spear Stickers' section (gith tribe)
- F Blood Drinkers' section (gith tribe)
- G Mountain Terrorers' section (gith tribe)
- H Chattering Skulls' section (gith tribe)
- I gith leaders
- J empty barred cages



### For Whom The Bell Tolls - The Temple

1 square = 3'

- A rope ladder
- B bones
- C bell clapper
- D bell

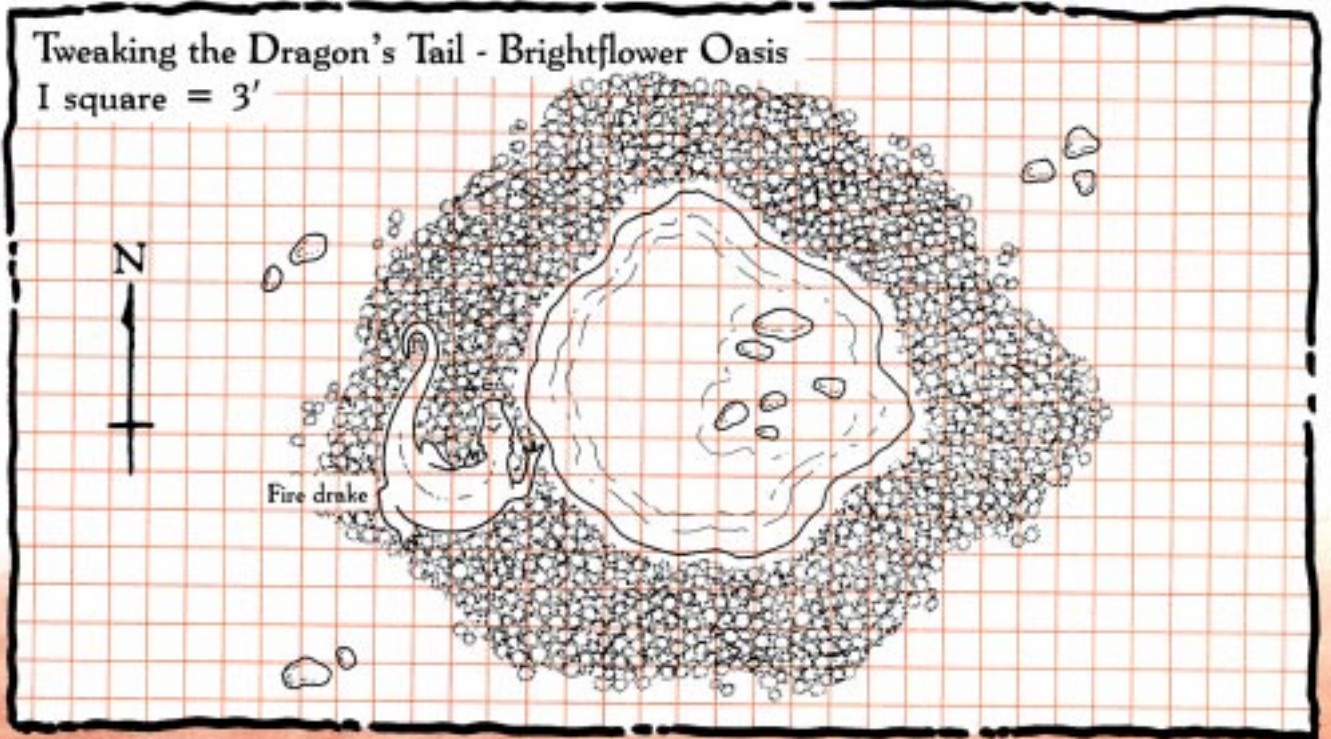


### Tweaking the Dragon's Tail - Brightflower Oasis

1 square = 3'



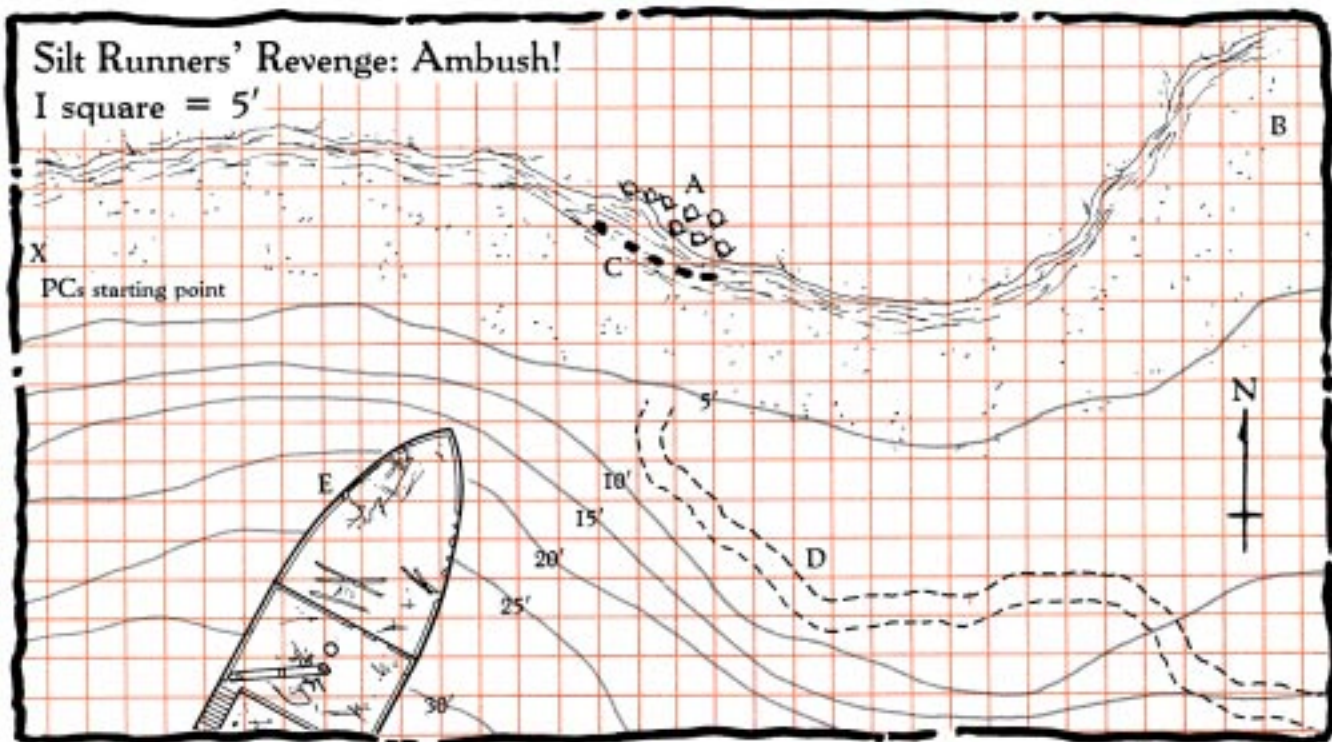
Fire drake





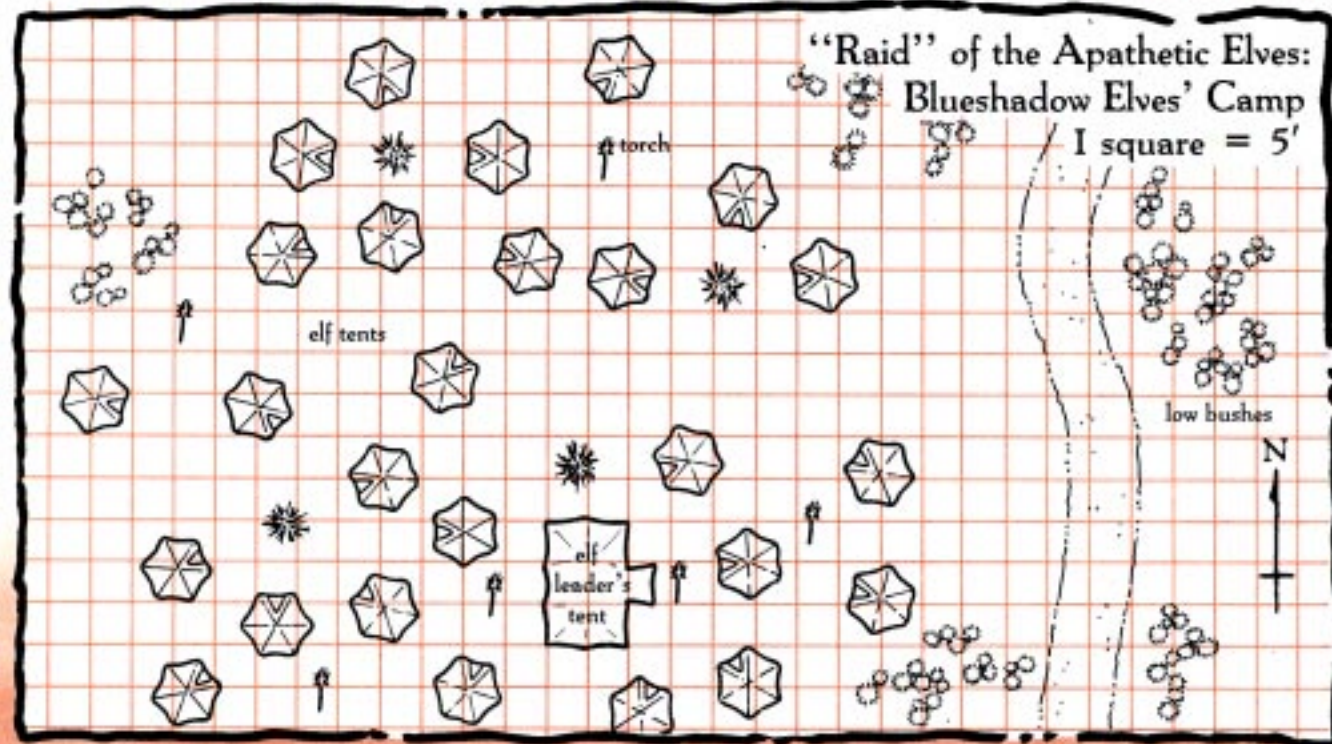
### Silt Runners' Revenge: Ambush!

