

# HOLLOW WORLD™

Official D&D®  
Game Adventure

## NIGHTRAGE

by Allen Varney



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Game

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# HOLLOW WORLD™

An Official DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® Game Supplement

## NIGHTRAGE

by Allen Varney

Part Two of the *Blood Brethren* Trilogy

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## INTRODUCTION

In that world beneath, where continents drift lazily across the sky like dandelion seeds—where, like firelight seen through parchment, red sunlight gleams through the dimetrodons' translucent spinal webs—nothing has changed.

Whole civilizations of glory and grandeur, lost for fifty centuries to the outer world, thrive like transplanted orchards. Sages from above would beg to explore their lands and people; yet the citizens eat and sleep, mend rips and herd sheep, breed and die, and know boredom as anyone would; and few things can amaze more than the birth of a calf.

Those who have seen the stars may retreat here, sheltered from the dark. The novelty of this eternal noon diverts the visitor like a stage's trappings. But even here a thoughtful hero may finally comprehend that nothing has changed. Nothing ever changes. Here, human minds grow like bonsai trees, carefully stunted.

Change of scene offers a shifting vantage. But as a tilt of the head shows a jewel's new facets, it also reveals flaws. The novelties of this world may only camouflage an unexamined and fearsome hollow.

## DM NOTES

*Nightrage* is the second module in the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® *Blood Brethren* adventure trilogy in the HOLLOW WORLD™ campaign setting. To use this adventure, you need the D&D® Basic, Expert, and Companion sets and the HOLLOW WORLD boxed set. Gazetteer 13, *The Shadow Elves*, may also prove helpful but not necessary.

This series began in module HWA1, *Nightwail*, and it concludes in HWA3, *Nightstom*. However, within broad limits the three modules can be played in any order. Though part of a series, this adventure can stand independently with some adaptation. If you are playing this module alone, see the lead-in description in the next section, "Adventure Overview."

*Nightrage* works best for a party of four to six player characters (PCs), levels 7-9. Everything that follows is for the Dungeon Master's eyes only. Players should NOT read further.

### Preparing the Adventure

In HWA1, the PCs' quest began in the outer world and led them to the Hollow World. (Though nominally beginning in the D&D Known World, this trilogy adapts easily to any existing campaign setting.) This part of the adventure takes place entirely in the Hollow World; if you play it alone, you can even use PCs native to the Hollow World, according to the guidelines given in the boxed set. In this module, native PCs would most plausibly be Azcans, other nationalities enslaved by the Azcans, or Merry Pirates; they should *not* be Schattentalfen or Nithians.

Because this module ranges across 3,000 miles of the Hollow World and through a complex storyline,

read all of the text before starting play. Also, it helps to familiarize yourself with the following sections from the HOLLOW WORLD boxed set:

- the History section's account of the burrowers, otherwise known in this trilogy as the Great Anne-lids;
- the Atlas entries on the Merry Pirates, the Nithians, and the Schattentalfen;
- two monster descriptions in the Atlas—the flying viper from the Azcan Empire listing, and the manscorpions in the Nithian Empire entry;
- and the entries for Thanatos and Asterius in the Immortals section.

### About the Text

The adventure's plot is described in a sequence of chapters, each keyed to a single setting or idea. The chapters are summarized in the following Adventure Overview. Most of the chapters contain the following entries.

**How They Get There:** Ways the PCs can reach this place, including a list of clues from other chapters that point here.

**The Scene:** General physical description.

**Investigation:** Paths the players can take to gather clues leading them further into the adventure.

**Events:** Occurrences that may happen while the PCs are present. Some are optional, some mandatory.

**Where Next?:** This entry summarizes the clues given in this chapter and the places they lead. Just as important, it summarizes the facts that you *must* convey to the players before the PCs leave this area.

**Staging Hints:** From time to time, the adventure offers notes on how to stage a scene—that is, how to pace it, create an appropriate mood, and produce certain dramatic effects. Use this advice to create a vivid, memorable adventure for the players.

Not every chapter has all of these entries; some chapters contain extra entries not listed here. Characters and events described in a chapter can appear in various orders, and your storyline may well depart from the default sequence this module assumes.

Any text in a box should be read aloud or paraphrased for the players. All other information is for you alone. Reveal it only in response to PC actions.

**THAC0:** In statistic listings, this stands for "To Hit Armor Class 0." Subtract the target's AC from this number to get the roll needed to hit.

**Ability checks:** The adventure sometimes calls for PCs to make an ability check. Roll 1d20 and compare the result to the character's appropriate ability (Strength, Dexterity, etc.). If the roll is equal to or less than the ability score, the action succeeds. If the roll is greater than the ability score, the action fails.

**Update:** In the Timeline given on the inside gatefold of HWA1, *Nightwail*, the reference to "Nommars" should be changed to "Nithia."

## ADVENTURE OVERVIEW ==

As outlined at the beginning of *Nightwail*, this trilogy details an elaborate plot by the Entropy Immortal Thanatos to corrupt the Hollow World and parts of the outer world. He has set in motion several schemes—in the Azcan Empire, the Nithian Empire, and, far overseas, the land of Shahjapur (a new culture introduced in this trilogy; for details, see *Nightstorm*). This module details the Nithian section of Thanatos's plot, the project code-named "Nightrage."

The boxed set outlined a pivotal event in the Hollow World's history, the onslaught of a monstrous race of burrowers (unnamed in the boxed set, but one type is identified here called "Great Annelids"). The Annelids' and other burrowers' devastation throughout the Hollow World led the Immortals to create their Spell of Preservation. The Spell put the Annelids into suspended animation, beyond even the Entropy Immortals' power to revive them. . . . the other Immortals thought.

Yet now Thanatos has revived some of the Annelids. As their master he has installed one of the Blood Brethren, the evil outer-world servants detailed in the first module of this series. (See the "NPCs" section of the appendix for a summary.) This is the evil sorcerer Koresh Teyd.

## KORESH TEYD'S SCHEME ==

Certain Annelids, vigorous again despite the lack of their once-fabled intelligence, have been tunneling through the World-Shield, the anti-magic boundary layer between the outer world and the Hollow World. For reasons detailed in the first module, Thanatos wants to turn the World-Shield into a honeycomb of passages. This is part of his plan to spread the Hollow World's corruption to the outer world, the PCs' homeland.

**Symbionts:** To date, the Annelids have tunneled at random, without guidance. But Koresh Teyd recently arrived in the Hollow World (his entry was detailed in HWA1) and has begun supervising the Annelids' tunneling. He has achieved control of the Annelids with a symbiont, a new organism that survives through an attachment to the Annelids' nervous system. With a symbiont attached, an Annelid obeys Koresh's commands to saturate the World-Shield with tunnels.

What are the symbionts, and where did Koresh get them? This provides the central mystery of this adventure.

**Serpent-mint and Schattalfen:** In lieu of a full explanation at this point, suffice it to say that Koresh requires a vital ingredient for the production of these symbionts: an otherwise innocuous herb called serpent-mint.

This herb grows only in rare spots in the Hollow World, and Koresh must enlist the aid of the Schattalfen, the dark elves, to procure it. Fortunately, the Annelids give Koresh the vital element he needs to enlist the elves' cooperation.

The Annelids' leavings, you see, include pure World-Shield ore. Though he himself has no need for the waste ore, Koresh Teyd can forge it into powerful anti-magical armor. With this armor, the Schattalfen become much more powerful and can plan the conquest of their hated enemies. Therefore, they have great incentives to harvest more serpent-mint to trade to Koresh.

**Elementals:** In order to forge the World-Shield ore, Koresh requires supernatural assistance. He has extorted cooperation from earth and fire elementals of the Elemental Planes, bringing them here to a volcanic vent in the Nithian Empire. There they staff and maintain a foundry. Nightrage foundry, that creates the finished World-Shield armor.

The plight of the unwilling elementals brings the PCs into the adventure. An escaped earth elemental, Gabbro, enlists their aid in locating the foundry and defeating Koresh Teyd.

This initial mission can dovetail neatly with the one given in HWA1, if you are playing all three modules of this trilogy. The assignment also attracts incidental missions, as detailed in the Adventure Summary below. But first, a further plot element vital to this adventure.

## THE DECOYED IMMORTALS

As detailed in HWA1, Thanatos has staged a clever ruse to divert almost all the world's Immortals into the distant past. With a magical "time marker" he has delayed their return for some months. Therefore, for the duration of this adventure, **no clerical spells above 2nd level are available!** The only exception applies to clerics of Thanatos himself, including Simm of the Blood Brethren. (Simm figures in HWA1. Note that Koresh Teyd, villain of this module, is not a cleric.)

Clerics can cast 1st- and 2nd-level spells as usual, since these arise from their own purity of spirit. But higher-level spells are granted by their patron Immortals, and the Immortals won't return until the end of HWA3.

**Asterius:** One Immortal, Asterius, has remained in the present—but Thanatos captured him and has imprisoned him in the land of Shahjapur, using a powerful device called a vampire sheath. Asterius sent out a fraction of his awareness to rescue the PCs in HWA1, for he recognized that as outsiders in the Hollow World they have the best chance of freeing him. In this adventure, he can do no more than send them a few enigmatic dreams.

Optionally, you can decide that Asterius (substituting for the PCs' patron Immortals) grants PC clerics spells higher than 2nd level. However, only PCs gain this advantage; NPC clerics still cannot cast high-level spells. Note that PC clerics have no clue why this should be!

## ADVENTURE SUMMARY ==

The adventure begins near Atacalpa, the ruins described in Chapter 6 of *Nightwail* as the PCs' arrival point in the Hollow World. From there it progresses to a Schattalfen cavern; across the continent to Tarthis, capital of the Nithian Empire; and it probably concludes on the floating continent of Ashmorain. What follows is only one likely course the adventure may take using the settings described.

**Chapter 1, *Setting the Stage:*** The PCs journey to their first stopping place and encounter their first information source, a humble but garrulous shepherd named Dael. Dael tells them the lore of an important (and endangered) Hollow World creature, the feathered serpent. No one can explain its rapid population decline.

**Chapter 2, *About Feathered Serpents:*** Details, both well-known and secret, that the PCs may eventually uncover.

**Chapter 3, *Colima:*** A small port town where the PCs take on a quest to locate the serpents' mysterious breeding grounds. Clues point toward the Nithians, whom no one has ever seen in this region before, and toward the Schattalfen, who have mysterious anti-magical armor that renders them almost invincible.

**Chapter 4, *Bar Cavern:*** A foray into a Schattalfen guerilla camp, and the first brief encounter with Koresh Teyd.

**Chapter 5, *Travelling in Annelids:*** The PCs get to the Nithian Empire via Great Annelid—the hard way—inside the gigantic creature!

**Chapter 6, *Worms and Worse:*** Three thousand miles inland, the PCs again meet Koresh Teyd and his Nithian henchman Kruthep, and they find clues to the World-Shield scheme. The heroes may ride in Koresh's magical Semekhtet-barge, which passes smoothly through solid rock.

**Chapter 7, *The Banks of the Nithia:*** The heroes explore one of the great cities of the Hollow World, and may well meet its Pharaoh, for better or worse. Koresh Teyd has used flattery and deception to befriend Pharaoh, in order to prevent interference in his larger scheme. Clues lead to a secret oasis in the desert, and to a smoking vent in the mountains near the capital city.

**Chapter 8, *Serpent Oasis:*** In the desert of the Nithian Empire lies a fertile oasis. Here the feathered serpents gather and breed. And here the PCs meet and fight a fierce tribe of manscorpions, which are harvesting the serpents' cocoons for mysterious purposes. Do the PCs run afoul of the Spell of Preservation?

Chapter 9, *Nightrage Foundry*: In the heart of a river of lava, the PCs discover how Koresh Teyd makes the anti-magical armor. With the help of elementals, he forges it from ore of the planetary World-Shield, from scavenged ore that the Annelids mine. But how does he enlist the elementals' cooperation?

Chapter 10, *The Trail to Koresh Teyd*: Beneath the Nightrage foundry, the PCs confront Koresh Teyd (they think). Can the heroes free the captive elementals and serpents?

Chapter 11, *Ashmorain*: On this floating continent the heroes discover the most secret lair of the feathered serpents, the hatching chambers; and they meet the amazing Queen Mother of the species—as well as the real Koresh Teyd. Here the PCs may even gain the power to become serpents themselves! With this power, they have the chance to rescue the residents of the oasis before the lava destroys them.

## FOR NEW PLAYERS

If you are playing this module alone, or as the first in the series, read the following section aloud to the players to begin the game. If you are not using the Known World campaign setting, make appropriate substitutions for Glantri (a powerful confederacy) and the Broken Lands (a savage territory on its borders). If you have already played *Nightwail*, skip this section and go to Chapter 1.

Your whole idea of the world has changed—expanded. The solid ground you've walked all your lives has turned out no more solid than a nutshell. The world is hollow.

The quest started routinely enough. The Principalities of Glantri hired you to find a caravan that had gone missing. You were also looking for the caravan's leaders: two goblin princes, Udán and Kano, and a Glantrian minister, a human named Irla Kaze.

The mission grew strange a few days along the trail, when one morning the clerics discovered they had not been granted powerful spells. You had no idea why, nor whether this was specific to your party alone or more widespread. While you were puzzling over this, you followed the caravan's trail to the ruins of Barleycorn Monastery, in the Broken Lands.

The whole place was a wreck. You found that the minister and the goblins had been looking for something beneath the monastery—and they set it free. Whatever it was, it possessed them, shrank the caravan, and fled with it underground.

In a cavern under the monastery you saw the dead remains of a 20-foot-long worm-creature that must have eaten away the tunnel to the monastery. Then you met an escort party of strange folks—elves, apparently, but they were short, with pure white skin and hair.

They called themselves "Schattenalfen," and claimed they were sent here by a dream vision from their patron entity, Atzanteotl, to serve the possessed princes, whom they called the "Blood Brethren." They called the worm-creature a "Great Annelid."

The Brethren had told these Schattenalfen to wait for allies who would be showing up, and the elves mistook you for those allies. You wisely said nothing to contradict that.

Let the players ask questions, get physical descriptions, and so on. For descriptions, see the boxed set's Schattenalfen section and this module's appendix. For other questions, improvise answers according to your campaign; also, the chapters that follow explain much of the mystery.

The Schattenalfen gave you items called "Pendants of Many Tongues," which let you understand their language. Then the elves used a device to summon an earth elemental—they wouldn't say why—and they led you into

the Great Annelid's tunnel. You and they both climbed down about a mile, and then climbed the same distance back up again; so you figured you couldn't be far from where you started.

But you emerged in the Hollow World: a huge spherical cavern in the core of your world, thousands of miles across, with a brilliant red sun floating at its center. You stood on the inside of this sphere, looking out at a horizon that bends upward—at huge islands floating by in the sky—at distant oceans and continents, homes to . . . who knows what? Suddenly you had to go back and rethink everything you knew before.

But when you tried to ask the elves about this place, they looked as confused as you. From their panic, you gathered that the earth elemental had deposited you all somewhere in the Hollow World that the elves hadn't asked for or expected.

**DM Note:** The introduction to this point parallels the opening of HWA1, *Nightwail*. The following conclusion differs from HWA1. The change expedites the action and disposes of loose ends this module does not resolve.

Your Schattenalfen escorts blamed you for the surprise. Even though you claimed innocence, they started to attack. But then the ground rose around their feet! The elves cursed by their patron, Atzanteotl, as pillars of dirt grew to cover them, like giant anthills. The last sounds you heard from them were smothered screams.

A mouth opened in the ground not far from you. The earth elemental spoke, in a voice like wind through deep caverns: "I am Gabbro, a holy one of my folk. We of the soil, and those of the flame, are trapped, by those like the ones I just took. I seek your help.

"I can not take you there—I cannot go near, or I risk the trap that once held me. Please. Go to that place: the pit with rock that flows. The peak that smokes. The pool in the sand. In the rich earth, evil grows. The World-Shield is weak. The worms gnaw. Help us."

For the elemental's game statistics, consult the Monster Summary Table on the reference screen.

**Talking with the elemental:** Gabbro, a native of the Elemental Plane of Earth, knows little of this plane and lacks the vocabulary to tell important facts to the PCs. He is describing matters as well as he can.

"The peak that smokes" lies in the mountains near Tarthis (see Chapter 9). "The pool in the sand" is the feathered serpents' oasis (Chapter 8). "The pit with rock that flows" is the volcanic forge beneath the mountain vent, where Koresh Teyd runs the Nightrage foundry devoted to processing the World-Shield ore. "The worms gnaw," of course, refers to the Great Annelids' tunnels through the world's crust.

Gabbro can answer questions, though his answers offer little help. (For the substance of his answers, consult later chapters, especially Chapter 9.) He concludes with, "You must go far. Cross the water. Talk is hard; I say no more." The mouth in the earth vanishes, leaving the ground unmarked.

The PCs should now follow the trail through the mountains to the port of Colima. Go to Chapter 1.

**Gabbro as guide:** If the PCs are moving in the wrong direction or have trouble getting started, Gabbro can lurk invisibly underground as a guide. To prompt them, he can nudge the bottoms of their boots. If you wish, he can even bring them freshly-killed (but rather dirty) rabbits and ground squirrels, to reduce their hunting time and speed them along. Play Gabbro as an exotic sometime companion; he even offers possibilities as comic relief.

When the PCs reach Colima, Gabbro vanishes. However, the heroes meet him again, and rescue him, later in the adventure.

As this part of the adventure begins, refresh your players on their goals. If they started with the outer-world beginning in HWA1, they seek Prince Udan Axe-Thrower of the goblin tribe of Queen Yazar, as well as the lost caravan he was riding to meet. If the players haven't yet played the Azcan section of HWA1 or the Shahjapur sequence in HWA3, they are also looking for Udan's brother, Prince Kano Arrow's-Whisper, and for Minister Irla Kaze of Glantri's House of Ministers.

If you use the introduction in this module, Gabbro the elemental has asked the PCs to help his people. They must find "the peak that smokes, the pit with rock that flows"—presumably an active volcano. Unfortunately, there are many such volcanos in the Hollow World, and no clue about where to start looking. If you're playing this module alone, the goal of finding the caravan and the princes becomes much less important.

In either case, the PCs' short-term goal should be to find out where they are, get information and transportation, and survive in these unknown lands. The first step leads them toward the town of Colima, 110 miles away over mountainous terrain.

## HOW THEY GET THERE

The PCs enter the Hollow World at the ruins of Atacalpa, described in *Nightwail*. If you don't have that module, situate an entry point of your own in the mountains south of Chitlacan. Alternately, you can bring the PCs into the Hollow World near the Schattenalfen caverns, or even near the Nithian Empire. This leads directly to the later chapters of this module, though the heroes won't see as much of the Hollow World that way.

If the players have already completed HWA1, the flying boat or a surviving gridbug can fly them down from the wreckage of the Smoking Mirror. The various methods of descent are discussed at the end of HWA1. Once they reach this deserted spot, the vehicle breaks, dies, or disappears.

## THE SCENE

### The Trail

From Atacalpa a slender trail winds through the grass and down the rocky mountainside. Though parts of it betray frequent use (by Azcan scouts spying on Colima), other parts cross such difficult slopes that it seems only goats could traverse them.

Nonetheless, PCs who take the trail slowly and sensibly have no trouble—unless you wish to stage optional encounters. If so, use the Mountain and Hill terrain creatures suggested in the Hollow World boxed set's Monsters section.

Ten miles along the way, the PCs hear rushing air beyond a twist in the trail ahead. They turn, and they're looking straight down several hundred feet to a crashing surf. The cliffside trail, only two or three handspans wide, covers half a mile on its gradual incline down to a rocky beach.

Stage the climb down as a perilous adventure; roll a few dice where the players can't see them, then chuckle malefically. But don't let the PCs fall here. Plunging to a watery death in the first chapter is hardly heroic! (Note the floating continent passage at this point, described below under "Sightseeing.")

Once on shore, the heroes must traverse 40 exhausting miles of watery beach. Then the mountain coast gives way to foothills and gentle beaches of white sand, making the remaining 60 miles to Colima much easier. The trail is clear; there's nowhere else to go.

### Scenery

These mountains, a habitat type known as paramo, feature grassy plains, heavy rainfall, and varied wildlife that is markedly different from the jungles of the Azcan plains. Here the PCs see small herds of vicuña and gigantic flocks of gray finches. They even spot a few ducks, which dote on the paramo's puna grass, lupins, and succulents.

Though naturalists among the PCs may delight in the numerous butterflies and the multi-chambered ground burrows of the pick and shovel bird, the wildlife here presents little threat. The spectacled bear, so called because of its white facial markings, roams the foothills, as do a couple of red-winged manicores. These steer clear of any human or demi-human beings.

### Travel Time

Per the Wilderness Travel rules in the Expert Rulebook, reduce the party's movement to half normal in the mountains, cliffs, and on the rocky beaches. As long as the PCs stay on the trail, there is no chance to get lost. On the gentler beaches, movement increases to the normal rate.

Newcomers to the Hollow World cannot mark the passing hours as natives do, by the configurations of the Floating Continents and other, local signs. PCs may inadvertently push themselves too long.

Unless they have timekeeping devices, or the players state precautions such as, "We march until we get tired," give the group a single Wisdom check per "day" marched; use the highest Wisdom score in the group for the check. Success means the PCs become aware they need to stop and sleep.

If the check fails, the PCs—perhaps exhilarated by the novelty of the Hollow World—travel half again the distance they could ordinarily go in one day, but at the price of exhaustion. At the end of that distance, each PC who fails a Constitution check temporarily loses 1 from both his Strength and Constitution scores. The loss can be made up with a full day's rest. These losses are cumulative, though eventually the PCs should get the idea and pace themselves.

### Sightseeing

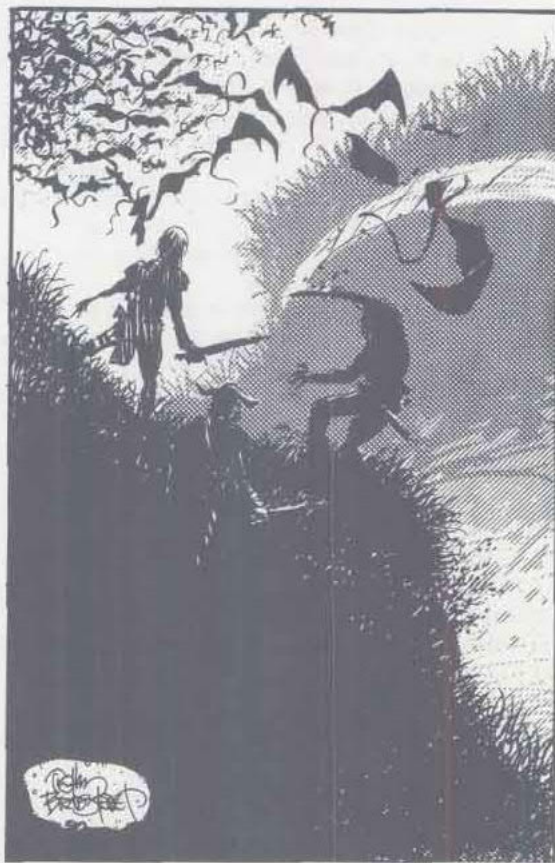
In staging this journey, take the opportunity to introduce new arrivals to the Hollow World's many peculiarities.

- "Let's make camp at sunset, and we'll each take a watch tonight. Oh, wait . . ." The Hollow World's perpetual, red-lit noon makes this a landscape without shadows, bright but darker, seemingly more vivid than life. (Be sure to emphasize the redness of the "sunlight", as it is quite different from the yellow light given off by the sun the players know.) Make it clear that when a PC lays a hand on the ground, the character is touching what an observer on the other side of the Hollow World thinks of as the sky. This seldom fails to impress players.
- On the faces of distant seaside cliffs the PCs see flocks of seagulls flying and feeding. But those seagulls look awfully large. . . no! They're pteranodons! Hundreds of small pterosaurs skim over the water, scooping up tuna, herring, sunfish, pompano, and other salt-water fishes—and the occasional baby seal. Whole colonies of screeching pterosaurs nest on the sheer cliff faces, ruled by a pair of great pteranodons (see the boxed set's Monsters section). These won't attack unless unwise PCs threaten their nests. (Note: Pterosaur guano is a semi-valuable potion ingredient.)
- A dark shape looms overhead. A shadow like night falls across the cliff. Overhead, silent and unapproachable as an eclipse, a teardrop-shaped continent passes by. The ash-black continent is perhaps as big as the Bay of Colima, perhaps as big as the Azcan Empire; its size is hard to gauge.

This is Ashmorain, site of this module's conclusion (see Chapter 11). The PCs should suspect nothing about this now, of course; present this as an "ordinary" floating island, with nothing remarkable to separate it from the dozens of others in the Hollow World's sky.

Flying PCs can try to reach this continent; if they succeed, go to Chapter 11 to describe it. (However, the feathered serpents who live there are too well hidden to be detected now.) Note that the island is at least 100 miles in the air, and it moves much faster than appearance suggests. Reaching it should prove a major, even insuperable challenge for now. But the PCs may reach it on its next orbit.

The continent's path? This depends on where you want the heroes to travel from Ashmorain, at the end of Chapter 11. If you want them to go to the Azcan Empire, the continent is heading roughly north; if they should head for Shajapur, it's heading due west (the Hollow World "west," that is—to the right on the map). For now the direction is immaterial, since the PCs won't visit Ashmorain until the end of the module. But take care to establish a path consistent with its direction in Chapter 11.



## EVENTS

### *Serpents at a Distance*

The PCs cross the hardest stretches of beach and head into the hills. Here a light scrub forest covers the hillside. Gray foxes, burrowing owls, and seven-banded armadillos venture up from the denser forest below.

Once they've marched for a few miles, give the PCs an Intelligence check. From high vantage points along the trail, alert PCs (that is, those who succeed in the check) notice herds of gray sheep in grassy clearings on distant slopes. Nothing unusual about this—but there's no sign of a shepherd or sheepdogs.

The same Intelligence check may also pick out, even at this great distance, high whistles that rise and fall. And then characters may note flying birds—or something—that are keeping the sheep together and herding them downhill. Soon the flock passes out of sight.

The shepherds are trained feathered serpents, owned by a human shepherd named Dael. Dael stands in the valley below, commanding his serpents through a series of whistled orders. The PCs meet Dael and learn about feathered serpents in this chapter's Investigation section.

### *The Viper Cavern*

Not long after the PCs spot the herd, they walk or

climb by a small opening in a slope. The cave entrance, low and partly overgrown with weeds, smells of dirt and dust.

The PCs may investigate, or they may not. They may thrust a torch in, or they might try to creep away silently. Whatever they do, they alert the cavern's residents. Out from the entrance they stream, an explosion of black ribbons, a cloud of bat-winged snakes: flying vipers!

**The attack:** Consult the Azcan Empire entry in the Hollow World boxed set for details of these fearsome creatures. There are, at first, two flying vipers for each PC, and they attack instantly. They hover at a distance and spit venom; if the PCs close with them, this close to their lair, the vipers fight to the death.

This seemingly may mean the heroes' death, for as the PCs kill a viper, two more fly out to take its place. The swarm grows larger and more dangerous by the moment; the PCs, though they may fight heroically, seem doomed.

**Flying vipers** (up to 36): AC 6; HD 2\*\*; hp 8; #AT 1 (bite or spit); Dmg 1d6 or 1d4 (save vs. Poison for half damage); MV 60' (20'), Fl300' (100'); Save F1; ML 12 (usually 10); AL C; THAC0 16 (18 when spitting).

**The rescue:** Let the PCs show off in battle for a while—or let them run like rabbits, with the vipers in close pursuit—and don't let anyone get heavily damaged (except the vipers). But gradually increase the viper total to three or four times the PCs' number. All the PCs are getting worn down, a few hit points at a time, when a high whistling sound drifts up from below.

The whistle has hardly died when, from the trees beneath, a swarm of feathered serpents flies to the rescue! These were the "shepherds" the PCs saw below. Now the winged reptiles, emerald-green and thin as whips, light into the flying vipers.

There are two feathered serpents for each PC. Describe them using the information in the next chapter. The serpents are immune to the vipers' venom, and with their feathered wings they easily outmaneuver the bat-winged vipers. Aiding the PCs, the feathered serpents grab the vipers and constrict them. *Many vipers fall, and the rest retreat back into their cave.*

In the battle PCs may note one especially large (four feet long) feathered serpent. Its forehead is marked with a gold patch of scales, and its wings are brilliant crimson. This distinctive serpent, named Malpolon, leads the rescue, acting in response to continuing whistles from the hills below.

(Protect Malpolon's life as far as possible. The PCs meet this creature again, in far different form and circumstances, in the final chapter of this module.)

**Aftermath:** With the vipers driven off, a new whistled tune rises from below, and the feathered serpents fly back down the hill. Malpolon, the lead serpent, flits back and forth, as though urging the PCs to follow. (Note, though, that these serpents are not intelligent. They're about as smart as trained sheepdogs.)

Assuming the PCs follow, go to "Investigation," below. Otherwise, the PCs can continue along the

trail and reach Colima; in this case, go to Chapter 3.

**The cave:** The vipers' home is an uninteresting limestone chamber, irregular in shape and only 30' across at the widest point. Across the uneven dome, water drips from brown stalactites. About three dozen vipers nest among these stalactites. Investigation produces no clues or treasure.

## INVESTIGATION

Following the serpents, the PCs venture down through the forest and into a valley a mile inland from the bay they saw before. Here the air is warm but dry, and it smells not only of salt water but of the odors that come with livestock. The source of these latter smells, the herd of sheep that the PCs saw earlier, is also the source of the whistles they heard. Those sounds came from the shepherd, Dael.

### Dael

Tall and almost as thin as the shepherd's crook he carries, Dael looks younger than his 24 years. It may be his disarrayed blond hair, or his thin blond beard that makes him look, not bearded, but simply unshaven. But the main cause may be the befuddled look Dael has worn ever since he fell under the curse of his ring.

This shepherd hardly looks the type to own a magical ring. Dael wears a woolen tunic over baggy linen leggings. His brown boots are worn and full of holes, as though he'd been wearing them for ten years without pause. Yet PCs quickly spot the bright gold band on his right ring finger. Its shine, sharply contrasting with the dinginess of Dael's wardrobe, marks it as magical. But nothing marked it as cursed; that's why Dael has fallen into his current trouble.

**The cursed ring:** This is a *ring of truthfulness*, as described in the DM's Companion. Since no 26th-level spellcaster lives nearby, Dael cannot find anyone to dispel its curse. So the ring (which he has named "Idiot's Luck") has forced him to speak the full and unvarnished truth for over two years.

That's why he's a shepherd. When he started speaking the whole truth, the people of Colima hounded him out of town within a week.

If this puzzles a PC, the reason becomes evident soon after Dael starts talking.

### Talking With Dael

The heroes' Pendants of Many Tongues convert Dael's words into their own languages with familiar accents, as though the heroes themselves were speaking it. But Dael's rustic speech and gravelly voice come through even in translation.

Some sample dialogue:

"Oi, welcome, strangers. Always glad to see new folk about these parts. Don't see many this way. You're an odd-looking lot, you are. Mayhap you're off on some adventure, eh? As a boy I often thought of going off on a gallivant like that, but I grew up. And I don't know as I'd want to travel with a strange



and disreputable-looking lot like yourselves. No offense.

"Sorry if I'm offending you. It's my curse, you see. Aye, a scoundrel of a travelling thief sold me this cursed ring. Two years back as the tides change, as we say here." (People in Colima measure the passage of years by tide levels, which the Immortals have adjusted so that they vary regularly through the year.)

"Oi, he was a smooth-tongued rascal. He played on my physical attraction to a barmaid named Mati. Wear this ring, he says, and ask her questions; the ring tells whether she speaks true. I think, What a way to discover Mati's heart! So I pay his fee, ask Mati questions, and soon, all against my will, I'm telling her what I'd really like. Mati slaps my face and orders me out of the tavern. Then, over the next week, I find I can't stop telling the truth like that, and so almost the whole town turns me out to be a shepherd.

"A lazy and unrewarding life, this is, but peaceful. And usually I don't have to talk. Your appearing has put me in two minds: first, gladness at some company, and second, pain at showing off my stupidity."

### *Dael's Exposition*

As long as the PCs can stand it, continue to pepper Dael's speech with lengthy, blunt, mercilessly honest opinions about them and himself. He can also offer information, both about the Hollow World and especially about feathered serpents.

**Dael's dwelling:** Before giving this exposition, however, Dael invites the heroes to share a meal with him at his permanent camp.

Accompanied by his serpents, he leads the PCs a short way to a hillside, one side of which has been eroded away to form a low, bare limestone cliff. At the base of the cliff Dael has constructed a lean-to of loose timber and thatch. In front of it is his small campfire. Here Dael can serve the heroes fresh mutton and a tasteless vegetable soup.

Dael carries no treasure. His culture does not coin money, and since his curse, he has no use for magic of any kind.

Dael has carved figures in the cliff beside the lean-to, stylized designs showing feathered serpents, bears, and other animals native to this area. Though the workmanship is good, most of the figures remain unfinished. "No folks around to help me polish them up," says Dael. (He belongs to the Stonecarver culture that settled Colima; see the beginning of Chapter 3 for its background.)

**Answers to questions:** Dael knows little about the area outside Colima, and (like everyone in the Hollow World) has no notion of the outer world's existence. So Dael may respond with a blank stare to PCs' requests for information about the Hollow World. "It's, you know, the world. Right?"

But he can help with other topics. . . and the PCs know his answers will be truthful. For instance:

"Where are we?": "This is the Aztlan Mountains you're in, and my hometown, Colima, on the Bay of Colima yonder. Those Azcas, they live everywhere

beyond those mountains to the north and east." (PCs new to the Hollow World now discover its reversal of east and west.) "Then there's pirates out on the Atlas Ocean, and south of here you've got a mother-big range of mountains with elves underneath them. That's right, elves, and a scruffy lot they are."

"What do you know about 'the peak that smokes' (earth elementals, the Blood Brethren, et cetera)?": Dael doesn't know anything about any of the PCs' goals. He points them to Colima. "You need to talk to, say, Tolvar or one of those sharp folks. They know more about the world than an ignorant shepherd like me."

"How do we get to Colima?": Dael can give full and accurate directions. He can also tell something of the town's history, as given at the start of Chapter 3.

"What are these serpents?": Dael knows virtually everything knowable about the feathered serpents. "Fine herders, they are. Trained them myself. Serpents are fine animals. Those vipers that attacked you, they drove the serpents out of most of these lands when my grandmother was a girl.

"But here in this area we've got the vipers on the retreat. Serpent-mint grows around here. Serpents eat this stuff, they're ready for fighting anything in the air." From a pouch he draws sprigs of a green-leaf herb that smells faintly of mint. His serpents gather round as he draws it forth, and he lets them nibble on it.

Dael likes talking about the serpents. He can convey much of the general information in the next chapter, perhaps even despite the PCs' wishes. He also knows about the mysteries surrounding their origin (but not the solutions to these mysteries, of course). These, too, are explained in the next chapter.

## WHERE NEXT?

Establish the serpents as friendly but non-sentient creatures, and try to conjure some of the mysteries surrounding them (see Chapter 2). Establish the "serpent-mint" that they love; this becomes important in Chapter 3. If the PCs ignore Dael in this chapter, they can meet an identical NPC in Colima; that, and Chapter 3, are their eventual destinations.

This chapter describes a new creature called the feathered serpent. Player characters don't know this information until they discover it, gradually, during the adventure. This chapter includes secrets that offer surprises for the module's climax. Don't give them away before then!

For the feathered serpent's full game statistics and rules details, consult the "New Monsters" section of the appendix.

## DESCRIPTION

**Appearance:** "A ripple in the air, a wave of sunlight/ Running along a sinuous line of sea-green scales./ A brush of feather-down wingtips on the maiden's cheek./ She is blessed of the serpent." So runs a rough translation of an anonymous Azcan song, dating from before the current era of Azcan Empire cruelty under the Immortal Atzanteotl.

In that earlier time the Azca worshipped another patron, Otzitiotl. His primary avatar was that of the hawk (as seen in *Nightwail*), but another of his forms was the feathered serpent. This accounts for the animal's popularity in Azcan culture, and for its extinction in this region when Otzitiotl gave way to Atzanteotl as the shaper of Azcan culture. (See "Ecology" below.)

As the song indicates, the feathered serpent is a lovely creature, admitted even among the squeamish who consider ordinary snakes abhorrent. Most varieties (there are over a dozen) display brilliant coloration: limpid green scales; feathers of vibrant colors on the two broad wings, on the tail, and in tufts behind the skull; eyes of jewel-like clarity, with hourglass-shaped pupils.

Unlike most snakes, the feathered serpent's eyes face forward, giving stereoscopic vision and an appealing look. Flared nostrils indicate another difference: the sense of smell, centered not in the tongue (as in snakes) but in the skull.

The serpent's long, slender body ranges in size from the length of a forearm to over five feet long, with a wingspan typically twice the body length. Presumably newborn serpents are smaller, but no one sees newly-hatched serpents. This, one of the long-standing mysteries of the serpent's breeding cycle, is discussed below.

**Notable features:** The eagle-like wings, of course, which carry the feathered serpent to phenomenally high altitudes in the Hollow World's dense atmosphere. The body, otherwise limbless, broadens at the wing level to anchor the powerful wing muscles; it narrows again below the wings. The belly is lined with smooth overlapping lines of scales, dragon-like.

Another feature shared with many dragons: A line of sharp spinal ridges offers the serpent protection against attacks from above, though the serpent probably employs the ridges more often in cutting its way through foliage to feed.

**Intelligence:** Feathered serpents, as known in the Hollow World, are about as smart as a large dog. Some humans keep and train them as pets. Unlike true snakes, they hear well. However, the serpents

make no sound themselves except for a dry hiss. They are neutral in alignment.

For the feathered serpent's game statistics, see the appendix.

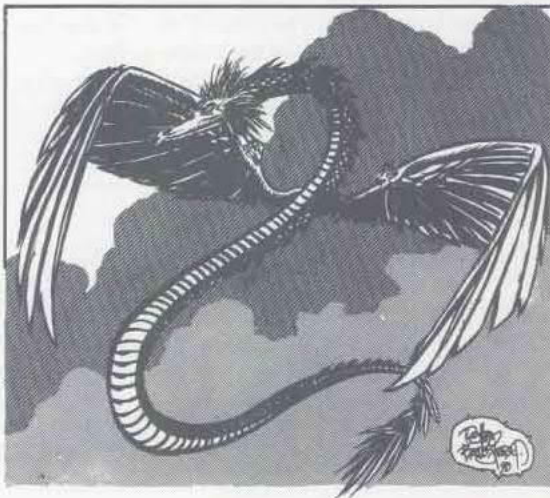
## ECOLOGY

Once found throughout the tropics of the Hollow World and in some temperate regions, the feathered serpent now inhabits a much smaller region. The shrinking habitat is due to competition from the flying viper, which eats the same insects, rodents, and amphibians that make up the serpent's diet. What's worse, the viper breeds in greater numbers, and swarms of them frequently attack individual serpents.

The viper has driven the feathered serpent to extinction throughout the Azcan Empire. Therefore, many scholars believe them altogether gone. However, a small population remains in the Bay of Colima, where serpent-mint grows. Unconfirmed sightings range roughly south-southeast across the World's Spine. Some have been sighted in the dark jungles south of that great range, but the terrain is so hostile that naturalists have not yet determined the rest of the serpents' habitat. (See "Mysteries of the Serpents," below.)

Coliman observers have noted that the feathered serpents there are seeking safety in greater numbers, gathering by dozens or hundreds in large trees. Their perpetual displays of flapping wings and loud hisses, like wind in the tree branches, make impressive spectacles.

**Migration:** There is no regular annual migration of feathered serpents, in the fashion of birds or butterflies. In the eternal light of the Hollow World this makes less sense than in the outer world. Instead, individual serpents embark on a common migration path at different times. They arrive at the Bay of Colima by twos and threes. They leave the same way. Where they come from, and where they go, no one knows. (See "Mysteries," below.)



**Serpent-mint:** This small-leaved green herb, scarce outside the Bay of Colima, draws feathered serpents with a magnetic attraction. The herb appears not to be magical; evidently the serpents find its taste and smell stimulating. Trainers in Colima use it to great effect in instructing newly-acquired pets and work animals. Serpents that dine on the mint also become more aggressive against flying vipers.