1 square = 5'



### "Raid" of the Apathetic Elves: Blueshadow Elves' Camp

1 square = 5'









# DARK SUN™

W O R L D



Azhul the Hasty

# Azhul the Hasty

Male Half-Giant Fighter  
11th Level  
Lawful/Neutral/Chaotic Good

Str 21                      Int 12  
Dex 14                     Wis 10  
Con 17                     Cha 8

**Reaction Adjustments:** Surprise 0, NPCs 0

**#AT:** 3/2 (2/1 with two-handed sword)

**THACO:** 10

8 with obsidian-tipped javelins  
8 with stone-headed mace  
7 with bone-studded gauntlet  
5 with iron two-handed sword

**Damage:** Obsidian-tipped javelins 1d6+8/1d6+8

Stone-headed mace 1d6+9/1d6+8

Iron two-handed sword 1d10+11/3d6+11

Bone-studded gauntlet 1d3+8/1d3+8

*Note:* May fight with two-handed sword in one hand due to large size; suffers damage as size L

**Armor Class:** 10 unarmored  
3 in hide armor with *shield* +2

**Hit Points:** 138

**Wild Talent:** Catfall

**Power Score:** Dex -2

**Cost:** 4

**PSPs:** 40

**Fighter Abilities:** Operate heavy war machinery, supervise construction of defenses, command up to 900 troops, construct heavy war machines

**Half-Giant Abilities:** Hit Dice are doubled, equipment and clothing costs twice as much as normal, alignment varies daily

**Saving Throws:**

DM	RSW	PP	BW	SP
7	3	8	8	10

**Weapon Proficiencies:** Javelin (1 slot unused), mace, short sword, spear

**Weapon Specialization:** Two-handed sword

**Nonweapon Proficiencies:** Animal Lore, Armor Optimization, Gaming, Heat Protection, Stonemasonry, Water Find, Weapon Improvisation

**Languages:** Common, elvish

**Equipment:** Braxat hide armor, *shield* +2, iron two-handed sword, bone-studded gauntlet, three obsidian-tipped javelins, bone short sword, stone-headed mace, fire kit, leather backpack (to size), 50-foot hemp rope, bone map case, tent (to size), five 2-gallon waterskins, two flasks oil, six torches

**Magic:** *Fruit of diminution*, *fruit of health*

**Money:** 35 sp, 255 cp; copper armband worth 45 sp; emeralds worth 40 sp, 30 sp, 30 sp; cat's eye agate worth 10 sp

## Background

Throughout your life, you have struggled to find yourself and discover your fate. Born near the Ringing Mountains, you have wandered over most of the Tyr region, selling your sword to one person or another. In every case, you found that you eventually had to move on. One day your wanderings brought you to the ancient city of Tyr, then under the rule of the corrupt King Kalak. You enlisted in his service as a soldier-guard.

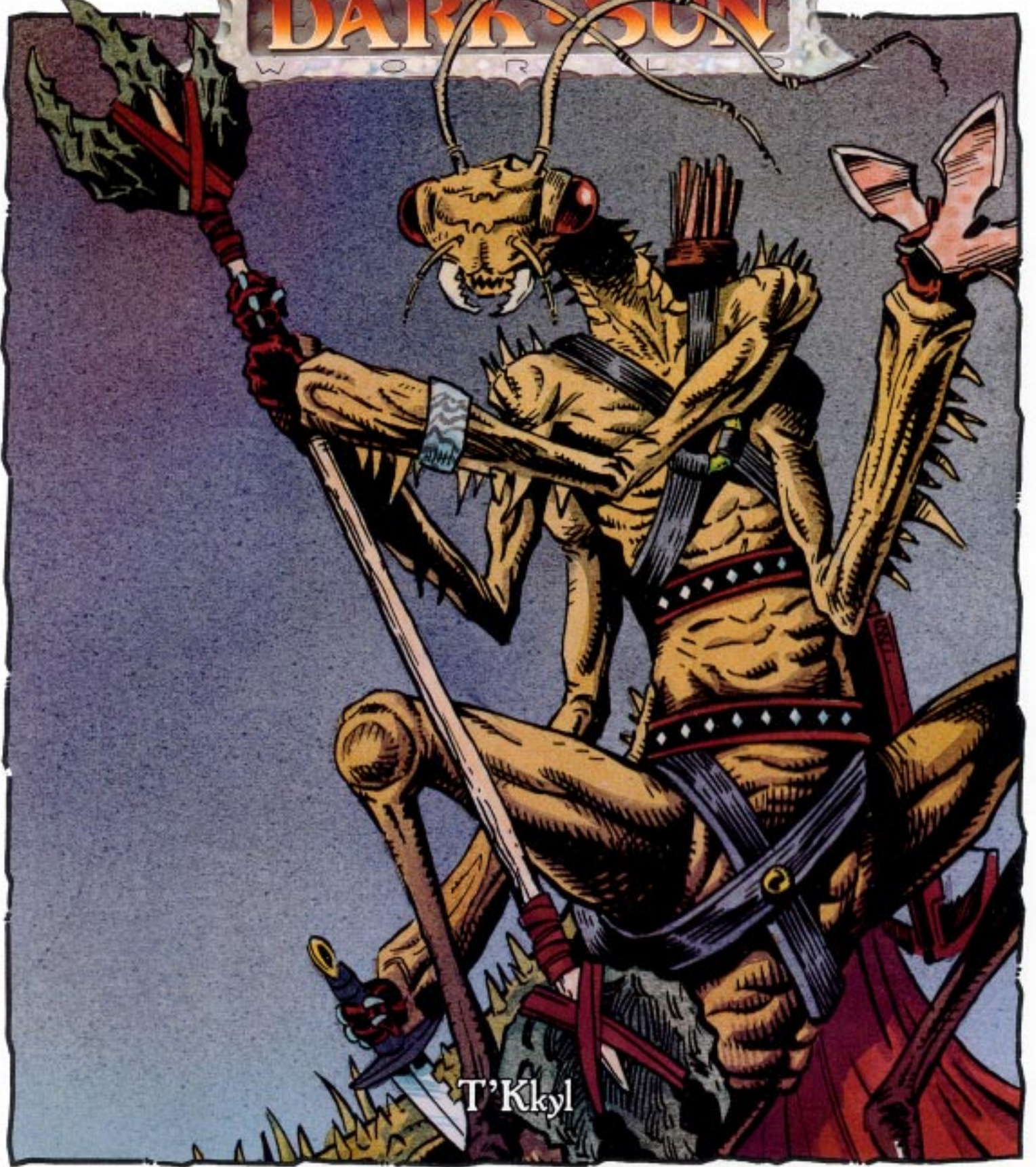
While you served well and faithfully in Kalak's guard, your sense of mercy and fair play was a constant hindrance to you. In the riots following Kalak's death, you found that it was not in your heart to slaughter the panicking citizens as they tried to escape the arena. You held your hand back that day, and doubtless saved dozens of lives.

In the weeks following Kalak's death, you found yourself a member of a much-despised group: the former servants of the king. You were even thinking about leaving Tyr when news came of the approach of Urik's army. Suddenly, you had a purpose again—the defense of your city. You fell in with your current companions as you mustered the free armies of Tyr, and in the ensuing campaign your strength and skill proved to be invaluable. For once, you knew that what you were doing was right and just.

You have had several subsequent adventures with your companions of the war against Urik. You saved the life of the avangion Korgunard, the noblest creature you have ever seen. You also saved Tyr from a conspiracy of discontented nobles. There is a lot to be said for the noble concepts of freedom and liberty, and you will go to any lengths to defend them now.

# DARK SUN

W O R L D S



T'Kkyl

# T'Kkyl

Thri-Kreen Gladiator  
11th Level  
Lawful Neutral

Str 15  
Dex 19  
Con 17

Wis 13  
Cha 15

**Reaction Adjustments:** Surprise +3, NPCs +3

**#AT:** 1 bite and 3/2 weapon or  
1 bite and 2/1 specialized weapon or  
1 bite and 4 claws or  
3/2 with light crossbow *or*  
2/1 with chatkcha

**THACO:** 10

11 with obsidian gythka  
10 with natural attacks  
10 with steel dagger (7 thrown)  
7 with light crossbow (5 point blank)  
7 with chatkcha

**Damage:** Obsidian gythka 2d4+1/1d10+1

Bite 1d4+1 and paralyzation  
Claws 1d4 each  
Steel dagger 1d4+2/1d3+2  
Bone-tipped quarrels 1d4-1/1d4-1  
Steel quarrels 1d4/1d4  
Chatkcha 1d6+4/1d4+3

**Armor Class:** 1 (modified for Dexterity)

**Hit Points:** 83

**Wild Talent:** All-Round Vision

**Power Score:** Wis -3

**Cost:** 6 initial, 4 per round

**Gladiator Abilities:** +/-4 chart bonus in punching or wrestling attacks, proficient in all weapons

**Thri-Kreen Abilities:** Leap forward 50 feet or up 20 feet; dodge normal missiles on roll of 3 or better (d20); bite paralyzes size S prey for 2-20 rounds, size M prey for 2-16 rounds, size L prey for 1-8 rounds, size H prey for 1 round

**Saving Throws:**

D M	R S W	P P	B W	S P
7	9	8	8	10

**Weapon Proficiencies:** All (1 slot unused)

**Weapon Specializations:** Chatkcha, gythka, light crossbow

**Nonweapon Proficiencies:** Animal Lore, Direction Sense, Navigation, Survival (stony barrens, scrub plains), Tracking

**Languages:** Thri-kreen, common, elvish

**Equipment:** Obsidian gythka, 3 chatkcha, light crossbow, 6 steel quarrels +2, 6 steel quarrels, 10 bone-tipped quarrels, steel dagger, pack, firebow, one week's dry rations, one 1-gallon waterskin, ball of twine, 40-foot giant hair rope

**Magic:** *Fruit of healing, fruit of levitation, bag of holding, fruit of acid resistance*

**Money:** 28 sp, 112 cp, pouch with one ruby worth 75 sp, two matched amethysts worth 40 sp each, silver bracelet worth 30 sp

## Background

It seems like a lifetime since your pack was destroyed by human marauders in the wastes of the Tablelands. The wild and free existence you had been born to came to a tragic end beneath the powerful psionic attacks of the humans, and only you and a few others survived. Terribly lonely, you found yourself wandering the wilds of Athas, and eventually you arrived at the city of Tyr.

In Tyr, the city's templars decided you would make a good slave, and soon you were laboring on King Kalak's ziggurat. In the hellish conditions of the slave pens, you found that not all humans were like the animals that had destroyed your family. In fact, you soon found yourself with a new clutch to protect. You and your companions survived the riots following Kalak's death and helped defend the city against the armies of Urik.

While the defense of Tyr's freedom is a good goal, you know that you have had a hand in far more significant events. You and your clutchmates saved the life of the avangion Korgunard, spiriting him out of the city of Urik when he was wounded by a templar attack. The wild thri-kreen of the wilderness call Korgunard the Great One; you know that he is the sole chance of survival for the dying world of Athas.

As a thri-kreen hunter and warrior, you find that the distinctions of human society are sometimes complex and confusing. Once you harbored an abiding hatred for all humans and their works, but now you realize that nothing is either wholly good or entirely evil. Your companions are fine examples of mammals that seem almost tolerable-and they have introduced you to other humans that are almost as sensible as they are. The mul Rikus, for example, is a hunter and a warrior to be admired. He is your patron in the Council of Tyr, and you have proven yourself valuable to him a number of times.