Serpent-mint grows wild in small patches in the hills around Colima. This may explain why the area marks one end of the serpents' migratory range. Those who live outside town harvest the mint and trade it for trinkets or provender in Colima. Dael, the shepherd in Chapter 1, has a small bunch ready for trade in the village, perhaps for a meal or two.

Dael may earn far more than that for his serpent-mint. Though he doesn't know it, serpent-mint has suddenly come into high demand in Colima. Mysterious visitors from elsewhere are snapping up the whole supply, and giving valuable trade goods for it. Colimans don't know their motives, but that doesn't stop harvesters from pulling up every serpent-mint plant they can find.

The visitors are Schattenalfen who work for Koresh Teyd. But Koresh has *polymorphed* them to look like Nithians, for reasons that remain mysterious until Chapter 6. Koresh seeks serpent-mint to help him lure and control the feathered serpents far away in the Nithian Empire. Why does he want them? That mystery, too, is explained below.

## MYSTERIES OF THE SERPENTS

Aside from their beauty and usefulness, serpents also arouse interest due to the enigmas of their life cycle. The oldest residents of Colima speculate about it over many an argument in the village square, and the youngest learn about it in folk-tales at their parents' knees.

The mystery is, Where do the serpents come from? Full-grown serpents arrive in Colima by twos and threes in their ongoing, irregular migration. They leave the same way, flying away south over the mountains, seemingly without seasonal cues.

No one knows exactly where they go. No one has ever seen young serpents or noticeably old ones. No one has ever seen them breed or reproduce, despite repeated (and sometimes comical) attempts.

## THE SECRETS

Everything in this chapter up to this point is known somewhere in the Hollow World and, theoretically, available to the PCs. To make running this adventure easier, this section reveals the solutions to the mysteries above; this information is not known anywhere in the Hollow World.

*The heroes should not learn these surprises until late in the adventure*, in the Nithian Empire or on the floating continent of Ashmorain. They may never

learn some of this information at all!

**The serpents' early life cycle:** These creatures are animals—at least so long as the intelligent races know them. But the serpents develop true intelligence in a second stage of their lives, unknown to the Hollow World's civilizations.

The serpents are born with only animal intelligence. After breeding at their hidden breeding ground (see below), each serpent withdraws into a weird cocoon something like an insect cocoon. There, during a long gestation, the serpent magically develops true sentience and gains inborn knowledge, the racial legacy of its species.

When it emerges from its cocoon, the serpent is a sentient being of human-level intelligence. It quickly leaves its breeding ground, so humans and humanoids remain unaware of this phase of its life cycle.

**The serpents' breeding ground:** All feathered serpents in the Hollow World breed and form their cocoons at one common mating ground.

Until recently this was the inaccessible floating continent of Ashmorain (seen briefly in the last chapter). In the last several years the serpents (which are unintelligent during this phase of their lives) accidentally got diverted to an oasis at the edge of the Nithian Empire. This has allowed Koresh Teyd and his underlings to exploit the serpents.

**The enemy's use for them:** Koresh Teyd, following the instructions of Thanatos, has devised an unnatural use for the feathered serpents involving dark shapeshifting magic. He harvests the serpents's cocoons at the Nithian breeding ground. Thus their declining numbers in recent years, and thus the Nithians' desire for serpent-mint to pacify the serpents.

Using fearsome magic, Koresh transforms the helpless creatures into something new: the misshapen symbionts that guide Thanatos's burrowing monsters, the Great Annelids. PCs may have seen a small symbiont briefly in the first module of this trilogy. The spiky creature bears no resemblance to its original form, so PCs only learn of the process in Chapters 10 and 11.

**The serpents' later life cycle:** In times past, a newly-emerged serpents would remain at the breeding ground of Ashmorain, supervising the hatching of the serpent young there. Later, at the serpent oasis before Koresh Teyd began his harvest of the serpent cocoons, a serpent fresh from its cocoon would realize its mistake, then fly upward to Ashmorain to join its comrades.

The intelligent serpents on Ashmorain have developed something of a civilization, though most humans would not recognize it as such. They cater to their great progenitor, the Queen Mother. She supervises the hatching of the serpents' eggs in an underground chamber far beneath the island's surface. The PCs meet her at the end of the adventure.

Some unusually powerful serpents also seem to depart Ashmorain, and even the Hollow World, for some other destination. But that is a mystery that even this chapter does not explain. PCs may solve it in roundabout fashion in a far-distant location, at the conclusion of HWA3, *Nightstorm*.

## HOW THEY GET THERE

This port town was born in a storm. Every decade or so a titanic hurricane reshapes the coastline along the Gulf of Aztlan. Sixty years ago, one such storm struck a shipload of migrants.

**The founders:** The travellers were refugees from the Stonecarver culture, a small and primitive group in the southern Gulf near Coresco. Transplanted by an unknown Immortal from the outer world to the Hollow World in the distant past and soon forgotten, these people alternated periods of nomadic wandering with more sedentary habits. Once every few generations they built and occupied a whole village, living there just long enough to carve one or more awesome stone monoliths, tributes to their unnamed patron entity.

In the Stonecarver village near Coresco a chieftain of notable ruthlessness seized power. His tyranny drove many of the village's finest artisans to flee, with their families, in a leaky longboat. They headed north, and then that decade's hurricane rose with the suddenness of a curse.

To call the refugees' survival miraculous would be trite but accurate. What saved them was the sheltered arrowhead-shaped Bay of Colima, named by the Merry Pirates for its ancient discoverer. Though seemingly an ideal harbor, the territory had never attracted pirate settlers because it was Azcan territory; and the Azca had never settled it due to the forbidding mountains that surrounded it.

Stranded in the bay, their ship destroyed, the travellers (ignorant of the Azcan threat) founded a small village. Pirate traders, happy to trade food-stuffs for the villagers' fine carvings, inevitably named the village Colima. The founders' sons and daughters, born to their new life, now embrace it with the Spell of Preservation's inbuilt devotion.

Meanwhile, the tyrannical Stonecarver ruler finally died. Leaving one more in its endless eries of giant monuments, the Stonecarver tribe moved on. Its current whereabouts are unknown.

**Diplomacy:** In the intervening decades Colima has attracted more settlers, for good or ill. At first the Azcan Empire simply wasn't aware of the village. After discovering it, the Azca made a few attacks, but the villagers' terrain advantage and unexpectedly strong defense made conquest more trouble than it was worth.

Attacks from the sea fared better. Frequent sackings by the Merry Pirates have kept Colima poor—a blessing in disguise, for the Azca feel less threatened so long as the village struggles to survive. Meanwhile, the Spell of Preservation has kept pirate raids from destroying the village. So, despite the raids and the fear of conquest, Colima's citizens carry on their holy work. The carving continues.

**DM's Note:** The area of Colima represented on the map, and where the PCs are headed, is the tiny coastal village originally settled by the stranded travellers. Farther inland is the main town, also called Colima.

Colima lies about 110 miles from the ruins of Atacalpa. The travel route was described in Chapter 1. Dael the shepherd can guide them from the hills to a gravel path leading downhill. This takes them, after two or three miles' walk, to the village.

Dael gladly accompanies the PCs, assuming they can put up with his cheerily ruthless opinions. "Aye, I need to head into the village, to trade off this here serpent-nip. Hope to get some salt for it from Mikalman, the cross-eyed storekeeper. Nice man, a kind one at heart. I like him. Greedy enough to pawn his own grandfather's bedclothes, though."

## THE SCENE

As the heroes approach Colima, read this aloud:

As you head down a path by a cliff, the breeze from the bay is fresh and cool. You can see the surf crashing against the beach below you. Then you round an outcropping of rock, and you see the village of Colima.

This is a small port right on the inmost edge of the bay. About two dozen low wooden buildings trail inland between two towering cliffs.

The near cliff is a sheer precipice, separated from the water by a wide gravel beach. But the farther cliff. . . it makes you stop in your tracks and stare.

The rock of the far cliff is being carved into an enormous statue. It hardly looks more than half-way finished—you can see the outlines, but only the lower half shows any detail. It's a figure of a giant man lying curled against the cliff, as though he's sleeping. The workmanship looks primitive.

The head hasn't even been roughed out. As you watch, you see half a dozen small, very small figures of human sculptors walking back and forth across the chest, measuring it by pacing it out. It looks like they've been working on this monument for generations, and it could easily take them generations more to finish it.

If Dael is along, he can explain the half-finished monument. "That's from an old Stonecarver legend," he says. "The Old Mountain Giant. In the stories we tell little ones, he follows good folk around and punishes those who harm them.

"When we finish this figure you see, we'll pick up and move on to another place. The legend is that then the mountain will wake up and fight those who'd follow us. Nice story. No one believes a word of it, of course."

**Staging note:** The statue is not magical; the legend is not true. The half-completed giant appears here to provide local color during this chapter. An occasional mention of its looming, faceless presence can enhance the eerie nature of some of the encounters in Colima.

## EVENTS

Colima appears on the large color map included with this module. Now read the key printed on the map. When you are done, return here.

### *The Guard on the Beach*

The trail to Colima from the PCs' direction needs no wall or other barrier. A single guard lazes on the beach, his spear lying on the gravel. He sees the PCs and starts up. If Dael is along, the guard relaxes again.

The guard, a 1st-level fighter named Clerias (5 hp, AL L), was a fisherman, until the last pirate raid sank his sail boat. Now, while he waits for another boat, he serves as perfunctory lookout for an Azcan beach-head. "But not likely we'll see one now," says the talkative Clerias. "What with the pirate raids, we're brought about as low as we can go and still survive. That means the higher-ups will step in and protect us."

This may be the first that newly-arrived PCs hear of the Hollow World's Spell of Preservation. Colimans have discovered that when their fortunes are at lowest ebb and the village is in danger of extinction, the sky swallows up their enemies. . . until Colima can rebuild far enough to survive another sacking.

"A dog's life, I say," says Clerias, and Dael truthfully agrees. "Work your nets, or hoe your fields, or carve stone, just to feed a bunch of rabble pirates. And then your patron entities, the ones who're supposed to look out for you, right? —They just let you fall long enough to get really miserable, and then, when you're right at the fingernail's-edge and ready to throw it all in, then they protect you. Not before, oh, no.

"A dog's life, did I say? Nay, I would not treat a dog so badly, letting him get good and starved before I take him in, no." His tirade over, Clerias shrugs and lets the PCs pass.

The heroes may find many others in Colima, and in beleaguered villages throughout the Hollow World, who show such bitterness at their perpetual oppression. The negative side of the Spell of Preservation reappears throughout this adventure. The heroes will be unable to do anything about it until HWA3.

### *Supply (None) and Demand (High)*

Colima does look pretty run down. The Merry Pirates hit here about two weeks ago. The wood and thatch buildings nearest the coastline were burned to the ground; villagers are rebuilding slowly. Half the docks and their attendant lines of small boats are smashed. Only the Spell of Preservation kept other piers and boats intact.

The Spell likewise protected Mikalman's Supplies, the village's tiny general store. Though unmarked, Mikalman's place stands out among village structures because of its large size, lapstraked wooden walls, and sturdy shingled roof. And as the PCs arrive, the

crowd in front of the store also sets it apart.

**The crowd:** As PCs may discover by talking to the crowd, or eavesdropping on their conversations, these 20 angry villagers are demanding fresh supplies of serpent-mint. Shepherds need it to keep and train the feathered serpents who tend their flocks. Farmers need it because they use trained serpents to chase gulls and finches away from their crops. (Farmers can't cultivate the serpent-mint because of its fragility; it's only found wild.)

The problem at Mikalman's is that serpent-mint has grown scarce and extremely expensive. Whereas farmers once traded a handful of feed corn for a sprig of serpent-mint, later they had to pay double handfuls of sugar or salt—a ruinous price! And now the mint is never on sale to them at any price; Mikalman is hoarding it for "foreign" buyers. The people of Colima are angry at Mikalman's greed.

What's more, the feathered serpents are gradually disappearing from Colima. Their numbers are dwindling, and villagers are sure it's because of the dwindling supply of serpent-mint. (This is partly true. The PCs won't discover the more important reasons until they find the serpent breeding ground in Chapter 8.) The reduction in feathered serpents threatens the farmers' crops and the shepherds' flocks.

**Mikalman:** After you have established these views, Mikalman emerges from his supply shop (or the PCs can enter to find him, with the angry farmers right behind).

Mikalman the shopkeeper is short and cask-shaped (like the casks of beer he sells), with a knob nose and a fringe of brown hair around the rim of his otherwise bare, patchy-red pate. He wears a gray woolen overshirt and black wool breeches. A tattoo of a fish skeleton graces the back of his hand—a common good-luck charm in Colima.

"You've got me wrong!" he tells the PCs and the angry farmers in a deep voice. "I'm only selling for what the traffic bears. Had a large supply laid in, I did, until those visitors down the docks stepped in. Traded nicely for it too, which is more than you lot have done!"

And so, of course, the villagers attack him.

### *Mob Attack*

If the PCs do nothing to interfere, the 24 villagers set upon Mikalman, beat him mercilessly, then invade his store, overturn furnishings, and steal his serpent-mint and everything else they can carry. The looters run off in all directions. Mikal, badly wounded, crawls into his ruined shop to recover. The PCs cannot learn anything useful from anyone involved.

Encourage the PCs to prevent this brutal riot. Any likely action they take—reasoning with the crowd, intimidating them, or protecting the store and Mikalman—should work easily.

**Coliman villagers** (24): AC 9; HD 1; hp 4-6; #AT 1; Dmg 1 hp; MV 120' (40'); Save 0-level normal; ML 5; AL N; THAC0 20. The villagers have 50 cp among them.

If the PCs draw their weapons and attack to kill,

an alignment change to Chaotic is in order. These are unarmed villagers, desperate and frustrated but not truly evil. Scenes of individual townspeople fleeing in panic, weeping for their orphaned children, or groveling for their lives may convince the players that this slaughter is unjustified.

Assuming the PCs quell the riot in heroic fashion, Mikalman thanks them and offers them his hospitality, which is lavish by Coliman standards. He can give them the information listed under "Investigation," below. He also pleads with the heroes to find out what happened to the feathered serpents.

## Getting the Mission

"You look the likely sort to travel and discover, and all that," Mikalman says. "Business can only get worse if we don't find what's going on with those serpents. Where they're going, where they breed, why these strangers like serpent-mint. All that."

"Now, if you're up to the challenge, I'm disposed to make it worth your while. I can pay ten—no, I am feeling expansive—twelve silver pieces. What do you say?"

The PCs are probably unimpressed by Mikalman's generosity; the poverty of the Coliman economy offers little monetary reward. But the offer may still intrigue them, especially when the strangers arrive to buy Mikalman's serpent-mint. See "The Visitors," below.

## INVESTIGATION

### Talking to Mikalman

The garrulous shopkeeper has no information on smoking peaks, except that there are supposed to be volcanoes on the World Spine to the south, across the Gulf of Aztlan. "There was a name I heard—what was it? Nomarys. Elvish place, I think." This is a red-herring clue.

Mikalman knows nothing about the Blood Brethren or earth elementals; he's not even aware of their existence. But if you are also playing HWA3, he has some surprising information regarding Minister Irila Kaze.

"Yes, if I recall rightly, we had someone of that name through here not long ago, asking for a kind of liquor. Couldn't help her. Don't know what became of her—ask around." (Kaze was looking for her favorite liqueur, Treesblood. For further clues and ways to follow her overseas to Shahjapur, see HWA3.)

"Those visitors": Mikalman can tell what he knows about the foreign serpent-mint buyers. The four armored figures have visited his store twice before, trading "ransom enough for fifty shepherds" to get every last leaf of Mikalman's serpent-mint.

The townspeople had no particular objections at first. But now their own shortage of mint grows acute. So they laid down the law to Mikalman: Should he sell his latest supply to the visitors, the situation could turn ugly.

"Don't know where these folks come from," says Mikalman. "They walk, I know that, not fly or any

fool thing like that. We've traced them as far as those old temple ruins about a sleep south of the village, but then we lose them. They go down in those caves, mark me.

"I wouldn't shriek to learn that they are using some kind of magic, anyhow. That armor they wear, now—foosh! Strong as a steel chisel, yet light as a feather to watch them move in it. Wish I could get a few suits of that to sell here. Ohh, who do I fool? Nobody here could afford to trade for such as that. Poor folk, we are."

"When are they due? Any time now, I'd think. Wait! I hear the call now!"

## THE VISITORS

### "Traders In Port!"

The cry, Colima's traditional announcement of a merchant's arrival, goes up from the waterfront. Yet the traders in question have not arrived from the sea, but from the southern shore. They come in on foot, as the PCs did: four short, slender figures in strange plate armor.

The armor attracts attention at once. Full plate, yet evidently light as chain—embossed with odd designs of birds, lotus stalks, and sun symbols—and all the suits are precisely the same size and build. They carry short swords and daggers. One hauls a heavy burlap sack.

The armored figures arrive with helmet visors up, showing dusky, clean-shaven men with black eyes and narrow, handsome features—Nithian features, though no one in Colima knows that (including the PCs). Two of the men wear purple scarves tied around their right arms. These clearly command the other two.

### Physical Description

The foreigners move with grace, despite their full armor. Their gestures are economical and delicate. They prefer the darkest parts of any room they are in, and they spend little time in the open.

One curious point: All the visitors look very much alike, with exactly the same height and build—each is about 5'6", slim and wiry.

**Language:** Even with the Pendants of Many Tongues translating the visitors' speech, the PCs instantly mark how the visitors speak with an elvish accent. And among themselves, these human foreigners speak the Schattentalen tongue.

(Since everything they hear is automatically translated, PCs must ask a Coliman to identify the tongue. If they don't think to ask, a Coliman friend would certainly remark on the visitors' unusual language.)

**The armor:** Each suit is dark gray, thin, and embossed with glyphs of unusual design—Nithian hieroglyphs for "immunity" and "suspension," though the heroes cannot know this.

The armor covers the body completely, down to gauntlets of fine workmanship and full helm with visor. From the way the visitors move, it appears to

be as light as chainmail. Slightly cool to the touch, it is obviously metallic, yet it does not ring when struck. And it does not detect as magical.

The armor is made of World-Shield ore, which has many unusual properties. For a complete description, see "New Magic" in the appendix. If the PCs attack anyone wearing the armor, go to "Battling the Visitors," below.

### The Visitors' Secret

These Nithian-looking foreigners are *polymorphed* Schattentalfen.

They regard their new appearance with deep personal disgust. Being forced to look like humans—phaugh! Schattentalfen would ordinarily spit at the idea. They never discuss the reasons for their transformation, even on pain of death. However, players who learn the visitors' secret may deduce that the elves' anti-magical armor provides the motive.

Only later in the adventure can the heroes verify their suspicions and discover the visitors' secret: Koresh Teyd is able to mold only one size of armor. So he *polymorphs* the Schattentalfen who trade for it into the shape of Nithians. The PCs won't meet real Nithians or Koresh Teyd until Chapter 6.

Here are background details on the four visitors who encounter the PCs.

### Argaluin Money-grower

The leader of these shapeshifted elves is that rarest and most disdained of elves, a moneylender. The Schattentalfen need coinage to hire mercenaries, and it expedites their trade relations with the Traldar. Even so, their culture regards the moneylender—the "grower of money," in their term—as even lower on the status scale than a grower of fungus.

This societal contempt didn't keep the Schattentalf king, Khilondor, from borrowing heavily of Argaluin to purchase Malpheggi lizard mercenaries in a war against the Oltecs. The war was a disastrous failure. Rather than pay back the embarrassing war debts to Argaluin, King Khilondor instead dispatched Argaluin to the remotest part of his kingdom. This "promotion" brought Argaluin, now almost penniless, to the caverns below Colima.

Here Argaluin abandoned his trade for some decades, instead helping in the guerilla war against the Azca. But recently, a dream vision from the Immortal Atzanteotl (actually Thanatos in disguise) told Argaluin that a visitor from elsewhere, Koresh Teyd, would soon need great quantities of serpent-mint. He would pay premium prices to one who could procure it.

Inspired with new hope that he might recoup his fortune, Argaluin has begun a profitable serpent-mint trade. Koresh Teyd pays him so much for the herb that Argaluin can afford to buy off the hostile peasants in Colima. The PCs see this bribery in action, below.

**Argaluin:** 1st-level elf; AC -4; hp 6; #AT 1 (dagger); Dmg 1d4; MV 120' (40'); Save F1; ML 9; AL C; THAC0 19.

### Kemenoth, Sun-bracer

Argaluin's right-hand man, or "first echo" in Schattentalfen slang, is this blase, tired-looking elf. Once a courageous guerilla fighter in the service of the Elf-King, Kemenoth earned his nickname by his many forays into open sunlight. (He braced himself to face the sun, you see.)

But just before an important assault on the Azcan village of Taxutlan, a soldier in Kemenoth's squad betrayed his fellow Schattentalfen. The soldier sold information to the Azca, then deserted under fire. Kemenoth was the only survivor.

After he hunted down the traitor and slew him, Kemenoth lost heart for further battle and became a merchant's aide. He has since come to believe that every person, even a Schattentalf, has his or her price. So, as Argaluin offers bribes charmingly, Kemenoth doles out the actual fee with cynical composure: "How much are you worth then? Twenty gold? Right, I figured about that much. Here you are. Thanks for your time."

**Kemenoth:** 4th-level elf; AC -4; hp 14; #AT 1 (short sword); Dmg 1d6; MV 120' (40'); Save F4; ML 6; AL C; THAC0 17. Carries a *potion of delusion* (see the Expert Rules) which he believes to be a *potion of invulnerability*.

### Maiglos and Thalion

These are spear-carriers for the two leaders. Typical male Schattentalfen (aside from the *polymorph* effect), they're prone to steal glances at the sun and to sneer sullenly at humans, at green plants, and at most everything on the surface. They snub PCs and Colimans alike.

**Maiglos, Thalion:** 2nd-level elves; AC -4; hp 7; #AT 1 (short sword); Dmg 1d6; MV 120' (40'); Save F2; ML 6; AL C; THAC0 19.

### Appeasing the Natives

The armored visitors arrive amid hostile reactions from the Colimans. But there on the beach below the village, the visitors quickly neutralize the ill will. To any farmers that approach with apparent hostility (that is, all of them), the visitors extend open hands of friendship.

Argaluin, a shrewd judge of character (even humans), has foreseen the problem with the villagers. "Great people," he says in a cloying voice, "please allow us to do proper honor to our hosts. Take these small tokens of our appreciation for your hospitality." He signals to Maiglos to dump open the burlap sack on the beach.

The PCs, observing this, may attack to pre-empt a suspected trick. The armored visitors are AC -4; any missed roll means the attack skips right off the armor, and magical attacks simply suspend their energies on the armor's surface. (See "Battling the Visitors," below.) The armored figures should be essentially immune for this scene.



There is no trick, in fact. The bag is loaded with trinkets like ceramics, fine textiles, and delicacies like *trania* (see the Schattentalen Atlas entry in the boxed set). At your discretion, some of these trade goods may be trivial magical items such as rings or potions. They should not be combat-related.

All the items together are worth perhaps 25 gp, a royal sum in Colima. But it's a pittance to Argaluin, who stands to gain magical armor from Koresh Teyd worth a hundred times that amount. He's no miser. He knows he can afford some small generosity to forestall trouble.

The two underlings, Maiglos and Thalion, wear tight, transparently false smiles as they hand out Argaluin's largesse to the Coliman natives. The peasants gasp at this wealth. Like hungry rats they sweep in, pick up a trinket or two, and rush home to examine their prizes. A few linger out of curiosity, but their former hostility is noticeably muted.

### Bargaining

Assuming the PCs don't interfere, the four mysterious visitors quickly head into Mikalman's store. If the PCs stop them, the visitors call politely to Mikalman, who brings his serpent-mint down to them.

"Welcome, gentlemen, I've been expecting you," the storekeeper says, while the crowd of peasants taunts him and grumbles. The grumbles grow louder as Mikalman brings out his hidden supply of serpent-mint. The greedy storekeeper has hoarded perhaps three pounds of the herb, a huge quantity, hidden in

the false bottom of a walnut bin.

With the most courteous demeanour, the visitors buy all the mint at premium prices—that is, by offering premium goods of Schattentalen make, the kind used in the previous scene to bribe the peasants.

Mikalman greedily raises his demands above those of previous transactions. He drives a hard bargain, but nothing in his haggling ever shakes Argaluin's composure. (Unknown to Mikalman, Argaluin sells the serpent-mint to Koresh Teyd for ten times his buying price.)

After the transaction, Argaluin expresses interest in the PCs. Nothing sinister—but his tone of friendliness rings hollow. "What excellent new bodyguards you've recruited, Mikalman. Perhaps they are visitors like ourselves? Tell me your stories, brave heroes."

### Talking to the PCs

Should the PCs ask questions, the visitors' leader, Argaluin, does all the talking. He's all smiles, and he acts really, really sincere. But everything he says is as much of a lie as necessary to stall the PCs' curiosity.

In fact, Argaluin doesn't know much about anything the PCs are interested in. He fabricates his lies based on a poor understanding of the actual situation, as indicated by the following smooth answers to likely questions. (Remember that spells to read minds or detect truth don't work in the Hollow World.)

**Who are you?:** "We are humble merchants from the distant land of Nithia, beyond the World's Spine. We were sent here to your beautiful land by the great ruler of our kingdom, Ramose III." (Argaluin is one ruler behind in his information. The current Pharaoh of the Nithian Empire is Ramose IV.)

**Why do you want serpent-mint? What do you do with it?:** "To be absolutely honest, I haven't the faintest idea. In my rare moments of leisure I suspect that King Ramose wants it because it helps him fight the Azca." (Argaluin presumes that anybody in Colima must hate the Azca, and so this line should go over well, regardless of its geographical unlikelihood.)

**Why are you speaking the elvish tongue?:** "I and my fellow merchants were raised by a Nithian enclave of the noble Schattentalen, whom you would call the 'elves of the shadows,' perhaps." (This preposterous story explains Argaluin's intimate knowledge of the Schattentalen.)

**What's this strange armor?:** "Why, everyone in Nithia wears this armor. It's made from ore mined from the great pyramids that stand everywhere in our land." (Argaluin hopes this lie will be accepted just because it's so weird.)

**Where is the serpent breeding ground/the "peak that smokes"/et cetera?:** Argaluin doesn't know and doesn't care. He may give the PCs some slapdash answer, citing a fictitious authority, if he thinks it will help win their confidence.



## Recruiting or Departing?

Argaluin has no idea of the PCs' background or mission to find the feathered serpent breeding ground. To him, they're probably just travellers of unusual competence. Thus, unless they have actively alienated him, Argaluin tries to hire the PCs.

"Here's the best offer you'll ever get: all the food you can eat plus a gold piece per sleep. A princely sum! I can ill afford such generosity, but I like you fellows. What say?"

PCs can accept this miserly offer, or haggle upward to 5 gp per sleep. If they accept Argaluin's terms, perhaps in order to infiltrate his operation, he refuses advance payment but says, "I can start you to work at the camp." The heroes won't find out what he means by "the camp" until the next chapter.

If the PCs refuse his offer, Argaluin bears no ill will. He tries to leave gracefully, heading south into the hills, serpent-mint in tow. If the PCs prevent this, he turns brusque, rude, threatening, and violent by turns. If there's a fight, go to the following subsection.

## Battling the Visitors

The armored visitors may act suspiciously. Or the PCs may just want to blow them away on general principles and loot the bodies of that neat armor. Either way, the battle is joined—and the PCs quickly discover their opponents have greater abilities than meet the eye.

The World-Shield armor is virtually impenetrable, as noted above (AC -4). But its true power becomes clear when any magical attack hits the wearer. The spell's energy collects harmlessly on the armor's surface, in a bright, writhing film of magical force. Thereafter, when the wearer touches someone else, the spell that was meant for the wearer instead is inflicted on the victim touched!

This obviously can produce an eerie scene in the midst of battle. A PC spellcaster calls forth a fireball—it explodes in the midst of the armored visitors—the flame cloud dissipates. And the four visitors stride forward through the smoke, unharmed, with sheets of fire blazing on their armor! One touches a PC, and the victim burns!

For detailed rules about the World-Shield armor, refer to "New Magic" in this module's appendix.

**The visitors' tactics:** The Schattentalfen fight reluctantly for the serpent-mint until it's destroyed or one of their number falls. Survivors fight viciously to protect their fallen comrade, or more specifically the fallen comrade's armor.

If two fall, the remaining two flee, if possible. They may seize a Coliman hostage to guarantee safe passage. If the PCs won't guarantee safe passage, the Schattentalfen first wound, then finally kill the hostage. An alignment change for the PCs may be in order, for letting villains kill hostages is not Lawful behavior.

**The visitors in death:** Don't forget that, should any of the visitors die in combat, they seem to shrink down inside their own armor—because they're trans-

forming from Nithian humans into Schattentalfen. This, too, should lend an eerie edge to the battle.

Heroes who know the ways of magic can identify the *polymorph* effect. However, they may be aware that this spell is supposedly unknown in the Hollow World. The surviving visitors admit that they are in reality Schattentalfen; but they flatly refuse to divulge the cause of their transformation.

**Victory and defeat:** If the PCs defeat all the Schattentalfen, they can remove the armor in the usual fashion. PCs between 5'4" and 5'8" in height, and weighing 135-165 pounds, can wear the World-Shield armor. Others don't fit. The armor is utterly invulnerable to any kind of reshaping.

Argaluin accepts surrender at any point. If the PCs lose or surrender, he binds survivors and leads them south at swordpoint. He takes his "prisoners of war" to the guerilla camp in the next chapter. The heroes can probably escape along the route, then turn the tables on their former captors. Argaluin pleads for his life, offering "a sizable ransom" at his base camp. This is a lie, but it leads the PCs onward to Chapter 4.

## WHERE NEXT?

As employees, prisoners, or captors of the Schattentalfen, the PCs accompany the merchants back to the guerilla encampment described in the next chapter.

If the PCs kill or drive off the merchants without following them, a search party of warrior-elf guerillas crosses the heroes' path within a day or two, searching for their absent comrades. The encounter with this party of elves plays out in the same fashion as the merchants, but this time the PCs should realize that a lot of elves are living in the hills south of Colima. Try to pique their curiosity and make them trace the guerillas' trail back to the camp.

The PCs may want to hire Colimans as native guides for an expedition. These guides are easily available and cheaply bought. Dael the shepherd would gladly go, even for free, if the PCs show they can stand his company.



In the early time when the Immortals created the Hollow World, the Immortal Ordana brought forth the jungles and forests that drape the continents in green. But the endless daylight of this world offered no sanctuary for the creatures and plants of the night—the tigers, owls, crickets, moon cactus, night-hawks, nightingales, mushrooms, and many more.

Ordana and the other Immortals altered many of these to let them function in perpetual daylight. But in some cases the animals' nocturnal habits could not be corrected by a simple change of instinct.

The bats, for example, could be made to fly in the daytime, but sunlight burns their wing membranes. Given this problem, Ordana debated whether to dispense with the bats. She decided not to, for they ate huge numbers of insects that would otherwise infest her beloved forests.

So Ordana granted the bats of the Hollow World an innate spell-like ability to create *continual darkness* around themselves in flight (as per the spell descriptions in the Expert Rules). With the ability to see through their own darkness, the bats could fly at will throughout their territories—and the darkness let them catch insects even more effectively.

There are upwards of a thousand species of bat in the Hollow World. One type roosts in a huge cavern south of Colima. A company of Schattentalen warriors, engaged in guerilla warfare against the Azcan Empire, has taken this cavern as its base.

Because of the presence of the bats, the Azca have not yet located these dark elves. The Azca may believe that only lunatics would reside in a batcave. Whether or not the Azca are right, the PCs may decide for themselves as they explore the cave in this chapter.

## HOW THEY GET THERE

Whether as the heroes' employers, hostages, or dupes, Argaluin and his Nithian-looking underlings lead the PCs to the bat cavern. Or the PCs are following clues from the bodies of the slain elves, or a search party investigating Argaluin's disappearance (see the end of the last chapter).

The journey leads the heroes some 50 miles along a rugged trail through rough-edged grass into the mountains south-southeast of Colima (that's "southeast" in the reversed Hollow World scheme, remember). This trip probably lasts at least one sleep, so the PCs may experience another dream-sending from Asterius, described below.

### The Dream-Sending

You dream you're flying through darkness. The air is full of squeaks and the flutter of bat wings. Suddenly you collide with something large and hard. You can't see it, but in the dream you know it's a stalactite. You're in a cave.

You fall downward in the dark, and the stalactite above you is growing down after you. It's making deep cracking sounds as it grows rocky

tentacles. They grab you, and you feel tiny balls of fur along each tentacle. Bats! It's covered with small bats roosting on the stalactite.

The rock hand carries you down to the bottom of the cave, but you escape somehow. And now you're flying down a tunnel with the hand stretching behind you, trying to catch you. You see an underground lake and fly across it. The hand stops at the edge of the lake. You feel safe, and you begin to nuzzle your wings.

This dream promotes the image of safety on the water. The Immortal Asterius sent the dream to lure the PCs to the fastest transport to the Nithian Empire and Koresh Teyd—the Annelid chamber in the next chapter. Once the PCs reach the underground cave pond, their conveyance to Nithia (however unwilling) becomes certain.

### The Cave Entrance

The trail through the hills leads to an inconspicuous cave entrance, hardly more than a hole in the ground, in a shaded hillside. In fact, the entrance looks much like the flying viper lair that the PCs encountered in Chapter 1. (Use the resemblance to make the players uneasy.)

On the slopes below the entrance grow stands of 20' tall, branchless trees with loose white bark and a crown of long, lance-shaped leaves covered with hair-like fibers. These trees, which the Colimans call "lances," are surrounded by patches of nettle bushes with bright red flowers. A cool wind blows in from the ocean, laced with salt smells.

In the lance trees the PCs can make out shifting areas of darkness that have nothing to do with shadows of the waving leaves. Infravision cannot penetrate the darkness. The heroes also hear high-pitched rodent squeaking.

These bats, feeding on insects, come from the cave nearby. They have grown used to the Schattentalen scent, but anyone else approaching the cave still alarms them. Assuming not all the PCs smell like Schattentalen, the bats in their blobs of darkness detach from the trees and dive toward the heroes.

**Bats** (12): AC 0; HD 1-1\*; hp 2; #AT Nil; Dmg Nil; MV 180' (60'); Save 0-level normal; ML 6; AL N; XP 6; THAC0 19. These are of the species known, very descriptively, as little brown bats. *Dispel magic* will temporarily neutralize a bat's *continual darkness*, but the ability returns after the bat sleeps for four hours.

These bats try to force the PCs away from the entrance to their lair. The bats present no danger to the PCs—but the players don't know that. This encounter may cause the heroes to waste a spell or two, and it presages the scene that the PCs find inside.

More importantly, the bats' raucous threats may alert the Schattentalen guards inside the cave entrance; see below.

**The nettle bushes:** The blooms on these thorny

bushes exude a dry, noxious odor that irritates the bats. If the PCs pick a few flowers and carry them or rub them over their bodies, the vapors keep the bats at bay. However, at your discretion, the foul-smelling PCs may find stealth difficult inside the cavern until they wash off the odor.

### The Guards

Two Schattennalfen guerilla soldiers, 2nd-level warrior-elves in ordinary leather armor, stand guard in the shade just inside the cavern entrance. These elves, like those the PCs met in the previous chapter, have been *polymorphed* to look like typical Nithian men.

**Schattennalfen guards (2):** AC 8; HD 2; hp 8; #AT 1 (spear or short sword); Dmg 1d6; MV 120' (40'); Save F2; ML 9; AL C; THAC0 19.

If the PCs disturb the bats outside, the bats' screeches may, at your option, alert the guards. If so, one guard rushes to ring a loud cattle-type bell hanging inside the entrance. This sounds the alarm throughout the lair, and the Schattennalfen soldiers inside begin donning their World-Shield armor immediately.

However, the entrance guards pay no attention to the odor of the nettle blooms, because they use the blooms themselves to fend off the bats. So PCs can use these to circumvent both the bats' and the guards' alarms.

## THE SCENE

When the PCs enter the cavern, read this aloud:

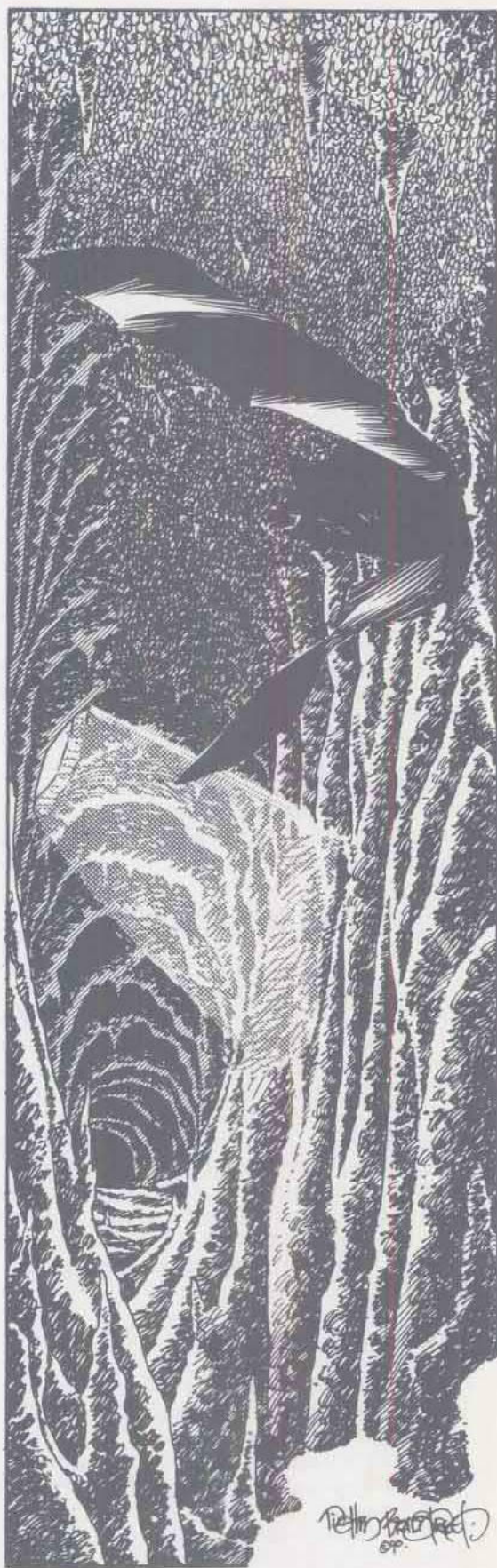
You're standing on a ledge in the middle of one wall of a high, narrow limestone cavern. It stretches up, sort of following the curve of the hill's slope, and it goes perhaps a hundred feet straight down from where you are. There are more ledges down there, too. Yet all the way along, the cave can't be more than twenty feet wide.

The air is dry but hot and close. The whole place smells terrible, like rat hairs and animal droppings.

There are lots of stalactites, crevices, and columns in the walls. They cast shadows everywhere, shadows that seem to shift around as you watch. In the shadows you hear loud, high-pitched screams—like the ones you heard from the trees outside, but many, many more of them. You can hardly hear yourself think, which is just as well considering what the sounds make you think of: bats. Millions of bats!

A steep trail, wide enough for two people, leads down from one side of the ledge.

The ledges below hold the Schattennalfen guerilla camp. A map of the cave and the camp appears on the inside cover of this module.



## The Bats

A very large colony of about 1,200,000 little brown bats roosts on the ceiling of this dry cave. They cluster together as tightly as grapes on a vine, their *darkness* flickering on and off. A light source reveals patches of blackness that seem to travel across the cavern ceiling, the way a gust of wind sends ripples across meadow grass.

The bats constantly fly in and out of the cave entrance by the hundreds. The Schattentalfen guards, bored, pay no attention. Many of the warriors in the cave use the nettle bloom odor to keep the bats away, but this is usually unnecessary; the bats have grown used to elves inside the cavern.

Unusually loud noises (louder than standard combat produces), bright lights, or tremors in the earth alarm the whole colony. When alarmed, the bats fly in all directions, screeching, but miraculously avoid colliding with anything. This usually paralyzes everyone in the cave and prevents most activity, such as combat. The bats swarm out of the cave within 10 minutes (1 turn), and they do not return for hours.

## The Guerillas

A field company of 25 Schattentalfen warrior-elves, and one elf mage occupies this cave as a permanent base camp. All of them but the mage, one elf cook, and the cook are *polymorphed* to look like Nithians.

Argaluin and his merchants, whom the PCs met in Colima in the last chapter, also reside here, in a tense and aloof relationship with the company. Argaluin and his merchants may or may not be here, depending on the circumstances of the PCs' entrance.

The 25 other elves are all present as the PCs arrive. They are preparing for a raid against an Azcan silver mine across the Aztlan Mountains, about 100 miles north of the Azcan city of Tenpocatliotl. They will leave the cavern 24 hours from now, and only four warrior-elves and the merchants will remain behind.

All Schattentalfen except the mage have suits of World-Shield armor, but they are not currently wearing the armor because it is too uncomfortable in the hot cavern.

The Schattentalfen-Nithians maintain living quarters here, as well as an armory, a small temple area, fungus gardens, and a stable of giant slugs, which provide milk and transport.

But the most important function of this camp is relatively new. Koresh Teyd of the Blood Brethren has selected this camp as a depot for the transport of serpent-mint from Colima to his home base in the Nithian Empire. Koresh pays for this service (authorized by the Elf-King and Queen in Issarthyl) by equipping the Schattentalfen guerillas with suits of World-Shield armor, which may well tilt the balance of power between the Schattentalfen and their hated enemies, the Azca. He also takes care of the *polymorphing* that lets the elves fit in his human-sized armor.

As the PCs arrive, Koresh Teyd and his henchman are meeting with the guerilla leaders on the cavern's lowest level. The meeting place is described under

"Barge Dock," below, and in the "Events" section that follows.

## Camp Layout

The camp occupies three ledges below the entrance ledge, spaced equally 25' apart. In the following description these ledges are numbered sequentially from highest to lowest, like levels in a dungeon. The camp also uses the floor of the cavern as a corral for its giant slugs, and an additional tunnel complex as a staging area for the serpent-mint shipments. All these are described in the following sections.

### Ledge 1: Living Quarters

(75' above the cave floor)

On this large, flat outcropping, 19 Nithian-looking warrior-elves live on simple woolen mats. (The wool was plundered from Coliman shepherds.) These elves are fanatical followers of their commander, Taranic, described below. If the PCs meet them in peace, the Schattentalfen are currently occupied in the barbaric pastime of picking off stray bats with thrown rocks.

Their personal effects are sparse, for these guerillas devote themselves single-mindedly to their crusade against the Azca, not to acquiring property. Simple toiletries and valueless souvenirs are all that searching can turn up.

However, each elf also keeps a complete outfit of World-Shield armor close to hand. Even in the unsanitary conditions of the cave, the armor does not stain or corrode.

The warriors don their armor as soon as an alarm sounds. This takes one turn (ten minutes); however, they can don partial armor in less time. An elf can increase his AC by 1 for each ten-second round spent doing nothing but donning pieces of the armor, to a maximum of AC 4 (taking five rounds). To get the armor's full AC -4 benefit, the wearer must spend the full ten minutes putting it on.

Schattentalfen-Nithians (19): AC 9/-4; HD 2; hp 8; #AT 1 (short sword); Dmg 1d6; MV 120' (40'); Save F2; ML 9; AL C; THAC0 19.

### Ledge 2: Mess

(50' above the cave floor)

On this long, thin ledge the warriors collect their daily ration of trania, fungus, and slug milk. Theoretically they eat here as well, off long split logs laboriously hauled in from outside. But in practice the warriors take their meals on the higher ledge, where the stench of the cave floor is less overpowering.

Fully-covered elves may even venture outside to eat. The warriors regard this as a display of courage, even though their Nithian forms theoretically protect them from sun damage. Even so, none are especially eager to prove themselves this way.

The "cook"—the officer in charge of processing the trania—is a slovenly, sullen elf named Boniath.

(Use the statistics given for the other warriors, above, but Boniath saves as a 2nd-level elf.) He is stirring fungus broth in an iron cauldron as the PCs encounter him. Note that, besides the mage, this is the only Schattentalf in the cave who doesn't look like a Nithian.

Boniath has no World-Shield armor and no interest in fighting a superior force. If possible, he hides behind the ledge's small supply of wooden barrels, which hold food plundered from outside, and slug milk for the brief time before it spoils. Boniath has no treasure.

The far end of Ledge 2 is a sheer drop, from which the Schattentalfen routinely dump garbage and unwanted items. These fall to the garbage dump on the cave floor, described below.

### Ledge 3: Administration, Supply

*(25' above the cave floor)*

This sheltered ledge holds the guerillas' armory, weapon repair tools, a small chapel area for rudimentary worship of Atzanteotl, and a planning and briefing area for senior staff. Hanging sheepskins mark off living quarters for Elmoth the mage; two staff aides, Merlongas and Ragnor; and the camp commander, Taranic. The statistics for these characters follow this section.

The farthest part of the ledge holds the disreputable and ignored quarters of Argaluin and his merchants.

The residents of this ledge are currently on the cavern floor meeting with Koresh Teyd. See the "Events" section below.

**Armory:** This is a small work area with an anvil, hammers, and smithing tools, designed for minor weapon and armor repairs. Against the cave wall stand stacks of long wooden crates stacked like shelves. Each crate holds up to a dozen spears, short swords, or bows and arrows of Schattentalfen make. The metal weapons are oiled and wrapped in oilcloth. One crate contains miscellaneous cleaning supplies.

A rusting pile of ordinary chainmail and banded mail lies near the smithy area. These 20 suits of Schattentalfen armor are well-made and still usable, once cleaned up. But the elves have no interest in it, now that Koresh Teyd has provided them with World-Shield armor in return for serpent-mint.

**Chapel area:** A humble shrine, designated by the rough carving of a flying viper (symbol of the Immortal Atzanteotl) in the cavern wall. Offerings made on the floor before the carving include food, dead bats, and the finger-bones of slain Azca.

**Planning area:** Undefined except by the absence of sleeping mats and personal effects, this small area is surrounded by sheepskin partitions. A large parchment map covers the floor. The map depicts the Azcan Empire, its major cities, and the Bay of Colima. Arrows identify the Azcan village of Tenpocatl as a target of attack.

A red star marks this campsite, and a straight red line heads due south, where it branches in several different directions. Unknown to the PCs, this line

depicts the Great Annelid travel route that will carry them from this camp to the Nithian Empire in the next chapter.

Try to keep this marking mysterious. If the PCs ask the Schattentalfen about it, the guerillas say only, "It's a network of transport tunnels." If the PCs ask why the lines run so straight, the elves shrug and say, "Just a symbol." They don't want to reveal that the Great Annelids have recently returned and, via Koresh Teyd's symbionts, are carrying elves from one end of the World's Spine to the other.

**Mage's quarters:** These house the 6th-level elf Elmoth, who is grim, quiet, moody, and frankly pretty deranged. Long absorption in the study of magic back in his native Issarthyl made Elmoth antisocial to a fault, even paranoid. Rather than try to imprison him, the authorities dispatched him to the war front.

Elmoth follows orders without argument, though with an ironic tone that irritates the warriors. He nurtures secret, and quite crazy, plans to gain power here, then return to Issarthyl and destroy the enemies who exiled him.

The elf-mage is currently at the cavern's barge dock, described below. If the PCs talk with Elmoth, he reveals nothing about the Great Annelids. After all, the PCs are his enemies! But he may pretend friendship and send the heroes down to the Annelid chamber, from whence they will not return to bother him.

**Aides' quarters:** Merlongas and Ragnor, two fanatical followers of Commander Taranic, live here on meticulously neat sleeping mats. Two sets of World-Shield armor, minus the pieces that the aides wear routinely, hang from spikes pounded into the cave wall.

If you played HWA1 and allowed any of the Schattentalfen escorts from Chapter 5 to escape slaughter in Chapter 6, they may live here as well, if you want to stage a surprise reunion (or renew a battle). They are waiting here for Annelid transport to Issarthyl.

Merlongas and Ragnor are with Elmoth at the barge dock (see below). They would die rather than tell the hated PCs anything useful.

**Commander's quarters:** The camp leader, Taranic, lives in this modest cubicle. World-Shield armor hangs on the wall, and a litter of parchment scrolls lies beside the spartan sleeping mat. These scrolls include orders and testimonials from the Elf-King and Elf-Queen in Issarthyl, and intelligence reports from spies beneath many Azcan towns. Only after hours of study can the PCs uncover occasional references to "transport via Annelid" and "World-Shield ore."

Like other guerilla leaders, Taranic leads through charisma, commitment to the fight, and a willingness to do anything his men do. He mixes admirable courage and ruthless brutality in equal amounts.

The PCs can meet Taranic at the barge dock described below. Taranic is a shrewd, calculating commander. Assuming the PCs have no particular interest in the guerillas' war against the Azca, Taranic quickly realizes this, and then the bargaining starts. He trades the PCs information—all completely fabri-

cated, but told with intense conviction—for anything he can get off them: food, treasure, magical items, whatever. However, he probably does not attack them, for he can see that defeating the heroes would be more trouble than they're worth.

**Merchants' quarters:** Taranic begrudges the merchants these two screened areas because they bring in the serpent-mint that provides World-Shield armor to the camp. The quarters are identical to those of the aides described above, except that they contain empty wooden casks intended to store serpent-mint.

## Statistics

**Taranic:** 8th-level warrior-elf; AC 6/-4; hp 45; #AT 1 (short sword); Dmg 1d6; MV 120' (40'); Save E8; ML 9; AL C; THAC0 15. When not transformed to look like a Nithian, Taranic is tall and muscular by Schattentalen standards, almost as tall as a short human male. Even in his *polymorphed* Nithian form, Taranic retains several disfiguring scars on his cheek and chin, which he refuses to have healed—"emblems of the cause," he calls them. He wears a breastplate and selected other pieces of the World-Shield armor. On his belt he carries a two-chambered canteen; one chamber holds fresh water, the other a *potion of fortitude* (described in the Companion Rules).

**Merlongas and Ragnor:** 3rd-level warrior-elves; AC 8/-4; hp 15; #AT 1 (short sword); Dmg 1d6; MV 120' (40'); Save E3; ML 8; AL C; THAC0 19. When not in full World-Shield armor, these two Nithian-looking Schattentalen wear little clothing besides a few pieces of light armor. They believe this demonstrates both inherent toughness and devotion to their commander.

**Elmoth:** 6th-level elf; AC 9; hp 22; #AT 1 dagger or spell; Dmg 1d4 or by spell; MV 120' (40'); Save E6; ML 6; AL C; THAC0 17. Spells: 1st level—*detect magic*, *read magic*. 2nd level—*continual light*, *web*. 3rd level—*create air*, *fly*. Elmoth keeps a *scroll of the mages* on his person (an item detailed in the Companion Rules). Elmoth also carries other spells in his hidden spellbook: *hold portal*, *knock*, *locate object*, *phantasmal force*, and *dispel magic*. The spellbook is hidden somewhere in the tunnels beyond the cavern, or it can be in the encampment at your discretion.

Elmoth is not *polymorphed*, even though he is among the few Schattentalen who would improve by the transformation. Elmoth is short and scrawny even for a Schattentalen, with heavy black eyebrows and a squinting gaze that lingers overlong on whomever he talks to. Elmoth mumbles to himself inaudibly, peers with intensity at ordinary objects, and starts at sudden noises. He smells like the cave, but worse.

## The Cave Floor

This tilted floor, littered with stalagmites and broken limestone columns, is liberally covered with *guano* from the bats overhead, which serves two purposes: fertilizer for a large fungus garden, and food for the company's eight giant slugs.

**Slug pens:** Because of the tilt of the floor, the

guano slides down toward these eight stone pens, made of mortared boulders. Each pen holds one giant slug, a slimy gray horror 15' long. Unlike the slugs described in the Master rules, these have no acid attack; instead, they bite weakly. They are quite gentle by disposition, but they panic when attacked with fire or heat.

**Giant slugs (8):** AC 8; HD 6\*; hp 25; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 (bite); MV 20'; Save F1; ML 8; AL N; THAC0 13. Because of its rubbery body, strength bonuses are not counted in attacks against the slug; blunt weapons inflict only magical damage; and edged weapons inflict half damage, plus magical adjustments. A Smash attack inflicts no additional damage. The slugs are described fully in GAZ 13, *The Shadow Elves*, DM's Guide, p. 39.

A small 4'x4' opening at the bottom front of each pen allows each slug to extrude its mouth forward and eat the guano that collects in front of the pens. (The attendants enter and exit the pens through these openings. If the openings were larger, the slugs could squeeze completely through and escape.) The Schattentalen also feed the slugs various fungi, in order to improve the flavor of the milk they give.

As described in GAZ 13, the slugs' "milk" is actually a nutritious yellow-brown fluid that they exude when massaged with a roller. Each pen includes one of these rollers.

**Fungus garden:** Bad-smelling, black or purple growths that cover every wall at the edge of the guano and garbage pits. Iron harvesting knives (1/2d6 damage) and large woven baskets lie at the base of the wall. The elves use this fungus to prepare their staple food, *trania*.

If you have GAZ 13, *The Shadow Elves*, consult p. 38 of the DM's Guide for an extensive list of cavern fungi.

**Garbage pit:** At the base of the cavern, this dump site holds everything the soldiers on the ledges above feel like throwing overside. Nothing of use can be found here.

**Privies:** Occasionally emptied to feed the slugs and fertilize the fungus.

## Barge Dock

A short, irregular natural passage slopes down from one end of the cave floor. A rocky slide with treacherous footing leads down to a tunnel with an unnaturally flat floor.

Around a bend, a wide part of the tunnel serves as the berth for a magical vehicle the PCs encounter in an Event described below: the Semekhtet-barge, a Nithian boat that sails through solid rock in the manner of a dwarven *rockship*. The barge is described in the *New Magic* appendix of this module.

Pharaoh Ramose IV of the Nithian Empire has given Koresh Teyd use of this Semekhtet-barge. Koresh uses it to travel from Nightrage foundry, in the Nithian Empire, to the collection points for the various items of his scheme: feathered serpent cocoons, World-Shield ore, and—the reason for his arrival here—serpent-mint.

As the PCs arrive at the cavern, the guerilla leaders

are down here, meeting with Koresh Teyd as described under "Events."

At the far end of the docking area, the tunnel descends steeply to the Annelid chamber described in the next chapter.

## EVENTS

### Reception

Recall the disposition of the Schattenalfen as the PCs arrive:

- Two guards stand at the cave entrance.
- Nineteen unarmored warrior-elves are sitting idly on Level 1.
- Boniath, the cowardly cook, is cooking fungus on Level 2.
- Commander Taranic, his two aides, and the mage Elmoth are at the barge dock, meeting with Koresh Teyd. They have with them a single warrior-elf, still in his native form, whom Koresh Teyd is scheduled to *polymorph* into Nithian form.
- Depending on the outcome of Chapter 3, the merchant Argaluin and his assistants may be dead, or traveling with the PCs, or they may have arrived here earlier. In the last case they are with the leaders, meeting with Koresh Teyd's henchman.

The guerillas' reaction to the PCs depends heavily on circumstances. Staging advice and elf tactics for the encounter are based on three broad approaches:

#### 1. Arriving with the Merchants

Whether as allies, servants, or prisoners, the PCs follow Argaluin and his assistants down the path to the cavern floor, and then to the barge dock for the meeting with Koresh Teyd. Argaluin can give the heroes a brief tour of the camp, just to be friendly; he glosses over his own low status among the warriors, and he claims his lowly quarters on Level 3 are "just a convenient way-station."

The warriors look at the PCs with deep suspicion but, since they're with Argaluin, maintain a superficial politeness.

#### 2. Entry by Stealth

If the PCs overcome or bypass the guards without alerting those inside, they are almost certainly discovered when they reach the warriors' quarters on Level 1. However, if they somehow get past this obstacle as well, the PCs can then reach the cavern floor without incident. By this time they should certainly realize that these warriors are shapeshifted elves.

Once at the barge dock, the heroes overhear the conversation in progress between Taranic and Koresh Teyd's henchman, Kruthep. They can sneak down the tunnel and eavesdrop. Go to the next Event.

#### 3. Frontal Assault

The guerillas sound the alarm, then try to get the PCs to surrender, meanwhile donning as much armor

as feasible in a few rounds.

If the PCs refuse to surrender, the Schattenalfen attack to capture. Only a few can face the PCs directly on the narrow ledge. The rest fire arrows or even throw rocks. (If a rock hits, roll 1d6; on a roll of 5-6, the rock does 1 point of damage.) If clearly outmatched, desperate elves may spit in the PCs' faces and, with a parting oath of revenge, leap over the ledge. If they land in the garbage dump (the thinking goes), they *may* survive to escape.

The alarm attracts Taranic, Elmoth, and the aides from their meeting on the cavern floor. They order the warriors to capture the PCs rather than kill them. Elmoth, on Taranic's orders, tries to *web* the PCs.

If the PCs are captured, the elves take them to Koresh Teyd's henchman, Kruthep, to determine whether the prisoners are valuable. Kruthep interrogates the PCs, trying to discover how much threat or assistance they can offer. Cruel and malicious, he may scar or disfigure handsome PCs, then laugh in their faces. For further guidelines on handling the interrogation, consult Chapter 6.

Depending on the outcome of the questioning, Kruthep (in consultation with the hidden Koresh, as described below) might offer the heroes a berth on the Semekhtet-berge, as Koresh's newest servants; or he might order the PCs killed. For the latter option, let the Semekhtet-berge depart, then give the PCs a chance to escape, perhaps by running down the tunnel to the Annelid chamber below. (Go to "Where Next?")

### Bargaining Session

Depending on the PCs' approach, get them to the cavern floor and to the meeting site. Describe the barge dock. The PCs note a fresh, sweet breeze coming from it; Elmoth the mage has cast his *create air* spell to make the fetid air breathable.

The meeting, already in progress, nears its conclusion. Present on the guerilla side are Taranic, Elmoth, the two aides, the untransformed Schattenalf, and (depending on circumstances) Argaluin and his assistants. If the PCs killed or disposed of the merchants, then there is a second, identical party of merchant elves at the meeting.

Having set up one party to the meeting, introduce the other party by reading this aloud:

The tunnel is blocked by, of all things, a wooden boat. It's a shallow barge almost eighty feet long, made of cedar wood, that tapers gracefully upward at bow and stern.

Amidships there's a small wooden cabin with a flat roof, but otherwise the boat is practically featureless. You don't see any oarlocks or other means of propulsion. But you can see a line of men lying prone on the deck. No, not men—empty suits of armor, just like the armor you've seen in this cavern.

Two figures are standing at the bow. One is a human—at least, he looks human—wearing a full

suit of the strange armor you've seen in this cavern. His helmet visor is up, showing a handsome face of the same general type as the others in this cave.

Beside him, looming over him, stands a minotaur, a monster with the body of a huge man and the head of a bull. Its horns curve out on either side of its head, as graceful as the prow of the barge; the horns are carved with strange symbols unlike any you've ever seen.

The people standing in front of the barge are arguing loudly with the armored man at the bow. The subject of the argument seems to be a stack of small wooden casks by the barge. Even from where you are, you can smell the odor of mint.

This is serpent-mint, of course, hundreds of pounds of it. Taranic is haggling for a higher price, as described below.

The barge is the magical *Semekhter*-barge mentioned above. The armored man is Koresh Teyd's chief henchman, Kruthep, a coldly cruel magic-user who follows Koresh in order to gain power. The minotaur is Augar, the barge's helmsman, who speaks the magical words of command that send the boat through solid rock. Descriptions and statistics for both these NPCs appear in this module's appendix.

The PCs may act now, or they may decide to listen to the argument. If they act, skip to the discussion of options below. If they do listen, read the following aloud. The PCs can interrupt at any time, of course.

The armored man on the barge is speaking in a voice like a cat's purr. "Taranic, your little exercises in marketeering leave us unimpressed. Your merchant scum here arranged a fair exchange for the mint. We stick to the agreed rate—or you can watch this new armor drift away, perhaps into enemy hands."

The one he is talking to replies, in a voice not so much like a cat's purr as a lion's growl. "Clearly, it is a human's way to bluster about fairness. My people have never been treated fairly. We do not know fairness."

He continues, "But we do know need. We know how much you need this green leaf at your breeding ground. And also, we do know strength. You, Kruthep, O talker like the wind in tunnels, you are not strong. We would speak to the one who pulls your strings."

On the barge, the minotaur laughs—a laugh like a snort. He nods his bull head. The armored man called Kruthep draws a breath, sharply, and for a moment you think he'll leap at the one below. And then it looks like he'll hit the minotaur instead.

But suddenly a voice comes from the barge's cabin. It's a strange mixture of hoarseness and power, like the last words of a dying general. "Do not talk of strings, elf," says the voice, which has

an orcish rasp to it. "Many are puppets, in their ways. If you wish to see strength, watch! Stand forth, the elf who would be shifted."

The short pale elf glances to his commander, then walks forward near the cabin. You hear the words of magic muttered inside, and the elf hunches over in pain!

This is the start of Koresh's *polymorph* spell. For the subsequent development of the spell, assuming the PCs don't interfere, see below.

The mysterious voice belongs to Prince Udan, the goblin controlled by the inhuman Blood Brethren Koresh Teyd. Koresh has neglected to maintain Udan's body, and so the voice is cracking. Occasionally Koresh loosens his control long enough for Udan to croak a plea for help, in his own voice. For further examples of this duality, see Chapter 6.

### Options for Action

Let the PCs take whatever actions they like. Their options here depend on their mode of entry and other circumstances. Here are some typical approaches.

**Continuing to watch:** Read the following aloud.

The elf groans in pain as the spell takes hold. His long white hair falls out, and his nose juts further from his face. His dark clothing rips as the whole body lengthens and straightens.

Tan color washes over the elf's white skin, as though he's been dipped in sand. Black hair sprouts on his scalp and over his eyes. Before your eyes, he's turning human.

The commander, Taranic, watches with a mixture of distaste and approval. He says to Kruthep, "Now that is strength."

And as he says the words, the spellbound elf screams! His arms lengthen and his legs contort into claws. In moments, as you watch, the former elf becomes a giant hawk with flaming wings—then a yellow-eyed ocelot—then a leafy bush, with blooms that are tiny human faces, sobbing uncontrollably—and finally a tiny orange sea-slug, curling and twisting on the cave floor.

Taranic and his men have shied back in horror. Only Kruthep stands near the slug. He says, "And this, too, is strength." And, jumping off the barge, he lifts his foot over the slug.

If the PCs don't interfere, Kruthep violently grinds the slug beneath his armored heel. In death it reverts to the elf's original form, which now shows the effects of the murder.

If the PCs do interfere with Kruthep, go to "Attacking" below to handle the battle. Taranic and his aides help the PCs attack Kruthep. But Koresh Teyd (still hidden in his cabin) stops the battle before Kruthep can die.

In a sardonic tone, Koresh congratulates the PCs



“for preventing this needless death.” Over Kruthep’s protests, he may hire the PCs and have them join him on his trip to Nithia, unless he is aware of their enmity toward him. In the latter case he leaves them here in the cave, with a taunting farewell. In either case, Kruthep has formed a deep and lasting hatred for the heroes.

**Interfering with the spell:** If the PCs stop Koresh from continuing his spell, the elf lives, but faints from the shock.

The Schattentalen reaction depends on circumstances. Taranic may attack them at once, or may simply chastize the PCs for their evident blunder; remember, he doesn’t suspect that Koresh intended anything but a routine transformation into a Nithian.

If the guerillas attack the PCs, Kruthep orders a hasty retreat from “this unseemly brawling.” The rockship departs as described below. At your option, the elf whom the PCs rescued may revive and help defend the PCs against his former comrades’ attacks. (A potential NPC ally for the rest of the adventure?)

**Approaching the barge’s cabin:** If a PC looks in its one window, he sees only an impenetrable *continual darkness*. Koresh Teyd is in here, but wishes to keep his appearance secret from the Schattentalen guerillas. He passes commands out via Kruthep. The PCs should not actually see Koresh Teyd until Chapter 6.

If a PC somehow does manage to glimpse Koresh Teyd, consult Chapter 6 or the appendix for his description.

**Questioning:** No one is willing to give information to these upstart PCs—no one except Taranic, and he just trades lies for supplies, as described above. With Koresh’s approval, Kruthep may hire the PCs as muscle, assuming he and Koresh don’t realize they are enemies. In this case, Koresh can take them aboard the barge back to Nithia.

But if the heroes show too much curiosity, he dismisses them with a curt wave and commands Augar to leave the dock. Then the PCs can attack, just watch the boat leave (narration for its departure is given below), or try to leap aboard and hitch a ride (see below).

**Attacking:** Make sure the players understand the strength of the opposition before they rush headlong into battle: Taranic, his two aides, up to four merchants another Schattentalen, Kruthep, Augar, and the mysterious sorcerer in the cabin. This should discourage foolhardy assaults.

But if it doesn’t, your priority in staging the battle is to let Koresh Teyd and the barge escape, without harming the PCs unduly. The PCs can even stow away on the escaping barge, if you wish. But in no case can the PCs capture Koresh or his servants.

To begin the battle, the guerillas in World-Shield armor move to engage the PCs, fighting to subdue them or force their surrender. Meanwhile, at Koresh’s command, Augar speaks the command word that starts the Semekhtet-barge on its way, while Kruthep grabs a couple of casks of serpent-mint and heaves a suit of World-Shield armor overside.

If necessary, Koresh casts *move earth* against the PCs. Suddenly, the earth buckles beneath their feet, tossing them around like a pulled rug. Persistent PCs

find themselves at the bottom of deep holes, or pressed against the tunnel ceiling by a sudden stalagmite.

If the PCs lose or surrender, Taranic interrogates the survivors, then binds them and takes them to the Annelid cavern described in the next chapter. There he dumps them in the pool to drown—except that the heroes get swallowed first.

## The Barge Departs

When the barge leaves, read this aloud:

The minotaur mumbles a magic word, and the barge seems to sink down into the stone floor, without a sound, without a vibration. The deck sinks toward the ground. The minotaur and Kruthep turn away and head toward the cabin.

There is hardly a better cue for the PCs to try leaping aboard and hitching a ride. Each PC has one opportunity. If you wish, ask for Dexterity checks from those who want to leap aboard; or the attempts can be automatically successful.

The attempts could fail, instead—the heroes could be too late to enter the magical transition domain that the barge creates. Make this choice if you want the PCs to travel to the Nithian Empire inside a Great Annelid, as described in the next chapter. (Or, if the party gets split up, one group goes on the barge as the other travels inside the worm. Both groups arrive in Nithia at about the same time.)

If the PCs get aboard the barge, all goes dark as they enter solid rock. They can feel the deck beneath their feet, and they can move, talk, eat, and sleep freely. But they are held inside the boat magically, and they cannot leave. Also, they cannot enter the barge’s cabin, and Koresh and his henchmen never leave it.

The heroes receive dim, cursory sensations of passing through lava pools, huge echoing caverns, and rich veins of gold. But the impressions vanish in moments.

The journey to the Nithian Empire requires several days. If the PCs don’t have provisions for that long journey, they can find and break into stores of salted meat and casks of water stored on deck.

## WHERE NEXT?

In this chapter the PCs should discover that *polymorphed* Schattentalen are trading serpent-mint for the World-Shield armor; that the serpent-mint traders have something to do with the feathered serpent breeding ground; and, perhaps, that there is a strange transportation network beneath the Hollow World’s surface. And the heroes should meet Kruthep, Augar, and the mysterious voice of Koresh Teyd.

Once that is taken care of, lure the PCs onto the Semekhtet-barge to Nithia (go to Chapter 6) or down to the Annelid breeding chamber in the next chapter. There they get swallowed alive.

In this chapter the PCs discover a deserted hatching chamber of the Great Annelids, learn something of their grisly life cycle, and finally encounter an Annelid—at extreme close range. In fact, it eats them alive!

With Koresh Teyd's arrival and the introduction of the symbionts, the Schattentalfen (through their distant allies, the Nithians) have started to employ the great worms not only as miners of the World-Shield ore, but as transportation. Ordinarily the Annelids move quite sluggishly. With symbionts attached, however, their speed increases by several orders of magnitude. The dark elves, always clever (and none too squeamish), have enchanted the creatures to allow a passenger to survive in suspended animation in a worm's interior.

Koresh Teyd dedicates few Annelids to transport. But a large Annelid crosses subterranean territory faster than almost any other mortal creature. The Annelid speedily ferries the heroes over 3,000 miles underground to the next chapter's location, the Nithian Empire.

## HOW THEY GET THERE

When you are ready to send the heroes along toward Nithia, then wherever they are, the PCs notice a suspiciously new-looking tunnel ten feet in diameter. It is smooth, circular, and shows little sign of traffic; in fact, it looks much like the tunnel the PCs used to climb down into the Hollow World (depicted in HWA1). The tunnel leads gently downward.

If necessary, tempt the PCs into the tunnel by having them follow a Schattentalf or some other quarry. Or, if the heroes are searching for some way back to the outer world, an elf could point them down this tunnel, knowing that the heroes will never return from it.

## THE SCENE

The tunnel ends at an underground pond. The water looks black; your light strikes thin rainbow lines off a layer of oil on the water's surface. You hear droplets falling into the still water, making echoes in what sounds like a large cavern. The air smells of rancid fat.

A wooden raft is tied to a wooden post anchored in the stone nearby. The guy-rope and the raft both look like elvish make, and both look brand new.

The cavern is dark. If the PCs can see in darkness or produce bright light, describe it: a dome about 40' across, with smooth walls leading straight down into the fetid pool. The droplets, condensation from the dome, fall every minute or two.

There's a mess hanging from the center of the dome. The PCs can make out a shapeless, bulging mass of dried mud and some things that look like huge, broken eggshells. This is a deserted Annelid nest, described below under "Investigation."

Around the ceiling of the dome, around the hanging mud, the PCs can see many smaller tunnel openings. Some are only a few feet in diameter, but others are over six feet. Almost all the tunnels except this one are closed loops—that is, they return by circuitous routes to another part of this cavern.

With the smoothness of the ceiling, this whole place might have been eaten out of the living rock from below by a huge Annelid, maybe 40 feet in diameter. The dome would be where the giant worm stopped eating.

This, in fact, is true. But don't tell the players!

### *The Cavern's Secret*

Years ago, a gigantic Great Annelid ate this entire cavern as a hatching chamber. The excavation incidentally made an inlet beside an underground river, creating the pool the PCs see. (The Annelid's later tunneling diverted the river, isolating the pool.)

The Annelid's nest is the hanging mass of mud on the dome's ceiling. When its eggs hatched, the hatchlings ate the smaller tunnels as part of their early forays from the nest.

After the Annelids grew large enough to leave the nest, the mother abandoned this chamber. For a time after the Annelids' departure, the Schattentalfen used the pool as a reservoir. But their wastes polluted it, and they turned it into a "depot," of sorts, for elves who would summon the Annelid. This summoning is triggered by entry into the cavern—as the PCs soon discover.

Since this is a vertical Annelid tunnel, what keeps the water in the pool? The tunnel goes down underwater, then bends to one side and arcs up, so that the water only fills the bottom bend. The PCs may try swimming down to investigate the bottom. If so, go to "Event," below.

## INVESTIGATION

The chamber has a new raft and rope because these are destroyed each time an Annelid arrives. All PCs can easily fit on this raft and travel safely across the chamber. However, there is nowhere to go. Give the PCs time to examine the nest overhead, and then trigger the Event that follows.

### *The Elemental Bodies*

The nest overhead is mostly dried clods of dirt held together with a viscous, slimy liquid that feels like mucus. (It is mucus, the adhesive Annelids use to construct their nests. The humid air of the cavern keeps it moist.)

In the dirt are the dry shards of five 15' long, capsule-shaped eggs. These are the Annelid's eggs, but the PCs have no way to know that unless they guess.

Protruding amid the dirt are several statues, or so it would appear. It's hard to tell, for all have been shattered. The larger fragments indicate these were roughly humanoid, about ten feet tall, with huge limbs and chests but no necks. They might have resembled the earth elemental the PCs saw before, Gabbro.

*Detect magic* or other analysis shows a residual magical energy. (However, *detect evil* and the like reveal nothing.) The PCs may realize that these are in fact the bodies of five dead earth elementals—insofar as earth elementals leave bodies when they die. Why are they here?

The tunnels around the dome were not quite the young Annelids' first meals. The fragmented "statues" in the nest are actually the debris of dead earth elementals. The PCs learn later in the adventure that young Annelids hatch inside live, paralyzed elementals. The young burrowers eat their way out of the living creatures, feeding on their energies to begin their life cycle. (Only large "mother" Annelids have the ability to trap and paralyze the elementals.)

When the PCs have looked around and you have established the mystery of the elemental bodies, begin the following Event.

## EVENT

There is no useful warning, except the smallest of tremors in the surface of the pool. No sound marks the approach—until it is much too late. Read this aloud:

You glance at the water, and you notice a small ripple. Then, in the time it takes you to blink, the ripple grows to a solid wave of water that rushes from your feet outward. Another eyeblink, and the wave crashes against another of the same size, rushing inward from the cavern walls.

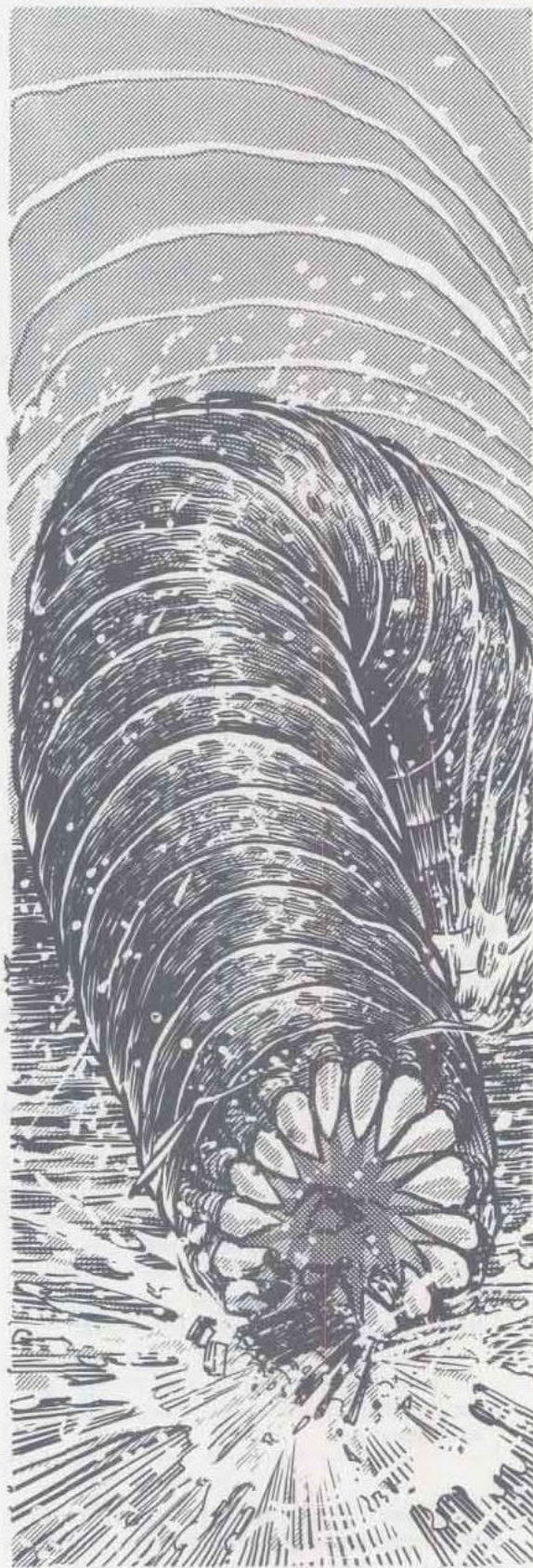
You still haven't had time to draw a full breath when the rumbling starts beneath your feet. You look around for whatever is crawling from the water.

And then all of the water—the whole pond—explodes upward!

Your light goes flying end over end, and in that wavering light something as huge as a building rises up around you. Filthy water washes over you! With a tremendous roar, walls rise to surround you—to cover the ceiling! And then you realize. . .

It's not walls. It's a mouth.

It closes around you. Something big strikes your weapons from your hands. Something wet



grabs your entire body like a giant fist. The roaring grows muffled, then stops. You can't move. You're trapped.

You're swallowed up.

And it all took two seconds.

This is a very large Great Annelid, about 40' in diameter. See the Appendix for its statistics.

If any PC remains outside the cavern when the Annelid arrives, the creature drives at the character, eating its way straight through solid rock, gulping the PC down with an avalanche of broken stone.

The PCs can't dodge, can't drive the Annelid back, and can't make a saving throw. They're caught.

## Nowhere to Run

The heroes have absolutely no chance to escape—none. Obviously this is unfair; but consider the alternative. If you allow the PCs an opportunity to escape the Annelid, they must make their way on their own, without guidance, through 2,300 miles of Schattentalfen caverns. This would take many months, and in that time Koresh Teyd could plausibly complete his scheme.

Recall also that, should you extend this trilogy's storyline to cover the extra time the PCs need, then clerics in the Known and Hollow Worlds will have no spells or Immortal guidance for that time.

This module assumes that the Annelid transports the PCs to the Nithian Empire, in suspended animation, in about five days. See "Travel Speed," below.

## INSIDE THE ANNELID

Like a pit trap, the creature's throat opens to swallow up the PCs. It constricts around them in sequence, and they feel like they're being wrapped in hot blankets and passed roughly hand to hand down a long line—in fact, down the first few segments of the Annelid's body.

After their entry into the monster, the PCs soon arrive in the first stomach. Read this aloud:

You fall out of the creature's throat and splash in a pool of bad-smelling liquid. You can't move. Something has paralyzed you.

Phosphorescent fluid is gushing from the walls of this stomach. It casts a dim white light over the rocks being digested here.

There's a white blob crawling up your leg. It's crawling higher, enveloping your waist. You can feel its warmth.

Each PC gets one of these white blobs, a platelet like the antibodies in the human immune system. These have been enchanted to protect travellers within the Annelid. They won't harm the PCs, but the PCs don't know that.

The blob reaches your chin and flows up over your face. It's semi-transparent, so you can make out the sights of your friends being engulfed too. You feel its tendrils reaching up your nose. You open your mouth to scream, and it slides down your throat. . . .

And everything goes dark.

The PCs go into suspended animation, while the platelets feed them air and sustenance.

**Attacking:** This should be futile. Fighters cannot get at their weapons, and spellcasters cannot speak, gesture, or use any items except those they wear. If they manage to make an attack, the platelets are conveniently immune to whatever hits them.

Optionally, you can allow clever PCs to circumvent their bindings and attack the worm. Such attacks may succeed automatically, if only to let the PCs cut their way out from the worm's interior. However, inside the worm, their perceptions slow drastically. By the time they free themselves, five days have passed and the PCs are already in the Nithian Empire!

Why? The Schattentalfen have enchanted the travel chamber to protect unmoving passengers from the cabin-fever hysteria that may occur after prolonged confinement. When their time perceptions are slowed, the five-day trip appears to take no more than a few minutes. The PCs are all equally slowed, so they may not understand what has happened until they get out.

Note that giving the PCs freedom of action inside the worm is strictly optional. For plot reasons that become clear at the beginning of the next chapter, it's better simply to have the PCs pass out and then wake up, groggy and weak, days later on the banks of the Nithia.

## Travel Speed

The Annelid travels about 20 miles an hour, the speed of a very fast runner. (Smaller Annelids go slower.) But where a sprinter quickly tires, the Annelid *crawls for hour after hour through the tunnels* that riddle the World's Spine. The creature never tires; it need not stop to eat, for it can consume the rock that lines the tunnels it crawls through. In this way it covers nearly 500 miles a day. So the PCs' involuntary journey across more than 2,300 miles takes just five days. On foot, it would take at least several months.

**DM Note:** An Annelid doesn't move this fast in combat—only when it has built up speed over several minutes. In terms of game movement rates, the Annelid moves only moderately fast.

## WHERE NEXT?

This should be self-evident—wherever the Annelid wants to go! Its controlling symbiont has been given just one instruction: Take its passengers to Koresh Teyd. The gigantic burrower deposits the PCs on the borders of the Nithian Empire, in the next chapter.

Whether the PCs arrive by Semekhtet-barge or Annelid, this chapter takes place at their destination: a sandstone mesa in the desert 80 miles south of Tarthis, capital of the Nithian Empire.