# DARK·SUN™

W O R L D



Herminard the Eloquent

# Herminard the Eloquent

Male Human Bard  
13th Level  
Neutral Evil

Str 12                      Int 15  
Dex 18                     Wis 10  
Con 11                      Cha 17

**Reaction Adjustments:** Surprise +2, NPCs +6

**#AT:** 1 or 2 (weapon in each hand)

**THACO:** 14

16 with obsidian short sword  
15 with bone wrist razors  
12 with bone *dagger* +3  
12 with sling

*Note:* dagger or wrist razors can be used as a second weapon for an additional attack at -2

**Damage:** Obsidian short sword 1d6-1/1d8-1

Bone wrist razors 1d6-1/1d4-1  
Bone *dagger* +3 1d4+2/1d3+2  
Lead sling bullets 1d4+1/1d6+1  
Sling stones 1d4/1d4

**Armor Class:** 6 unarmored (modified for Dexterity)  
3 in leather armor •/- 1 (modified for Dexterity)

**Hit Points:** 48

**Wild Talent:** Time/Space Anchor

**Power Score:** Int

**Cost:** 5/1 per round

**PSPs:** 57

**Bard Abilities:** Influence reactions, +/-4 die modifier; inspire allies, +1 THACO, +1 on saving throws, or +2 on morale checks; identify magical item, 65% chance

## Background

For as long as you can remember, your talents and skills have never been appreciated. As a freeman of the city of Balic, you were persecuted by the templars of the Dictator Andropinis. Misery and pain have been your lot since you were driven out of your home city and exiled to Tyr.

And did they appreciate you in Tyr? No, they threw you in their cursed slave pens with all manner of wretched criminals! Only by wit and skill did you survive the horrid weeks of lab or on Kalak's ziggurat and the riots that followed the king's death. The sorcerer-king and his templars got exactly what they deserved, as far as you're concerned.

On the bright side, Tyr has become a land of opportunity for someone with intelligence and a willingness to put the end before the means. You have made yourself valuable to the leaders of Tyr, and while they would probably find your methods unacceptable, they never complain about the results. You were instrumental in coercing various factions to support the war effort against Urik, and later you were able to unmask a plot of the lady Minging Asticles and the Forest Queen of Gulg. No one is better than you at finding out hidden secrets and then using them against their keepers.

You still do not know what to make of your companions. All of them are far more squeamish than you are, and you can think of several occasions where they lacked the courage to use the most efficient methods to solve a problem. Then again, they have been capable of selfless acts of courage that have saved your life more than once. They must have had some other motivation, or maybe they're holding out for favors from you. No one does anything for free in this world.

Your patron in the Council of Tyr is none other than King Tithian himself. Tithian seems to be very sensible on the matter of ends and means, and it is obvious that when everything settles down, he'll be in charge. By casting your lot with him, you know you'll finally be appreciated.

### Thieving Percentages:

PP	OL	FRT	MS	HS	HN	CW	RL
70	45	30	65	65	35	80	20

### Poisons Known:

B (Injected, onset 2-12 min, 20/1-3)  
C (Injected, onset 2-5 min, 25/2-8)  
E (Injected, onset immediate, Death/201)  
G (Ingested, onset 2-12 hours, 20/10)  
H (Ingested, onset 1-4 hours, 20/10)  
I (Ingested, onset 2-12 min, 30/15)  
K (Contact, onset 2-8 min, 5/0)  
L (Contact, onset 2-8 min, 20/10)  
N (Contact, onset 1 min, Death/25)

### Saving Throws:

DM	RSW	PP	BW	SP
10	8	3	13	3

**Weapon Proficiencies:** Dagger, sling, short sword, wrist razor

**Nonweapon Proficiencies:** Appraisal, Disguise, Etiquette, Heraldry, Local History, Reading Lips, Read/Write Common, Ventriloquism

**Languages:** Common, elvish, halfling

**Equipment:** Leather *armor* +1, obsidian short sword, bone *dagger* +3, bone wrist razors (each hand), sling, pouch with 15 lead bullets and 20 stones thieves' tools, 80-foot ball of twine, bone hook, five glass vials, various herbs (for poisons), one 1-gallon waterskin, riding kank, saddle and bridle, saddlebags

**Magic:** *Ring of fire resistance, fruit of healing, boots of levitation*

**Money:** 8 gp, 78 sp, 142 cp, jade ring worth 10 sp, gold chain worth 25 sp, silver seal (of templar of Balic) worth 30 sp, diamonds worth 45 sp and 35 sp, ruby worth 85 sp



# DARK SUN

OR LD

Ghedran of Raam



# Ghedran of Raam

Male Dwarf Fighter/Cleric  
9th Level/ 10th Level  
Neutral Good

Str 13                      Int 13  
Dex 10                     Wis 17  
Con 21                      Cha 12

**Reaction Adjustments:** Surprise nil, NPCs nil

**#AT:** 3/2

**THAC0:** 12

12 with sling  
11 with stone-headed mace  
9 with steel impaler

**Damage:**

Lead sling bullets 1d4+1/1d6+1  
Sling stones 1d4/1d4  
Stone-headed mace 1d6+7/1d6+6  
Steel impaler 1d8+7/1d8+7

**Armor Class:** 8 unarmored (modified by ring)  
3 in hide armor and shield (modified by ring)

**Hit Points:** 106

**Wild Talent:** Control Sound

**Power Score:** Int -5

**Cost:** 5 initial, 2 per round

**Range:** 100 yards

**PSPs:** 49

**Cleric of Earth Spells:** Six 1st-level spells

Six 2nd-level spells  
Four 3rd-level spells  
Three 4th-level spells  
Two 5th-level spells

Major access to the sphere of Earth

Minor access to the sphere of the Cosmos

Cleric of Earth Abilities: Turn undead, ignore presence of earth for 10 rounds per day, gate 4 cubic feet of stone/earth once per day

**Fighter Abilities:** Operate heavy war machinery, supervise construction of defenses, command up to 900 troops, construct heavy war machines

**Dwarf Abilities:** Infravision to 60 feet, focus, regenerate 1 hp per five turns due to exceptional Constitution, +1 on saving throws or +10% to performing any task directly related to focus

**Saving Throws:**

D M	RSW	PP	B W	SP
6	10	9	9	11

+3 magical attack adjustment for Wisdom

+6 on saving throws vs. poison or magic

Weapon Proficiencies: Dagger, hand axe, impaler, light cross-bow, long sword, mace, sling

**Nonweapon Proficiencies:** Ancient History, Armor Optimization, Endurance, Fire Building, Heat Protection, Read/Write Common, Stonemasonry

**Languages:** Common, giant

**Equipment:** Steel impaler, stone-headed mace, obsidian dagger, sling, pouch with 20 stones and 12 lead bullets, mekilot hide armor, shield, belt pouch, chalk, ball of twine, flask of oil, oil lamp, tinder kit, 50 foot giant hair rope, two 1-gallon waterskins, riding bank, saddle and bridle

**Magic:** *Ring of protection* +2, *fruit of gaseous form*, *fruit of healing*

**Money:** 28 sp, 85 cp, obsidian necklace worth 10 sp, iron bracer worth 12 sp, two diamonds worth 45 sp each, emerald worth 85 sp

## Background

The rattle of chains and the sounds of battle heralded the end of your freedom as a child. The raiders were not desperate savages of the wastes; they were the soldiers of House M' Ke of Raam, and their defilers and half-giants soon overcame even the fierce defenders of your home village. Dragged back to the city of Ream in chains, you and the survivors of your village were sold as slaves.

For years you trained as a house guard to the merchant house of Zanakath. Harsh discipline was your lot from dawn to dusk. Those of your fellows who showed the least flagging in determination or loyalty were sent to the salt mines. You endured and grew strong.

You also discovered that you had a natural affinity for the earth. A wise old slave tutored you in the ways of the elements, and you learned to revere them and to use their power for good. When the elder died, you decided that you could no longer be content as a slave warrior. You refused to serve any longer and were sold to quarry stone in the ancient city-state of Tyr.

Shortly after you arrived in Tyr, you were confiscated by King Kalak's templars and sent to work on the king's ziggurat. The conditions in the pens were awful, but you endured. When the slave revolt broke on Tyr like a storm, you did not hesitate to strike hard and heavy blows for freedom. Later, when the army of Urik marched on Tyr, you did not shy away from defending your new-found freedom. Tyr is your home now, and you hope to someday cleanse the Tyr region of the evil blots of slavery and defiling magic.

Tyr must be defended, and it must grow strong enough to strike the shackles from the slaves of all the Seven Cities. This is your purpose in life.



The image is a cover illustration for the Dark Sun Roleplaying Game. At the top, a stylized sun with a face is partially obscured by flames. Below this, the title "DARK SUN" is written in a bold, orange, serif font within a metallic, spiked frame. The letters "R", "L", and "D" are spaced out below the main title. The central figure is a female warrior with vibrant red hair, wearing a black and purple outfit with gold accents. She has a large, circular earring and a tattoo on her left arm. She is holding a sword with a purple blade and a gold hilt. The background is a plain, light brown color.