In searching for the breeding ground of the feathered serpents, the PCs have accidentally stumbled on that of the Great Annelids! Actually, the Annelids have no single breeding ground as such. However, they often congregate for days at a time at a single spot, attracted by a particular flavor of rock or a concentration of elemental magic.

On this mesa Koresh Teyd has taken the opportunity to corral the Annelids. With the aid of his elemental servants, he fits the Annelids with symbionts and gathers the leavings, or castings, of the Annelids' eating in the crust of the planet. This is his source of World-Shield ore.

Since the Annelids cannot digest World-Shield ore, this pure material makes its way through the creatures that eat it and is left behind as waste castings. The castings also contain other indigestibles—such as the PCs.

## THE SCENE

**If the PCs arrived here via the Great Annelid:**

They awaken from their long journey partly encased in Annelid castings of nearly pure World-Shield ore. Each casting looks like half of a hollow cylinder, with jagged upward-turning edges. In fact, it looks much like this adventure.

Only the PCs' faces are exposed in the glistening grayish metal. Their nails and beards (where appropriate) have grown, indicating the passage of time. The Great Annelid that swallowed them is nowhere to be seen.

The PCs are groggy and painfully stiff. They cannot move inside the castings. Spellcasting and magical items don't work because of the ore's anti-magic effects.

For the description of their surroundings, keep reading.

**If the PCs came here aboard the Semekhtet-barge:** The barge rises through blackness and surfaces on a rock promontory jutting straight up from a sandstone mesa.

However the PCs arrived, read the following description aloud:

You can see clearly for miles around. But there is nothing to see except yellow-white sand dunes, extending away like an ocean in all directions.

In the east, where the world curves up, you think you can make out a thin jagged line of light brown, a river, with green squares of farmland on either bank. Beyond it there is more desert, and then haze and clouds block everything.

You're on a tall mesa rising out of the desert, a mass of rock the color of dried blood. The only signs of life here are a few scrubby tamarisk and thistle bushes. . . and, of course, the giant

worms, dozens of yards long, writhing around each other in a hollow of this mesa.

Oh, and a line of earth elementals is ferrying strange metal fragments from the earthworm hollow up the side of the mesa, like a bucket brigade.

And then, of course, there's also the cedarwood barge resting on the lip of the mesa, near you. The armored man called Kruthep is guiding the elementals as they load the metal into the barge. On the barge you can see a few suits of the strange armor you've been encountering—but these suits are rusty brown and corroded.

Other than that, there's no sign of life.

## EVENTS

### Waking Up

Use this event only if the PCs are trapped in World-Shield castings. Huge earthen arms extend from the promontory, pick up the PCs, and ferry them toward the Semekhtet-barge. These are earth elementals, moving just below the surface. No ripple or upturned clod of dirt marks their passage through the rock.

At the barge, the arms gently lift the PCs onto the deck. A dozen or so similar castings already lie on deck. Though they look fragile, no force can dent or splinter them.

Kruthep gloats over the heroes' plight, taunting their helplessness, perhaps even slapping the exposed face of a PC who insults him. Kruthep is a loathsome henchman, sadistic toward underlings and truckling to his master. Try to inspire the players' deep resentment toward him.

For Kruthep's statistics, see the appendix.

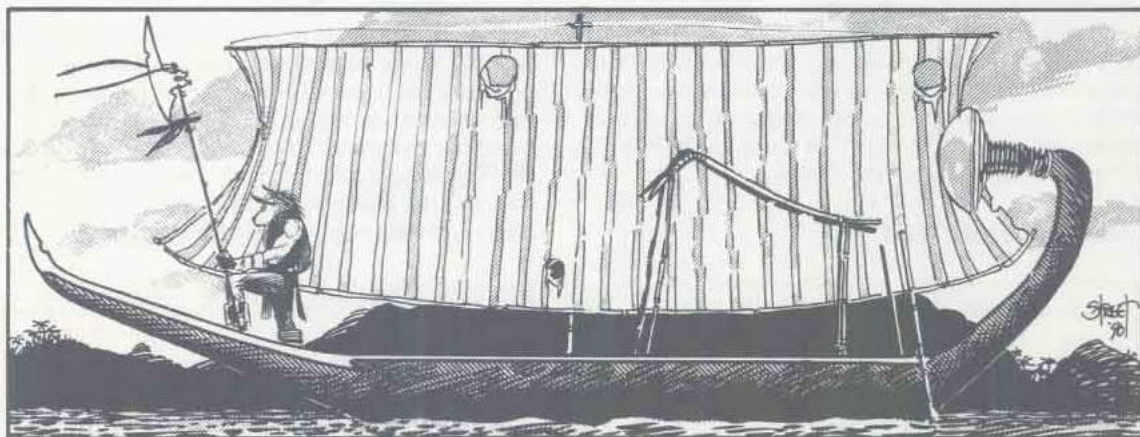
Kruthep may offer mysterious, frustrating clues in response to the PCs' questions. For instance, if they ask what the armor is made of, he says, "You're wearing it now. No matter where you are, you'd have to travel 500 miles to find that ore." (That is, travel straight down 500 miles to the World-Shield gravity belt.)

The following events proceed regardless of the PCs' status. Even trapped in the castings, they can investigate by observing and asking questions.

**Staging note:** If the PCs arrived via Annelid and are still trapped, try to move through the expository material here smoothly and rapidly. The players have had little chance to do anything, and while trapped in the castings they still won't, until they get free as described below. The more quickly these intervening scenes go by, the faster you can get the players active again.

### Enter Augar

The door of the barge's cabin opens. The minotaur you saw in the bat cavern comes out. He's carrying a small, bright red creature. It's sort of



disc-shaped, but irregular, with lots of barbs and prongs sticking out at all angles. In skin texture it resembles a leech, and it smells like acid.

Kruthep sneers. "Look at Augar," he says, "One monster carrying another."

He's about to add something else when a voice from the cabin calls, "Kruthep! In here!" And then, in a different tone, the same voice adds, "No! In Wogar's name, please help me!"

Kruthep hesitates, then straightens and enters the cabin.

Known World PCs familiar with the Broken Lands may recall (with an Intelligence check) that Wogar is the patron Immortal of the humanoids in High Gobliny, homeland of the goblin prince Udan. Prince Udan's own voice briefly (and futilely) overcame Koresh Teyd's mental control.

There is only one plot-related reason for Kruthep to enter the cabin: His absence leaves the PCs alone with Augar, so that they can get to know him and vice versa.

As detailed in this module's appendix, Augar the helmsman is a minotaur, formerly a Nithian (human) soldier whom the priests of Nithia *polymorphed* into this form. The figure of the bull-headed man is one of the many animal-human hybrid entities that the Nithians worship.

But if the PCs ask about his background, Augar says only, "Was once like you. Thought it would be good, good, to be like this. Priests made me. Hrn-nnh." If the heroes ask whether it is good being a minotaur, Augar says, "Still not sure."

**The creature:** Heroes who saw the young Annelid in HWA1, Chapter 4, instantly recall the seeming parasite that rode just behind its clump of sensory tentacles. This creature must be the same variety; all it lacks is a host.

This, of course, is a symbiont, the creature that allows Koresh Teyd to command the Annelids. The PCs cannot know now, and won't find out until the

climax of the adventure, that these symbionts were once feathered serpents, transformed by dark magic in Nightrage foundry.

All Augar says about it is, "Urnnh. Have to put it on worm. Makes worm listen. Obey orders, like Augar has to." He sighs heavily.

**Augar's role in the adventure:** Now brutish and slow-witted, Augar the minotaur has formed a dull hatred of Koresh Teyd and (especially) Kruthep. But he dares not attack them, for he fears their magic.

Augar works as a wild card in the adventure—perhaps allied with the PCs, perhaps their enemy. It all depends on whether and how long the PCs can get access to him, as well as the approach they take in persuading him to join them.

For instance, promises to turn him back to his human form don't work; Augar is still debating the merits of minotaur form. But anything that frees him from Koresh's authority, or anything that does harm to Kruthep, probably goes over well.

### *Infecting a Symbiont*

Just as Augar is about to betray an important secret, or finally decide to join the PCs, Kruthep comes back on deck and orders the minotaur to "go infect another one of the Annelids." Sighing, Augar jumps off deck and trudges toward the hollow where the Annelids have gathered.

As the PCs watch, Augar hesitates, then leaps on the back of a large Annelid. Clutching one of its ridgelines one-handed, the minotaur slaps the symbiont onto the worm's gray, sandpaper-like hide.

At once the symbiont crawls forward, even as the Annelid tries to throw off both riders. Blind, but guided by some unknown instinct, the symbiont crawls forward unerringly to the Annelid's cluster of sense tentacles. Then the symbiont extrudes two sharp fangs from its body and sinks the fangs into the Annelid.

The change comes at once. The Annelid freezes, paralyzed. Then Augar leaps off and grunts a command: "Hunh. Go to ship." And the Annelid re-

sponds, slithering up to the barge!

There Kruthep shouts orders: "Tunnel down to the gravity layer and eat tunnels straight through it. When you are full, return here."

The PCs' shouts to the Annelid have no effect. But if they try such a tactic, as a means of escape for instance, that's a clever idea and worth an experience point bonus. However, it only alienates Kruthep and brings the wrath of Koresh Teyd down on the PCs. (See "Talking with Koresh," below.)

### Enter Koresh Teyd

Again the cabin door opens. A darkness inside seems to lift, and a small figure staggers out. He's thin as a skeleton, and an inhuman skeleton at that: short, hunched, with a sloping forehead and gawky limbs. He's a goblin, and it looks like he hasn't eaten in a month.

The goblin wears nothing but a loincloth made of some kind of animal fur. He also wears something like a small iron cylinder on a thin chain around his neck. And there's something on his back, but you can't see what. His limbs twitch like they're pulled by strings.

The worst sight is the goblin's eyes. They're bulging, bloodshot, and filled with terror. But his voice is confident, as though someone else were using it.

"When the loading is done, we leave for Tarthis," the voice says. "The foundry is running short." Kruthep bows his head and says, "Yes, great Koresh."

Then the goblin's head turns, as though someone's hand swivelled it around. He sees you, and for a moment the voice changes—his whole manner changes. For a moment he looks like nothing but a frightened goblin. "You! Friends!" he shouts. "Help me, help —"

And then he changes again, and says, "Enough of that. We have work to finish."

He goes over to barge-side and looks down at the elementals. And now you see his back. Reaching from the base of his neck all the way down his spine is a dark brown mass of oily flesh, like a hump. The skin is moist like a slug's. It's shot through with yellow veins, and it pulses as you watch.

This wretched creature is Udan, once a goblin prince of the tribe of High Gobliny in the Broken Lands of the Known World. Now he is the puppet of the Brethren parasite Koresh Teyd, the slug-like monstrosity riding on his back.

Koresh has neglected the body of his goblin host, forbidding it food and sleep. This accounts for Udan's horrible condition. Occasionally his tormented spirit breaks through to scream a phrase or two.

**The pendant:** The PCs also note that Koresh carries a small iron vial, too large for a potion vial but much too small for a canteen. It hangs from a thin

(but unbreakable) cord around the slender goblin neck; in back it runs under the slug, so PCs cannot easily remove it. The item is presumably magical, but if analyzed, its effect is unclear.

The PCs only learn near the adventure's conclusion that this vial, a magical item called a *durance vial*, holds the life forces of two leaders of the fire and earth elementals. Koresh holds them hostage to extort the elementals' cooperation, both here and in the Nightrage foundry. Koresh always keeps the vial close to him. Don't let the PCs steal this vial; it figures prominently at the module's climax.

## INVESTIGATION

### The Elementals

Koresh, supervising the earth elementals, constantly brandishes the vial around his neck. Every time the elementals see this, they instantly carry out whatever orders he gives—loading the ore castings faster, disposing of garbage from the cabin, patrolling the mesa borders.

By calling an elemental aside for a whispered conference, the PCs might collect a few enigmatic clues. The elemental, named Pyrite for its distinctive gold-like flecks, confesses that it and its fellows have vowed to serve Koresh Teyd, reluctant though they are. "He speeaks. We aaact. All he says, we dooooo."

The wizard clearly has some hold on them, yet magic of this kind does not function in the Hollow World. Pyrite, like all the elementals the PCs meet, refuses to reveal the nature of Koresh Teyd's power over them.

(Only at the adventure's end do the PCs learn the reason for their silence: shame, at the way their elemental ruler became involved with (gasp!) a fire elemental, and the way Koresh trapped both beings in his *durance vial*.)

**About Gabbro:** If the PCs ask after Gabbro, the elemental they met in the first part of this adventure, Pyrite reports that Gabbro is missing. No one knows where the elemental cleric has gone, but the elementals are gravely worried.

**Enlisting aid:** If you want to speed the adventure along, the PCs might enlist the elementals' aid in escaping Koresh Teyd and journeying overland (under-land, that is) to Tarthis. "Biiiig power there," say the elementals. Their vow prevents them from carrying the heroes directly to Nightrage foundry. But the elementals know the PCs can find enough information in the Nithian capital to make their own way there.

### The Armor

Koresh also commands the elementals to offload the rusting armor on deck. These suits of World-Shield ore have corroded at the joints and are covered with a fine sheet of rust. The metal, once impervious to physical force, now shatters like brittle rock.

"This load was the first to go," Koresh tells Kruthep, where the PCs may overhear (perhaps with a successful Intelligence check, if you wish). "I foiled

the elves' questions with a cock-and-bull story, but the other suits will start to go soon.—Your plan will fail! Let me go!" The voice of Udan breaks in on Koresh's voice, but the wizard again overcomes the goblin. "Nonsense! We only increase the demand this way. Soon they may be helping us mine the whole World-Shield."

This should be the PCs' first clue, and perhaps their only one, that confirms the World-Shield armor is unstable. If they have procured their own suits, they should realize that they cannot remain invincible forever. (In future combats, dangle the danger of sudden armor failure. When will the armor corrode and fall from the heroes' limbs? Which sword-stroke will shatter a breastplate? This adds tension to otherwise uneventful fights.)

## Annelids

The huge Great Annelids writhe and wriggle over one another, their anterior and posterior ends impossible to identify and separate. The PCs have their first chance to examine closely the creatures that have created all the unnaturally smooth and round tunnels they've been travelling through.

The Annelids are Koresh's pride. They are the living symbol of Thanatos's power, for the Entropy Immortal has resurrected them even despite the insuperable Spell of Preservation. Granted, he could not resurrect their intellects as well as their bodies—but with the new symbionts, the burrowers remain as potent a menace now as in the prehistory of the Hollow World.

Koresh dares not tell the heroes any of this. However, he may reveal other secrets, if the PCs play upon his vanity and arrogance. Given skillful psychology in their probing, the PCs can learn from Koresh of the symbionts' function (but not their origin!);

of the tunnels through the World-Shield, and of the Annelid castings that refine the ore into the form used to make the armor (but not the real reason Koresh wants tunnels through the World-Shield);

and of the life cycle of the Annelids, including the way the hatchlings feed on the life forces of paralyzed earth elementals.

## Talking With Koresh

First, Koresh Teyd takes care of business. He appraises the ore castings on hand, nods, and says, "Again, quite pure. Nothing matches those Annelids for purity of extraction." Then he orders the elementals to dump the corroded World-Shield armor overside, along with spoiled food and other garbage from the barge cabin.

At last, as appropriate depending on circumstances, Koresh examines and talks with the PCs. Since he doesn't necessarily know they are his enemies, he might converse with them peaceably, sounding them out as possible servants (go to "Talking" below). But if the heroes don't sound cooperative, Koresh casually attacks.

## Fighting

If the PCs attack him, Koresh retaliates. Since he's a 25th-level magic-user, with the extorted support of a horde of earth elementals, he probably overcomes the PCs in short order. Go to "Offense Taken," described below.

If the heroes are somehow beating Koresh, he defends himself, then quickly leaps aboard the Semekhtet-*barge* and escapes. He is entirely willing to leave Augar in the lurch, and Kruthep as well if necessary. Use any device necessary to ensure that he escapes.

If the PCs defeat the remaining opposition, go directly to "Where Next?" at the end of this chapter.

## Talking—and a Job Offer

It's important to recognize that, depending on circumstances, *Koresh may not yet realize the PCs are his enemies*. Unless the PCs attacked Koresh directly in the bat cavern, killed his henchman, or subverted his minotaur, Koresh regards the PCs simply as itinerant adventurers who accidentally got swallowed by an Annelid or hitched a ride on his barge. Koresh is suspicious by nature, but after all, he may have no evidence (yet) that the PCs are hostile.

Therefore, whether by flattering Koresh, playing dumb, pretending evil intent, or some other strategy, the PCs may lure Koresh to free them from the ore. He's certainly not dumb; he has plenty of defensive spells ready, and he makes sure the PCs are disarmed. He has half his earth elementals do the job, while the other half guard him.

In talking with the PCs, Koresh probably spots their talents and offers them a job. "There are great movements in the world now, and every able warrior is needed to help bring about a new order. I would like to present you to my employer," he says, putting the faintest touch of sarcasm on the last word.

(This "employer" business is Koresh's ironic reference to Pharaoh Ramose IV, from the boxed campaign set. Koresh has played on Ramose's ambitions to build ever greater monuments, offering great glory in return for non-interference with the Nightrage foundry.)

Clever heroes recognize the need to know their enemy; they may accept eagerly. If so, Koresh takes them on a barge-ride to the basement of the Royal Palace in Tarthis. If the PCs refuse without appearing overtly hostile, Koresh nods and departs without hard feelings—though Kruthep may manage to get in a parting shot.

**Double blind:** Note that the PCs may be as much in the dark as Koresh, especially if they haven't played the other modules in this trilogy. They may not yet realize Koresh Teyd is the main villain of this module. They may possibly regard him as a henchman, and his "employer" as the chief villain. If so, try to perpetuate this confusion, keeping the truth to surprise the players in the adventure's climax.



## Offense Taken

Run this sequence only if the PCs are trapped in the Annelid castings.

Very possibly the PCs do not immediately charm Koresh; instead, they insult him, alienate him, or demonstrate dangerous knowledge of his plan, or that of his counterpart, Simm of the Grasping Dark (see HWA1).

If so, Koresh wastes no more time in banter. Pausing only to gloat, "So sorry you won't be able to drop in on us again," he kicks the PCs, still trapped in their castings, over the side of the mesa!

The PCs still cannot escape the castings. They have many moments of a long fall through empty air to contemplate their folly. Then the metal strikes the side of the cliff, and the shock knocks out the PCs. All goes black.

But don't let the players whine too loudly. Their characters haven't died. Just as the World-Shield ore prevented their escape, so it also shields them from damage by the fall. They arrive at the bottom out cold, but otherwise unharmed.

Koresh and his henchman leave the heroes to starve or bake in the sun. But they will escape their trap much sooner than he realizes.

## Getting Loose

The PCs wake up trapped in the World-Shield castings. Let them try to escape, such as by rolling against each other to crack the ore castings. Since the ore has not been forged and tempered, it remains brittle, so you can be generous in allowing success for imaginative escape attempts.

If the players have no idea how to get out, within an hour or so they notice that the World-Shield ore is corroding and turning powdery around their fingertips—around their throats and ankles—in fact, wherever it contacts their bodies. Soon they can get free.

This reveals an unrecognized property of the World-Shield ore, one that also affects the armor made from it. As described in this module's appendix, contact with a living wearer sooner or later renders the ore unstable and useless. Koresh Teyd knows this, but he has not told the Schattennalfen who use his armor. Koresh did not realize how quickly the untempered ore surrounding the PCs would decay and free them.

Once the PCs are free, they can look around the area and find a route to their next logical destination: Tarthis.

## The Surroundings

The PCs stand at the base of a sandy cliff at the desert's edge about 80 miles south of Tarthis, on the west side of the Nithia ("west" in Hollow World terms).

Several noblemen's tombs lie farther south on this cliff. All of the old ones have been looted and the newer ones are still being built. These tombs play no part in this adventure.

Beyond a rocky outcropping to the north the PCs find an artisan village, a layout of some 40 rude mud huts without roofs. These are all deserted, for the artisans have been recruited to Pharaoh Ramose's distant mortuary. The poor huts are temporary structures designed to house construction workers, and they contain only a few canteens of water and pouches of dried food—dates, apricots, and nuts.

## WHERE NEXT?

### *Journey Through Stone*

If the PCs accompany Koresh on his Semekhtet-berge, the underground journey to the Royal Palace of Ramose IV takes only an hour or so. Should the heroes try to attack Koresh or his aides while on the barge, Koresh springs a few hidden earth elementals to delay the PCs while he escapes.

Assuming all proceeds uneventfully, the barge arrives at an underground "dock" beneath the pharaoh's palace. Go to the next chapter, starting with the section there about the palace.

### *On Their Own*

If the PCs separated from Koresh, they must locate clues on their own in order to find the way to Tarthis.

The PCs could find a laggard earth elemental who has not yet followed Koresh's order to leave; this elemental could point them, not to Nightrage foundry (a violation of its oath), but to Tarthis.

Also, the artisan housing might contain a makeshift map, presumably made for an officer in charge of buying food for the artisans. The map traces a route a few miles across open desert to a road leading north to Tarthis.

Finally, the heroes could just lurch toward the flooded Nithia, the most prominent landmark around. Optionally, stage a desert encounter from the boxed campaign set. Once the heroes reach the river, routes leading anywhere but to Tarthis are impassable because of the river's flood.

When they reach the city, go to the next chapter, beginning with the "Investigation" section.

This chapter lists information sources in Tarthis and the surrounding area. The PCs' investigation of these sources points to two places: a desert oasis far outside the city, below the mountains (the feathered serpent breeding ground, described in the next chapter); and the mountains outside Tarthis, beneath which Koresh Teyd has built a volcanic foundry to smelt World-Shield ore (Nightrage foundry, described in Chapter 9).

Review the Nithian Empire entry in the boxed set's Atlas section. As you run the encounters in this chapter, stress the salient features of Nithian culture:

- its timeless, eternal quality;
- its reliance on tradition and reluctance to innovate;
- reverence for the River Nithia, source of all water and all life;
- a pragmatic attitude toward learning—though not dull-witted by any means, the Nithians do not relish knowledge for its own sake, but only for the immediate uses it offers; and finally,
- morbid fascination with death and the presumed afterlife. The Nithians obsessively nurture a complicated mythology of the tests, entities, and experiences awaiting their spirits after they die.

Significantly, none of this folklore comes directly from the Immortals. Rather, the Nithian priests "receive" it in visions and promulgate it to the people. For Nithians, this life is only preparation for the true ordeal to come, and everything important in their society is directed toward that phase of existence.

## THE SCENE

The color mapsheet in this module includes a map of Tarthis. Now read the description on that map, then return here.

As the PCs arrive, the Nithia is in the fourth month of its annual four-month flood. Just now, the river is brown and somewhat bad-smelling, for the flood is depositing another rich load of silt on the peasants' farmlands. The farmers will soon return to their fields, but for now they remain at the Pharaoh's beck and call. Ramose IV has set them several monumental building projects in distant lands upriver, so the PCs may meet comparatively few Nithians.

Though the peasants are mostly gone, the wildlife of the river remains in force. Hippos, ibises (tall wading birds), and crocodiles haunt the shores. Giraffes and jackals trot easily in the wild grasslands at the desert border. Falcons and vultures circle overhead, riding the hot wind from the western mountains. PCs who succeed in an Intelligence check may detect a hint of sulfur in those winds. But that is a clue for later.

## THE PALACE

For a map of the Royal Palace of Pharaoh Ramose IV, consult the module screen.

The Royal Palace, built over 25 years with the

backbreaking labor of a million peasants, stands aloof many miles distant from the dwellings of mere mortals in Tarthis. After all, this is the dwelling of the Nithians' Immortal patron in human form, grand and unanswerable Pharaoh.

The heavily guarded palace includes hundreds of bedchambers for priests and attendant nobles, and for Pharaoh's family and huge entourage. More important by far are the many temples built in every part of the palace, to every Immortal known to the Nithians. The palace serves both everyday and spiritual needs, for in Nithia the two can never be separated.

**How the PCs arrive:** If the PCs come to the palace under their own power, read the exterior palace description under "The View From Outside," in the next subsection.

If the PCs travelled with Koresh Teyd on his Semekhtet-barge at the end of the previous chapter, they arrive in the palace, at a cellar "pier." Read this aloud:

The darkness around you falls away, in a clean line, like a black curtain lowering. The barge surfaces through the bare stone floor of a long room with painted walls and a low stone ceiling. The room seems to be shaped exactly to accommodate the barge.

The wall paintings show long wooden barges identical to the one you ride, and dusky people wearing white pleated loincloths and gesturing strangely. Strange symbols are drawn around their hands, so you decide these must be the wizards that enchanted the barge.

Koresh Teyd staggers out of the cabin. His legs are shaking, but his voice is deep and strong as he says, "This is the dock beneath the Royal Palace in Tarthis, capital of the Nithian Empire."

He continues, "I suggest you go upstairs, talk to Pharaoh's guards—don't worry, they'll find you—and ask to see Pharaoh in his Chamber of the Sunfire Throne. I must leave you now, having pressing business elsewhere." As he says this, the look in his eyes grows more frightened. It's like one person is controlling the goblin's mouth, and another is looking out from those haunted eyes.

The description's interpretation of the paintings is correct, and Koresh Teyd can confirm this.

Once the PCs leave the boat, Prince Udan's emaciated goblin body attempts to lunge over the side. But instead, the skeletal figure falls prone. His head jerks upward as though pulled by a puppeteer's string, and Koresh's deep voice shouts, "Augar! Cast off!"

The PCs cannot "rescue" Prince Udan. He made a senseless, futile attempt to escape Koresh's control, but Koresh has reasserted dominance. If the PCs attack Koresh or Augar, Koresh defends himself and the minotaur while the boat descends once more into solid rock. The PCs will not see Koresh Teyd again until the end of this module.

When the PCs leave this room, they enter the Royal Palace above. Continue with the interior description under "Meeting Tothmes," below.

## The View From Outside

You first see the tremendous building in the distance, miles away, against a background of jagged brown hills to one side, and the sluggish brown Nithia River to the other.

Between hills and river, a huge palace complex stretches across the desert sand. Its brown stone is the same color as the hills, and it looks as solid and changeless as the hills do.

Palm trees mark the high stone wall that surrounds the main building. In the still air, not a single leaf trembles.

You make your way to a rise overlooking the palace. Twin statues stand at an open gate in the wall. The statues are sitting sphinxes, maybe fifty feet tall at the shoulder. Beyond the gate, a straight path stretches across a quarter-mile of open sand to the palace. The path is lined with wooden flagpoles and with smaller sphinx statues.

The palace itself is one long, low building, built in sections. The line of sections curves and straightens and curves again, like a road. You see row and rows of massive stone columns, standing like a forest. They support roofs made of giant stone blocks. Open skylights mark the roof of every section.

Everywhere on the grounds you see squads of spearmen, axemen, and archers, all wearing white loincloths and woven black wigs. Some carry round-topped wooden shields with serpent symbols on them.

The serpent symbols do not include wings, as observant PCs may note. The serpent shown is a standard rock python, found in the jungles of the upper Nithia, near Hapta.

There are 128 elite (2nd level) male Nithian infantrymen patrolling the grounds in 16 squads of eight soldiers each. These soldiers carry bronze axes (the peculiar Nithian weapon called an *akas*) and copper-tipped spears.

There are also four squads of eight 2nd-level charioteers. Each squad assigns two charioteers to one chariot, pulled by two white horses in horse barding. (Nithia armors its horses better than its soldiers, on the logic that horses are less easily replaced.)

For each four squads there is a 3rd-level company commander. The four companies are led by a 4th-level battalion commander, a jackal-headed Hutaakan named Retennu. All soldiers above 2nd level are foreign mercenaries from the various lands adjoining the Nithian Empire.

**Nithian soldiers:** AC 9 or 8; HD 2; hp 7; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6; MV 120' (40'); Save F2; ML 8; AL N; THACO 18.

The PCs can enter stealthily only with magic, extreme cleverness, or great luck. Ordinarily the patrols guard every part of the palace very thoroughly. Once they reach the palace, stealthy PCs could climb to the roof and enter almost any part of the building via the open skylights.

It makes more sense, however, just to march up to the gate and demand to see Pharaoh. If the PCs do so, a squad of infantrymen asks them a few questions, then escorts them into the palace. Go to the next subsection.

## Meeting Tothmes

The interior of the Royal Palace reminds you of a cavern. The walls are so far away, the ceiling so high, and the scale so much larger than human, that the whole building seems like a work of nature—or of Immortals.

The first thing you notice is the smell. Exotic perfumes drench every room: lilacs, ambergris, cedarwood, vanilla, and many others.

Pale light shines down from the skylights overhead. The massive columns regularly spaced in every room are carved like lotus stalks, blossoming to support the roof. Brown stone walls bear carvings of Pharaoh conquering his enemies, dispensing excellent justice, and talking with his fellow Immortals in the afterlife.

The hall is crowded with people. You see bald priests wearing diaphanous pleated gowns, alligator-skin robes, and beaded necklaces. You see soldiers leading processions of naked slaves tied to a line of hemp rope. You see scribes, thin men in loincloths, carrying rolls of papyrus and clay jars of ink. And everywhere you see painters and sculptors covering the walls with more of Pharaoh's exploits.

Curiously, you see hardly any women, except for maidservants.

Echoes drift to you: the slap of sandals on floors, the annoying tap of chisels on stone, and a constant murmur of conversations throughout the colossal halls.

Develop further description depending on where the PCs have entered, using the map on the module screen. Note that most of the women are confined to unseen service areas or to Pharaoh's own harem quarters.

Sooner or later the guards arrive, if they didn't bring the PCs in themselves. The soldiers interrogate the PCs briefly, and, very quickly, lead them straight to the atrium before the Sunfire Throne chamber. But there, in front of the great bronze doors to the throne room, the heroes are stopped.

A Nithian archpriest, Tothmes, controls access to the room. In a small antechamber next to the throne room, Tothmes interviews the PCs before allowing them to approach "the Sun at zenith"—that is, the Queen.

Pharaoh Ramose, it develops, is not currently in the chamber, though he is expected to give audiences within the hour. "And if you want to talk to him, I'd advise you to have something nice to give him first," says Tothmes huffily.

**Tothmes:** Short, pot-bellied, with discolored patches of skin across his nose and jaw, and shaved bald as most Nithian high priests are, Tothmes hardly looks like a man of romantic feelings. He doesn't act romantic around the PCs, either. In fact, he practically threatens their lives if they make remarks that he construes as disrespectful of Pharaoh or (in particular) Pharaoh's queen and chief wife, Tafiri.

This is because Tothmes, despite appearances, actually nurtures a deeply romantic and totally unrequited love for Tafiri. The love is one of Tothmes' two deepest secrets; the other is his loathing of the newly arrived upstart in Pharaoh's court, the wizard Koresh Teyd.

If the PCs bring up the subject of Koresh Teyd, Tothmes quizzes them closely about what they know. However, he reveals nothing about his own hatred and suspicion of Koresh, who is supplanting Tothmes in Pharaoh's favor. If the PCs have evidence that would make Koresh Teyd look bad, Tothmes hustles them into the throne room for an immediate audience with Tafiri and Pharaoh Ramose.

Should the PCs taunt Tothmes, he bluntly refuses them access to the throne room.

In that case, let the PCs barge in, if they like. Or, in the unlikely event that they accept Tothmes' refusal and start to skulk away, Tafiri herself may appear, followed by her entourage. She latches on to the most handsome PC, then leads the entire party into the throne room. Go to the next subsection.

**Tothmes:** 14th-level cleric of Rathanos; AC 9; hp 38; #AT 1 spell; Dmg by spell; MV 120' (40'); Save C14; ML 8; AL N; THAC0 13. Languages: Nithian, Neathar, Milenian. Spells: 1st level—*cure light wounds*, *detect evil* (x2), *protection from evil*, *cause fear*. 2nd level—*bless*, *find traps* (x2), *resist fire* (x2). Tothmes has no higher-level spells while the Immortals are absent from the Hollow World.

### Meeting Tafiri

The throne room has the highest ceiling of any room in the palace. The voices of dozens of priests, scribes, courtiers, and supplicants echo from that roof. A few small skylights let in dim beams of reddish light.

Every other room of the palace had walls full of carvings, paintings, and tapestries. But the walls here are completely bare. The contrast makes you feel like you're in a temple.

But there's no altar here—just two thrones, side by side on a pedestal with a small staircase in front. The thrones are plain sandstone with simple white cushions on the seats.

In the acre or so of open space in front of the thrones, a long line of supplicants waits patiently. Two lines of scribes sit cross-legged on either side of the thrones, waiting to write down any word from their occupants. The scribes are dressed like peasants, but you notice that everyone seems to defer to them.

Right now only one throne is occupied. There

sits one of the most beautiful young women you've ever seen. She's tall and sleek, with very black hair and eyes, and dark blue powder on her eyelids. She wears a clinging white dress and a red-and-gold headdress, but not much jewelry. She's wearing less gold than almost anyone in here except the scribes, but she seems to look that much prettier because of it.

Right now she looks bored—or at least she did, until you came in. "And who are these handsome strangers?" she says.

Queen Tafiri's full description and statistics appear in the *Hollow World Atlas*, p. 77.

Ignoring the supplicants, Tafiri instantly picks the most comely male PC as a target for flirtation. "So, this dull place must be disappointing after the wonderful sights you must have seen," she says, favoring the victim with a melting gaze. "Tell me of the women you have loved on your travels. There must be many for such a handsome man."

Naturally, this banter irritates Tothmes. And it will also (less obviously) irritate Pharaoh, when he enters momentarily.

**Tafiri:** AC 9; hp 36; #AT 1 spell; Dmg by spell; MV 120' (40'); Save C14; ML 6; AL N; THAC0 13. Spells: 1st level—*cure light wounds*, *detect evil*, *detect magic*, *protection from evil*, *remove fear*. 2nd level—*bless* (x2), *find traps* (x2), *resist fire*. Tafiri has no higher-level spells while the Immortals are absent from the Hollow World.

If the other PCs wish to talk with the courtiers or the scribes, they can learn of the tensions between Tafiri and Pharaoh. But though it is common knowledge (and a source of much cruel humor), no one dares speak of Tothmes' infatuation with Tafiri. ... at least while Tothmes is present.

### Meeting Pharaoh

As the ruler of the Nithians enters the throne room, a herald declaims the traditional sequence of epithets hung on every Pharaoh's name:

"Hail and bear worship to His Immortal Majesty, Pharaoh Ramose: life of the river, creator of the flood, bringer of the sunlight, master of the wind, lord of all the empire, enduring in kingship like the sun in the sky, beloved of Rathanos, beloved of Pflarr. May he live eternally!"

In one corner musicians pluck lutes and harps, pound drums, and strum zithers. Acolytes wave censers, filling the air with the smells of sandalwood and jasmine and cinnamon.

Two dozen priests, young shaven-headed men holding gold staves, line up on either side of the rear doors, forming a wide aisle. At the sound of a gong, the doors open outward.

Framed in the doorway you see a tall, well-built man wearing a bright crimson cloak, a pleated white kilt, and lots of gold jewelry. He wears a tall

conical hat, a graceful crown made of white linen with a golden cobra fillet on the forehead. But more impressive than the white crown are the heavy eyebrow ridges beneath it, and the sand-colored eyes that look at you alertly.

He enters the room. As he passes the priests, they fall prostrate before him, two by two, chanting "Pharaoh is great."

As he ascends the throne, everyone else in the room except the Queen kneels. What do you do?

If the PCs kneel before Pharaoh, all is well. If they don't, nothing bad happens, but the heroes may have a more difficult time winning Pharaoh's favor.

**Pharaoh Ramose IV:** AC 8; hp 45; #AT 1 (golden mace); Dmg 1d6 + 2; MV 120' (40'); Save C18; ML 7; AL N; THAC0 11. Spells: 1st level—*cure light wounds* (x2), *detect evil*, *detect magic*, *protection from evil*, *remove fear*. 2nd level—*bleed* (x2), *find traps*, *silence 15' radius* (x2), *speak with animals*. Pharaoh has no higher-level spells while the Immortals are absent from the Hollow World.

For a full description of Pharaoh Ramose IV, consult the boxed campaign set's Atlas, p. 76.

**Winning Pharaoh's favor:** Pharaoh dismisses the priests' conventional blessings with a wave of his hand. He gestures for the PCs to come forward. "Wanderers, I see, from other lands," he says, not unkindly. "What do you bring to present to your Pharaoh?"

The PCs should present a valuable gift, a fascinating anecdote of their adventures, or some display of amazing ability. They must also delicately stave off flirtations from the queen, Tafiri, who lauds handsome male PCs with excessive praise in hopes of making Pharaoh jealous. Try to stage this dilemma to provoke maximum nervousness in the PCs (and maximum fun for the players).

**If the PCs win Pharaoh's favor:** He answers all their questions as described in the next subsection. He also offers them his Palace's full hospitality for two sleeps, and he commands his court to treat these foreign visitors as though they were of Pharaoh's own blood.

Then he grants them the "privilege" of serving their esteemed Pharaoh on a mission to the western desert—a mission described below.

**If the PCs can't win Pharaoh's favor:** Or, worst of all, they don't even try! Pharaoh becomes aloof and arrogant toward the heroes, and he casts an occasional bitter glance toward Tafiri. The less the heroes do to win him over, the less useful information Ramose gives the PCs in the discussion that follows.

Truly dismal performances mean no information at all. And they get the mission assignment below as punishment!

Also, PCs in disfavor get no lodging in the Palace, are snubbed by the priests and nobles of the court, and get no provisions except a skimpy meal of rice and stewed plums before they're shunted off to their mission.

## What Ramose Tells the PCs

In playing Pharaoh, try for maximum self-assurance, self-righteousness, self-absorption, and absolute selfishness. The players should appreciate the fundamental injustice of Nithian society, where every citizen's effort goes simply to glorify Pharaoh. Those PCs who are aware of the Spell of Preservation must realize that they cannot do anything to help; if they destroy Ramose, another Pharaoh just as selfish must take his place.

Here are some of Pharaoh's specific answers on likely subjects:

**About Koresh Teyd:** None among the Nithians, at least in recent times, can rival this sorcerer's command of magic. Though new to this land, the goblin mage has proven to be a loyal servant who recognizes Pharaoh's glory, as all must. (Ramose is so accustomed to supreme power that he doesn't question this, and he resents PCs who do.)

Koresh has embarked on schemes to bring Pharaoh even greater power and glory, so that soon all lesser lands must pay tribute to Tathis. Koresh enjoys Pharaoh's most glorious favor, and Pharaoh trusts him implicitly. Alert PCs may notice Tothmes wincing at these words.

**About the amazing armor:** This is one of Koresh Teyd's breakthroughs. Pharaoh cares not how the goblin produces it, and knows only that the barbaric "elves under the mountains" buy it with valuable trade goods. Pharaoh cares not what the trade goods may be; this is a matter for mere merchants.

Pharaoh and the Nithians, of course, have no interest in wearing such cumbersome and inappropriate armor themselves. (This is the Nithian cultural bias, as dictated by the Spell of Preservation.) Ramose doesn't know how Koresh makes the armor, and he has never heard of the World-Shield.

**About feathered serpents:** Pharaoh announces that he has never heard of them, and so they cannot be important. (A lie. Their breeding ground, in a distant oasis, is regarded as a gift from the Immortals and a close secret. Tothmes may part with this information, for a healthy bribe. Tafiri has vague inklings of it, which she may use to lure an attractive male PC to a "secret" rendezvous.)

**About "the peak that smokes" or earth elements:** Pharaoh knows nothing of these either. (Another lie. Pharaoh has learned of the white smoke that erupts from the mountains to the west. Koresh Teyd has told him this arises from the secret production of the World-Shield armor. This is true. Pharaoh will not betray the secret unless it appears convenient.)

## The Unexpected Mission

Remember that during this exposition, Tafiri has been casting meaningful glances at one or more male PCs. Pharaoh happens to notice this once too often, and he abruptly says to the PCs, "You must know of a small trouble weighing on Pharaoh's mind. You will, of course, be honored to serve glorious Pharaoh in this mission."

"There are recent ill tidings of monster incursions from the desert to the west, the monsters that are horrible mixtures of man and scorpion. You will equip an expedition into the desert, search out these monsters, and slaughter them in Pharaoh's name."