# DARK SUN

Vaerhirmana

# Vaerhirmana

Female Half-Elf Fighter/Preserver  
9th Level/ 10th Level  
Chaotic Good

Str 17                      Int 15  
Dex 17                     Wis 12  
Con 16                     Cha 15

**Reaction Adjustments:** Surprise +2, NPCs +3

**#AT:** 3/2

**THAC0:** 12

13 with stone club  
12 with bone dagger (10 thrown)  
10 with bone-tipped javelin  
10 with steel *bastard sword* +1  
10 with short bow

**Damage:** Bone-tipped javelin 1d6/1d6  
Stone club 1d6/1d3  
Bone dagger 1d4-1/1d3-1  
*Bastardsword* +1 (1 hand) 1d8+2/1d12+2  
*Bastard sword* +1 (2 hand) 2d4+2/2d8+2  
Bone-tipped arrows 1d6-1/1d6-1

**Armor Class:** 7 (modified for Dexterity)  
2 with bracers (modified for Dexterity)

**Hit Points:** 63

**Wild Talent:** Hear Light

**Power Score:** Wis -3

**Cost:** 6/3 per round

**PSPs:** 50

Preserver Spells: Four 1st-level spells  
Four 2nd-level spells  
Three 3rd-level spells  
Two 4th-level spells  
Two 5th-level spells

**Fighter Abilities:** Operate heavy war machinery, supervise construction of defenses, command up to 900 troops, construct heavy war machines

**Half-Elf Abilities:** Infravision to 60 feet, survival, befriend one animal companion

**Saving Throws:**

DM	RSW	PP	BW	SP
8	9	9	3	10

**Weapon Proficiencies:** Bastard sword, club, dagger, javelin, short bow (2 slots unused)

**Nonweapon Proficiencies:** Ancient History, Animal Lore, Armor Optimization, Heat Protection, Psionic Detection, Read/Wrote Common, Running, Somatic Concealment, Survival (stony barrens, mountains)

**Languages:** Common, giant, halfling

**Equipment:** Steel *bastard sword* +1, short bow, quiver with 20 bone-tipped arrows, stone club, bone javelin, bone dagger, backpack, bone map case (spell book), bottle of ink, papyrus, quills, three 1-gallon waterskins, one week of dried rations, riding bank, saddle and bridle, saddlebags

**Magic:** *Bracers of defense* AC 5, *wand of illumination*, *fruit of sweet water*

**Spell Book**

**1st Level:** Change Self, Color Spray, Detect Magic, Enlarge, Feather Fall, Identify, Magic Missile, Phantasmal Force, Read Magic, Shocking Grasp, Spider Climb, Unseen Servant

**2nd Level:** Blur, ESP, Invisibility, Knock, Levitate, Mirror Image, Scare, Summon Swarm, Wizard Lock

**3rd Level:** Dispel Magic, Haste, Fly, Lightning Bolt, Spectral Force, Suggestion, Wraithform

**4th Level:** Confusion, Fear, Fire Shield, Ice Storm, Solid Fog, Vacancy, Wall of Fire

**5th Level:** Advanced Illusion, Chaos, Hold Monster, Passwall, Wall of Force

**Money:** 85 sp, 145 cp, obsidian amulet worth 25 sp, gold earrings worth 10 sp, turquoise gem worth 15 sp, two diamonds worth 35 sp each

## Background

Life as a half-elf has never been kind. Throughout your childhood you endured prejudice and hatred in the small village of your birth. It was the scorn of the village's children that drove you to the house of Thangros, a preserver. Kind and humble, Thangros taught you much about magic before he was stoned to death by the villagers he lived among and protected. You narrowly escaped his fate and fled your home to seek your fortune in the ancient city of Tyr.

The great city proved little kinder than your home village, and you were soon enslaved by the evil templars of King Kalak. You were put to work on Kalak's riggurat, but in your adversity you found stout companions and friends for the first time in your life. When Kalak was killed, you played a key role in the riots and rebellion that followed. It was a bloody battle, but freedom came to Tyr.

Since that day, you have worked to preserve the city's hard-won liberty. You and your companions helped to defeat an army sent by King Hamanu of Urik. You also helped rescue the great preserver Korgunard from Hamanu's templars and participated in the ceremony that transfigured him into an avangron. Your adventures have taken you far from your village home, and in Tyr you know that you are respected for the person you are.



# DARK SUN

W O R L D



Anavias of the Split Rock

# Anavias of the Split Rock

Female Human Psionicist

11th Level

Lawful Neutral

Str 17

Int 19

Dex 19

Wis 15

Con 13

Cha 18

**Reaction Adjustments:** Surprise +3, NPCs +7

**#AT:** 1

**THAC0:** 15

16 with stone club

15 with bone spear (11 thrown)

15 with bone dagger (11 thrown)

13 with iron *short sword* +1

**Damage:** Stone club 1d6/1d3

Bone spear 1d6/1d8

Bone dagger 1d4/1d3

Iron *short sword* +1 1d6+2/1d8+2

**Armor Class:** 6 unarmored (modified for Dexterity)

0 in hide armor (modified for Dexterity and cloak)

**Hit Points:** 37

**Primary Discipline:** Psychokinesis

**Secondary Disciplines:** Psychometabolic, Psychoportive, Telepathy

**Sciences:**

Disintegrate (Wis -4, IC 40, R 50 yds)

Domination (Wis -4, IC contact, MC varies, R 30 yds)

Metamorphosis (Con -6, IC 21, MC 1/turn, R 0)

Mindlink (Wis -5, IC contact, MC 8/rd, R unlimited)

Project Force (Con -2, IC 10, R 200 yds)

Telekinesis (Wis -3, IC 3+, MC1+/rd, R 30 yds)

**Devotions:**

Adrenalin Control (Con -3, IC 8, MC 4/rd, R 0)

Animate Shadow (Wis -3, IC 7, MC 3/rd, R 40 yds)

Ballistic Attack (Con -2, IC 5, R 30 yds)

Body Equilibrium (Con -3, IC 2, MC 2/rd, R 0)

Cell Adjustment (Con -3, IC 5, MC varies, R touch)

Conceal Thoughts (Wis, IC 5, MC 3/r-d, R 0)

Contact (Wis, IC varies, MC 1/rd, R special)

Control Light (Int, IC 12, MC 4/rd, R 25 yds)

Create Sound (Int -7, IC 8, MC 3/rd, R 100 yds)

Dimension Door (Con -1, IC 4, MC 2/rd, R special)

Id Insinuation (Wis -4, IC 5, R 60/120/180 yds)

Inertial Barrier (Con -3, IC 7, MC 5/rd, R 0)

Levitation (Wis -3, IC 12, MC 2/rd, R 0)

Molecular Agitation (Wis, IC 7, MC G/rd, R 40 yds)

Psychic Crush (Wis -4, IC 7, R 50 yds)

Soften (Int, IC 4, MC 3/rd, R 30 yds)

**Defense Modes:** Intellect Fortress (Wis -3, IC 4); Mental Barrier (Wis -2, IC 3); Mind Blank (Wis -7, IC 0); Thought Shield (Wis -3, IC 1); Tower of Iron Will (Wis -2, IC 6)

**PSPs:** 124

**Saving Throws:**

DM	RSW	PP	BW	SP
11	11	8	13	12

+2 on saves vs. enchantment/charm spells

**Weapon Proficiencies:** Club, dagger, short sword, spear

**Nonweapon Proficiencies:** Harness Subconscious, Heat Protection, Meditative Focus, Psionic Detection, Read/Write Common, Rejuvenation, Sign Language, Survival (sandy wastes, rocky badlands)

**Languages:** Common, gith, halfling, thri-kreen

**Equipment:** Braxat hide armor, bone dagger, bone spear, stone club, iron *short sword* +1, belt pouch, ink, papyrus, 5 candles, fire kit, personal seal, quill, sealing wax, silver mirror, two 1-gallon waterskins, riding kank, saddle and bridle, saddlebags

**Magic:** *Fruit of healing, fruit of feather fall, cloak of the bat, 4 beads of force*

**Money:** 55 sp, 330 cp, topaz worth 35 sp, ruby worth 80 sp, copper bracelet worth 25 sp

## Background

Since the age of 12 you have studied and practiced the demanding secrets of the Way. For many of those years you lived in the wilderness with Master Ghil. He became a father to you, replacing the ungrateful parents who abandoned you to your teacher's care. Eventually your beloved master told you it was time to be tested in the world outside his safe refuge. You were sent from his door to wander the wilderness and learn from your travels in the Tyr region.

Making your way to the city of Tyr, you found that you were indeed tested. The wilds of Athas were harsh and cruel, but the corrupt city of Tyr was even worse. You were enslaved and sent to work in the pits, building King Kalak's insane ziggurat. It was a struggle to survive, but you found friends and allies in adversity. Together you and your companions helped to overthrow the cruel tyrant, and later you helped to defend the city's newfound freedom from the army of King Hamanu of Urik.

You are now an acknowledged master of the Way, skilled and confident. While you know that you could return to your master, you also know that the ideals of the first free city of Athas are worth defending. Tyr has become your home.

Your special patron in Tyr is Senator Agis of the Asticles house. You have served with him in his efforts to rebuild Tyr's shattered society. You are also friendly with the Veiled Alliances of both Tyr and Urik. Your enemies include the Senators Turax and Vildeen Tyrthani, as well as the Forest Queen of Gulg and her retainers.

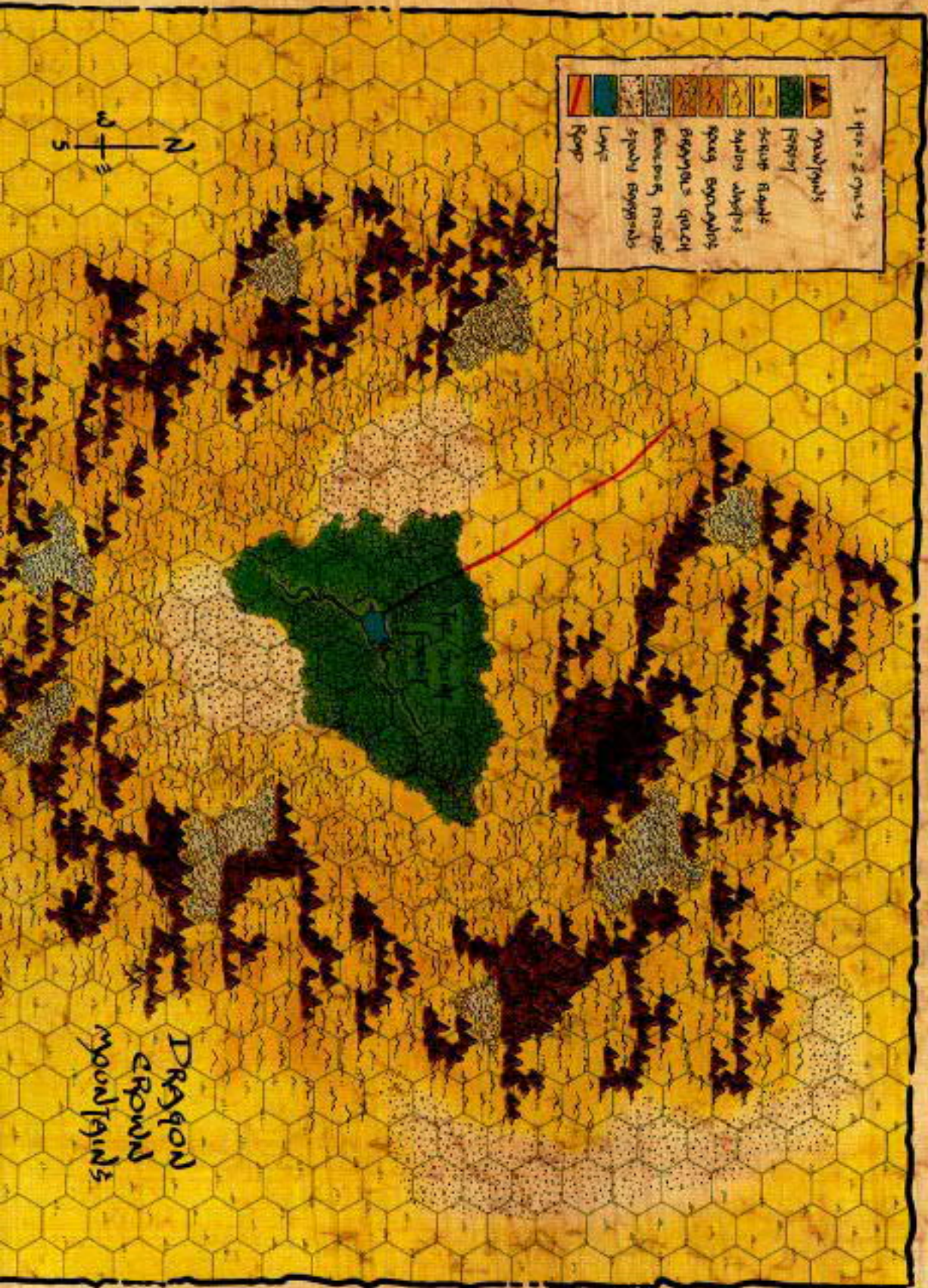


1 Hex = 2 miles

	mountains
	forest
	swamp
	water
	marsh
	lowland
	highland
	lowland
	highland
	road