Pharaoh assigns the PCs their duties without asking. Pharaoh may underwrite the expedition's costs, depending on how much the PCs have impressed him.

**Accept or not?:** Now the players must weigh the costs of ignoring this unasked-for mission, or of trying to wriggle out of it (a very bad move).

In all cases, they should at least pretend to accept the assignment. Pharaoh takes refusal as a grave offense, and the PCs must either spend a few sleeps under house arrest, or fight their way out of the palace. While in Tārthis, they will be fugitives, marked for capture or, if that proves unworkable, death.

If the PCs accept the mission but then ignore it, they have the freedom of the city for a sleep or two before Pharaoh's priests begin asking pointed questions. The PCs can stall for a reasonable time, but eventually the outcome is the same as absolute refusal.

A better approach is to put together the expedition, make nominal forays into the desert, and there, outside Pharaoh's vigilant gaze, decide where to go next.

As it happens, the expedition will take the PCs right where they want to go: the breeding ground of the Feathered Serpents. See "Raising an Expedition," below, and the next chapter.

### *Adventures in the Palace*

The Royal Palace is huge and crowded, an ideal location for fill-in adventures before the desert expedition. Some suggestions follow. Note the last one in particular!

**Assassination:** Tāfiri has flirted with a PC; Ramose has restrained his jealousy, but Tothmes cannot; he arranges to have the troublesome PC assassinated. As the heroes sleep in their luxurious guest chamber, Tothmes' junior priests admit a killer into the room: perhaps a monster, such as a starved young sphinx; perhaps a band of high-level thieves; possibly even a single, highly poisonous asp or scorpion.

The priests wait outside to bear the awful news of the PCs' "accidental" death to Pharaoh. The PCs can catch them, but the priests refuse to incriminate their leader, Tothmes. Tothmes, in his best more-in-sorrow-than-in-anger manner, condemns the priests to slavery in the granite quarries.

**Poison at the feast:** An annual temple ceremony, full of pomp and pageantry, takes place while the PCs are in the palace, followed by a great feast. Tāfiri insists the heroes sit near her. One of Pharaoh's lesser wives, jealous of the Queen's beauty and power, has poisoned her dessert of sugared dates. If the PCs can prevent her from eating them, or cure her once she is poisoned, they earn the Pharaoh's gratitude (though it is perhaps reluctant). Then the furious Pharaoh may condemn his entire harem to a brutal death,

unless the heroes volunteer to locate the poisoner and bring her to justice.

**An origin for the Brethren?:** A scribe named Menemhat, a respected professional in court, enlists the PCs to help him carry a load of old scrolls from previous dynasties out of the voluminous archives to a disposal site. There they are scheduled for routine disposal in a bonfire.

On the way, the PCs collide with a hurrying priest and the scrolls spill. While picking them up, the PCs notice one old papyrus with faded hieroglyphic drawings that closely resemble the original Blood Brethren, and a picture sequence depicting the grasping dark spell!

Menemhat, one of the few literate people in the palace, can interpret the scroll's writing. Two centuries ago, during the previous Pharaonic dynasty, the nomarch (provincial governor) of the province of Ranak ordered dark sorcerous experiments conducted. These experiments, upon captured Schatnalfen, attempted to transform the elves into monstrous warriors who would serve the nobles of Ranak. (As the Nithian Empire Atlas entry in the boxed campaign set explains, Ranak's nobles scheme constantly to regain control of the Pharaoh's throne. Menemhat can tell the PCs about this history.)

The scroll describes two survivors of the experiment, transformed elves of monstrous appearance and horrific power. Their own researches into magic soon surpassed their creators'. The scroll ends before telling of the experiment's results.

No one alive in Tārthis can tell the PCs anything more. It is a single, frustrating clue to the origin of the Brethren. The PCs can only learn more in HWA3, *Nightstorm*.

## INVESTIGATION

This section describes sources of clues outside the palace. Let the PCs explore Tārthis, and Nithian society, as they wish. They soon discover the following basic ideas.

**Classes:** Nithian society falls neatly into three classes. The upper class includes Pharaoh and his family, the priesthood, and the scribes. PCs meet them mainly in the palace and the temples.

Artisans form the middle class—architects, sculptors, painters, and other craftsmen. Foreign mercenaries, who are generally superior to native Nithian troops, also merit respect due the middle class. The PCs might meet these people anywhere.

Finally, the largest and lowest class includes farmers, slaves, and conscript Nithian soldiers. These work the banks of the Nithia and the desert's edges.

**Character:** Nithians are literal-minded people, not given to idle speculation unless it involves temple gossip. The general population, as opposed to Pharaoh, shows little curiosity about foreign lands.

Religion suffuses their lives. The complex mythology includes a couple of thousand entities, mostly avatars of a few genuine Immortals. However, Nithian religion is not a moral force; the precepts do not deal with right and wrong, but with magic to keep the river flowing and the sun shining.

**Staging notes:** When possible, emphasize the injustice of the Nithian system. A single Pharaoh exercises arbitrary but unquestionable authority, and the impoverished citizens must endure his commands silently. They suffer, but they (and the PCs) can't do anything about it—because of the Spell of Preservation.

"There's been revolts in the past, I hear," a peasant may say. "Almost overthrew the tyrant. Killed one or two, I hear. But the higher powers stepped in and put another Pharaoh in his place, one just as bad. This is the way they want it, I guess: to look down from above the sun and watch us sweat."

As in Colima, the PCs are seeing the worst effects of the Spell of Preservation. They cannot do anything about these, for now. But in the third module of this series, they may get their chance.

### Farmers and Slaves

**Location:** Along the river's edge, where they are working to build municipal structures like temples; and at the edge of the desert, where they build tombs and other structures that are meant to stand forever. Currently the farmers' fields are under deep, muddy water.

**Names:** For men, Khnoumis, Matti, Nefer, Setanu, and Merhu. For women, Isis (very common), Mut, Teta, Shekti, Ahura, Neithis, and Serqeti.

**Description:** Dressed only in white linen loincloths, with no ornaments except an occasional onyx plug through one nostril, these peasants look as identical as cattle. They groan under their labors, but without protest, for protest means harsher treatment both now and in the afterlife.

**Accessibility:** As they explore the city, the PCs may encounter many building projects, some large (giant temples to Rathanos and Ramose), others small (minor crypts or embalming centers). Peasant stoneworkers work unceasingly here. That the buildings are stone means they must be important. Lesser structures, of wood or thatch, are for mere peasants.

Since the buildings are important, they merit guards and overseers. Peasant stoneworkers at these sites are guarded and hounded by priests (up to four 3rd-level clerics with scale mail and short swords), by up to 24 burly black policemen from Hapta, armed with truncheons (1d6 damage, 1st-level fighters in leather armor), and by any number of petty temple bureaucrats (0-level, unarmed, unarmored). None of these overseers tell the PCs anything, and all refuse to let the PCs bother their workers.

If the PCs can get to the peasants, any bribe—in fact, any show of compassion—elicits all the peasant information below, as well as many grumbles about their lot in life.

**Information:** These commoners occasionally see smoke rising from the hills far to the west. The west wind occasionally brings foul smells of sulfur.

Some soldiers from patrols in that area recently returned to these peasants' village, saying the smell had driven the patrols away. However, these soldiers have since been reassigned to the conquering armies of the south.

**Farmers and slaves:** By and large, 0-level normal people, unarmed and unarmored.

### Soldiers

**Location:** Around the palace walls, patrolling the desert's edge, or in fortresses at strategic points in the Nithia delta.

**Names:** As for male peasants, above.

**Description:** Low-status conscripts. Half wear linen loincloths and carry shields made of animal hide painted with abstract designs. The other half are archers who carry long bows and eight arrows. (Nithian archers don't keep their arrows in quivers.)

**Accessibility:** Highly dependent on circumstances. For instance, if the PCs are alone at the desert's edge, a patrol may investigate them. But garrison troops probably find the PCs much less interesting. Note that all Nithian troops are eminently bribable.

**Information:** The first troops the PCs encounter have just been transferred in from the western desert frontier, where they picked up tactics useful in fighting manscorpions: "Never engage from the front except at long range. Attack from behind on the underside of the tail, just where it curves up. If you can get a blade in between the armor plates, it freezes the tail right up. Then they're not much trouble."

These or subsequent troops may mention noxious gases that are rising from the mountains. No one yet knows why, but it is taken as an omen of Immortal displeasure.

If asked about feathered serpents, some soldiers mention that they've seen an oasis out in the western desert, where "lots of birds" gather. But they're not sure of its location.

**Soldiers:** AC 9; HD 1; hp 5; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6; MV 120' (40'); Save F1; ML 6; AL N; THAC0 19.

## EVENTS

### Crocodile Attack

By the flooded Nithia, the PCs hear screams. They see a peasant being dragged into the swollen river—by a crocodile!

**Crocodile:** AC 3; HD 6; hp 30; #AT 1 bite; Dmg 2d8; MV 90' (30'), Sw 90' (30'); Save F3; ML 7; AL N; XP 275; THAC0 14.

If the heroes rescue the peasant, a humble fisherman named Arakhtet, he thanks them. But Arakhtet's elderly mother and young wife storm down from the hills to scold them! The Nithians regarded being eaten by a crocodile as a sign of favor from the Immortal Rathanos. (The widow and family also come into line for pensions from the state—but of course that has nothing to do with it.)

Understandably, Arakhtet himself has a different idea. He can reward the PCs with a tiny magical item, concealed in his loincloth. "This scarab is the best thing I own," he says. "I found it on the shore after the flood eight circles ago, and I hid it from everyone, everyone! Wear it, and the heat of the sun

doesn't burn you. Maybe nothing can burn you. Please, take it."

The scarab, a small green jade stone, protects the wearer as though with a permanent *resist fire* spell. Arakhtet may also know some clues to help the PCs, at your discretion.

### ***Funeral for a Cat***

Near a mortuary or necropolis, the PCs encounter an elaborate ceremonial procession. Four male 3rd-level priests in full regalia (leopard skins, onyx jewelry, diaphanous white gowns) bear a small sarcophagus. Professional mourners, young women of low status, follow behind, wailing loudly. The more they cry, the more they get paid. All the mourners are unarmed and unarmored; they carry no treasure.

This funeral train mourns a deceased housecat. In Nithia cats are semi-sacred. The pet belonged to one of the priests, a large bald man named Hakh. (His grief, contrasted with his frightening appearance, may provide comic relief.)

The mourners are inaccessible until after the lengthy ceremony is over. They can provide clues at your discretion, perhaps in the form of rumors or pointers to other sources.

### ***Raising an Expedition***

PCs who want to venture into the desert may look for a caravan or other expedition. Unfortunately, no caravans are leaving Tarthis during the flood season. The only people heading into the desert now are military patrols; unless they have Pharaoh's blessing, the PCs are unwelcome (to say the least!) with these patrols.

To put together their own expedition, PCs must think about the following matters.

**Food and water:** At least three weeks' supply of food, amounting to about 25 pounds per character (less for elves, more for dwarves and halflings) and costing the equivalent of three or four gp each. At least two quarts of water per sleep, or ten gallons per character for three weeks. Fresh water costs 8 gp/gallon in Nithia! Magical items that produce water are valued above all others in Nithia, and cost the equivalent of 10x their usual cost elsewhere.

**Protection from the elements:** White linen bur-nooses that cover the whole body cost 1 gp each. Magical devices that protect from fire or heat also guard against sun damage; these, too, are highly prized in Nithia, costing 5x their value elsewhere.

**Transport:** Magical devices like carpets are not available. Dromedary (one-humped) camels or ostrich mounts are available at commercial lots at the desert border or in central Tarthis. Natives known to the dealer can sometimes rent their mounts, but strangers, such as the PCs, must buy theirs outright. Camels cost 200 gp, and ostriches 100.

A Nithian camel can carry 500 pounds for long distances with no water, but it is notoriously temperamental. Ostriches carry 150 pounds (a typical human rider and nothing else) for short distances and

make camels look positively mellow.

**Staging:** As comic relief, roleplay the purchase of mounts, complete with a blandly lying merchant who haggles endlessly over prices. "What, you offer a mere emerald ring for this fine-tempered, noble bird? And I with my grandfather in need of a sarcophagus! No, honored elder, to part with this excellent mount so cheaply would dishonor your memory! Call it two emeralds and that fine shield you carry, sir, what do you say?"

### ***Hohet, the Guide***

Anywhere in Tarthis, the PCs may encounter the sunburnt, wiry, white-haired Nithian man called Hohet, or "River Rat."

This 55-year-old curmudgeon is burnt in spirit as well as skin. In his long ordeal as a farmer, he has seen a long sequence of oppressive pharaohs rule the Nithian Empire, with the system itself seemingly protected by higher forces (the Spell of Preservation). Disgusted at the injustice of life, Hohet has long since given up belief in anything.

—Except loot. Hohet eagerly volunteers his services as the PCs' guide at the first (and each subsequent) opportunity.

**Staging:** Though his story sounds tragic, you can play Hohet's resigned cynicism for comic relief rather than somber dismay. "Yeh, those manscorpions 'll probably bake us alive in the sun. Magical protection? Oh, right, right. Come on, we'd best get on our way to meet them."

## **WHERE NEXT?**

With the clues from the Nithian peasants and soldiers, the PCs should realize something mysterious is happening in the mountains west of Tarthis. By heading west and looking for plumes of smoke or foul-smelling air, they can locate a fumarole (smoking vent) in the hills above the Fortress of Khufneh. This leads down to Chapter 9, "Nightrage Foundry."

The PCs may also be looking for an oasis in the desert below the mountains. If they head that way for several days, they find Serpent Oasis. Go to the next chapter.



This is the legendary breeding ground of the feathered serpents.

**History:** Several centuries ago, across the desert from the Nithian Empire, the Tanagoro suffered under the rule of an unusually powerful Chaotic sorceress who specialized in water magic. The sorceress, Lakati, capriciously caused floods and droughts by turns in the Forest of Lakogo. A lake in that dense forest, the only remnant of her most massive flood, still bears her name.

Lakati's disasters drove many forest inhabitants across miles of forest, over hills and deserts, and finally into the Nithian territories. There the refugees' plight did little to arouse the sympathies of the Nithians—but Lakati's expansionist ambitions moved them to act.

Ordered by the reigning pharaoh, a band of Nithian adventurers staged a trap for Lakati, luring her to the most barren reaches of the western desert. There they fought her, and after much struggle they defeated her. The battle's conclusion destroyed the sorceress and (very nearly) the heroes as well.

**The decanter:** Unfortunately, the disastrous finale sent one of Lakati's most powerful magical items astray. An enchanted decanter from the Elemental Plane of Water, able to produce an endless stream of fresh water when the plug was removed, fell out of sight down a desert ravine. In the battle its loss was hardly noticed. Afterward, however . . .

The decanter, unplugged, poured forth many gallons of water every minute. It eventually filled its ravine, producing a minor oasis. Evaporation matched the decanter's production, and the oasis stabilized. By then the decanter was lost beyond detection, still pumping out a gallon a minute at the bottom of a small lake.

For many years the oasis, though never particularly important, watered the rare Nithian traveller to and from the Tanagor forests. Then the feathered serpents, drawn to the oasis by accident en route to their normal breeding grounds, took up semi-permanent residence. Nithian priests regarded this as an omen of uncertain significance. With typical conservatism, they recommended withdrawing the oasis from public use until they could discern the Immortals' will. Since the oasis was off normal trade routes and alternate routes were readily available, no one protested strongly.

Still, the withdrawal would not have lasted long. However, soon after the Nithians left, a large band of manscorpions (see the boxed campaign set) moved in. The sentries at Khufneh Fortress have observed this, but they have as yet avoided reporting it to their leaders in Tarthis. ("You tell them." "No, you tell them. . .")

So matters have stood for several years.

## HOW THEY GET HERE

Consult the boxed campaign set's color map showing the Nithian Empire. Four hexes (160 miles) southwest of Tarthis—"southwest" using reversed Hollow World directions, of course—and three hexes

due south of the Fortress of Khufneh, stands the northern edge of a desert plateau. This hex contains the Serpent Oasis.

The journey involves at least 60 miles of travel through areas where the rocky hills themselves seem to scorch in the Hollow World's everlasting noon. This distance may increase to more than 100 miles, if the heroes start from Tarthis. Travel speed is two thirds normal; the party may get lost (on a roll of 5-6 on 1d6 for each 24 hours they travel); and during the journey the PCs may encounter a family of giant lizards, say, or a wandering mummy. Select from the Desert monsters listed in the boxed campaign set.

A strenuous trip, and there are no permanent trails and no guideposts. However, the PCs may have their cheerful native guide, Hohet (see end of previous chapter).

## Another Dream Sending

If the PCs stop to camp and sleep on the trail to the oasis, or even if they fall asleep on camelback, the Immortal Asterius (see HWA1, Chapter 6) visits them with a dream vision. The Immortal intends this vision to guide the heroes to stop the harvesting of feathered serpent cocoons at the oasis, and to find the path leading to Nightrage foundry. Both of these obstacles are described later in this chapter.

The dream vision goes like this:

You're walking across the desert toward a high stone cliff. You hear the flapping of wings overhead. You look up see feathered serpents, hundreds and hundreds of serpents in numbers that darken the sky. They're all flying toward the cliff.

So you start running toward it. There's a bad smell in the air, like rotten eggs. You cover your mouth. Then, without any warning, the cliff face breaks apart! Boulders fall away, and dust rises from the rubble. Then the dust clears.

And standing there before you, filling the horizon, is a gigantic brown scorpion. The sun glints on its carapace. Its mandibles clack. The tail's stinger lowers toward you, and the claws extend to grab you.

You run away down a long tunnel, but the air is too hot. There's a red fire ahead; it's so hot, you catch fire yourself. You're burning up! You scream!

—And the scream wakes you up.

Asterius is warning the heroes to beware of the manscorpion lair at the serpent oasis. The tunnel leading to fire is an underground lava floor that connects the oasis to Koresh Teyd's lair in the mountains. See the end of this chapter for details.

## THE SCENE

The serpent oasis lies beneath a cloudless sky in flat, completely barren desert at the foot of a large

sandstone outcropping. This outcropping looks familiar to PCs who experienced Asterius's dream vision (see above). But there is nothing unusual or magical about this rock; it won't turn into a giant scorpion, at any rate. As they approach, the PCs hear loud bird calls and breezes blowing through trees. . . and the distinctive hiss of serpents.

The serpent oasis itself is an irregularly shaped lake about a quarter-mile across at the widest point. It's too large to view in one glance, but the PCs could do it in two.

The water is quite warm. (As the heroes may discover later, the oasis is heated by an underground river of lava.) Papyrus reeds, flax plants, and convolvulus choke the shoreline. Island drifts of water lilies reach further out. Mud dirties the water near the shore, but the center is clear and blue. Here, buried in sand 40' down, lies the *decanter of endless water* that created this oasis.

**Life:** This is a rich, verdant garden that nurtures many kinds of plants and creatures (albeit in small numbers). Note, though, that no fish swim in this lake.

Date palms hang over the water's edge, creating shady spots ideal for drinking. If PCs watch the water's edge for a few minutes, they may see any of these animals venture down for a drink or a nibble:

**Large herbivores:** a herd of two dozen oryx, slender antelopes with straight, spiky horns; and a similar herd of addax, sturdy antelopes with dirty tan-white fur and gracefully curving horns. The addax never drinks water; it survives on the moisture of the leaves it eats.

**Birds:** sand grouses, Lanner falcons, herons, jacana (lily trotters), and pairs of white cockatoos.

**Small mammals:** kangaroo rats, jerboas, and the tiny desert fox, or fennec.

**Insects and vermin:** locusts, ant lions, and vicious mosquitoes. True scorpions also inhabit the oasis—small competitors to the manscorpions the PCs will meet later.

**Reptiles:** sidewinder snakes and a small burrowing lizard called the agamid. And, of course, the feathered serpents.

## The Serpents

When they enter the oasis, characters should not doubt that, at last, they have found the feathered serpents' breeding ground. Serpents are everywhere—flying, interlacing on the ground, curled around every palm trunk.

The serpents breed in pairs, or occasionally in swarms, issuing loud hisses throughout the process. Males fly in close pursuit of eligible females, and both disregard observers. So the PCs may have to duck the occasional onrushing couple! Only an imminent threat to their lives makes the serpents break off and flee.

After breeding, the serpents move groggily, sometimes even crawling on the ground rather than flying. Unaware of observers, they seek likely spots on tree trunks or in shadowed hollows, and there, in a few minutes, they produce their cocoons.

## The Cocoons

The heroes have noticed many of these odd formations hanging from trees or in ground recesses. They're light brown with a papery texture, and they smell vaguely of wood pulp. Each cocoon weighs about 20 pounds.

Should the PCs cut one open (a bad idea), they discover a feathered serpent inside, identical to those flying around but apparently dead. In fact, the serpent is only in suspended animation, but without the cocoon it actually does die within an hour.

Before they vandalize the cocoons, allow the PCs to observe a serpent make one.

**The process:** A serpent produces its cocoon by belching up internal fluids, then spreading them over its body with its muzzle. Then the serpent curls up into a tight ball and falls dormant, barely breathing.

The fluids foam up, covering the body completely in a seething brown mass. Over the course of hours, the foam dries to a hard shell with a papery texture.

As explained in Chapter 2, this cocoon stage bestows intelligence on the serpents. They instinctively spin the cocoons shortly after mating. To this point in the life-cycle, they are only animals; in the cocoon, they become aware of their genetically-inborn sentience. On emergence, they fly up to Ashmorain, the floating continent, there to lay their eggs or otherwise serve the Queen Mother.

But nobody in the Hollow World knows this. And the PCs should not see a serpent break out of its cocoon and fly upward toward Ashmorain. Not yet, anyway.

## EVENTS

Let the PCs explore the oasis at their leisure before running the next encounters. The heroes should have time to discover the feathered serpents and the mysterious cocoons.

**Staging notes:** Stress the miraculous presence of this oasis in the desert. Describe the barren sands stretching away in the distance. Also, there are so many feathered serpents here, and they are so vigorous, that the entire place should take on a magical, legendary aura, like an Elephant's Graveyard.

The PCs may even glimpse, across the oasis, a flash of feathers and scales that looks familiar. It disappears into the trees just as they identify it: Marpolon, the most prized of the feathered serpents belonging to Dael the shepherd, whom the PCs met outside Colima in Chapter 1.

But regardless of attempts to follow or trace Marpolon, the PCs cannot do so—at least not before they run into the new residents of Serpent Oasis.

## Manscorpions!

Around the oasis grow thick patches of undistinguished xerophytic (low-moisture) shrubs, green and waxy. The PCs are making their way through this waist-deep foliage when they see, just across a narrow

inlet of the lake, two male humanoids wearing white linen burnouses. The humanoids also stand in waist-deep foliage.

Each humanoid carries two serpent cocoons. One also carries a mean-looking glaive slung on his back. The other carries a long bow strung over his shoulder. Alert PCs may note that each is wearing an iron thumb-ring; these are *rings of fire resistance*. Only close inspection, though, reveals the small snake skull affixed to each humanoid's throat. These are talismans that protect against the foul sulfur vapors that the PCs encounter later in this chapter.

Unless the PCs conceal themselves, the humanoids spot them and halt in their tracks. They hail the PCs in primitive Neathar, translated by the Pendants: "You! You on our land! Go!"

The PCs can talk with the others, flee, or attack. They may not have heard that manscorpions inhabit this oasis. If so, try to stage the encounter to surprise the players when the humanoids move out of the foliage and reveal their arachnoid bodies!

**What they're doing here:** These brutish manscorpions, brothers named Hass-hut and Ssakh-ren, are harvesting serpent cocoons to bring to Koresh Teyd, who pays them off with food, spices, wine, and conventional treasure. The manscorpions have no interest in Koresh's anti-magical armor, because they refuse to be *polymorphed* into human form in order to wear it.

The brothers know what the cocoons are, but they don't know why Koresh wants them.

**Reactions:** These two manscorpions regard the PCs

with the deep suspicion that stupid people feel toward any intruder. Their reactions depend, of course, on the PCs' approach.

**PCs pretend friendship:** The manscorpions let them drink from the oasis, but then try to chase them off. Since the heroes probably look like formidable opponents, Hass-hut says, "No trouble now, because we got many strong warriors on their way!" (A lie, possibly transparent.)

If the PCs draw them into conversation, the scorpions try to find out whether the PCs are working for Koresh Teyd. They may drop inadvertent clues about the cocoons and a "fire river" below the oasis.

**PCs attack:** The manscorpions fight unless and until they see they're outclassed, then try to run for their burrow (see below). Should the manscorpions win, they drag the PCs to their lair and heal any poison wounds in their medicine chamber, then bind the PCs to deliver to Koresh Teyd at his Nightrage foundry. Go to the next chapter.

**PCs flee:** The manscorpions laugh and follow, but only for sport; they don't seriously try to catch the PCs.

**PCs offer bribes:** The easiest approach. Hass-hut and Ssakh-ren and their family can use any food, magical item, or other supplies that the PCs care to offer. Greed motivates them to accept even useless treasures like coins. If bribed with at least 10 gp apiece, the two leave the PCs alone. But they retreat to their lair to guard the entrance.

**Manscorpions (2):** AC 1; HD 8\*\*; hp 40; #AT 1 weapon/1 tail; Dmg 3d6/1d10 + poison; MV 240' (80'); Save F8; ML 10; AL C; THAC0 11; XP 1,200. These manscorpions have no spells, but they wear *rings of fire resistance*. If their victims fail their saving throws vs. Poison, they do not die right away; if treated within an hour, they can be healed in the scorpion lair.

## INVESTIGATION

### The Lair

This is a deep, multi-chambered burrow in the base of the sandstone outcropping. The foliage outside the lair is yellow and dead, because sulfurous fumes waft out from the entrance. The gasses, deadly in concentration but quickly dispelled in the desert breeze, come from the lava river beneath the lair (see below).

For each 10 minutes a PC spends in the lair, the character takes 1 hp of damage from the fumes. Any device that defends against gasses or vapors will protect the wearer. PCs might not notice the fumes' effect until several minutes have passed, when they experience splitting headaches and blurred vision.

Five adult manscorpions live in this burrow, including one patriarchal cleric named Joko-akh; two females of egg-laying age named Tolkak and Non-akh; and the two brothers the PCs have already met. All of these adults wear *rings of fire resistance* and talismans that protect them from the fumes. In addition, 14 younglings (unnamed) may present some incidental danger to the PCs. The deployment of



these monsters is discussed in a subsection below.

**Entrance:** A wide, six-foot-high opening in the side of the cliff. The manscorpions have made no attempt to conceal the entrance; if nothing else, the filthy trail of garbage should lead the PCs right to it. Garbage also litters every room of the burrow.

The manscorpions have hung up a "door" of antelope hides, crudely stitched together. On the hides they have blazoned a rough symbol of a circle ringed by curved fang-like teeth. This non-magical symbol is a superstitious ward against dangerous intruders.

If the two manscorpion brothers from the encounter above survived, they are standing guard here.

**The passages:** The burrow soon leads down from rock into ordinary dirt. Tunnels are irregular, badly dug, and poorly ventilated; the sulfur fumes are overpowering. But the tunnels are wide and occasionally show bizarre architectural touches. For example, a given length of tunnel may be studded with rows of white pebbles arranged in symbolic patterns. These touches, though irrelevant to the adventure, convey to the players that this is not simply an animal burrow.

**Carrion chamber:** A repulsive storage room for antelope carcasses in all stages of decomposition. Most are half-eaten. Piles of bones litter all sides of the room. The foul odor here should drive PCs away within moments.

Small pine casks hold spices (oregano, fennel, thyme, turmeric, and anise), part of Koresh Teyd's pay to the manscorpions for their cocoons. Larger oak tuns once held bad-tasting but strong wine, the most prized of Koresh Teyd's payments; the manscorpions have drunk it all.

**Medicine room:** A room with a high ceiling and several pillows made of woven linen fibers and stuffed with reeds. These large pillows, though well made in comparison with the rest of the lair's furnishings, are stained and bad-smelling. The odors of human blood and scorpion ichor mingle.

Shallow stone bowls line one part of the chamber wall. The bowls contain powdered spices like those in the carrion chamber, as well as more exotic ingredients that the PCs probably cannot identify: powdered viper fangs, dried scorpion barbs, leaves of dogwood trees, and foxglove stems.

What is this room for? Manscorpions are not immune to their own poison. Hence they have developed powerful antidotes to its toxin, in the (rare) event of accidental self-stinging. When prepared by a trained healer, the antidotes in this room can rescue PCs who would otherwise have perished from poison in battle with the manscorpions.

Game mechanics are left to your discretion. For instance, a trained healer who succeeds in an Intelligence check can prepare a potion that allows a victim another saving throw vs. Poison. Or a very successful check may mean automatic healing. Much depends on the abilities of the person preparing the antidote.

An inconspicuous covered bowl contains several asp skulls, the magical talismans that protect against fume damage. These work only against the fumes from Nightrage foundry, not against other harmful

vapors. You may impose a time limit on the amulets' effectiveness, so that their magic doesn't last beyond this adventure.

**Sleeping chambers:** These are small, dark, cramped, routine chambers. Dried papyrus reeds are spread on the floors. Nothing of interest here.

**Cocoon storage:** This small chamber is filled to its low ceiling with six dozen serpent cocoons. The manscorpions have been preparing to take this load to Koresh Teyd, using the lava river described below.

A small clay urn holds thin, bitter-smelling oil. This oil works like a *portion of fire resistance*, except that it lasts long enough to journey from the lair to Nightrage foundry and back, using the lava river described below. There is enough oil to cover all the cocoons, the equivalent of six potions.

The last two rooms of this lair are described in the following two subsections.

## The Nursery

At the far end of this bare round chamber sit piles of small leathery eggs, each the size of a hen's egg and pale yellow in color. Some of the hundreds of eggs have hatched, and grubs wriggle over them. The grubs are pink in front, with vestigial arms and a shapeless head like a fetus; behind, they have tiny but well-developed scorpion bodies.

Two horrible female manscorpions, Tolkak and Nonakh, are feeding on carrion. On the back of each ride seven younglings, after the fashion of real scorpions. These children, the size of human three-year-olds, squeal in fright and huddle on the far side of their mothers' bodies.

The mothers beg mercy of any intruder, and their shouts bring every surviving manscorpion in the lair to defend them. If the PCs show no sign of mercy, Tolkak starts sobbing and pleading further. But Nonakh reaches behind a pile of eggs, pulls out a short polearm, and attacks. The younglings fall from her back and run under the PCs' feet. They do no damage, but on every round, each PC who wants to attack must succeed in a Dexterity check to do so; spellcasters must make an Intelligence check to retain their concentration.

Tolkak never does anything but cry. If the PCs slaughter her too, they receive no XP.

**Nonakh:** AC 1; HD 8\*\*; hp 40; #AT 1 weapon/1 tail; Dmg 3d6/1d10 + poison; MV 240' (80'); Save F8; ML 10; AL C; THAC0 11; XP 1,200. Wears *ring of fire resistance*. If her victims fail their saving throws vs. Poison, they do not die right away; if treated within an hour, they can be healed in the medicine chamber.

**Manscorpion younglings (14):** AC 7; HD 1-1; hp 3; #AT Nil; Dmg Nil; MV 90' (30'); Save 0-level normal person; ML 5; AL C; THAC0 Nil; XP 0. Each youngling wears an asp skull talisman that protects it from the deadly fumes.

## The Chamber of the Ages

This small tribe of manscorpions worships an Entropy Immortal whom they never name—probably

Yagrai, possibly Bagni or Ranivorus. It's likely the manscorpions themselves don't know who it is.

With the highest ceiling of all the chambers, this room is a chapel, of sorts, for the manscorpions' vicious clerical ceremonies. It's the only clean room in the lair. A granite boulder with a fairly flat surface, now blood-stained, occupies the center of the room. A single ray of light shines down on it through many yards of earth, via a fissure in the rock.

**The drawings:** Crude chalk drawings cover the walls, showing manscorpions slaughtering humans and animals; harvesting serpent cocoons; and confronting Koresh Teyd, depicted as a bestial many-legged horror (a token of high respect among manscorpions).

A vague diagram shows the lair as a cluster of circles; a line leads downward from these circles to a picture of a long barge in Nithian style. Strange glyphs to either side are the manscorpions' symbolic representation of fire. This drawing indicates the passage leading down to the river of lava and the Semekhtet-berge, down in the depths of the lair.

**The cleric:** An elderly male manscorpion, progenitor of this tribe (which has seen better days), guards the chamber at all times. This 10th-level cleric, Joko-Akh, is wise enough to use spells but not smart enough to negotiate with the PCs. He hysterically orders them out of the chamber, and if they refuse, he attacks with *cause fear* and *darkness* spells. He does not leave the chamber except to defend the females and young against the PCs.

If the PCs can somehow calm Joko-akh, he still isn't cooperative. This is a Chaotic cleric of an Entropy Immortal, after all, and he's quite stupid as well. If he thinks information can persuade the heroes to leave, he may tell of the tribe's arrangement with Koresh Teyd. But he ends nearly every statement with, "Now get out!"

**The rings:** If death looks imminent, Joko-akh finally offers as ransom his prized possessions: his set of six *rings of fire resistance*. Each adult manscorpion is wearing one, and the sixth is held in a secret hollow beneath the altar boulder. (Increase the number of rings to match the number of PCs, so that each PC can have one.)

The manscorpions use these rings as protection on the lava river below. Koresh Teyd loaned the rings to the tribe, so that they could pilot their Semekhtet-berge to Nightrage foundry and deliver the serpent cocoons.

**Joko-akh, manscorpion cleric:** AC 1; HD 10\*\*\*\*; hp 45; #AT 1 spell/1 tail; Dmg by spell/1d10 + poison; MV 240' (80'); Save C10; ML 10; AL C; THAC0 10; XP 3,700. Joko-akh wears a *ring of fire resistance*. Spells: 1st level—*cause light wounds*, *darkness*, *cause fear* (x2); 2nd level—*blight*, *resist fire* (x2), *silence 15' radius*. Joko-akh has no higher-level spells until his patron Immortal returns from the past.

## Deploying the Manscorpions

If the two brothers, Hass-hut and Ssakh-ren, survive their initial meeting with the PCs, they guard

the lair's entrance. If and when the PCs demonstrate combat superiority, these manscorpions call to their kin for help—but no one comes. Then the brothers retreat to the nursery.

The patriarch Joko-akh never leaves the Chamber of the Ages except to defend the nursery. The two females never leave the nursery unless the PCs confront them there. Then, if death looks imminent, Tolkak may herd the younglings up toward the surface while Nonakh guards her retreat. Other survivors accompany them. By this point, though, the Spell of Preservation may have other ideas (see below).

**Staging Notes:** Note that this encounter doesn't require the PCs to slaughter everything that moves. That is wasteful, hazardous, and barbarous. The manscorpions fight to protect their tribe and dwelling; though stupid and savage, they would prefer to keep bloodshed in the lair to a minimum. They may well let obviously superior PCs head down to the lava river rather than risk combat to the death.

To convey this, emphasize the "human" values in combat encounters: The scorpions may grovel for mercy, or try to bribe the PCs with everything they own to leave the younglings alive. This may shame less bloodthirsty players into sparing at least some of the tribe.

**Defeating the PCs:** Should the manscorpions get the upper hand, they don't kill the PCs outright. As mentioned above, they bind the characters and carry them down the lava river to present to Koresh Teyd. Stage the journey described below, and at the Nightrage foundry in the next chapter, give the PCs a chance to escape their bonds and explore on their own.

## The Spell Kicks In (Optional)

This is an optional event for DMs who wish to emphasize this adventure's theme of the negative effects of the Spell of Preservation.

If you wish, assume that this tribe of manscorpions is the last of its culture in the Hollow World—the last that worships in the chamber of the ages, speaks Nithian, and so on. They may be monsters, but they have a culture of sorts, and so the Spell of Preservation extends its non-judgmental protection over them.

If the heroes are on the verge of dispatching the last members of this tribe—if, say, they have the last few loathesome young and their mothers cornered in the nursery, with only one male to defend them—read this aloud:

There is a sudden change in the air. It feels hot, and there's a smell like lightning just struck. The manscorpions look as puzzled as you.

And then light bursts all around you! There's a hollow roar like an avalanche. The ground shakes! Through clouds of dust you see the manscorpions floating gently away. At least you think it's away—all of you think they're getting farther away from you, even though you're each looking

at them from a different angle.

When the dust clears, the manscorpions are gone. You've been cheated of your victory.

This is probably the players' first confrontation with the Spell of Preservation. Like the episodes in Colima and Nithia—not to mention in the Azcan Empire in HWA1—this, too, may give the PCs reason to question the merits of this Immortal magic. But that questioning must wait for this trilogy's finale.

### **The River of Fire**

Below the Chamber of the Ages and the nursery, the sulfur fumes grow still stronger. It's also unbearably hot. PCs cannot go farther unless they have protection from both the fumes (for instance, the asp skull talismans the manscorpions wear) and from the heat (for instance, *tings of fire resistance*).

Heat has scorched the earthen walls charcoal black. A ruddy glow rises from below. At a turn in the tunnel, the PCs see the following:

This large chamber is lit from the floor—because the floor is molten lava. It's pretty much solid and black at the surface, but through a network of cracks you can see reddish yellow magma.

The lava chamber opens away into a long, wide, perfectly round tunnel that reaches as far as you can see. A river of magma flows slowly down that tunnel into this chamber.

A pier extends from where you are out into the lava. It looks like ordinary cedar wood, but it's unmarked by the heat. At the end of the pier, floating in the lava, sits a long wooden barge. It's slender, with a shallow draft and a broad beam. It doesn't seem to have any method of propulsion.

The tunnel, eaten by an Annelid, leads to Koresh Teyd's lair, the foundry named Nightrage.

The Semekhtet-berge, like the one Koresh Teyd rides, can travel through solid rock. It does not require the lava river, but the manscorpions do. They're too stupid to locate the foundry without it.

The PCs can learn the barge's command words from any of the adult manscorpions, or perhaps even from a youngling. If no manscorpions survive or prove cooperative, the PCs can also find the words written in Nithian hieroglyphics on the barge's deck, and in phonetic Neathar on the walls of the Chamber of the Ages. All these reminded the manscorpions whenever they forgot the words.

For more about the barge, consult the "New Magic" Appendix.

## **WHERE NEXT?**

When the PCs enter the barge and speak the proper command word, the barge carries them up the lava river to Nightrage foundry. The pace seems quite stately, but in fact the magical ship covers almost 200 miles in only a few hours.

When the PCs arrive at the foundry, go to the next chapter. However, the beginning of that chapter assumes the PCs are climbing down through a surface vent, where they meet an earth elemental sentry. This river of lava leads directly to the foundry "floor" (described in detail next chapter).

However, you can easily translate the entry encounter from the overhead vent to the floor-level tunnel. Just transfer the elemental sentry to this tunnel, and have it block off the entryway in the same fashion described at the start of the next chapter.

If the PCs have already been to Nightrage foundry: They've taken the barge from there and arrived here. They may also have defeated Koresh Teyd, as explained in later chapters. If so, a few manscorpions should hardly offer a powerful climax to the adventure!

If the heroes have already completed the main storyline, consider revising this chapter to minimize any anticlimax. Delete the manscorpions, their treasures, and the barge at this pier. Just show off the breeding ground and then bring in the serpent escorts to Ashmorain, as discussed at the end of Chapter 10.



Bathed in molten lava, its air thick and glowing with vaporized iron, the Nightrage foundry achieves temperatures above 10,000 degrees. Other fires burn hotter—a huge dragon’s flame, some high-level *fire balls*, and the Hollow World’s central sun—but the sun is inconveniently placed, and the other flames are magical. Magical flame cannot shape World-Shield ore, and this ore is the foundry’s reason for existence.

Here, in one of the hottest non-magical places in the world, Koresh Teyd of the Blood Brethren supervises the three projects that make up his scheme, code-named Nightrage.

**Forging armor:** Fire elementals, using metallic fire implements from their native plane, melt and pour the World-Shield ore into molds. Since all the molds create armor of just one size, Koresh Teyd *polymorphs* the wearers to that size.

**Creating symbionts:** In a side chamber above the molten rock (but only accessible after passing through the lava), Koresh Teyd’s henchman Kruthep supervises the distortion of feathered serpents, freshly ripped from their cocoons, into the misshapen symbionts that control the Annelids.