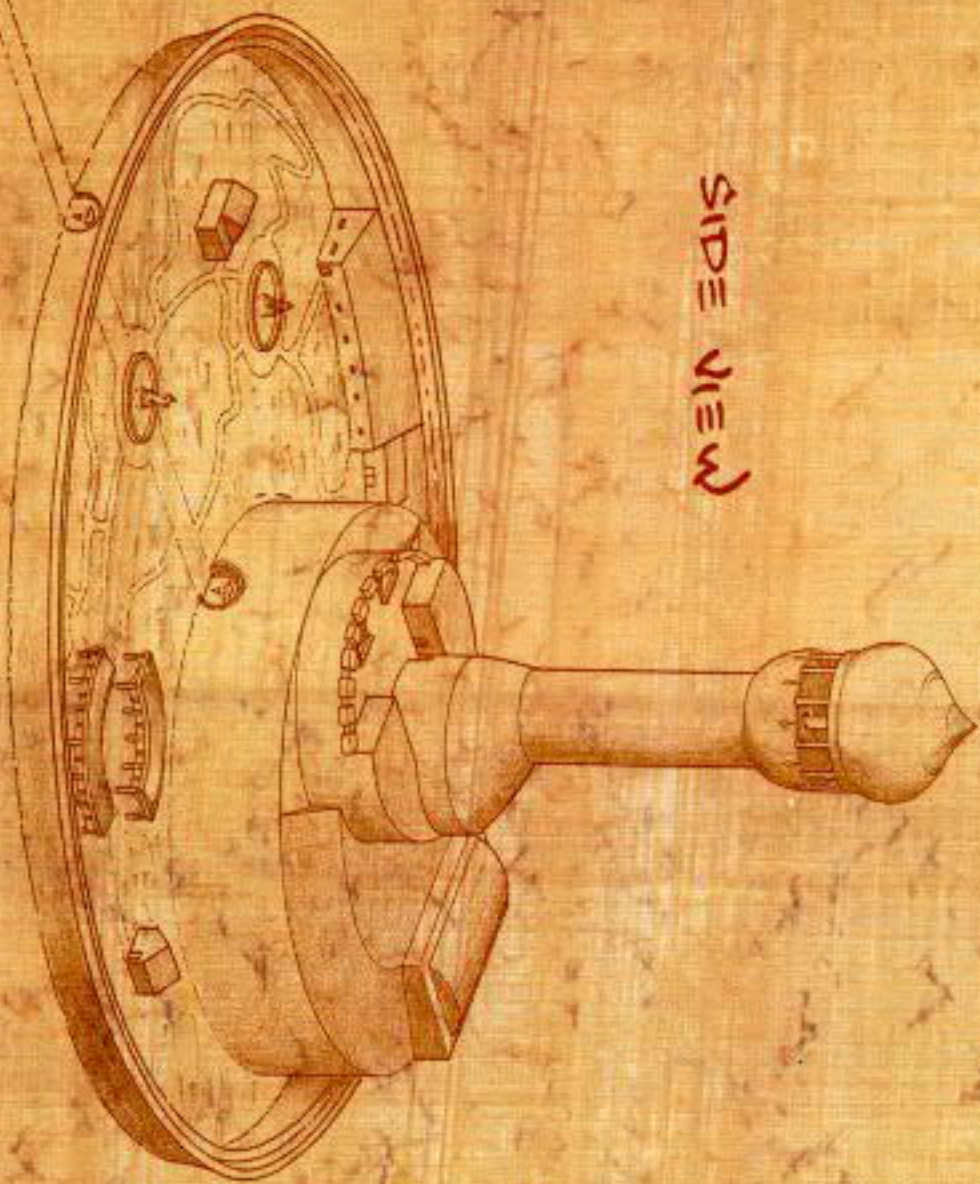
Dragon  
 crown  
 mountains







SIDE VIEW



LEVEL  
THREE



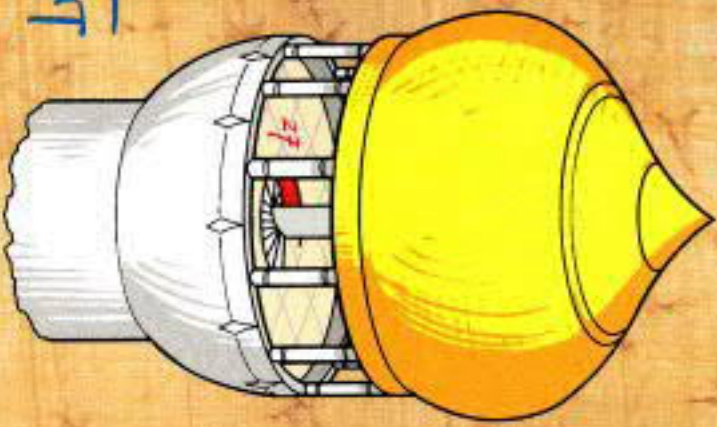
LEVEL  
TWO



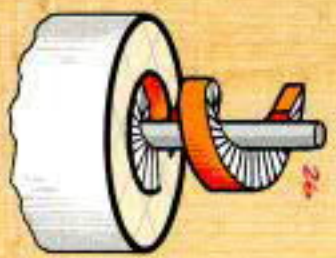




Level  
= 1947



Level  
= 1947



# Dasaraces

The White Fortress

One square = 10 feet



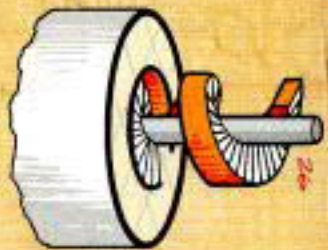
Door

Double Door

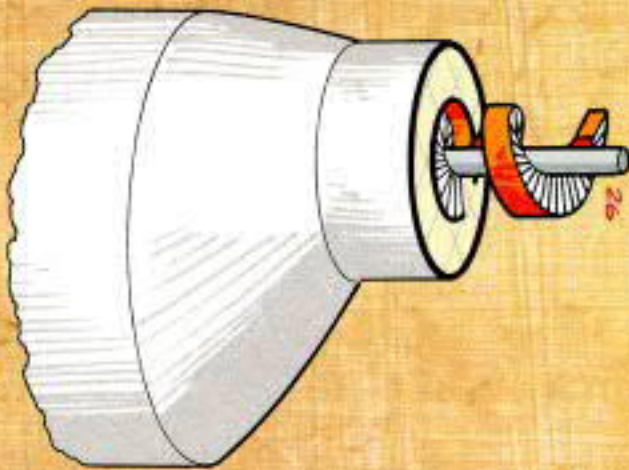
LEVEL SEVEN



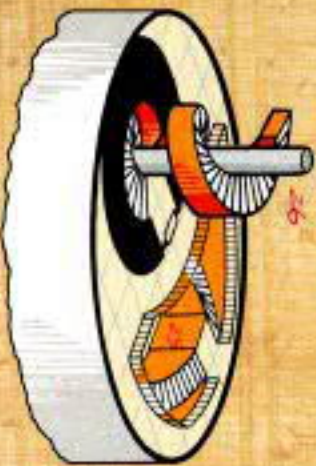
LEVEL SIX




LEVEL FIVE

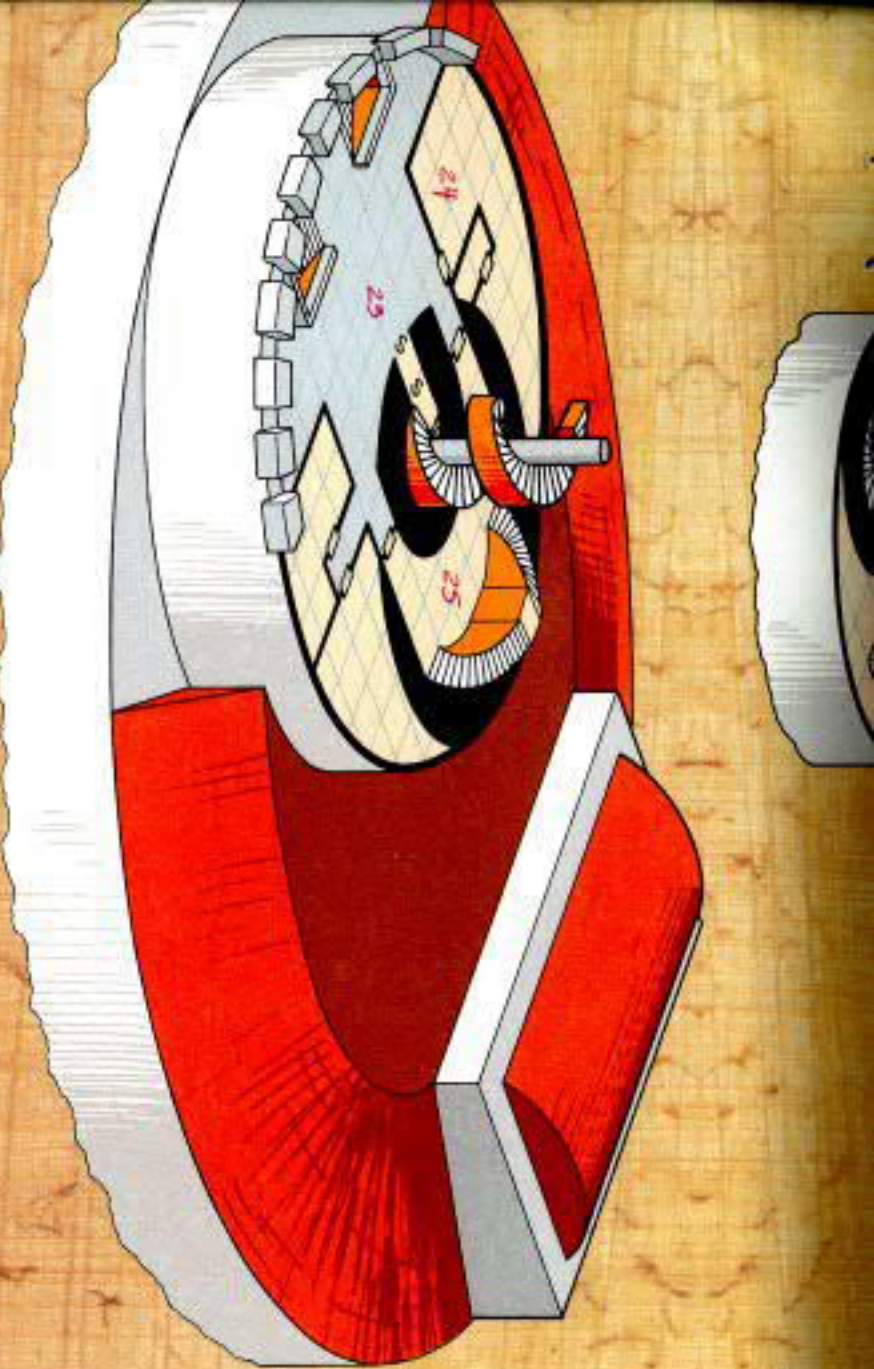


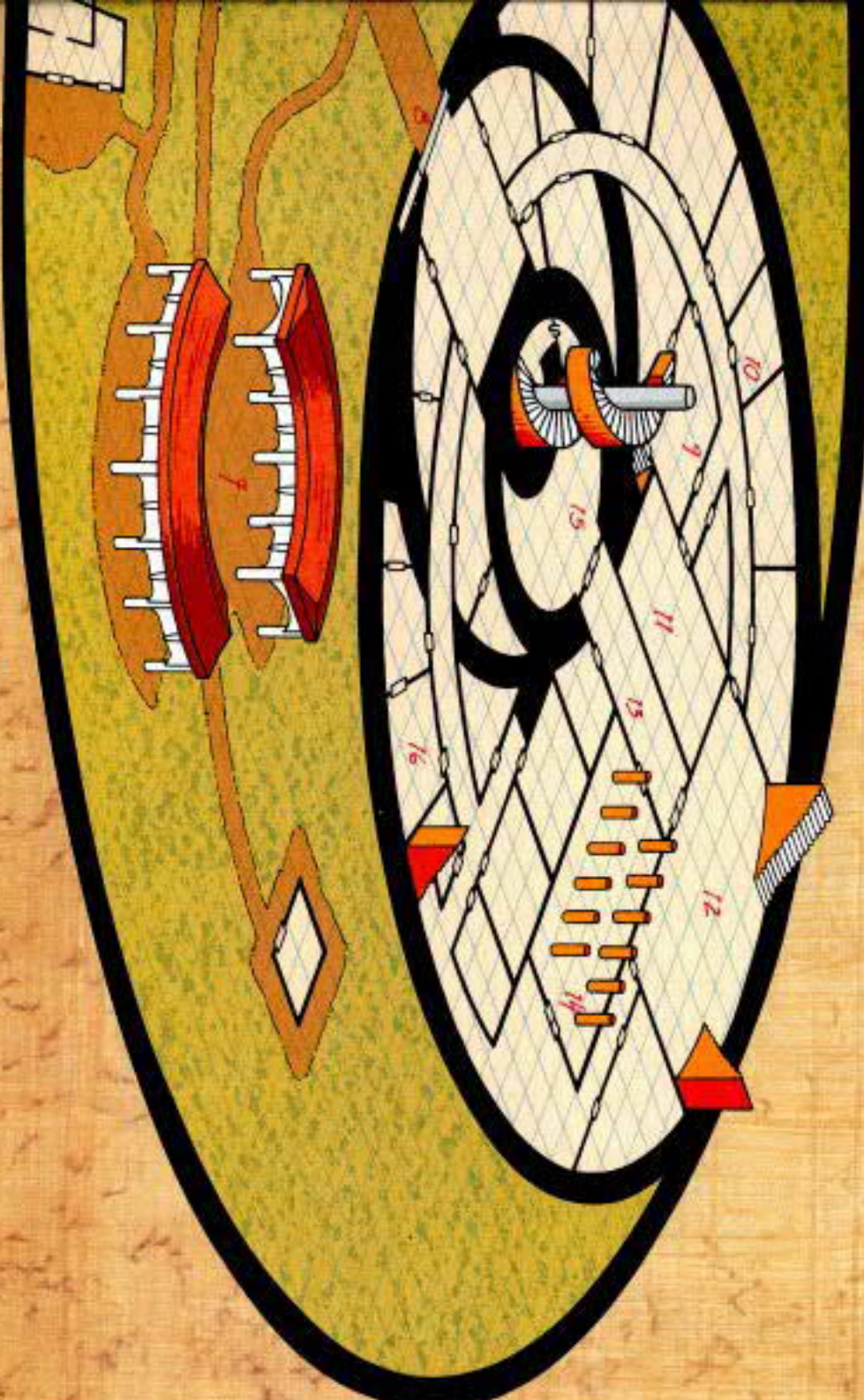
LEVEL FOUR



-  Door
-  Double Door
-  Secret Door
-  Disk Gate