**Breeding the Annelids:** By far the largest chamber in the foundry, this lair holds a huge “mother” Annelid. It lays hundreds of eggs at a time. The lava’s heat is incubating a new brood; if the heroes can destroy them and the mother, they can greatly reduce the Annelids’ danger to the World-Shield.

## HOW THEY GET THERE

The PCs can find their way to the foundry in one of two ways: either via the underground river of lava from the serpent oasis in the last chapter, or via direct exploration in the mountains west of Tarthis. The latter is a straightforward task: simply let the heroes trace it by its smoke trail.

They find an open crack in the earth that belches smoke and fumes. The smell of rotten eggs is almost overwhelming. Around the rugged vent, sulfur crystals grow in a tangle astonishingly like thorn bushes. Thorny, leafless branches of crystalline sulfur break under the PCs’ fingers as they climb down. (They take no damage, but the cuts cause a burning pain.)

The vent leads hundreds of yards straight down, to Nightrage foundry.

**Protection:** However they find this place, the PCs require protective magic to survive here.

**Heat protection:** Any *ring of fire protection* will do, or a potion of *fire resistance*, or a sequence of *resist fire* spells, or the various items the PCs could collect in the manscorpion lair in the previous chapter.

These items protect against all heat damage from the environment. But note that the PCs could still, for example, drown in molten lava. And in some cases they still take damage from *fire ball* and similar spells, due to the shock of the blast.

**Gas protection:** Almost as important, the PCs need protection against the sulfurous fumes that emerge from the volcanic vent. These nauseating vapors inflict 1 hp damage per minute of close expo-

sure, and in this chapter there is no other kind of exposure!

Gas protection may take non-magical forms. For example, the PCs could improvise temporary filters, such as soaked kerchiefs tied over their mouths; these interim measures last ten minutes at most. As the heroes may have discovered in Tarthis, Nithians use magical amulets made of asp skulls. The PCs may buy, steal, borrow, or loot these talismans for indefinite protection in Nightrage foundry.

**Scenic description:** The vent runs fairly straight for the first part of its length, then swerves and angles as it approaches Nightrage foundry itself. Light is not a problem; molten rock below emits a hazy orange glow.

All along, the vent’s walls are hard, rugged, smoky black, and coated with charcoal. Farther down, the charcoal covering gives way to a fine sheen of condensed metals: copper, iron, zinc. As the PCs climb down, their fingers gouge small indentations in these drifts of soft metal, indentations that grow deeper the farther down the PCs go.

Later in the climb, the PCs also encounter metals ordinarily not found in native form—aluminum, for instance, and rivulets of liquid mercury. Alchemists can collect these for later use, though some are toxic when handled carelessly. Poison effects, if any, are left to DM’s discretion.

## Sentry

You climb down for a long time—it feels like a quarter of a mile, or maybe more. The smoke here is thick, and the walls shine with the heat. Then, after you edge past a twist in the vent’s path, the smoke clears for a moment—and you see the end of the tunnel. It’s a narrow hole about four feet across, with a red glow beyond it.

As you watch it, the tunnel’s end contracts, like a throat closing. Four big arms made of rock grow out from the walls to block the path. A mouth opens in the rock to one side, and it speaks to you in a deep, hollow voice: “Whooo iiiis thiiiiis? Whyyy are yooooou heeeere?”

This guard is an earth elemental named Pumice. Though it has grown four arms, there is only one elemental, and it can only attack once a round. However, because of the narrowness of the opening, only one PC at a time can attack the elemental or try to move through the opening.

**Talking with Pumice:** The best way to pass the guard is to talk with it; the PCs’ Pendants of Many Tongues allow this. The PCs can gain Pumice’s sympathy if they mention Gabbro, the elemental from this module’s Introduction (or from Chapter 5 of HWA1). Gabbro is a high-level cleric from the Elemental Plane of Earth, and Pumice respects him; if Gabbro sent the PCs, they must be all right.

The PCs could also try to convince Pumice they’re allies, even without mentioning Gabbro. This should not prove difficult.

However, whether or not they’re friendly to the

heroes, Pumice and the other elementals in Nightrage foundry are held here by a bond stronger than magic: their solemn oath of honor (described below). They have vowed to serve Koresh Teyd, for reasons the PCs cannot discover now. Even if convinced the PCs are allies, Pumice cannot in good conscience let them pass unmolested.

The elemental's solution in this case is to enact a mock combat. It cuffs the nearest PC gently on his or her armor (no damage), then waits for the PC to counter-attack—provoking the hero, if necessary. Any blow "drives off" Pumice and returns the tunnel exit to its normal size, so that the PCs can pass safely. However, the attacking PC receives no XP.

In staging this, treat it as comedy of a surreal sort. This encounter should be the first tip the PCs get that the elementals are not Koresh's mindless slaves, and that they can be, if not allies, then peculiarly unthreatening opponents.

**Questions:** When speaking for Pumice, draw out your words and try to stick to single syllables. Remember that, like other earth elementals, Pumice is not stupid, but it lacks understanding of many human and demihuman concepts.

Nonetheless, the heroes can obtain enigmatic clues about why the elementals are working for Koresh Teyd. For instance, "Heee hooolds a great onnne." "We gaaave ooor woord, on the liife of ooor loved prinnce." The story behind these clues is given in the next chapter. However, Pumice won't reveal the shameful details of that story—a romance between their "prince" and its fire elemental lover.

**Fighting Pumice:** Of course, PCs may attack outright. Pumice attacks each PC in sequence as he or she tries to get through the tunnel opening. Meanwhile, Pumice roars loudly in the cavern below, alerting other elementals to aid it. Pumice flees if reduced to half its hit points or less.

If Pumice alerts the other elementals, the PCs probably must either flee or be captured. The elementals fight to subdue—that is, any PC reduced to 0 hp or less is only knocked cold, not killed, and can heal normally. Captured PCs are taken to Koresh Teyd's lair (see the next chapter). If any PCs remain free, they can rescue the prisoners later; meanwhile, players whose characters were captured can play rogue earth elementals until their PCs are retrieved.

**Pumice, earth elemental:** AC 0; HD 12; hp 50; #AT 1; Dmg 2d8 + 1d8 if opponent stands on ground; MV 60' (20'); Save F12; ML 10; AL N; THAC0 9; XP 1,100.

## THE SCENE

Nightrage foundry and Koresh Teyd's lair are depicted on this module's inside cover.

The foundry, built on a pool of molten lava, lies less than a quarter mile under the mountain vent described above. Lava seldom rises so close to the surface in the Nithian Empire, where volcanic activity is virtually unknown. However, such subsurface pools aren't completely without precedent—which gave the Immortal Thanatos all the excuse he needed to

draw this pool so close to ground level, near the Serpent Oasis. No mortal or Immortal could detect his handiwork.

Koresh Teyd's handiwork, though, is another matter. The servant of Thanatos has commanded his elemental slaves to build and maintain the foundry that the PCs now discover.

### The Chamber

The tunnel you're in opens above a sheer drop. The walls curve down smoothly on each side of the tunnel mouth. You're at the apex of a giant stone hemisphere. The walls are charred black, and parts are flowing like molasses.

You look down, and fifty feet below, you see a vast expanse of burning rock, black and boiling on the surface, huge chunks floating in a sea of molten orange lava. Here and there you see fountains of yellow sparks.

One area looks more regular. It's a floating rectangle—hard to tell how big it is from up here. It looks like a grid, with lava burning in it in various shapes.

On the rectangular grid, you spot flickering flames moving slowly back and forth. They look like burning people, about two dozen of them. They seem to be carrying things, but you're too far away to tell what. There's no sign of anybody else around.

Nightrage foundry is a huge sphere 100' in diameter, its lower half filled with thick molten lava. The spherical shape helps maintain maximum heat, the better to smelt the World-Shield ore. Drafts of air pumped in from distant caverns also increase the foundry's heat. (These create the spark fountains the heroes see.)

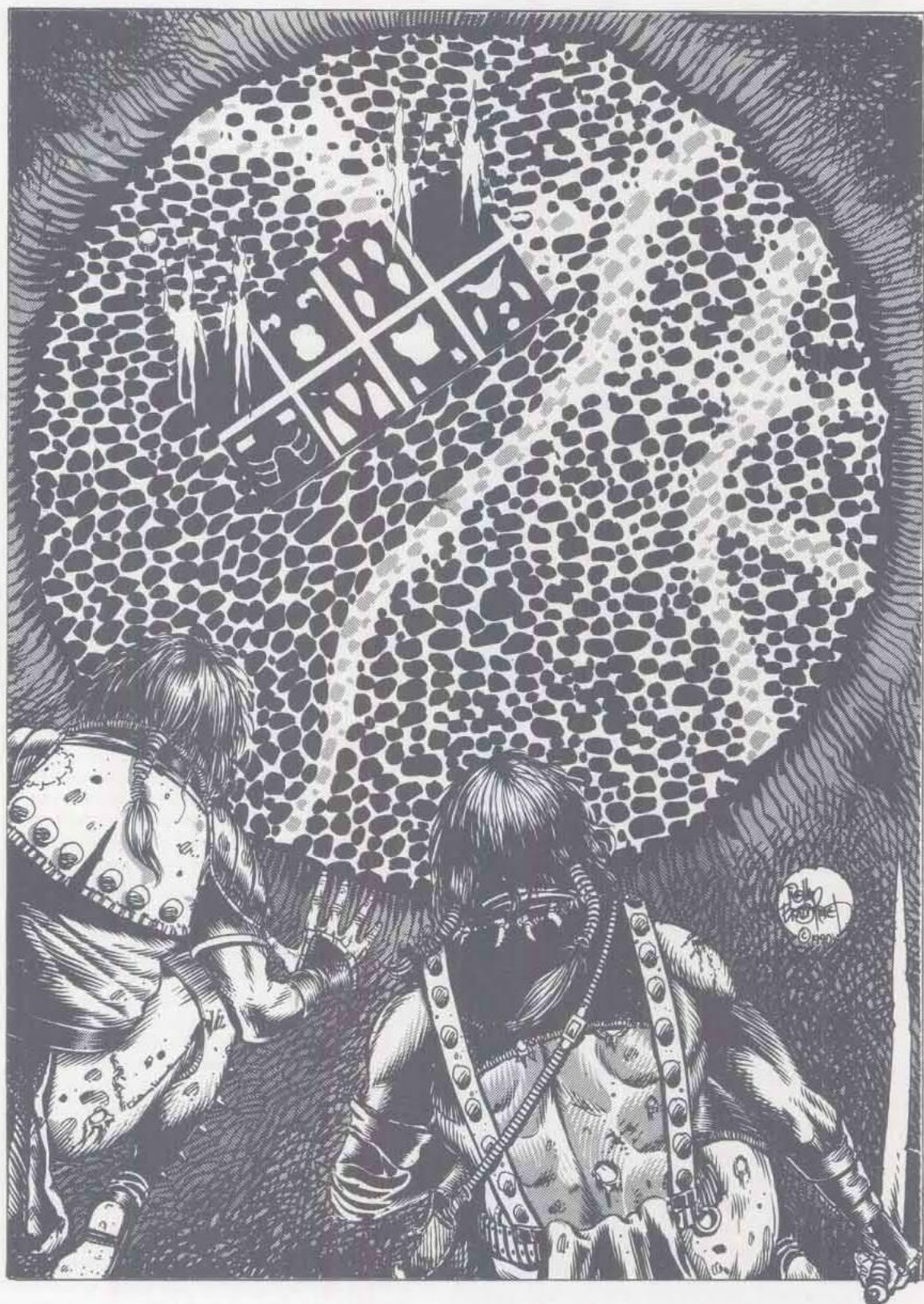
The semi-solid rock walls of the chamber, heated to taffy consistency, constantly droop and deform. PCs see the arms of earth elementals emerge (as in the "Sentry" section, above) to push back and smooth over the sphere's walls. Without the elementals' constant intervention, the sphere would collapse in minutes.

**The grid:** This flat structure measures 20' long by 10' wide and a few inches thick. It's made of metallic fire from the Elemental Plane of Fire. This substance glows a dull orange-red, and tendrils of yellow energy flicker across it, just under the surface. Though it feels hard like metal, metallic fire appears to have no definite surface, but only jewel-like depths of color.

The fire grid is pocked with indentations at points across its upper surface. These are molds, as for shaping metal, in the forms of armor breastplates, vambraces, halves of a helm and visor, and all the hundred or so individual parts of one suit of armor. There is even an array of small circular molds to create the ringlets of chainmail.

Around the grid stand a range of metallic fire implements, much like those found in conventional smithies: anvils, hammers, and tongs. At one end of the grid stands a massive cauldron, about seven feet in





diameter and six inches thick, also made of metallic fire.

These fire molds and implements shape molten World-Shield ore. No metal native to this plane could do this; all melt at a much lower temperature than the World-Shield. Koresh Teyd has fetched these molds from the Plane of Fire, along with fire elemental servants to maintain them. The actual forging and molding process are described below.

**The fire elementals:** About two dozen of these servants melt the World-Shield ore as it is brought in, cast it in the molds, and work the molded shapes into full suits of armor. The elementals resemble vague humanoid outlines covered with yellow flames—human flames, in other words. They smell of carbon dust and candle wax.

For the characters, temperaments, and statistics of the elementals, see “Investigation” below.

### The Molding Process

All the implements here—the cauldrons, molds, anvils, tongs, and other utensils—are made of metallic fire. The implements are not magical as such, but they can’t exist for long on this plane in lower temperatures than this.

Next to a huge fiery cauldron rests a large pile of irregularly shaped metal shards—Annelid castings, like the one the PCs emerged in after their trip in Chapter 6. The fire elementals put these castings into the cauldron and melt them over the course of hours or days. Then, using fiery ladles, they spoon out the surface scum. This is the pure World-Shield ore. They pour this molten ore into the armor molds.

The molds shape the ore into the anti-magical armor seen throughout this module. Once a piece of cast ore cools (relatively speaking), the elementals tilt the armor out of its mold. Like blacksmiths, they construct the completed suits using the anvils and tools to one side of the molds. They do not temper the armor here in the foundry; that occurs more or less automatically once the armor enters cool outer air. (See “Donning the Armor” below for the properties of untempered armor.)

Then the elementals carry the suits of armor down out of sight under the lava. Their destination is a storage chamber in Koresh Teyd’s headquarters, described in the next chapter.

### The Heat

Ambient temperature in the foundry exceeds 5,000 degrees Fahrenheit. This may damage characters’ possessions.

Be prepared to rule whether a given PC’s protection also covers his or her items. In general, magical protection from heat covers the character and everything carried; anything beyond arm’s length is usually outside the protective charm’s scope. This applies to all the magical protections available to the PCs in this module.

**Magical items:** When an item falls outside the owner’s protective magic, follow the procedures given in the DM’s Companion—that is, roll 4+ on 1d6 to

damage the item. “Damage” to an item without pluses usually means the item becomes non-functional, at least as long as it remains here.

**Non-magical items:** These are melted, incinerated, or vaporized as appropriate as soon as the owner lets them go.

Two devices available in the foundry can protect an item from heat damage: a shell of solid rock (probably made with the assistance of an earth elemental) and a container of World-Shield ore (including the armor being molded here; see below).

## INVESTIGATION

### Getting Down

The only visitors to Nightrage foundry have been fire elementals, which can fly; earth elementals, which can travel magically through rock; and Koresh Teyd and his servants, who can also fly. So there is no ladder, rope, nor other device leading down from the ceiling vent. How do the PCs reach the lava floor, 50 feet below?

They may be able to fly themselves—though the temperature here may foil some devices, such as *flying carpets* or *ropes of climbing*. See above under “The Heat” for details.

Failing that, the characters might persuade Pumice or another earth elemental to transport them. The elemental grows arms from the rock wall, one arm to hold each PC, and lowers them in a tight bunch down the curving rock wall. At ground level, the elemental lets them go.

If all else fails, the PCs can even drop and suffer the 5d6 falling damage. The lava, though molten, doesn’t splash like water. To a falling character, it feels as solid as rock! Don’t encourage the players to try this—the foundry offers no healing magic.

### The Elementals

PCs can interact with the elementals in several ways.

**Observing:** They can watch the elementals carry out the duties described above. The elementals observe the PCs, but make no greeting nor any hostile move. They converse using a sputtering language involving showers of sparks. The PCs, via their *Pendants of Many Tongues*, may overhear fire elementals gossiping about them: “Who are the burnt-out ones?” (“Burnt-out” is their term for anyone who isn’t on fire.)

“Maybe they have journeyed here to claim the next armor,” says one.

“More villains, then! Alas, these rogues.”

Should the PCs continue listening, they realize the free-thinking fire elementals have nothing good to say about Koresh Teyd, his foundry, or his armor. (They don’t much like the earth elementals, either.) If you wish to drop an obvious clue, an elemental could mention “the holy ransom” that Koresh Teyd holds—perhaps the PCs’ first clue that the fire elementals, like their earthen counterparts, are held here through extortion.

**Attacking:** The PCs may attack these creatures, thinking them allies of Koresh Teyd. The elementals flee from any combat, and they never fight except in self-defense. In this case, they use the fiery implements described above under “The Molding Process.” The hammers do 1d6 damage; other implements do 1d4 damage.

All the while, the elementals cry out, “Why do you attack? Are we not obeying your commands?” They take the PCs for lieutenants of Koresh Teyd, since all the non-elemental creatures they have seen are his servants. This should prompt rational PCs to stop and engage the elementals in conversation. (But if the PCs have killed any of their number, the elementals prove sulky and uninformative.)

**Talking:** As noted above, the PCs’ Pendants of Many Tongues allow communication with the earth and fire elementals. They are talkative but enigmatic speakers, for they often refer to ideas that the Pendants cannot translate into human terms, and so the words simply drop out of the sentence.

**Fire:** Furthermore, fire elementals are given to ill-tempered arguments or flowery expressions of passion, all at the least excuse. Think of them as full-hearted poets, ready to sing or scowl at little provocation. “Fie, you call me an agent of evil? Ah, the ignominy! Puny material ash-heap, I would fain burn you where you stand, but that my honor restrains me!”

However, if the PCs approach them sensibly and politely, the elementals may pass along information, such as the details of the forging process and the way the earth elementals maintain this foundry. Though the fire elementals can point the way to the rest of the lair, down beneath the lava, they know little of the layout or what awaits below.

More importantly, the elementals won’t directly aid the heroes. They have sworn unbreakable oaths not to betray Koresh Teyd—and they won’t tell what power he has over them to enforce such oaths.

But *most* importantly, the elementals hate their oath and obey only its letter, not its spirit. As outlined below, they happily follow suggested ways to find holes in their oath and help the heroes. The PCs have to suggest those ways, though.

**Earth:** These more sedate elementals, by contrast, offer few observations. They offer little information. They offer hardly anything at all, in fact. Not only are they slow and taciturn by nature; they are all preoccupied in shoring up the walls of the spherical foundry. PCs can find out little more than they could from Pumice (see “How They Get There,” above).

**A note on names:** Elemental names do not translate into human tongues. Earth elementals dealing with humans take on names of minerals, such as Pyrite, Geode, Pentlandite, Garnet, and so on.

Fire elementals, too, take on arbitrary designations when on this plane. Typical names of this kind include Shining Effulgence, Silvery White Fire, Pure Flame Heart, and Golden Radiance—names no entity on this plane could use with a straight face. Such is the elemental nature, or perhaps it indicates their sense of humor.

## Donning the Armor

Since they’re protected from heat damage, the PCs can wear the still-hot armor forged from the World-Shield ore. But they quickly encounter problems. Technically, the fire elementals guard and protect the armor for Koresh Teyd. So if the PCs want it, they have to fight the elementals first.

Should the PCs ask before attacking, though, the fire elementals explain their situation—and then, in a bit of comic byplay, they say, “So you see, we cannot let you have this armor. . . and as soon as we return, we’ll tell you more about the solemn the oath we swore to protect it.” And then they leave!

As the elementals move across the foundry to gather far from the PCs in the other-dimensional equivalent of a coffee break, the PCs realize how the elementals observe their oath to Koresh Teyd to the letter, but not in spirit. Conceivably, clever PCs could persuade the elementals to aid them further. Meanwhile, the heroes can take the armor while it lies unguarded.

Are there problems in taking the armor? That is up to you. There might be only a few completed suits, not enough for all the PCs. Also, the armor might not work well until it’s completely cool—and it probably can’t get cool here in the foundry, unless the players do something clever.

This untempered armor only improves the PCs’ Armor Class by 1; its anti-magic resistance only improves their own saving throws by 2. Unfortunately, the PCs won’t find this out until they test the armor the hard way.

Exceptionally cruel or mischievous DMs may even have the armor’s anti-magic properties interfere with the PCs’ protection from heat and sulfur fumes! This guarantees that the PCs go into the final confrontation with only their own equipment (if that!), unprotected by the World-Shield armor. But given the opposition in the next chapter, you may wish to give the PCs every edge they can get.

## WHERE NEXT?

The heroes can see the fire elementals periodically disappearing under the lava’s surface. If they don’t catch on that something must be going on down there, any elemental can drop an obvious hint to that effect.

When the PCs examine the lava floor, they note one especially bright line of fire stretching across it. This is a rope of woven fire, taken straight from the Elemental Plane of Fire. At the center of the foundry floor, the rope disappears down under the lava. The heroes can climb down the rope, hand over hand, to reach the true lair of Koresh Teyd. Go to the next chapter.

**Chickening out:** If the heroes try to retreat back up to the surface, the earth elementals won’t let them. “You’ve started this,” they say (or one-syllable words to that effect). “Now you have to finish it!” The heroes must travel down beneath the lava, on the trail to Koresh Teyd.

## HOW THEY GET THERE

By following the fire elementals or examining the molten floor of Nightrage foundry in the previous chapter, the PCs discover the rope of woven fire that leads down under the magma. Spells like *find the path* also point the way to Koresh Teyd, Kruthep, and the serpent cocoons. All lie just a hundred-foot climb down the fiery rope.

The rope descends straight down a vertical tunnel at the bottom of the foundry sphere. If the PCs can somehow sense the tunnel walls through the lava, they discern that the tunnel appears remarkably smooth and circular for a volcanic vent. But the earth elementals deny shaping it. Clearly this is more work of the Great Annelids.

## THE SYMBIONTS' ORIGIN

### First Look

The PCs follow the rope up a branch of the volcanic vent and emerge here, from a pool of lava in the floor. Read this aloud:

The foundry you saw before reminded you of a blacksmith's shop in its function. This small chamber also reminds you of a smith's shop, this time in appearance. You see iron machines that fill the room, black with soot, and yellow firelight flickering on the walls. You hear the clank of metal on metal. All the noises you hear sound distant, almost drowned out by the gusts of heated air circulating here.

The room is roughly square and maybe 20 paces across by 10 wide. The "firelight" is really the glow from the lava pool at the corner of the room, where you are now. The ceiling is high enough that the glow can't reach it.

From the darkness overhead a big mechanical apparatus hangs down, a conglomeration of hooks and barbs at the ends of multiple iron rods. The hooks extend in all directions, or so it looks to you. You see a living creature stretched between the hooks—a feathered serpent!

All of the serpent's feathers have been plucked, exposing pink skin. The hooks go through the serpent's wings, through its upper and lower jaws, and all along its body and tail. The serpent's body is twitching, and now and again it hisses weakly.

Standing beneath the serpent, facing away from you, are two figures, one human-sized and wearing a large cloak over a suit of anti-magic armor, and the other a large, dark humanoid. The armored figure is using a long pincer-tool, like a pair of pliers, to pull at the scales of the feathered serpent.

At the feet of the armored figure lie the tattered remains of a cocoon. And what's more, you see piles of cocoons lying around everywhere. But

the sensation that strikes you most strongly is the pervasive odor of serpent-mint.

The armored figure is Kruthep. The other figure is the minoraur, Augar, who wears no armor. (If Augar has joined the PCs, or has died earlier in the adventure, this figure is an earth elemental servant.) They are modifying the feathered serpent, untimely ripped from its cocoon, into a symbiont suitable for attachment to a Great Annelid.

The presence of serpent-mint should tell PCs, at last, why Koresh Teyd was willing to send *polymorphed* Schattenalfen as far away as Colima to fetch it. The mint is a vital catalyst in the serpent transformation process. The concentrated and enchanted juice, rubbed on the serpents' wings and bodies, makes them pliable and easily re-formed.

### Battling the Alchemists

The PCs automatically surprise Kruthep and Augar. This may be sufficient advantage to take Augar out of the fight, but Kruthep (at AC -4!) should not fall so easily.

**Kruthep (armored):** Ordinarily a 16th-level magic-user, Kruthep has surrendered most benefits of his class in order to wear armor (prohibited, of course, to magic-users). AC -4; hp 34; #AT 1; Dmg by item or spell; MV 120' (40'); Save MU16 (drops to 0-level normal person while wearing armor); ML 8; AL C; THAC0 13 (19 in armor). Inside his armor Kruthep wears a ring of *fire protection* and a talisman against fume damage, to protect against the foundry environment.

Since Kruthep cannot cast spells while wearing his World-Shield armor, he has prepared several magical items that lie close to hand. He carries them in and out of this chamber using a *bag of holding* tucked carefully inside his armor. The items Kruthep uses:

1. He wears a large *displacer cloak* (from the Expert Rules); Kruthep must spend an entire round wrapping it carefully around his armored form in order for the cloak to work. The *cloak* bends light before it strikes the World-Shield armor, so the armor's anti-magic effect doesn't neutralize the effect.
2. He wields a yew-wood *staff of striking* with a number of charges equal to the number of PCs. The *staff* does 2d6 damage per strike, producing a shower of blue-white sparks on contact. It is carved with Nithian hieroglyphics symbolizing the sun, the Nithia, and death.
3. A pouch on a fine cord around his waist holds one charge of *powder of slowness*, a new magical item. This fine gray-green dust, when tossed in the air, causes all living things in a 15' radius to become *slowed* (as the reverse of the 3rd-level magic-user spell *haste*) for one turn. Victims who make a successful saving throw vs. Spells are *slowed* for only one round. Undead are immune, as are those in World-Shield armor. The *powder* is made from dried alligator scales that have been enchanted in lengthy ceremonies.

*Kruthep's tactics:* Kruthep first draws the *cloak* around himself, then tosses the *powder of slowness* into the air. If this slows Augar as well as the PCs, that makes no difference to Kruthep.

Next he bends down to seize the *staff of striking* from its hiding place beneath the mechanical apparatus. He strikes the most dangerous-looking heroes until the *staff* runs out of charges (wasting a round on an extra "dud" strike, for 1d4 damage; he didn't know how many charges were left).

Then Kruthep dashes for the lava pool exit. The *cloak* and *staff*, now unprotected, burn into cinders as he leaves.

**Augar:** AC 6; HD 6; hp 35; #AT 1 gore/1 bite or weapon; Dmg 1d6/1d6 or by weapon +2; MV 120' (40'); Save F6; ML 12; AL N; THAC0 14. Augar now wears a ring of *flight*, which works like a *broom of flying* from the Expert Rules. He also wears a ring of *fire protection* and a talisman against fume damage, to protect against the foundry environment.

Should Augar survive the PCs' initial approach, he uses his ring of *flight* to launch himself into the darkness overhead. The ceiling is 30' high, and the iron apparatus blocks most clear views upward. But the minotaur knows the ceiling layout quite well, and he can descend on any given PC at any time, automatically winning initiative. After attacking, he can fly upward and hide again on the next round.

Try to emphasize the uncertainty and terror of this situation, where the PCs know that a powerful monster can drop on them at any moment.

On the other hand, the PCs might persuade Augar to join them. The minotaur, though brutish by nature and low in intelligence, takes no joy in torturing feathered serpents. ("Just snakes. No harm to me. Why hurt?") A fervent argument based on heartfelt sentiment, though delivered in the midst of pitched battle with Kruthep, might sway the minotaur to rebel against his masters at a crucial, dramatic moment.

**The elemental:** If Augar has been replaced in this scene by an elemental, the elemental flees at the first sign of attack, so that Kruthep cannot order it to fight the PCs. The elemental will not harm the heroes unless Kruthep directly orders it. Use the statistics for Pumice in the previous chapter.

## Victory

If the PCs reduce Kruthep to 10 hp or less and their victory appears inevitable, he breaks into tears, surrenders like a coward, and gives up all his magical items (but not his armor, unless threatened).

Then Kruthep begs for mercy, with the panic of a Nithian unprepared for death. "I haven't got a tomb yet, no sarcophagus—If you kill me now, in the afterlife I'll be nothing but a peasant! I was only following Koresh's orders," he whines. "I can tell you anything you want to know."

Can he? That is up to you. Kruthep knows little about Koresh Teyd, and nothing about Thanatos or the other parts of the scheme outlined in HWA1 and HWA3. As a henchman of Koresh, Kruthep only knows vague details of the World-Shield scheme,

including this provocative (and true) information:

"Koresh wasn't interested in the anti-magic armor itself—that was just a way to get the elves to bring in the mint. With the mint, and the serpent cocoons, he could make the unholy creatures that guide the great worms. When he commanded the great worms to tunnel, it was not so he could get more of the strange rock. It was so he could make tunnels. The tunnels were the thing. I don't know why, I swear I don't!"

**Looking around:** If they didn't keep Kruthep alive to interrogate him, the PCs may not deduce this laboratory's function right away. But they can, as soon as they investigate the rest of the apparatus that holds the serpent. In the room's dark reaches, more serpents hang there, in all the painful stages of transformation into symbionts.

Putting these poor creatures out of their misery would be charitable, but powerful healing magic, such as *cure serious wounds*, transforms the serpents back to their rightful forms. These serpents need time to recuperate, perhaps at the Serpent Oasis, before once again forming cocoons.

Meanwhile, stacks of cocoons remain untouched in this chamber, for Kruthep had not yet gotten to them. If the PCs can get these to the surface unharmed, possibly with help from the elementals, the mature serpents will emerge unharmed in due time. That time may be due even as the PCs finish the encounters of this chapter; see "Aftermath," below, for a serendipitous meeting with serpents in the final stage of their life cycle.

## THE LAIR OF KORESH TEYD

In a dark corner of the symbiont chamber, the PCs find a passage downward. A ladder of World-Shield ore carries them down to the ultimate room of the Nightrage foundry, and the climactic meeting with Koresh Teyd—or is it?

### First Look

This is a wide (50'), low (10') cylindrical room lined with vertical pipes running from floor to ceiling. These pipes are made of World-Shield ore, formed using molds that Koresh Teyd later transformed into the armor molds in the foundry above.

Lava from the rocky vent below flows through these pipes into the foundry overhead. Koresh uses valves and water-clock-type gauges control the flow, thereby controlling the temperature in the foundry. The air here resonates with the flow, a loud clanking over a steady bass thrumming.

After Koresh Teyd transforms all available feathered serpent cocoons into Annelid symbionts, he will have no reason to keep making armor. Then he'll let the lava flow up and destroy the scene of his crime. (If they discover this, perspicacious players may realize that this flood of lava would also surge through the side-tunnel to the beautiful Serpent Oasis, de-

stroying it as well.)

**The elementals:** Fire elementals, their thin flames casting orange glows on the pipes, supervise the gauges and valves. There are three elementals here for each PC in the party. They wander from point to point in the chamber, studiously avoiding the PCs. Koresh Teyd has commanded them to attack intruders; but the fire elementals are making an elaborate show of ignoring the heroes, so they need not fight them.

Should a PC actively hail an elemental, the creature's first question is, "Are you supposed to be here?" Any answer even vaguely affirmative lets the elemental avoid attack. Truthful answers, though, bring a heavy sigh. The elemental attacks as a formality, missing automatically with a slow swing of its burning fist. Any damage drives off the elemental in "defeat"; however, the victorious PCs get no experience for this mock battle.

In any case, the fire elementals are bound by oath not to speak to the PCs, and they cannot offer direct help.

## The Cloning Apparatus

This consummately weird arrangement of pipes, tubes, and vats stands near one wall, blocked from view by a curving screen of World-Shield ore. The apparatus is made of ordinary glass, clay, and two marble slabs, yet the chamber's heat has not affected it. Obviously the contraption is magical, but what is its function?

One slab lies flat. Clear glass tubes circle down from its grooved surface to a water wheel-style pump. The pump runs seemingly without impetus, and glass pipes lead upward from it to large clay cisterns above eye level. These two ten-gallon containers smell of vinegar and blood. Pipes at their bottoms lead down to the second marble slab, which tilts at a steep angle and rests on the ground. This slab is enclosed in a glass mold that looks like a skeleton; a successful Intelligence check recognizes the outline as that of Prince Udan, the goblin puppet of Koresh Teyd.

PCs experienced in magic can identify this as some kind of creative apparatus. But anything beyond that depends on the players' own speculations.

The secret? Koresh Teyd used this apparatus to create a duplicate of himself, using a version of the 8th-level *clone* spell supplied by Thanatos. The wizard's goblin body lay on one slab; his blood flowed from it through the pipes to cisterns filled with enchanted liquids; and the resulting mixture flowed into the glass mold, creating a duplicate Udan. The PCs encounter this duplicate below. The original has left the foundry for a new destination.

## The Dome Illusion

At the center of the room, the ceiling rises steeply in a dome. Beneath the dome is a huge translucent hemisphere—an illusion, some 15 feet across—showing the northern hemisphere of the Known and Hollow Worlds, plus the crust between. Characters

can walk through it without harm. Experimenting with the illusion, PCs find they can "turn" it as they would turn a globe, bringing new areas into view with a wave of their hands.

Let them examine the globe at their leisure; use the maps from the boxed campaign set, or Trail Maps TM1 and TM2 to show a great part of the Known World in detail. Between the two surfaces, a fine network of red lines runs all through parts of the crust, like blood vessels. These are Annelid tunnels in the World-Shield. The damage in some parts of the Shield is quite evident.

Here PCs can begin to understand the damage caused by the World-Shield tunneling. They probably don't understand Koresh Teyd's larger purpose . . . until he appears from behind a pipe, clad in World-Shield armor. Cackling, he takes a moment to gloat over his scheme. "Coming along famously," he says, confidence in his voice despite the terror in his goblin eyes. "Soon, I think, the whole Shield will crumble like a ruined foundation."

## Who is Who?

Despite appearances, this is not Koresh Teyd. The PCs cannot know it, but this is a duplicate of Koresh Teyd and a *clone* of his goblin host, Prince Udan. The original Koresh became aware of the PCs shortly after their arrival, via magical wards or messengers; since his own plan was proceeding well, he saw no reason to risk confrontation. So he activated the duplicate he had prepared for just such a circumstance.

Koresh Teyd, aided by Thanatos, designed the the complex apparatus they saw in this chamber to make the *clone* of Udan. This worked as per the 8th-level magic-user spell in the Master Rules. (If you don't have those rules, the spell creates an exact duplicate of the magic-user, subject to certain requirements and restrictions.) Thanatos intervened with Immortal magic to circumvent most of the spell's restrictions, but no one except Koresh Teyd knows this—and Thanatos has magically forbidden Koresh to tell anyone, or even to mention the name "Thanatos."

A duplicate Koresh-slug controls the duplicate Udan. The slug form can split like an amoeba into two identical offspring, over the course of hours. Only one retains its spells; that one has left the foundry with the original Udan. The PCs encounter them, the "real" Koresh and Udan, in the next chapter. Nonetheless, the Koresh offspring in this chamber knows everything the original did, lacking nothing except spells—and he wears the *durance vial* around his neck, which forces the elementals to obey his commands.

## Talking With the Enemy

If the PCs talk with Koresh before attacking, they can confirm that this indeed seems to be the sorcerer they met before. His visor is up, exposing his tormented goblin face. If they attack, he lowers the visor, gaining the full AC -4 of the World-Shield armor; go to "Battling Koresh Teyd," below.

Though forbidden to even hint at the role of Thanatos, this duplicate Koresh is happy to talk at length about the volcanic foundry, the Great Annelids, the World-Shield, and (if you're playing the other modules in this series) the conjunction of his plan with that of his Blood Brother, Simm of the Grasping Dark. He is stalling for time, while the original Koresh does the deeds seen in the next chapter.

"A marvelous scheme, truly," this Koresh says. "Send enough tunnels through the core of the world, and like a wall eaten through by termites, it will collapse. I can only speculate on what effect this will have on both inner and outer worlds. We shall soon see, I imagine."

(In this guess Koresh is wrong, though the PCs cannot know it. The World-Shield is not in danger of collapsing. However, stress Koresh's belief that it is, so that the players feel the urgent need to stave off a great menace.)

"And how nicely it dovetails with my venerable brother's plan," Koresh continues (if you're also playing HWA1). "The magic shines forth from the sun; it strikes the earth and passes through, yet the boundary between the worlds stops what mere rock could not. Dispense with the boundary, and the inner light strikes the outer world. And what will that do, I wonder?"

If you're also playing HWA3, Koresh might taunt the PCs, especially clerics, to pray to their Immortal patrons. "After all, the Immortals see everything, do they not? No mere mortal could possibly capture all these great entities." The goblin lips curl into a wretched smile. Koresh speaks no more of this, except to drop enigmatic hints.

Koresh soon tires of gloating. Holding the *durance vial* on the chain around his neck, he commands the fire elementals to attack the PCs. Reluctantly, they do so—and the battle is joined.

### Battling Koresh Teyd

Though this is a *clone* of a 25th-level magic-user, the duplicate currently has no spells. Thus he trades most of the benefits of his class for the protection of World-Shield armor. Like Kruthep in the previous chamber, Koresh also wields several magical items:

1. A fireproof *staff of earth and fire* (from the Companion Rules) with one charge for each PC confronting Koresh;
2. A *dagger +1* with the *slowing* talent (described in the Companion Rules); and
3. One of the usual talismans protecting against fire and fume damage.

With such items, and the elementals Koresh commands, this is a tough battle for the PCs. However, recall that Koresh the slug-thing has let his host body (Prince Udan) become starved and emaciated. This applies to the duplicate as well. The goblin body may falter at a strategic moment during the battle, giving the PCs time to catch their breaths and regain the initiative.

But the fire elementals, though they fight with great reluctance, remain a problem. To handle them, the PCs must get the *durance vial* that coerces their cooperation. Clever and skillful PCs might be able to pull the *vial* away without harming it; let the players try anything that sounds either sensible or foolhardily courageous.

If the duplicate Koresh loses the *vial*, then the fire elementals turn against him, to the extent that their earlier vow of service allows it. The PCs can quickly defeat Koresh then. However, should the PCs destroy the *vial*, the fire elementals furiously turn on them and help Koresh capture them!

**Koresh Teyd (duplicate):** 25th-level magic-user; AC -4; hp 34; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6; MV 120' (40'); Save MU25 (0-level normal in armor); ML 12; AL C; THAC0 11 (19 in armor).

**Fire elementals:** These use the statistics for "staff" elementals in the Expert Rules. AC 2; HD 8; hp 32; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8 + 1d8 vs. cold-based abilities; MV 120' (40'); Save F8; ML 10; AL N; THAC0 12; XP 650. Reduce the XP award if the elementals fight reluctantly, as they usually do.

## AFTERMATH

### Failure

What if the PCs fail utterly? The duplicate Koresh, as much a manipulative scoundrel as the original, seizes one PC and transfers him or her into the *durance vial* along with the two elementals. With this hostage, he coerces the surviving PCs into taking on a mission: Find and assassinate Minister Irla Kaze, whom Koresh believes is plotting against him and his Blood Brother, Simm. This is a lead-in to HWA3, *Nightstorm*.

As for the unfortunate player whose character has become a hostage, he or she can play a Nithian, an elemental, or even a feathered serpent *polymorphed* into human form, as a replacement for the hostage PC.

### Victory

Since the PCs probably believe this is the one and only Koresh Teyd, they probably feel they've finished the adventure. Encourage this assumption by passing out rewards and resolving dangling storylines. This will make the next chapter's encounter with Koresh more surprising.

**Rewards:** In addition to the treasure the PCs can collect from Kruthep and the duplicate Koresh, and the usual experience points for defeating opponents, the PCs should also receive a bulk XP award at least large enough to raise one PC by one level. For example, if the party includes a 7th-level thief who needs 25,000 XP to reach 8th level, award each PC up to 25,000 XP.

Also, give 10-20% extra XP to individual players who role-played well, devised clever plans, and otherwise increased everyone's enjoyment of the game.

Of course, adjust these XP awards to reflect your personal play style and the needs of the individual players.

## WHERE NEXT?

In addition to these rewards, use this opportunity to wrap up a few loose ends.

**Freeing the elementals:** By speaking the word of release engraved on the side of the *durance vial*, the PCs can free its two captives: Niccolite, an earth elemental of princely rank on the Elemental Plane of Earth, and Aura Grandiose, a high-ranking artist from the Plane of Fire.

Though grateful to the PCs for their release, the two only reluctantly tell their story. Aura was preparing a new perfume to be part of a new aroma-scape on its home plane, and so it made an illicit journey to the Plane of Earth for a magical ingredient: the heart of an earth elemental. In trying to find a desirable heart, Aura met Niccolite and—the taboo broken!—they fell into a cross-planar romance.

To avoid censure on their home planes, the two met in various places in the Hollow World. (Aura could reach it easily, through the central sun.) During their most recent liaison in Nomarys Volcano under the World's Spine, Koresh Teyd discovered and imprisoned both of them. Koresh used the hostages to extort service from both their families of elementals. Because of the shame of the relationship, none were willing to divulge the reason to the PCs.

(As a subplot, you can introduce a "hybrid" earth-fire elemental, a new creature spawned by the two lovers' long containment in the vial. This creature might reappear in a later adventure, either in or outside the Hollow World, as the PCs' ally.)

**Defeating the Annelids:** If you are playing this module alone, the elemental Gabbro can show up and volunteer to lead his earthen followers throughout the crust of the planet, seeking out all the Annelids and removing their symbionts. For this adventure's purpose, this leaves the Annelids dormant once again, no longer a threat.

If you are playing the other modules in the *Blood Brethren* trilogy, the Annelid problem admits of no such easy solution. Even without the symbionts, the Annelids remain active. The only solution is Immortal intervention, and that only comes at the climax of HWA3, *Nightstom*.

**The World-Shield ore:** Without the earth elementals' constant maintenance, Nightrage foundry soon becomes a shapeless, useless volcanic vent, and the existing armor there melts or corrodes. If the Schatnalfen or other armor wearers discover the PCs' role in this, they will swear revenge against the PCs.

**Retrieving the serpents:** As described above under "The Symbionts' Origin," the still-intact feathered serpent cocoons should be returned to the Serpent Oasis, or at least the surface of the Hollow World. At that time, some of the cocoons tear open, and feathered serpents crawl out. For their greetings to the PCs and their offer of transport, keep reading.

It's not over yet! Whether the PCs won or lost, the earth elementals transport them back to the Hollow World surface. They refuse to carry the heroes all the way back to the outer world; this is much farther than they want to travel. After their long captivity, the elementals just want to leave!

But they're willing to help ferry up the serpent cocoons. As the PCs watch over the cocoons in the warm sunlight, the papery coverings seem to darken toward black. Is something wrong? No, as the PCs discover when a single fang slices open a gash in one cocoon and, shaky as a leaf, out flies a newly mature serpent. Many others, activated by the sunlight after their long captivity, soon follow.

The PCs may even recognize the serpent. If appropriate, make this one Marpolon, the shepherd Dael's pet that the PCs met in Chapter 1. Now mature, Marpolon recalls the inborn genetic wisdom of the serpent race—and also his own acquaintance with the PCs.

The mature serpents can speak, via a spell-like ability similar to a *magic mouth*. Marpolon can explain this new and final stage of the serpent life cycle to the heroes, and he answers other questions as appropriate.

Then he gazes on the PCs with profound intelligence and says, "Our debt to you surpasses the height of the sky. If you care to, we would like to usher you into the presence of our great matriarch, the Queen Mother. Only she can reward such heroism. But do not answer frivolously! The trip to the Queen is difficult, for she lies in our most secret place: Ashmorain, the hatching ground."

(If the PCs carried no cocoons to the surface, then a flock of feathered serpents flies down from the sky. They came here from a Floating Continent that [by coincidence] is fairly close overhead. These serpents are mature and have full intelligence. Having sensed the end of their fellow serpents' suffering, these arrivals thank the PCs and make them the same offer described above.)

Assuming the PCs agree, go to the next chapter. If they don't agree, the serpents depart; let the PCs go their own way. They probably want to return to Tarthis for supplies or to wrap up loose ends; there you can dangle leads to the other parts of this adventure, as described at the end of the next chapter.



## HOW THEY GET THERE

The PCs travel upward about a hundred miles, borne by feathered serpents. Chapter 10 of HWA1 describes a similar journey, and the staging tips in that module also apply here: stress the grandeur of the hollow globe stretching away from the heroes' view in all directions; the towering thunderclouds stretching above, seemingly straight overhead, and just as far below; the sharp, gusty wind and the biting cold.

**The Smoking Mirror:** If the PCs haven't already defeated the menace in HWA1, they see the Smoking Mirror far overhead, flashing in the reddish sunlight; however, the serpents can't carry them that far. If the PCs have already fought and bested Simm of the Grasping Dark, they see the last parts of the Mirror's debris, drifting in slow orbits that will gradually send them plunging into the sun.

## THE SCENE

At high altitude, the feathered serpents change their course toward a thick cloudbank that stretches for miles. Penetrating the cloudbank, they continue their flight upward. They break through the clouds—and the PCs see their goal.

The Floating Continent hangs in the air ahead of you. Most of its base is covered by clouds—it looks like the seashore, with the water covered by a fogbank.

But through the clouds you can make out a jagged underside of rock, and beyond it you can see more clouds below, stretching away up the curve of the Hollow World.

The serpents fly you up above the continent and bring you in from a high viewpoint. From here it doesn't look big enough to be a continent. More like an island, maybe—a hundred miles long, and shaped like a big raindrop lying on its side.

If you wish, show the players the map of Ashmorain on the full-color mapsheet. But don't let them look closely enough to read the labelled locations!

The wide end of the island is a high mountain range, with the mountains piled up on each other like a lumpy pyramid, miles high. They're white with snow, and rugged like the mountains of the World Spine, far below you.

In the middle part of the island, these mountains gradually give way to forested hills, and then to low hills and open green grassland that stretch to the far point of the landmass.

The serpents bring you down toward the border between the hills and the grassland. As you descend, you see swarms of feathered serpents flying all over the grassland and in the hills.

## INVESTIGATION

The serpents can set the PCs down wherever they like. If the characters want to explore the island, refer to the color map.

Assuming the PCs trust themselves to their carriers, the serpents ferry them down to an undistinguished foothill at the south central edge of the mountains, amid dense forest. With a rapid flapping of wings, the serpents hover and then gently deposit their passengers in a clearing of soft green grass.

"The hatching ground lies below," they tell the PCs. "You may approach the Queen Mother there." If the PCs ask questions, the serpents can describe the Queen Mother (use the description later in this chapter), hint at her great age and wide knowledge, and foreshadow the weird magic of the underground breeding chambers (described below). The serpents have nothing to hide, and they do their best to put the heroes at ease.

**Entry:** The cavern entrance lies in an unremarkable cleft of rock at the base of a foothill. No tracks mark the gravel and scree that surround the entrance. Inside the cleft, a tunnel leads steeply down toward a distant light. The serpents are happy to accompany or lead the heroes down.

### The Hatching Grounds

When the PCs climb down, read this aloud:

A cavern of bubbles: Magical light shines on walls and towers of crystal spheres—bubbles blown in molten glass, then quick-cooled. They fill the cavern. They ring slightly, like crystal goblets. The only other sound is the crackle of lightning somewhere in the distant caverns.

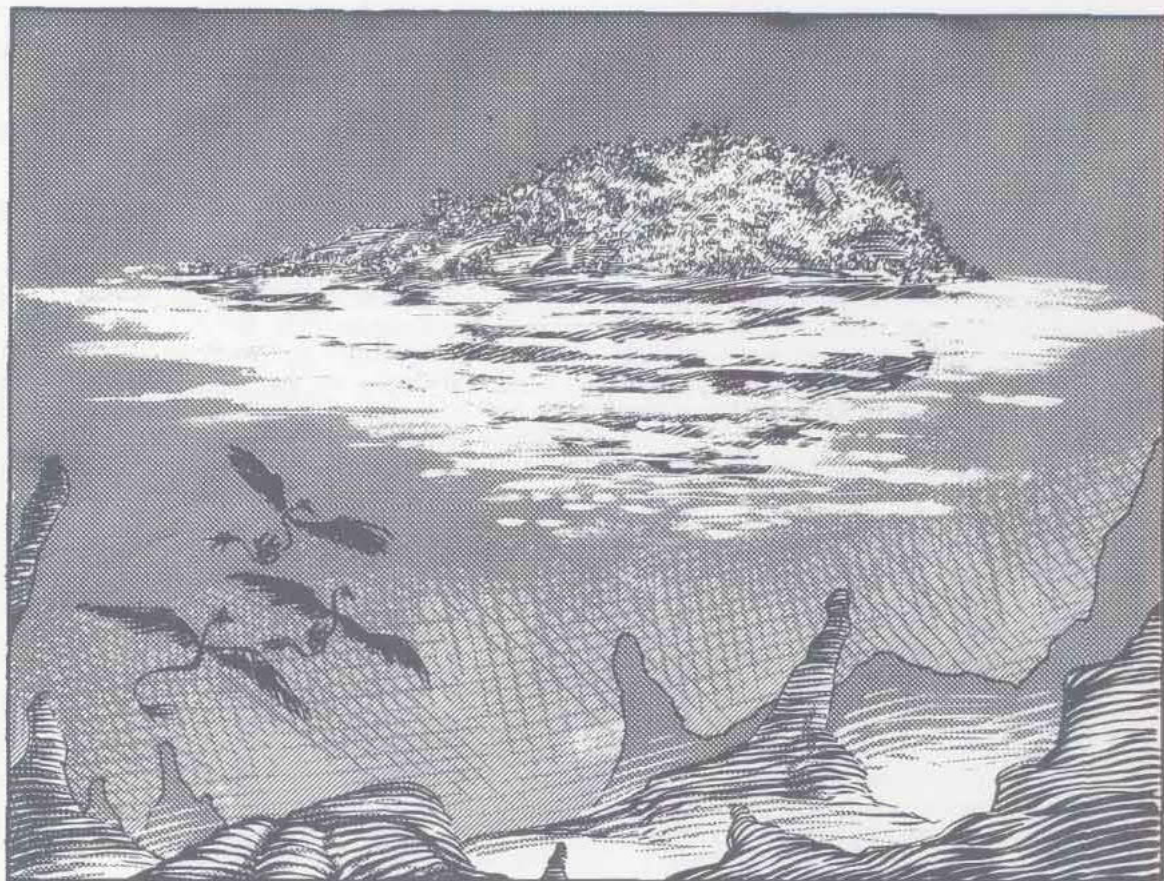
Then come the new sounds: footsteps, gravel sliding, maybe even a curse or two as the brave adventurers try to descend a passage not meant to be taken on foot.

The serpents with you glide between the towers of crystal bubbles. The breeze of their flight makes a beautiful tone in each tower. The serpents fly back and say, "Where is everyone?"

The serpents expected to find many others of their kind. But Koresh Teyd, who has arrived here already, has slain or chased away all of the serpents. There is no sign that he is here, for he flew in without touching anything.

Koresh fled here because it makes the ideal hideout. He learned of Ashmorain from a feathered serpent that had emerged from its cocoon before being transformed into a symbiont. He killed the poor creature, but kept the secret. When the PCs invaded Nightrage foundry, his prudence dictated a quick retreat.

The lightning the PCs can hear is a lightning bolt spell that Koresh cast shortly after his arrival here. The spell is rebounding endlessly among the cavern's crystal walls and towers; see the next subsection.



## EVENTS

### *Ricochet and Strike*

The magic that keeps the Floating Continents aloft has affected the interior caverns of Ashmorain. Their crystal walls melted and recrystallized long ago, due to the cataclysmic energies released when the Immortals set them floating. The crystal sympathetically absorbed some of that magical energy, thereby taking on unique properties.

Physical attacks easily shatter the crystal (it is AC 9), and resourceful characters can use the shards as weapons (1d4 damage). However, intact crystals reflect magical energy, somewhat like a *ring of spell turning*, except that the crystals turn the magic in a random direction, not necessarily against the caster. (Broken crystals lose this property.)

This is what happened when Koresh cast a *lightning bolt* here, almost an hour ago. The crystal walls and towers have sent the spell ricocheting, and now, its energy still unspent, it is heading toward the PCs.

As the heroes explore the cavern, the bolt strikes a pillar within sight, bounces three times off walls and ceiling, and drives past the PCs, close enough to let them smell the ozone in its wake. A sharp crack echoes behind as it departs once more to the cave's depths.

(The bolt returns at some dramatic moment, such as the first encounter with Koresh Teyd below. This time, each PC and NPC gets a Dexterity check to

dodge the bolt, rolled in order of Dexterity from lowest to highest. The bolt hits the first character to miss the check, doing 8d6 damage; the long journey has weakened it from its 20d6 maximum.)

It should now be clear to everyone that something is wrong. The serpents lead the PCs down a steep crystalline slope, perhaps carrying them over difficult sections, and into a large, somewhat spherical chamber: the hatching chamber of the feathered serpents, home of the Queen Mother of the race. And the PCs find that their presumed victory at Nightrage foundry in no way ended the threat of Koresh Teyd.

### *The Queen Mother*

The smooth floor of the chamber is dotted with piles of symmetrical crystals, each fist-sized and seemingly cut like a fine, many-faceted jewel. Though it may not be clear to the PCs, these are serpent eggs. Around the largest pile, containing some 100 or 200 eggs, lies the stretched body of the Queen Mother.

The Queen Mother of the feathered serpents is large, about 30 feet from her brilliantly crested head to the tip of her lavishly feathered tail. Along her spine run slender, pointed quills that shine in prismatic colors from the chamber's magical light. Her eyes are filmed over with a milky coating, and her wing feathers are frayed, indicating great age; yet her scales shine bright green like a mossy pond.

But as the PCs encounter the Queen Mother, her scales show the scorch of lightning. And she is

wrapped entirely in a webwork of greasy gray silk. She sees them and tries to raise her long, graceful neck, but she only becomes more tangled.

This is an improved 5th-level version of the 2nd-level *web* spell, creating a much larger and heavier web. The 5th-level version permits the entrapment of any one creature up to gargantuan size, and it is trapped for 1d4 hours unless it succeeds in a Saving Throw vs. Spells (in which case it can escape immediately). The Queen Mother failed this throw, and now she lies trapped in the spell's sticky strands.

She speaks urgently in a rich, modulated, almost womanly voice: "Whoever you are, save yourselves! Fly!" But from behind the web a dark figure rises, wearing a robe of serpent scales. Lightning crackles at his fingertips.

"You have come so far," says Koresh Teyd in frustration, "and with every mile you have made yourselves a greater nuisance to me. Now, turn back. Leave. Or I shall finish off this sickly cow on the spot." He hold a mysterious rainbow-colored egg over the Queen Mother.

### Hostage Situation

Koresh really would prefer the heroes to go away, giving him time to rest and form new plans. But of course the PCs are unlikely to do so. If they attack at once, go to the next section to stage the battle.

If the PCs leave, they may only be withdrawing for the moment. If so, encourage them to explore Ashmorain for something to defeat Koresh. (If the PCs really want to abandon the Queen, the feathered serpents won't carry them back down until they rescue her.)

The color map explains the island's magical flora, which make ideal potion ingredients. To help the PCs along, let one of their first potions be that of *flying*, so they can fight the airborne Koresh. Or you could introduce an ointment that works like a *dispel magic* spell, to let the heroes bring Koresh down to their level. Many other aids are possible.

Once they have stocked up, let the PCs head back down and face Koresh. They might surprise him, if they're clever. But more likely, you can resume the confrontation where you left off. See below to run the battle.

Note that after the PCs return to fight and defeat Koresh, the makeshift potions should soon spoil or become inactive.

### Battling Koresh—Again

This is the true, original Koresh Teyd, with (almost) all his magic intact. His complete spell list appears in the appendix; Koresh has cast *protection from missiles*, *fly*, and both of his *lightning bolt* spells.

In addition to his magic, Koresh also carries the strange egg the PCs saw. When Koresh flings down this *egg of wonder* (described in the Companion rules), it shatters on the Queen Mother's body. The egg, provided by Thanatos, magically summons several rhagodessae (see the Expert Rules; note that

Immortal magic can circumvent the Hollow World's prohibition of summoning spells). Koresh commands them, "Slaughter the Queen serpent!"

How many monsters are there? Choose the number by the size of the PC party. If the PCs need every hand just to fight Koresh, then only one rhagodessa appears, as a time-pressure story device. If there are so many PCs they can't all attack Koresh at once, call up enough rhagodessae to keep the extras busy.

**Rhagodessae:** AC 5; HD 4+2; hp 14; #AT 1 leg/1 bite; Dmg 0+suckers/2d8; MV 150' (50'); Save F2; ML 9; AL N; THAC0 15; XP 125.

After appearing, the rhagodessae take one round to get their bearings, then one round to crawl up the Queen Mother's body toward her throat. They attack on the next round, against her reduced AC of 8. Her struggles (and thick scales) may save her until the PCs can rescue her.

Meanwhile, though, Koresh is attacking. He launches low-level spells at first, conserving his strength. Only if hard pressed does he try *fire ball* or other devastating attacks. Also, should Koresh get the upper hand, he may pause to gloat over the PCs' imminent defeat (giving them a round or two to recover); Udan's goblin body may give out temporarily, as in the previous chapter's battle; or reflections from the cavern crystal may introduce a random element.

**The cavern crystal:** Whenever a spellcaster (including Koresh) misses his or her target with an attack, the spell goes off anyway—and it reflects at random around the cavern. At your discretion, this may also happen if a target makes a successful Saving Throw to resist a spell.

The ricochets usually provide only scenic atmosphere. But at critical moments, when you want to prolong or finish the battle, one or another rebounding spell can surge by. This may cause Dexterity checks as described above, or the spell may strike automatically. This is a good, ironic way to finish off Koresh if he is nearing defeat.

**Staging:** Another fitting climax calls for Koresh, hard pressed by the PCs, to retreat downward. This cavern reaches all the way through the island, opening at a treacherous ledge above a hundred-mile drop. There Koresh makes his last stand against the PCs; if they can negate his *fly* spell, they send him plummeting toward certain death. (Or is it certain? They never see the body, after all . . .)

## AFTERMATH

Assuming the PCs defeat Koresh and the rhagodessae, they can free the Queen Mother from her web and receive her warmest gratitude. Aim for a solemn, almost reverential tone as she thanks the PCs for their work.

The PCs can examine the piles of fist-sized faceted crystals. These have no treasure value, but they are incomparably valuable to the Queen Mother and the other serpents. Even as the heroes watch, a crystal may crack open, and a finger-length serpent hatch-

ling wriggles out. It squawks for food, and the grown serpents rush to feed it leaves, bugs, and worms.

The Queen Mother can provide valuable exposition to fill in gaps in the players' knowledge. Use the Queen to confirm or dispel their speculation about some large details of this trilogy's plot, such as the Brethren's scheme to send corrupted magic from the central sun through the tunnels in the World-Shield. But the Queen should not mention anything new to the players, nor does she know anything about Thanatos or the other Immortals.

On another point, though, the Queen Mother can speak volubly and with passion. She has lived for thirty centuries and seen the long-term effects of the Spell of Preservation, as well as the effects of the recent plot to corrupt it. She can't find much good in either state of affairs.

"The Spell has done much good, but at such cost," she tells the PCs. "It paralyzes this world and all its creatures. The Spell preserves us—like specimens in alcohol. You do right in battling the Blood Brethren's schemes to corrupt the Spell. Yet even should you win, I wonder how much better off we shall be. If only something could be done to the Spell itself. . . but that is a matter for the Immortals, wherever they may be."

### The Last Task

This Event offers an optional final sequence for the adventure.

The Queen Mother tells how the feathered serpents, in the unintelligent phase of their life cycle, happened on the oasis in the Nithian desert and adopted it, unaware of the danger the manscorpions and Nightrage foundry represented. Now, at that foundry, Koresh's lava flow is on the verge of flowing out of control. The oasis will be destroyed.

The task she offers the PCs: to join with the feathered serpents here in evacuating all serpents from the oasis to Ashmorain. In return for their help, the Queen Mother says, "I can offer you the power to become as we are, at will, should you desire."

That's right, the PCs can gain the power to assume the form of a feathered serpent, whenever they like, and resume their original forms as easily. The power only lasts for a certain time (say, one year), but otherwise has no strings attached. The Queen Mother can describe the power in whatever detail is necessary to put the PCs at ease; they have nothing to worry about.

To those PCs that accept this gift, the Queen Mother says, "Drink of my juices." With one long tooth she cuts a small gash in her belly, and purple liquid wells forth. The PCs who taste the fluid gain the power to turn into feathered serpents for one year.

### The Power

This spell-like ability works like a permanent *polymorph self* spell, restricted to feathered serpent

form. The power does not interfere with other magical effects, including other *polymorph* spells. The user's clothing and possessions disappear when in serpent form, reappearing intact when the user resumes original form.

If a PC does not want to drink the Queen Mother's fluid, there is another, albeit riskier, way to get the ability. The PC gets a small crystal egg to wear like a jewel; it magically adheres to skin or cloth. This egg grants the transformation power. After a year the egg will hatch into a tiny feathered serpent. At that time the hatchling may fly off to Ashmorain or, at your discretion, it may "imprint" on the PC and become its loyal companion for life.

This offers rich campaign possibilities, but in any case, the PC loses the transformation power. To regain it, the PC must visit Ashmorain again and beseech the Queen Mother to renew her gift. She may ask for a favor in return. . . a new adventure!

### The Rescue

Along with the other serpents, the newly transformed PCs can fly down to the oasis and evacuate the feathered serpents and cocoons. The PCs should have their hands (or wings) full just herding the young, non-sentient serpents up into the air; perhaps a clever PC can lure them upward more efficiently by capturing a breeding female as bait. Meanwhile, the Ashmorain serpents lift the cocoons aloft, as they lifted the PCs at the beginning of this chapter.

The evacuation may take several trips, but these can be quickly summarized. As they fly upward with the last evacuees toward Ashmorain, the PCs see, far below, cascades of lava erupting from the manscorpion lair. The molten rock overwhelms the oasis; its burning palms provide the concluding scene of this module.

### WHERE NEXT?

If you are playing this module alone, award additional XP as appropriate. Assume that Thanatos kept his rival Immortals trapped here inside Ashmorain, and that PCs can deactivate the imprisoning device without trouble. Since the Immortals can depart invisibly, the PCs may never even realize that they've freed the Immortals, until clerics start receiving spells again.

Then allow the PCs to return home by undertaking a long flight out the Hollow World's nearest polar opening and back to the Known World.

If you are playing the other modules in this trilogy, the Queen Mother knows quite a bit that can point the players toward either the Azcan Empire (HWA1) or Shahjapur (HWA3). Her serpents have relayed reports of magical disturbances in Chitlacan and in Dharsatra. As it happens, when the PCs leave Ashmorain, the most convenient landing spot is near Atacalpa, where they began this module. . . and where they can begin the others.

## THE BLOOD BRETHREN

As described in HWA1, *Nightwail*, the Blood Brethren were two goblins who terrorized the Broken Lands and Glantri some two centuries ago. One, Simm of the Grasping Dark, was a powerful cleric; the other, Koresh Teyd, commanded amazing sorcery. Both were renowned for vicious cruelty and for their hideous attack, the Grasping Dark (see below). Their descendants include the goblin princes Kano and Udan, whom the PCs were sent to find at the start of HWA1.

Their origin remains mysterious. *Nightwail* suggested that they might be disfigured Shadow Elves, given the Shadow Elf practice of abandoning their deformed young for the humanoid to find (a practice described in GAZ 10, *The Orcs of Thar*, and GAZ 13, *The Shadow Elves*). But this cannot explain the Brethren's ability to interbreed with the goblin tribes.

GAZ 10 also mentioned the ancient Nithian experiments that created the gnolls. As hinted in Chapter 7 of this module, some Nithians (manipulated by Thanatos) have continued their dark experiments and may have created new life forms. This offers a potential explanation for the Blood Brethren.

But if they were created in the Nithian Empire in the Hollow World, how did the Brethren reach the outer world? Having ridden in an Annelid during this part of the adventure, the PCs might start putting together the pieces of the mystery. Yet even now, they lack a few clues. An ambitious DM can keep dangling the mystery of the Brethren's origin until the final scenes of this trilogy's concluding module, *Nightstorm*.

### Koresh Teyd, Nightkiller

As goblin: Male, height in life 5'1", weight in life 100 lbs., last age 37. Currently a sluglike monstrosity, length 22", weight six lbs., age inapplicable.

**Koresh Teyd:** 25th-level magic-user; AC 9; hp 34; #AT 1 (dagger or spell); Dmg 1d4 or by spell; MV 120' (40'); Save MU25; ML 12; AL C; THAC0 13. Spells carried: 1st level—*darkness, detect magic, light, magic missile, read languages, read magic, sleep*. 2nd level—*continual darkness, continual light, detect evil, knock, levitate, phantasmal force, web*. 3rd level—*dispel magic, fire ball, lightning bolt* (x2), *fly, protection from normal missiles*. 4th level—*polymorph others* (x2), *polymorph self, curse, wall of fire, wizard eye*. 5th level—*cloudkill, dissolve, pass-wall, telekinesis, wall of stone*. 6th level—*anti-magic shell, disintegrate, projected image, flesh to stone, stone to flesh, wall of iron*. 7th level—*magic door, power word stun, reverse gravity, sword*. 8th level—*clone, dance, force field, polymorph any object*. 9th level—*meteor swarm, heal, shapechange*.

### Prince Udan Axe-Thrower

Male goblin, height 5', weight 110 lbs., age 18. Slender build, by goblin standards; reddish-black

body hair; warts across right cheek. Wears a head-dress and cape made from an owlbear skin, and a loincloth of dire wolf fur. Carries a rusty short sword (1d6).

Udan is the second oldest son of Queen Yazar of High Gobliny. Possession by his Brethren ancestor Koresh Teyd has drastically affected Udan's health. Koresh, who needs no nourishment, has neglected to allow his host to feed himself more than once or twice a week. So Udan is now a wasted, skeletal goblin. Like famine victims at the very edge of endurance, he appears almost too emaciated to survive—a horrific sight. Most frightening, perhaps, is the insane fear in his eyes, an indication that somewhere inside, Udan may comprehend what has happened to him.

**Udan Axe-Thrower**, as goblin: AC 5; HD 1 + 1; 7 hp; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6; MV 90' (30'); Save F1; St 9, In 11, Wi 9, Dx 10, Co 12, Ch 5; AL C; THAC0 18; XP 10. However, use Koresh Teyd's statistics while he possesses Udan.

### KRUTHEP

16th-level magic-user; AC 9; hp 34; #AT 1; Dmg by item or spell; MV 120' (40'); Save MU16; ML 8; AL C; THAC0 13. Spells carried: 1st level—*detect magic, hold portal, light, protection from good, read magic*. 2nd level—*continual light, continual darkness, levitate, phantasmal force, wizard lock*. 3rd level—*create air, dispel magic, fly, haste, protection from normal missiles*. 4th level—*curse* (x2), *wall of fire, wizard eye*. 5th level—*dissolve, pass-wall, wall of stone*. 6th level—*anti-magic shell, projected image*. 7th level—*magic door, statue*. Sometimes wears a *displacer cloak* and carries a *staff of striking*.

Once a servant of Pflarr in the Royal Palace in Tarthis, Kruthep grew ambitious beyond his station. When Koresh Teyd arrived, Kruthep entreated Pharaoh Ramose to let him serve the new wizard. Kruthep hopes to learn Koresh's magic, kill Koresh, and set himself up as the power behind Pharaoh's throne.

### AUGAR

AC 6; HD 6; hp 35; #AT 1 gore / 1 bite or weapon; Dmg 1d6/1d6 or by weapon + 2; MV 120' (40'); Save F6; ML 12; AL N; THAC0 14.

Augar was a follower of the Immortal Rathanos in the Nithian city of Tarthis. Though he had no gift for magic or clerical studies, Augar was consumed with desire to serve his patron in extraordinary ways. He volunteered himself to the dark flesh-shapers of Nithia, who transformed him into a minotaur. After the change, Augar's intellect fell to such brutish levels that he no longer feels much devotion to any Immortal. He enjoys his new strength and the awe he inspires in others, but he hates being apart from humanity.

## GREAT ANNELID (Large) ==

AC 7; HD 25-50; hp 85-175; #AT 1; Dmg 3d8 or swallows prey whole; MV 240' (80'); Save F10; ML 5; AL N; THAC0 14 (reduced due to clumsiness).

"Unknown to light, deeper than root of mountain, large as clouds. The earth shook when they passed. The earth can shake again." This obscure passage comes from one of the world's oldest books, *Prophetic Truths*, known to partisan scholars as *The Sayings of Madmen*.

The ancient text cannot possibly date from the era that Thanatos created his burrowers to menace the Hollow World. In that time, millennia past, many of these monsters haunted the underworld. Most were intelligent, and they commanded power to rival the Immortals themselves. In defeating the burrowers, the Immortals were unable to destroy them outright; instead, they compromised and suspended the creatures' life processes, using the Spell of Preservation.

Some burrowers, of brilliant but alien intelligence, still reach forth with their awareness. They seek release, and so they send visions to susceptible human minds. These visions may have produced the deranged, yet strikingly accurate, history given in *The Sayings of Madmen*.

**About the Annelids:** Not all the burrowers were intelligent. The Great Annelids had only rudimentary intelligence but more than compensated in sheer size. No larger mortal creatures occupy the Hollow World.

Their lack of intelligence evidently allowed Thanatos to free them, where the other, sentient burrowers remain trapped by the Spell of Preservation. Within the past millennium, Thanatos somehow managed to circumvent the Spell and reactivate certain large Annelids. How? Theorizing is dangerous, yet it seems clear that the Spell of Preservation works primarily through the burrowers' intelligence—in the manner of hypnosis. The Annelids were not very smart to begin with; in their reappearance they have shown no sentience whatever. Thanatos may have neutralized their feeble minds in order to reanimate their bodies.

The symbionts, then, perform a crucial role in his scheme. These creatures not only speed the Annelids by a factor of ten or more; the symbionts also allow the Nithians and Shattenalfen to command the wretched Annelids.

**Description:** Full-grown Annelids measure about a thousand feet long and 25' in diameter. The largest Annelids reach 40' in diameter and some 2000' in length. Their bodies, grayish-brown in color (the color of rock), are segmented like earthworms. The longer the Annelid, the more segments it has, up to perhaps 600 in the longest.

Biologically, an Annelid is a long tube inside a larger tube. The Annelid's mouth is a circular funnel-like opening lined with three rows of sharp conical teeth. The inner digestive tract, including pharynx, esophagus, crop, and gizzard, runs from head to tail. A long nerve cord connects head and

tail as well. Otherwise, each segment can live virtually on its own, for each has two hearts around the central tube, shaped like half-toruses (half doughnuts).

Hairlike sensory fibers called "setae" grow on the posterior edge of each segment (except the first). These can grow to an inch in diameter and a few feet long. The Annelid has no other sensory equipment except light- and heat-sensitive patches at its anterior (front) end.

**Abilities:** Annelids excel virtually all other creatures in the ability to tunnel. An Annelid tunnels almost as fast as it can crawl, grinding and swallowing solid rock without effort.

Mature Annelids also have the ability to attract and paralyze earth elementals. Though this power is poorly understood, it apparently involves a false signal, propagated through the earth, that replicates the signal of something desirable to elementals—a rich lode of ore, perhaps, or a beautiful cavern. Whatever its nature, this power allows the Annelids to lay their eggs in the elementals, a vital step in their grisly reproductive process (see below).

**Ecology:** Annelids subsist on the rock they eat. They have no other known diet. Annelids can live anywhere underground, even in lava pools; they are immune to heat and pressure damage. Exposure to light does not damage them, but they dislike it.

Annelids are hermaphroditic, but only those of huge size ever reproduce. The Annelid lures several earth elementals, paralyzes them, and lays eggs within the rock they animate. After some unknown period (probably several weeks), the eggs hatch, and the Annelid grubs dine on the elementals' magical life force. Thus fed, the young grubs grow to several feet in diameter and begin to tunnel. They soon reach a length of 15', but they grow more slowly thereafter. There is no known limit on an Annelid's lifespan.

## FEATHERED SERPENT ==

Unintelligent phase: AC 6; HD 2; hp 7; #AT 1 bite; Dmg 1d6; MV 60' (20'); Fl270' (90'); Save F1; ML 6; AL N; THAC0 16. Mature phase: as above, but ML 10 and AL L. Mature serpents can speak one or several languages, using a spell-like *magic mouth* ability.

A serpent that has taken serpent-mint has AC 5, HD 3, hp 9 for 1d4 hours. With serpent-mint, the serpents can defend themselves against flying vipers, which otherwise defeat the serpents easily.

These creatures' life cycle is discussed in Chapter 2.

**The Queen Mother:** AC 3; HD 12; hp 40; #AT Nil; Dmg Nil; MV Nil; Save C12; ML 12; AL L; THAC0 Nil.

## WORLD-SHIELD ORE

This ore is not magical but strongly anti-magical; still, its properties merit discussion here. The metal forged from this ore can absorb magical energy harmlessly. Furthermore, it holds the magic intact on its surface, affecting those who touch it.

The ore's unique properties derive from its source: the World-Shield at the center of the planet's crust, which is impenetrable by any magic, even that of the Immortals. The World-Shield may be a "zone of influence" as opposed to an actual barrier of rock; this remains unclear, for the evidence is conflicting. Perhaps its cons in the zone of influence has bestowed on the ore its strange powers.

### Properties:

**Strength:** The World-Shield ore, once forged, exceeds all other minerals in strength and hardness. It is essentially indestructible. Though conventional hard materials are also brittle, this ore is not. Few blows can shatter it.

However, this strength makes the ore extremely hard to forge. Nothing but the heat of the planet itself, as in a live volcano, can melt it.

For game purposes, assume armor forged from this ore gives the wearer AC -2 (negative 2). Yet because of its lightness, it encumbers the wearer only as much as ordinary banded mail (described in the *Players Companion*: AC 4, 450 cn).

**Anti-magic:** The ore, and items made from it, completely blocks, negates, and neutralizes all magical effects. (If you have the *Master Rules*, the ore has 100% Anti-Magic value, as described in the *Master DM's Book*.)

Armor made of World-Shield ore completely protects the wearer from all magical attacks. (This includes magical liquids poured through cracks in the armor; the liquid simply doesn't work.) The armor also seals the wearer totally from any effects of other magic, for better or worse. For instance, the wearer cannot become invisible, be lifted by *telekinesis*, travel through a *gate*, or be *teleported* or *charmed*; *bleed* spells and healing magic are similarly futile. Scrying and communication magic such as *contact outer plane*, *lore*, and *clairvoyance* also don't work for the wearer. The wearer also cannot cast magic from within the armor, though he or she can use magical items held outside the armor.

Note that the wearer can be affected by the rings, amulets, and other items worn on his or her person *within* the armor. The armor simply prevents all outside magic from entering.

In theory this armor should even protect against Immortal magic, since the World-Shield itself resists the Immortals. However, this could easily prove too powerful for a campaign, so the DM has final ruling on the effects of Immortal magic on World-Shield ore. (Note: If the armor were built by an Immortal, it would be effectively an artifact, and would protect against Immortal magic.)

**Suspension:** When the armor is attacked magically, the attack's magical power "collects" on the ore's surface, suspended. This power automatically attacks

the next person or object (besides the ground) that the armor touches. This target is affected just as if the spell had been cast directly on it. If the armor touches nothing for one minute (six rounds), the suspended power dissipates harmlessly.

If the armor collects and suspends magic from an area-effect attack, it still only inflicts its damage on a single target, by touch, and only as much damage as the armor's wearer would have taken from the spell.

**Instability:** Note that the World-Shield armor is unstable (unless it's an artifact). A month or so after forging, its properties wear off, and the metal crumbles. So even if they manage to fit into the armor suits, the PCs can't be permanently invincible.

Apparently only one factor governs the armor's instability: the presence of a living wearer. The act of being worn apparently saps the armor's power. Armor forged and stored unworn may last indefinitely, until worn. After one wearing, the armor inevitably decays within a month. (At your discretion, other factors can also make the armor unstable, such as exposure to light or corrosive acids.)

## THE GRASPING DARK

(Cleric/Magic-User Spell Level 7)

Range: Touch

Duration: Permanent

This evil attack draws the victim into an unknown pocket dimension. The realm, dark, malodorous, and crowded with the spirits of past victims, manifests itself within the victim's own form. No matter what angle one views the victim from, he or she appears to be a flat silhouette. Within the silhouette, the viewer sees the victim receding into the distance, pulled by countless green-gray hands. Typically the victim shrieks horribly. The silhouette vanishes, and the victim is lost forever.

The victim receives a saving throw vs. Death Magic to resist the Grasping Dark. Success means no effect. If the throw fails, the margin of failure determines how long until the effect takes hold (as it were)—the wider the margin, the sooner the attack takes effect. Missing the roll by 1 or 2 means the victim has an hour or two of painful life left; missing by (say) 7 or 8 means the victim departs almost instantly.

**Cureall**, cast before the victim disappears, dispels the Grasping Dark effect. After the disappearance, nothing can bring the victim back except Immortal magic or, at the DM's discretion, a *wish*.

## SEMEKHTET-BARGE

Koresh Teyd uses this magical ship to travel underground. Like the dwarven rockship (DM's *Companion*), it moves through solid rock as easily as an ordinary boat moves through water. Also like the rockship, barge passengers are protected from the environment and can breathe and speak normally. However, the Semekhtet-barge is not so rare nor hard to produce as the rockship, and it has figured prominently in Nithian folklore and mythology. (Thus the

name; Semekhtet was a legendary hero who owned a similar barge.) Though Koresh Teyd received the barge as a gift from Thanatos, there is nothing inherent in the barge's power that necessarily indicates Immortal magic.

Treat the Semekhtet-barge in all respects as an *undersea boat*, as described in the DM's Companion, except that it moves through rock, not underwater.

## DURANCE VIAL

This small iron vial, three inches long and a finger's breadth in diameter, can confine one or more magical creatures indefinitely. The tube contains no opening, but the silver runes engraved on it often include the words of command necessary to trap and release a captive. It often appears as an ornament on a necklace, bracer, or other item.

When the user holds the vial within six feet of a magical creature(s) and speaks the command word of trapping, all magical creatures in the vicinity receive a saving throw vs. Spells. A failed roll means the creature is absorbed into the vial. The user and all non-magical creatures are immune to the effect. Using the vial is a Chaotic act.

When empty of captives, the *durance vial* can be destroyed easily. While the vial holds its captive(s), it has an AC equal to the captives' best AC, and hit points equal to the combined total of all captives. Damage to it damages all the captives as well. If the vial is destroyed, all captives reappear, dead.

Captivity lasts until the user holds the vial and speaks the command word of release. At once all creatures held in the vial are released (unless they desire otherwise). They reappear in the nearest open space large enough to hold them, and they have immunity against subsequent captivity in that vial. The former captives have no obligation to their captor or those who freed them.

*Durance vials* are intrinsically evil and therefore quite rare. Lawful heroes often feel honor-bound to free their captives and destroy the vials. If sold intact, the vial is worth about 1,500 gp.

Koresh Teyd received his vial from Thanatos. However, evil alchemists in the Known World have been known to manufacture them, so the vial doesn't necessarily imply Immortal magic.