-  Spiral Stairs
-  Building Interior
-  Fountain
-  Pillar
-  Path

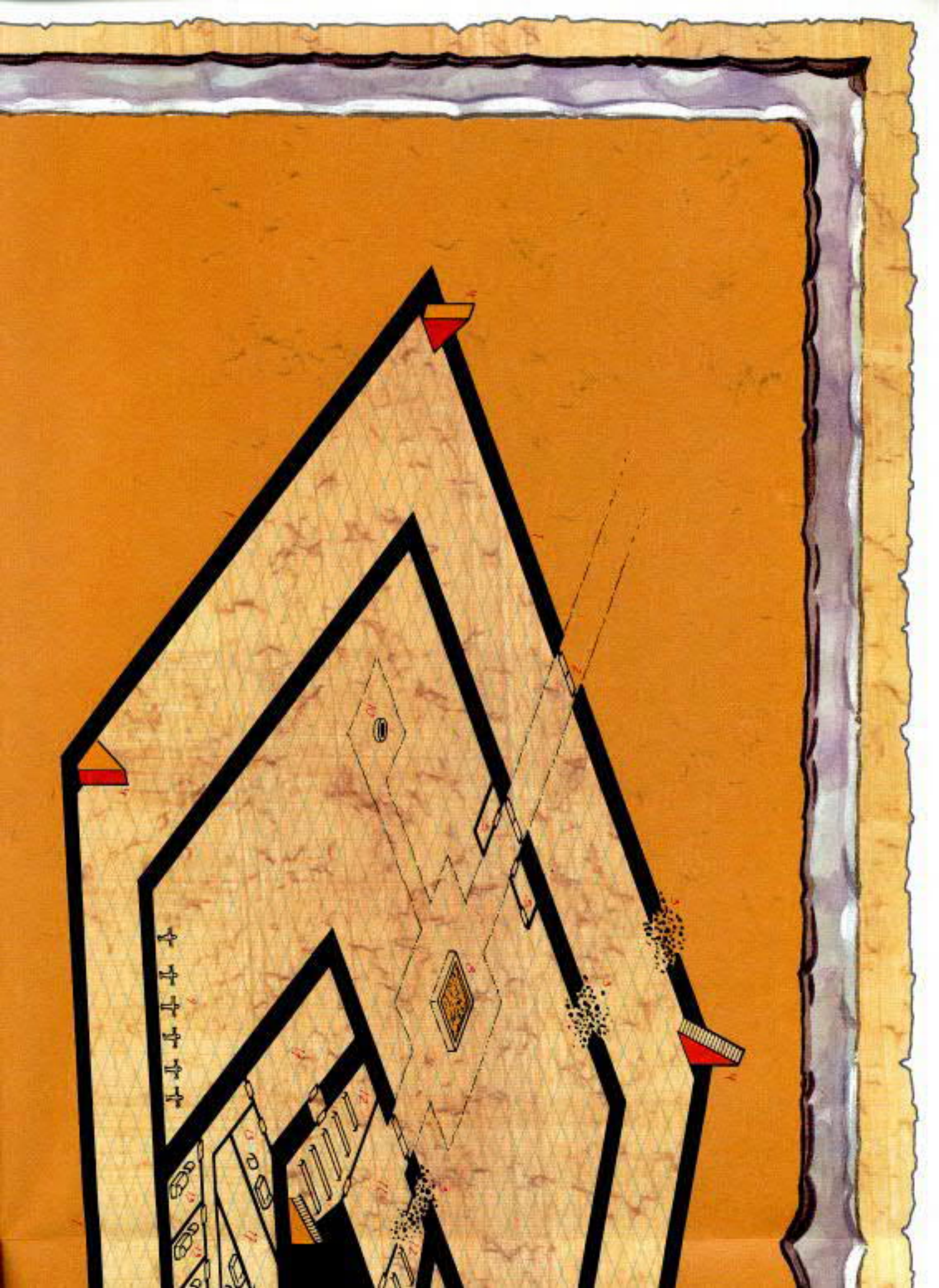
- 1. Grand Gate
- 2. Gatehouse
- 3. Stairs
- 4. General Fountain
- 5. Guesthouse
- 6. Servants' Quarters
- 7. Mage's Forge
- 8. Circular Gate
- 9. Kitchens
- 10. Refrainers' Quarters
- 11. Refractory
- 12. Spiral Stair
- 13. Pressing Stair
- 14. Round Stair
- 15. Central Cylinders
- 16. General Guardroom
- 17. Upper Hall
- 18. Messenger
- 19. Mage's Chambers
- 20. Library
- 21. Library Vault
- 22. Priest's Quarters
- 23. Upper Terrace
- 24. Mage's Quarters
- 25. Museum
- 26. Tower Stairs
- 27. Boundary Chambers