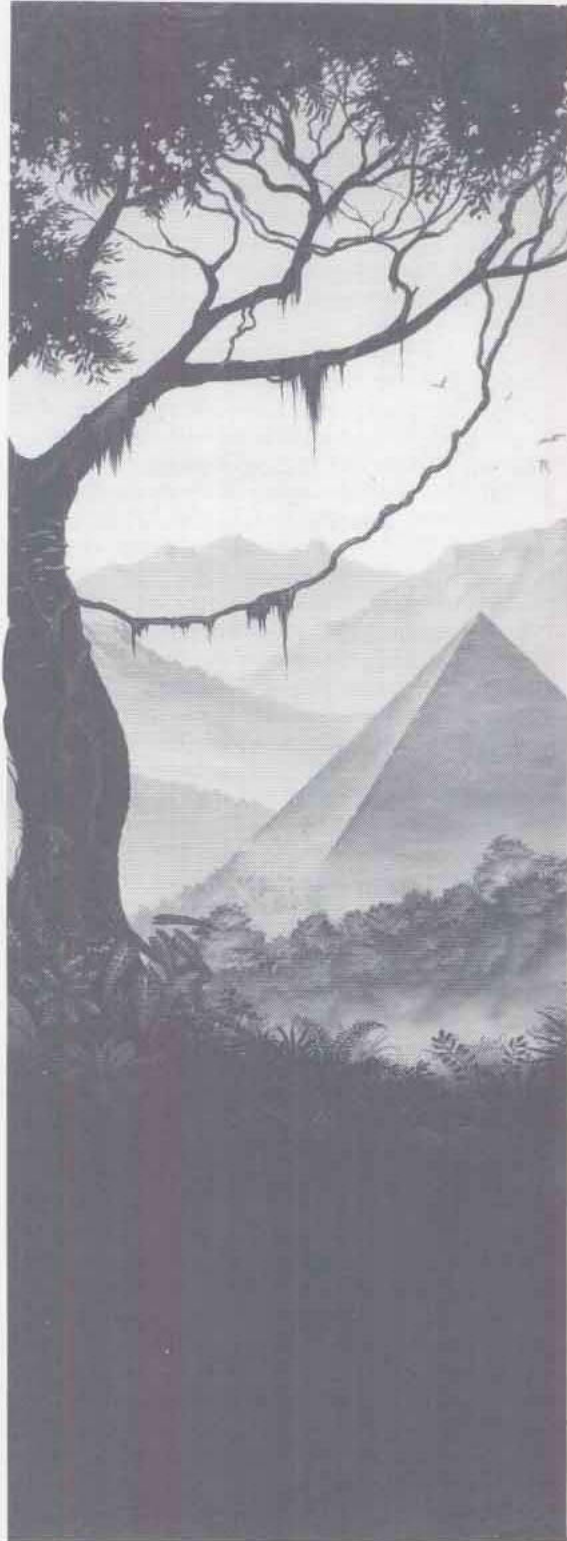
## DECANTER OF ENDLESS WATER

This stoppered flask, almost always of fine workmanship, contains a portable wormhole to the Elemental Plane of Water. The user removes the stopper and speaks a word of command, and a stream of fresh water pours out. Some *decanters* have variable rates of flow, but others simply pour forth at a constant rate until the command word stops them.

These items tend to be rare, for the elementals who inhabit the Plane of Water dislike these drains on their resources. Rumors speak of elemental patrols

who scour the Prime Plane and buy or steal every such flask they find. Once transported to the Plane of Water, the flask's magic is permanently dispelled.

The *decanter* that created the Serpent Oasis pours several gallons per minute in a strong stream. It is a shapely flask of untarnished gold with inlaid lapis lazuli in a geyser design. It is worth perhaps 1,000 gp.





Just as the Nithian Empire is modeled on ancient Egypt, so some locations in this module come from Egyptian history.

This module's Royal Palace of Ramose IV derives from the famous Temple of Amon at Luxor, built for Amenhotep III over 3400 years ago and still (partly) standing.

**To find out more:** The literature about ancient Egypt is vast. We know far more about one of the world's first civilizations, its politics, customs, and everyday life, than about many cultures that rose and fell much more recently.

If you want source material to lend color to Nithian adventures, the endless shelves of volumes on Egyptology may offer both encouragement and terror. Here are a few titles to start with:

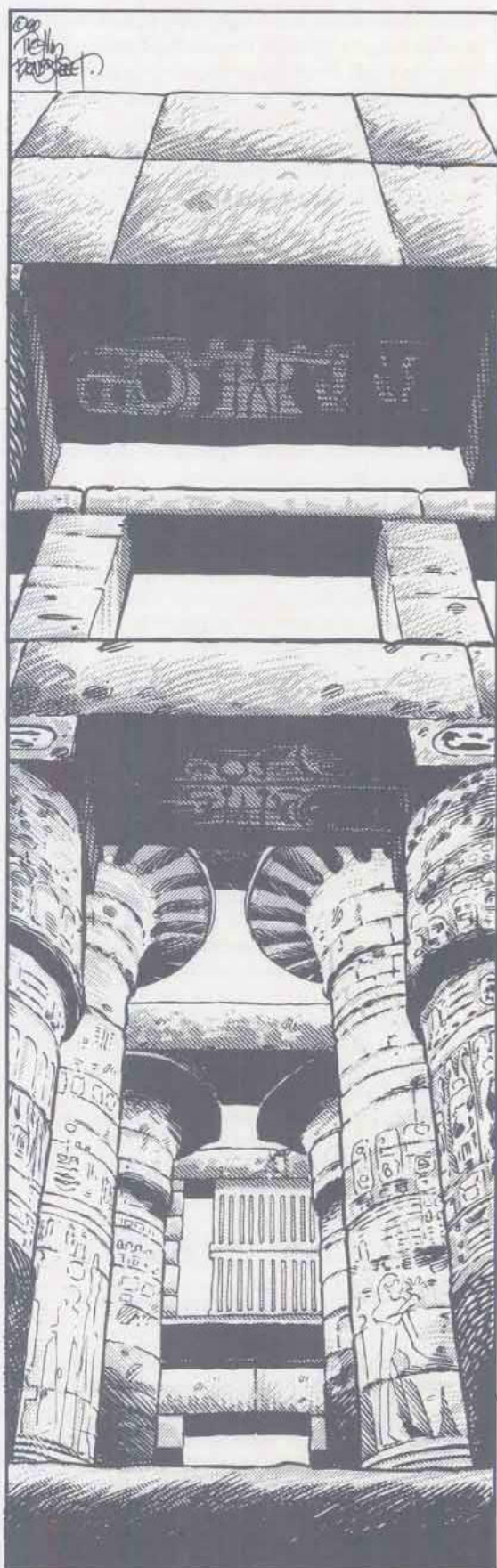
Jon Manchip White, *Everyday Life in Ancient Egypt* (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1963; New York: Capricorn Books, 1967; 200 pp). Delightful introduction, concise yet filled with detail useful for any Nithian role-playing scenario.

Sir Alan Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs: An Introduction* (London; Oxford Univ. Press, 1961; 461 pp). Thick, comprehensive overview; clearly written, but not for the casual DM.

A. J. Spencer, *Death in Ancient Egypt* (London: Penguin Books, 1982; 256 pp). Particularly note Chapter 4, "Security of the Tomb." Elaborately details, with diagrams, the traps and tricks that tomb workers designed to protect a buried pharaoh's treasures from looters. Though some of these surpass any published dungeon adventure, clever thieves eventually foiled them all. Fascinating to see how *real* dungeon traps work.

The March 1977 and February 1982 issues of *National Geographic* magazine offer articles on historical and modern Egypt. These suit the casual student and also present beautiful photos of tombs, people, and the timeless desert.

Look for all these at your local library or a good store that sells used books. These few titles can lead you into your own study of Egypt's past—and you will feel the awe that rewards every historian.



# MONSTER SUMMARY TABLE

This table presents the vital statistics for some of the monsters featured in this adventure. Use it for handy reference during play, and refer to the various rulebooks for details.

Name	AC	HD or level/hp	THACo	#AT	DMG	MV	Remarks
Annelid, large	7	25-50/85-175	14	1	3d8 OR swallow	240' (80')	
Augar (Minotaur)	6	6/35	14	2	1d6/1d6 OR by weapon +2	120' (40')	flight ring (Chap 10 only)
Bat	0	1-1/2	19	Nil	Nil	180' (60')	continual darkness
Crocoble	3	6/30	14	1	2d8	90' (30')	
Elementals							
Earth	0	12/50	9	1	2d8 + 1d8 vs grounded	60' (20')	
Fire	2	8/32	12	1	1d8 + 1d8 vs cold	120' (40')	
Gabbro	0	12/52	9	1	2d8 + 1d8 vs grounded	60' (20')	
Pumice (sentry)	0	12/50	9	1	2d8 + 1d8 vs grounded	60' (20')	
Feathered serpent	6	2/7	16	1	1d6	60' (20'), Fl270' (90')	magic mouth ability when mature
Queen Mother	3	12/40	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	
Flying viper	6	2**/8	16/18 spit	1	1d6 bite, 1d4 spit	60' (20'), Fl300' (100')	
Koresh Teyd	9	25/34	13	1	by spell	120' (40')	
duplicate	-4	0/34	19	1	1d6	120' (40')	staff of fire and earth, dagger +1
Kruthep	9	16/34	13	1	spell or item	120' (40')	displacer cloak, staff of striking
armored	-4	0/34	19	1	by item	120' (40')	save as 0-level
Manscorpion	1	8**/40	11	2	3d6/1d10 + poison	240' (80')	ring of fire resistance
Joko-akh (cleric)	1	10****/45	10	2	spell/1d10 + poison	240' (80')	ring of fire resistance
younglings	7	1-1/3	Nil	Nil	Nil	90' (30')	
Nithians							
Pharaoh Ramose IV	8	18/45	11	1	1d6 + 2	120' (40')	
Palace guards	9/8	2/7	18	1	1d6	120' (40')	
Soldiers	9	1/5	19	1	1d6	120' (40')	
Tafiri	9	14/36	13	1	by spell	120' (40')	
Tothmes	9	14/38	13	1	by spell	120' (40')	
Rhagobessa	5	4+2	14	15	2	0 + suckers/2d8	150' (50')
Schattentalen ( <i>polymorphed</i> into Nithians unless noted)							
Argaluin							
Money-grower	-4	6hp	19	1	1d4	120' (40')	
Elmoth (mage)	9	6/22	17	1	1d4 OR spell	120' (40')	not <i>polymorphed</i>
Kemenoth Sun-bracer (Argaluin's henchman)	-4	14hp	17	1	1d6	120' (40')	
Maigios, Thalion (Argaluin's stooges)	-4	7hp	19	1	1d6	120' (40')	
Merlongas, Ragnor (Taranic's aides)	8/-4	3/15	19	1	1d6	120' (40')	
Taranic (commander)	6/-4	8/45	15	1	1d6	120' (40')	potion of fortitude
Guards and guerillas	8/-4	2/8	19	1	1d6	120' (40')	
Slug, giant	8	6*/25	13	1	1d4	20'	half DMG edged weapons, NO DMG blunt
Villager, Colima	9	1/4-6	20	1	1hp	120' (40')	

# THE MANSCORPION LAIR

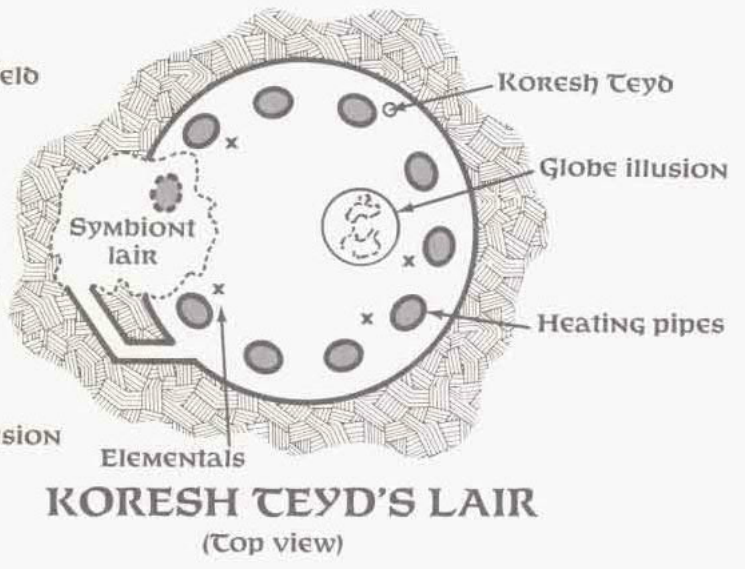
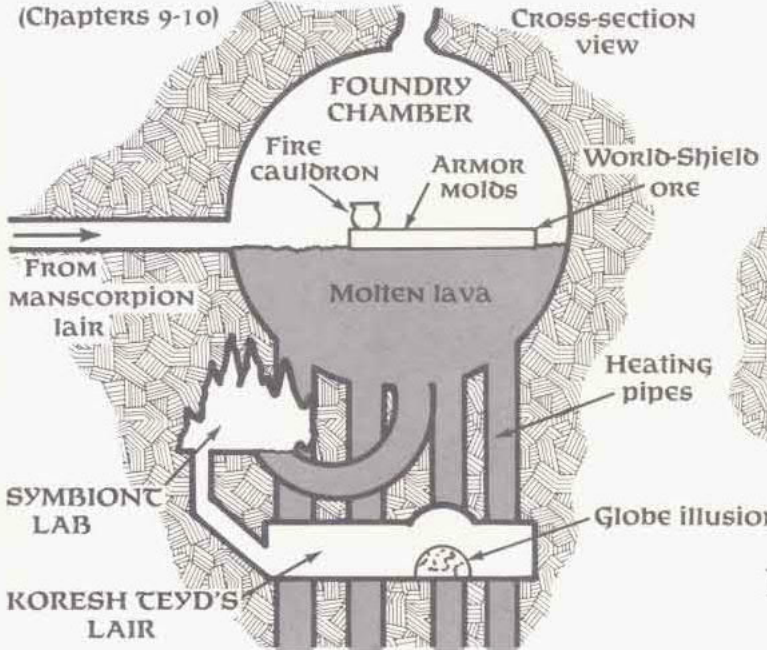
(Chapter 8)

Scale: 1 square equals 5 ft.



# NIGHTRAGE FOUNDRY

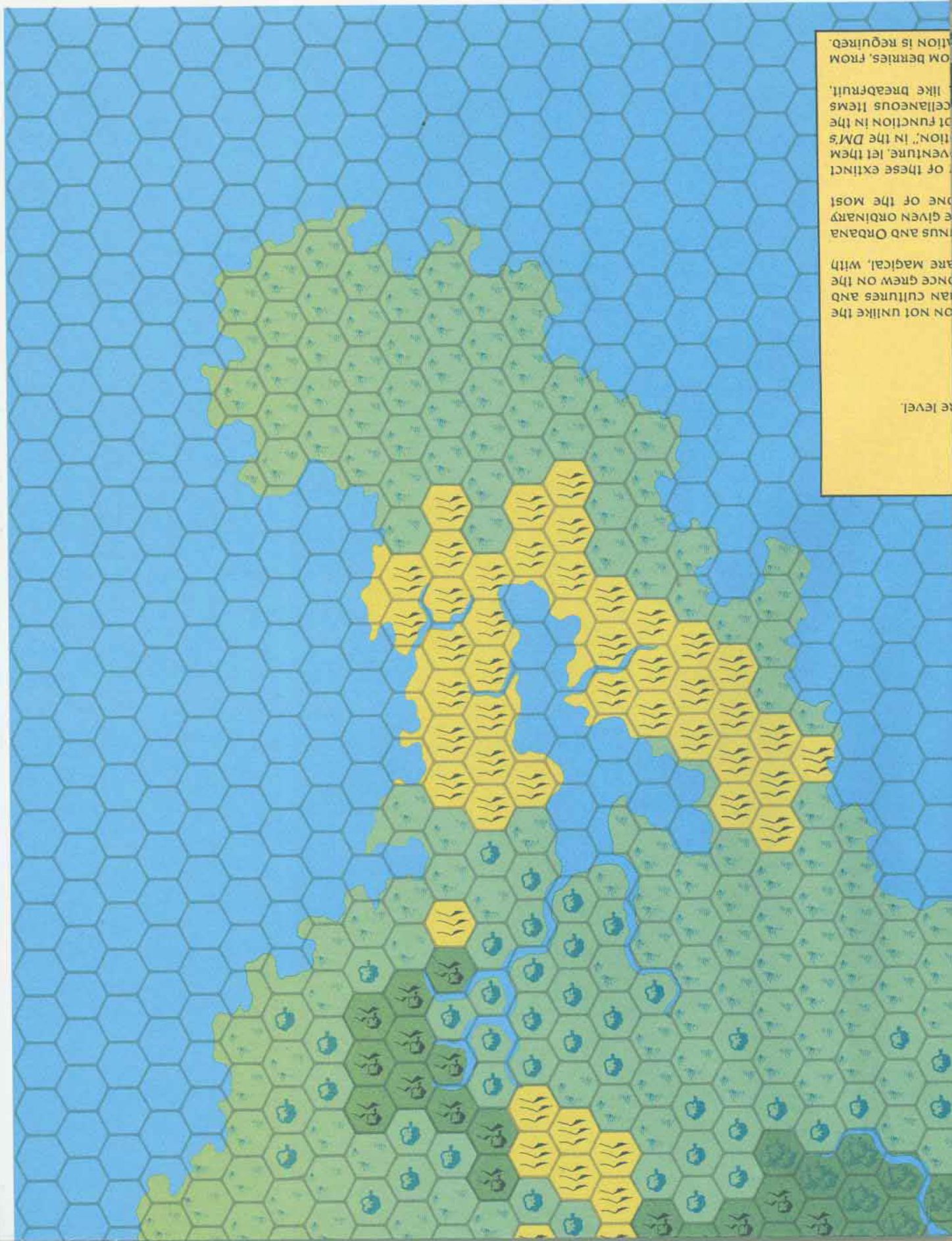
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# KORESH TEYD'S LAIR

(Top view)

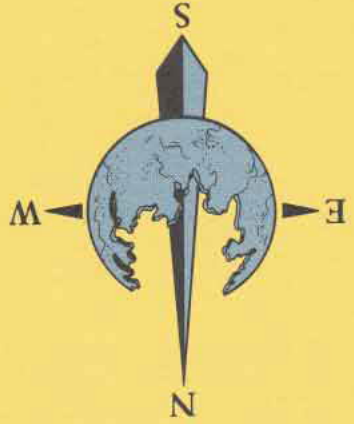




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OF THESE EXTING  
VENTURE, LET THEM  
TION; IN THE DM'S  
CELLANEOUS ITEMS  
LIKE BREADFRUIT,  
OM BERRIES, FROM  
TION IS REQUIRED.

re level.

Scale: 1 hex equals 2 miles



RIVERS



PLATEAU



SWAMP



GRASSLAND



HEAVY FOREST



LIGHT FOREST



FORESTED HILLS

## ASHMORAIN (Chapter 11)

Area: Approximately 3,400 square miles.

Altitude: About 100 miles. The highest mountains are 18,000 feet above sea level.

Speed: 240' (60').

Climate: Temperate (magically controlled); cold on the highest peaks.

For more information, consult Chapter 11.

### Flora

Ashmorain, among the smallest of the Floating Continents, serves a function in the world. Whereas the lands beneath Ashmorain preserve hundreds of extinct animals, Ashmorain preserves a small number of plant species that are unique to the world. These plants are remarkable because their fruits and oils have medicinal properties. With the coming of humans and the other sentient races, the Immortals feared that these magical plants from the world. The plants' effects would have been removed from the world. The Immortals preserved these species on the continent of Ashmorain. If the PCs explore this island, they may encounter some of the plants. When they enter a new terrain type, or at dramatic moments in the story, the DM may substitute either a random ointment effect (from the *Magic of the Companions*). The result gives the new plant's effect. If the potion rolled cannot be used, substitute either a random ointment effect (from the *Magic of the Companions*) or an exotic (but non-magical) fruit or nut (such as mango, tonka bean, or macketti nut).

The plants' appearance is up to the DM. Their magical effects may derive from the stems, or from chewing leaves or roots. No preparation is necessary.

## COLIMA (Chapter 3)

Scale: 1 inch = 100 feet.

**Population:** 104. All are 0-level normal people.

**Economy:** Barter only. Subsistence agriculture from Merry Pirate Isles. Periodic episodes (GENERATION).

**Beliefs:** Ancestral Stonecarver culture holds guard the villagers' trail once they leave town.

**Government:** Occasional town meetings in Twinchisel, oldest citizen, exercises inform

### KEY

**Bay of Colima:** A beautiful placid bay of blue ideal, except for the Serpent Rocks that render it a narrow avenue. This, unfortunately, has not been the case recently two weeks ago.

1. **Giant carving:** An unfinished frieze of a couple of decades before it's through.

2. **Village Common:** Planted with a circle of stone. A public well of stone stood here; recently demolished.

3. **Docks.**

4. **Alehouse:** A rundown place operated by a mebiocre whiskey, supported by charity from outside. Burned in the recent pirate raid.

5. **Common storage:** A ramshackle warehouse for stonecarving tools, seed grain, farm implements.

6. **Mikalman's Supplies:** The only actual store that carries a little of everything. Intact but looted for information.

7. **Lookout posts:** Steep, easily defended trails stand ready for the torch.

8. **Tailings:** Waste from the giant carving is trails, but this is a slow process. So much rock.

9. **Serpent's Head Rock:** Largest of the Serpent Rocks. Named for its distant resemblance to the lair of a mated pair of red-winged wyverns. It is their filthy nest here.

**Wyverns (2):** AC 3; HD 7<sup>+</sup>; hp 25; #AT 1 bite/1 st (80'); Save F4; ML 9; AL C; XP 850; THACO 13.

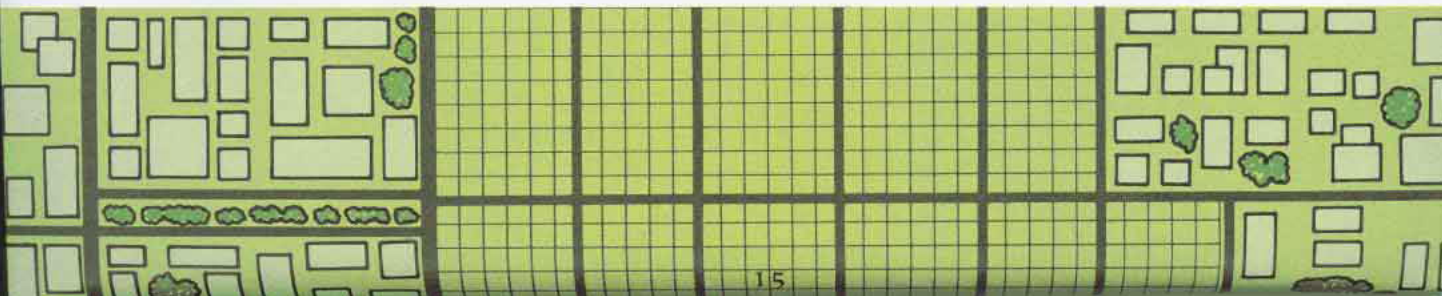
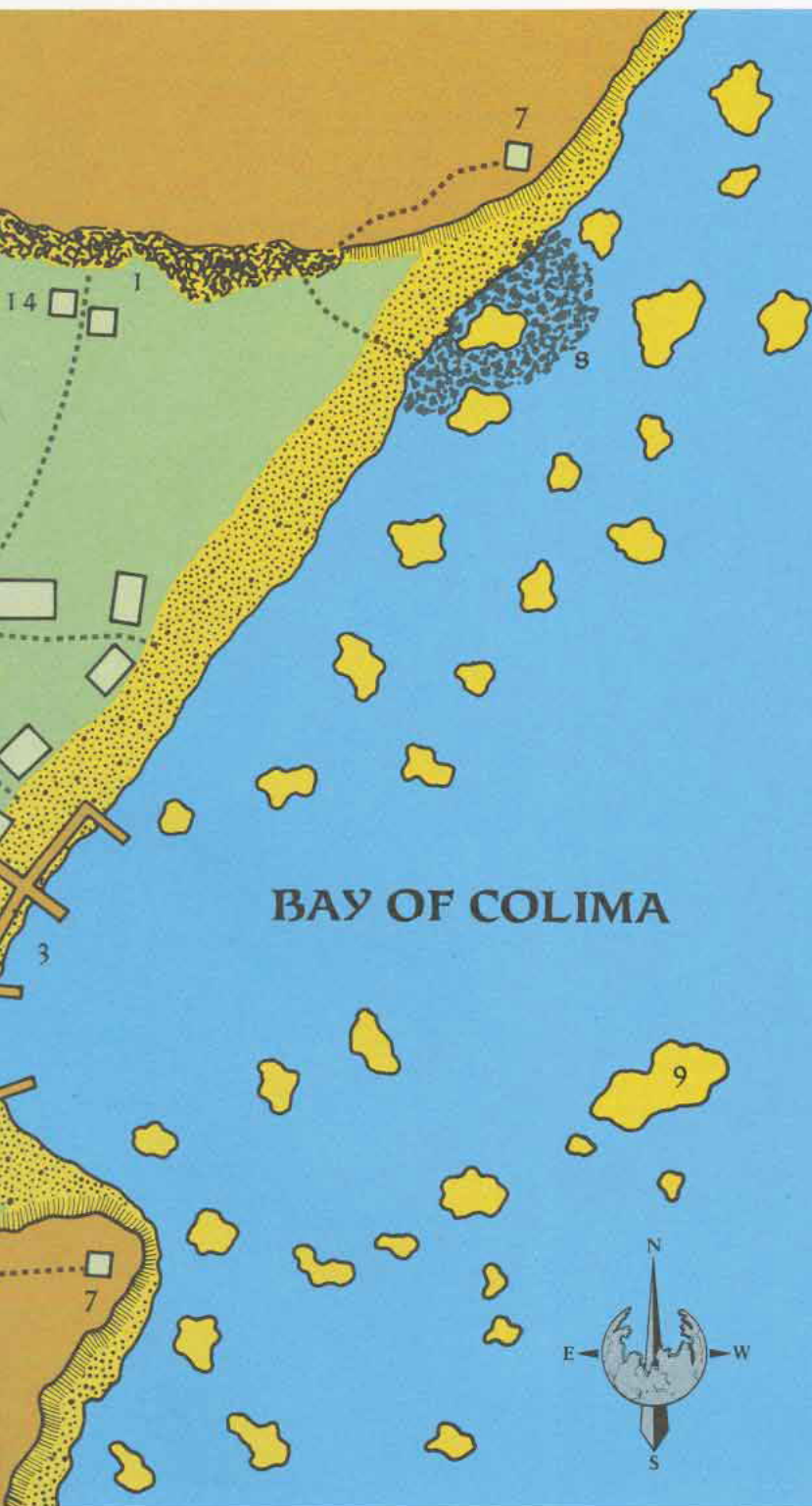
10. **Smithy:** Small forge; has its own well. Operated by a smith who makes and repairs stonecarving implements. Old (AL N), and two sons (each F1, 5 hp, AL N). The following three entries are still intact, protected by Preservation.

11. **Weaver's home:** Riv the Weaver lives in this beautiful daughters. They maintain a herd of sheep. Riv's intense dislike of Oleg the smith has caused her to carry on her romance with Oleg's eldest son.

12. **Rashan's home:** The village elder (F1), formerly a humble cottager. He leads the giant carving project though he does not have cleric abilities.

13. **Herbalist:** Malba, an anti-social 32-year-old woman with its large herb garden. Druidic in attitude but not a druid. She has 14 cats, but she is searching for an apprentice.

14. **Carvers' shelters:** Rude thatch huts, intended for temporary use. Recently burned to the ground in the pirate raid.





HOLL  
WO



# ASHMORAIN

Unless otherwise noted.  
; stonecarving; some trade with merchants  
OF NOMADIC WANDERING (NOT DUE FOR ANOTHER

That carving huge statue from cliffside will  
the area.

Village COMMON, otherwise NONE. Rashan  
mal authority.

water and gentle surf. The harbor would be  
for the approach treacherous except along a  
kept pirates from raiding, as they did most

sleeping man. A decade's work already, and  
still a striking sight.

tim trees (otherwise unknown in the area). A  
sheep in a pirate raid, now being rebuilt.

IVAN ONE-LEG AND his small family. They distrust  
other villagers due to Ivan's disability; partly

house, maintained by Ivan's family. Holbs  
s, and so on. Partly burned in the raid.

in the village; a neatly-kept wooden house  
in the recent raid. See Chapter 3 for more

is lead up here, where piles of green timber

bumped here. (Some gravel used for paving  
here, you can almost walk on the water.

ENT Rocks, a steep granite peak covered with  
ice to a feathered serpent's head, this rock is  
Every week or two they kill a sheep and carry

NG; DMG 2b8/1d6 + poison; MV 90' (30'), F240'

ated by Oleg Whitebeard (F2, 7 hp, AL L), who  
eg lives next door with his wife, Sala (F1, 4 hp,  
forge and the three homes described in the  
cted from the pirate raids by the Spell of

large cottage with his wife, Rally, and their six  
eep and goats, once large but reduced by the  
reated tension, forcing Kiv's eldest daughter  
in secret.

erly F3 in his youth; 5 hp, AL L) lives in this  
ect and serves the village's spiritual needs,

y woman, lives alone in a dilapidated cottage  
ut without druid powers. Lives alone except  
ice.

ed for tool storage and shelter from storms.  
p.

## KEY



HILLS



MOUNTAINS





FORESTED HILLS



LIGHT FOREST



HEAVY FOREST



GRASSLAND



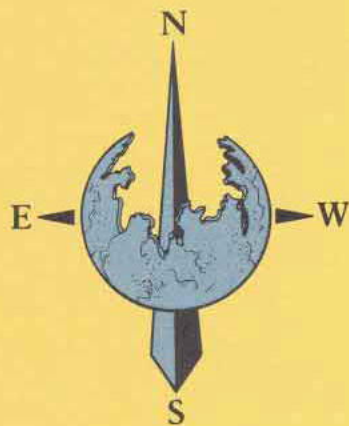
SWAMP



PLATEAU



RIVERS



Scale: 1 hex equals 2 miles



## ASHMORAIN (Chapter 11)

**Area:** Approximately 3400 square miles.

**Altitude:** About 100 miles. The highest mountains are 18,000 feet above shore.

**Speed:** 240' (80').

**Climate:** Temperate (magically controlled); cold on the highest peaks.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONSULT CHAPTER 11.

### Flora

Ashmorain, among the smallest of the Floating Continents, serves a function in the Hollow World itself. Whereas the lands beneath Ashmorain preserve human and animal species that are extinct in the outer world, Ashmorain preserves a small number of plant species that are also extinct. These plants are remarkable because their fruits and oils have magical effects that resemble many potions and ointments.

With the coming of humans and the other sentient races, the Immortals Faerlons removed these magical plants from the world. The plants' effects would have been too much power for mortals. The Immortals preserved these species only in inaccessible places in the Hollow World: Ashmorain.

**Magical effects:** If the PCs explore this island, they may encounter some of these plants. When they enter a new terrain type, or at dramatic moments in the adventure, they may discover a new plant. Roll percentile dice and consult Treasure Table 5, "Potions and Ointments." The result gives the new plant's effect. If the potion rolled cannot be used in the Hollow World, substitute either a random ointment effect (from the Miscellaneous section of the Companion) or an exotic (but non-magical) fruit or nut, such as a mangosteen, tonka bean, or manketti nut.

The plants' appearance is up to the DM. Their magical effects may derive from milky drippings on the stems, or from chewing leaves or roots. No preparation is required.





e level.

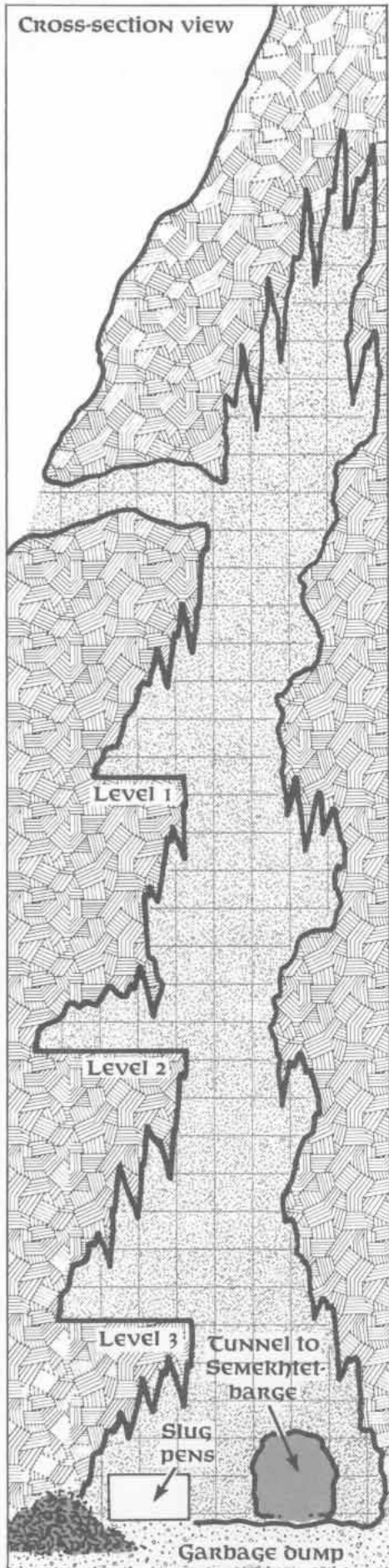
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OM berries, FROM  
tion is required.

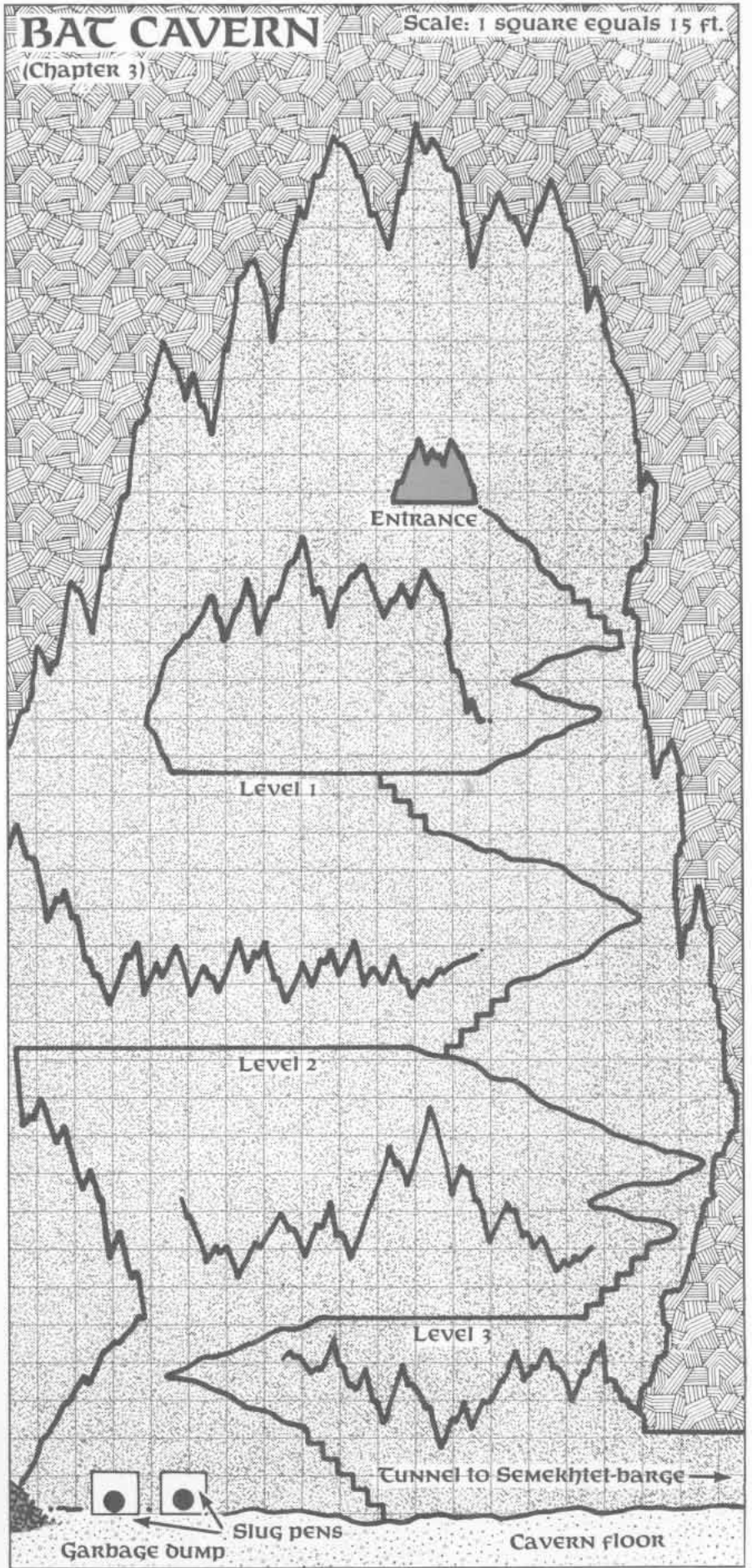
Cross-section view



# BAT CAVERN

(Chapter 3)

Scale: 1 square equals 15 ft.



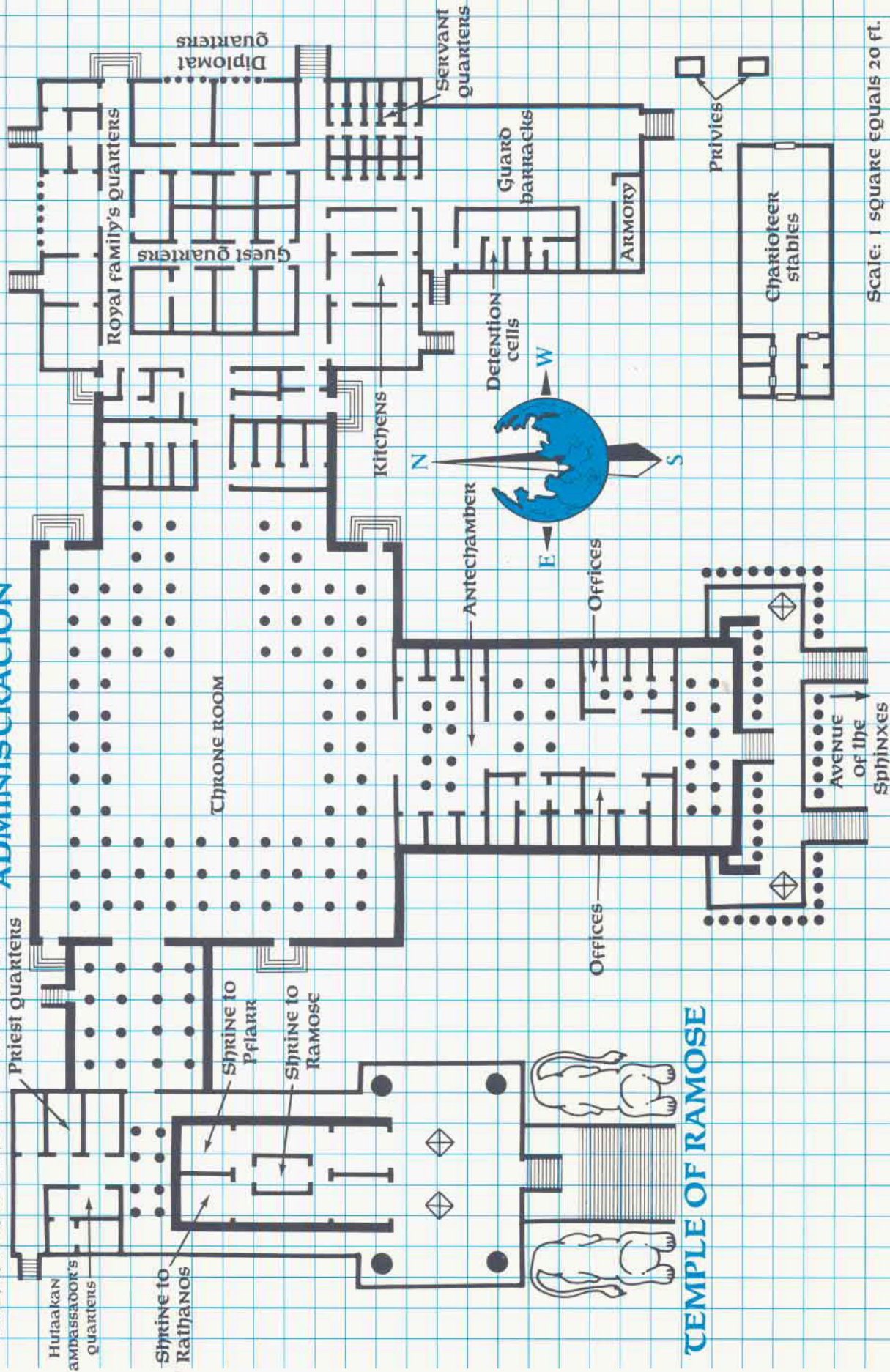
# THE ROYAL PALACE

(Chapter 7)

Carthis, Nithian Empire

# DOMESTIC WING

# ADMINISTRATION



# TEMPLE OF RAMOSE



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