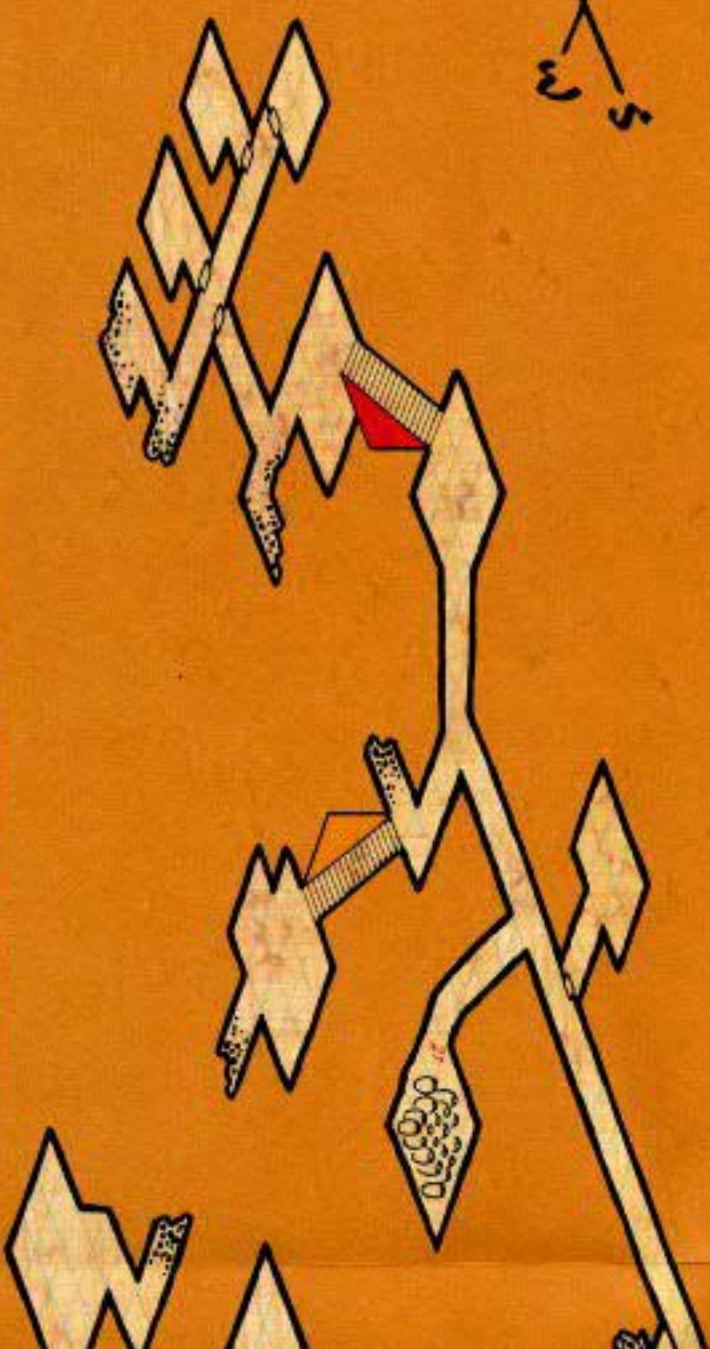




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THE ANCIENT FOREST OF  
**AKARAKLE**



Door  
 Spear  
 Wall



Rug  
 Bed and Chest  
 Large Table

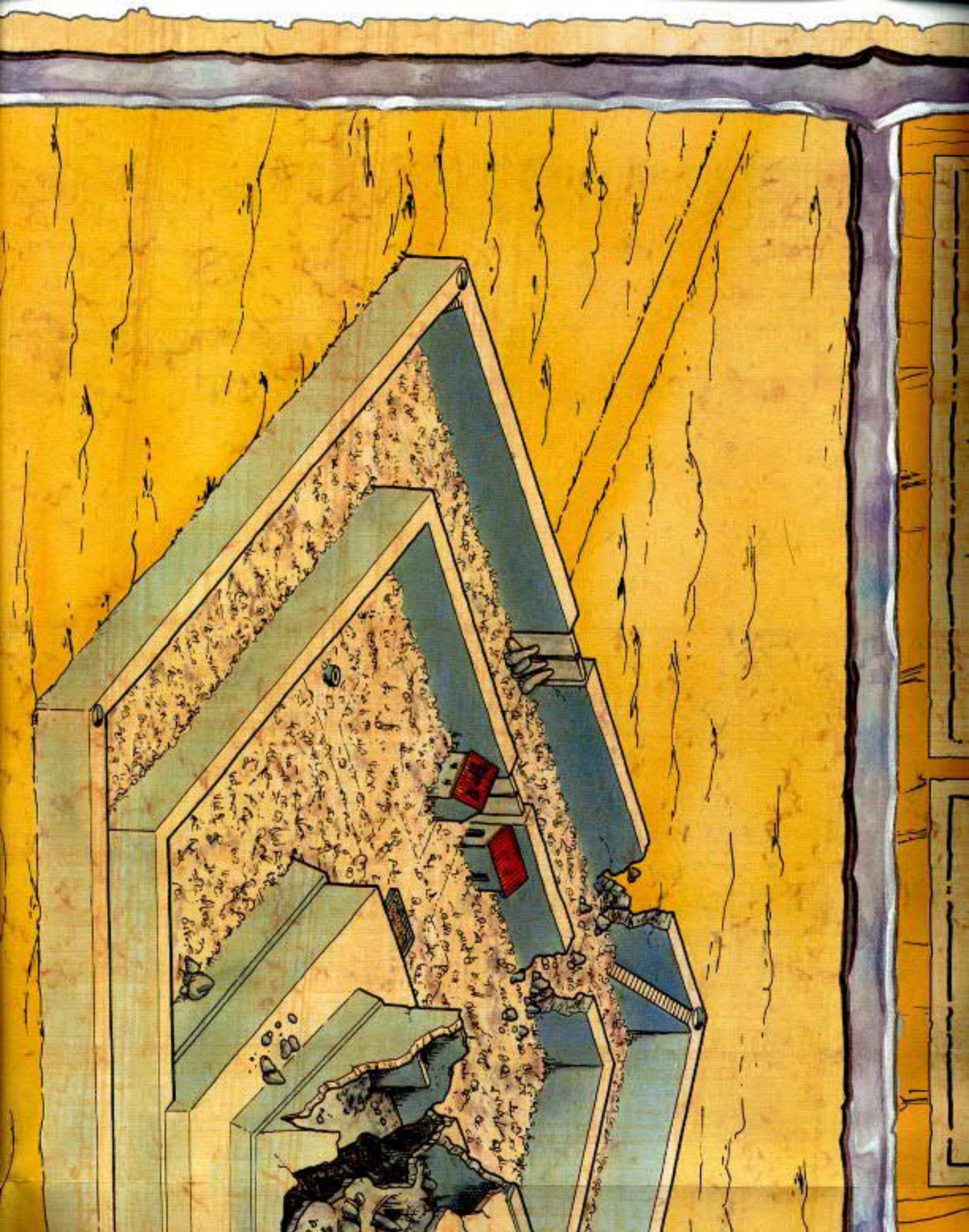


Sword Displays  
 Weapon's Rack  
 1-3 tables of food displays

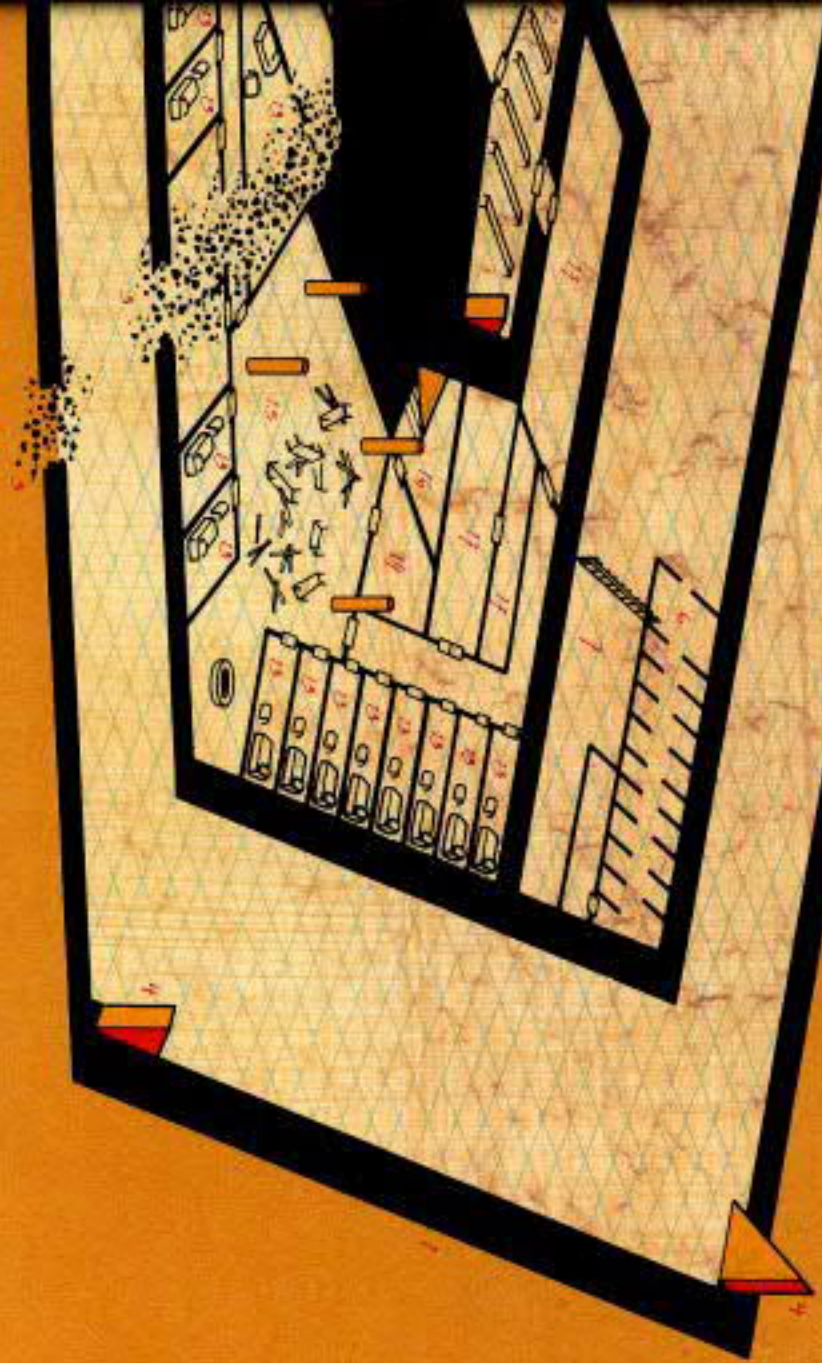
One square = 10 feet

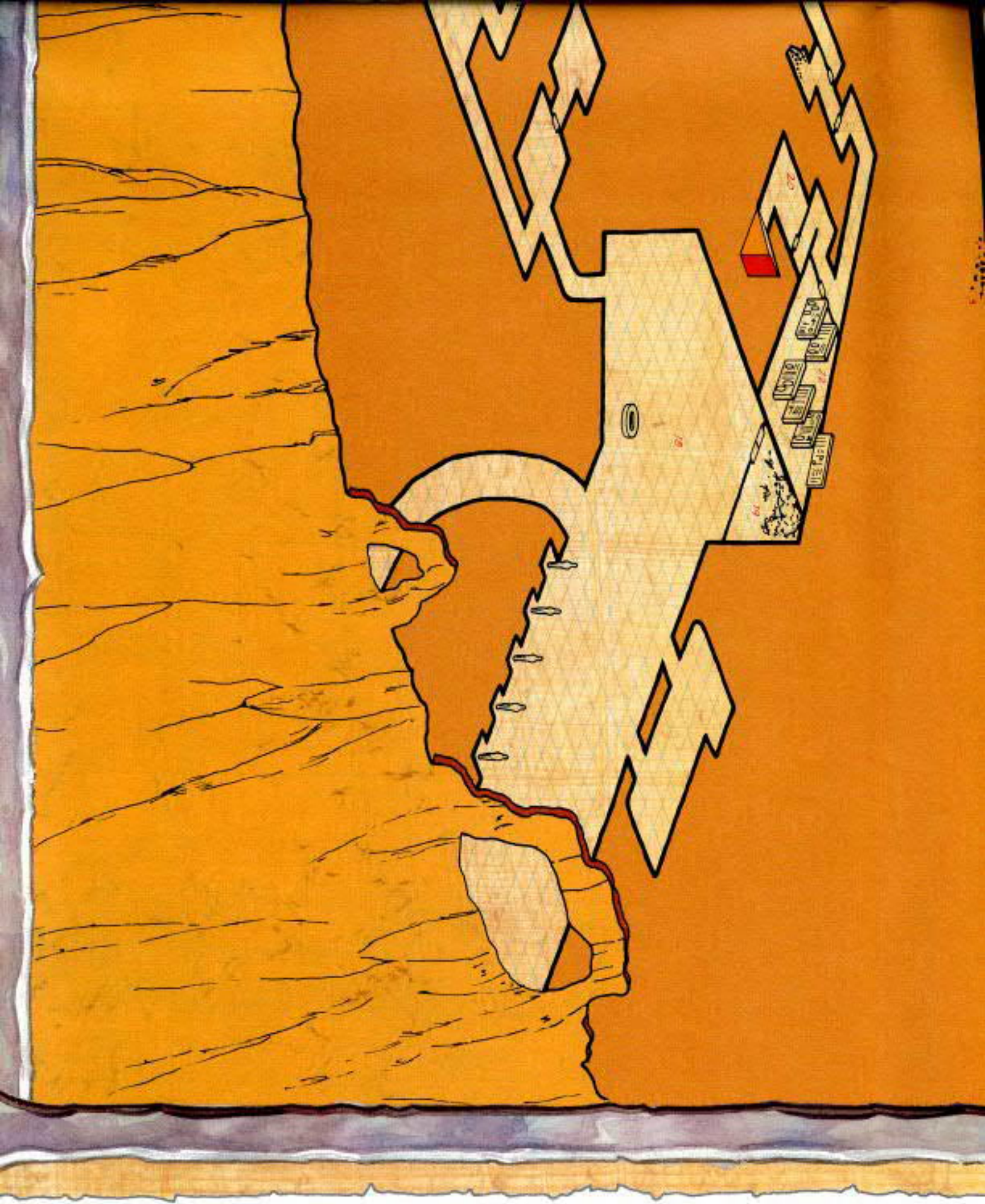
1. Outer wall
2. Outer Gate
3. Camp when
4. Guard Room
5. Gate House
6. Stairs
7. Guard Room
8. General's office
9. Archer's Room
10. Camp when when
11. Stairs when
12. Reentry Room
13. Living quarters
14. Kitchen
15. Dining Room
16. Banquet
17. The House
18. Room for the
19. Bed Room
20. Roof Guard
21. White Guard
22. Guards

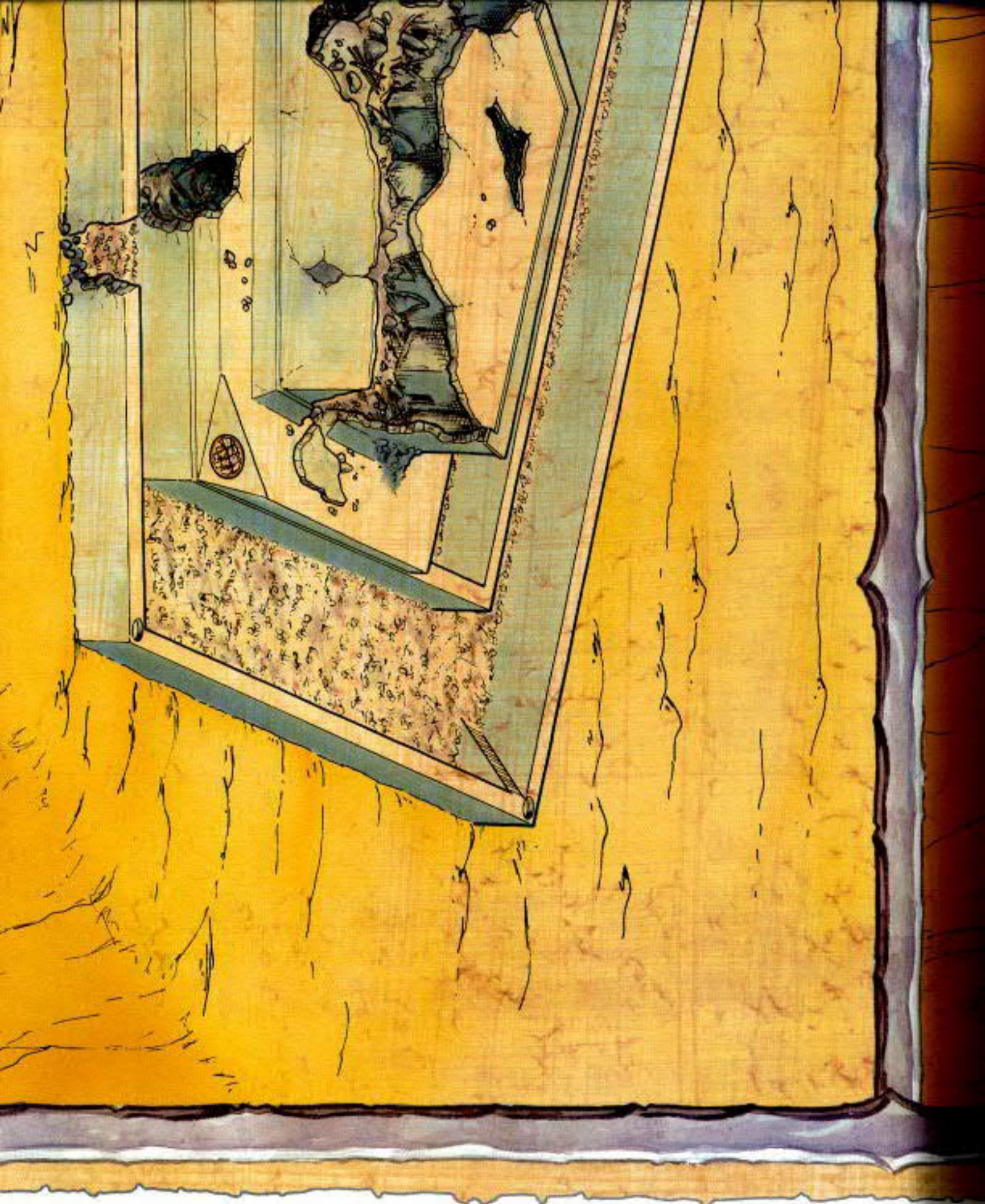












24/0000000

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# THE ROAD OF FIRE

- Mountains
- Rough Baylands
- Spiny Baylands
- Stony Wastes
- Dust Swamps
- Scrub Plains
- Barren Fields
- Volcano
- Mount
- Lake
- Long Canyons
- Road
- Unge
- Islands
- Oasis





## The Books of Dragon's Crown™



### *Welcome to Dragon's Crown!*

This epic adventure completes the series of DARK SUN™ flip-book adventures that began with *Freedom* and continued through *Road to Urik*, *Arcane Shadows*, and *Astician Gambit*. In this slip-case, you'll find three adventure books, a map book, and a short story. The three adventure books should be used in the order listed below. When you open this box, the first thing you will want to do is pull out *Book One: Out of the Valley* and read the introduction to the module.

Included in this folder are the following:

- **Book One: Out of the Valley.** This 96-page book contains three linked adventures that will begin the Dragon's Crown saga. These adventures take the heroes to the camp of their old enemies, the Black Sand Raiders; to the fortress city of Urik; and to the mysterious Sea of Silt.
- **Book Two: The Road of Fire.** This 96-page book contains the next three adventures of the saga. The heroes will journey to the uttermost end of the Tyr region, back again to the forests of the halflings, and then onward into the trackless plains of the Hinterlands.
- **Book Three: Dragon's Crown Mountains.** This 64-page book concludes the epic quest of the heroes, bringing them face to face with one of the most powerful and deadly secrets of Athas.
- **The Map Book:** For your convenience, all detail maps referred to in the adventure books have been collected in a 32-page book of maps.
- **The Story:** A DARK SUN short story has been included to help set the mood for the *Dragon's Crown* saga.
- **Poster Maps:** Two of Athas's ancient fortresses, Akaracle and Dasaraches, are shown here.

**The Case Map:** The map opposite this text is a reprint of a portion of the poster map included in the DARK SUN accessory *Valley of Dust and Fire*. It shows the farthest reaches of the Tyr region, to the north and east of Lake Island and Bitter Well. In Book Two, the heroes will journey to this lonely outpost of civilization.

# Dragon's Crown™

by Richard Baker III, Lisa Smedman, Kirk Botula, and Geoff Pass & Alex Bund



Hail, heroes of Tyr!

Bravely you have served your adopted city since the day of King Kalak's fall. As slaves and rebels you rose from Kalak's slave pits to claim your freedom from his ancient tyranny. Now that freedom is being threatened once again by an insidious new enemy, one who controls the use of psionics throughout the dying world of Athas!



The *Dragon's Crown*™ adventure is the exciting climax of the *Freedom* flip-book module series. In one final journey of epic proportions, the player characters must defend everything they have worked so hard to build. Seven adventures connected by one great plot take the PCs from the volcanic islands of the Sea of Silt to an ancient wonder hidden in the forests of the Dragon Crown Mountains. The grandest and most ambitious adventure of the DARK SUN™ game world, *Dragon's Crown* will provide many hours of exciting play!

*Dragon's Crown* is suitable for 4 to 6 characters of 10th to 13th levels. The previous flip-book modules (*Freedom*, *Road to Urik*, *Arcane Shadows*, and *Astician Gambit*) are helpful, but they are not necessary to enjoy *Dragon's Crown*.

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Official Game Adventure