

VER6-07

Ride the Merchant's Highway

A One-Round Dungeons & Dragons® Living Greyhawk™ Verbobonc Regional Adventure by Ron Lundeen and Gregory Hanigan

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Playtesters:

Ancient magical energy slumbers in hidden points around the Viscounty, waiting to be awakened. Do you dare to brave a path none have tread for centuries? This is adventure two of five in the Skyroad Series, which should be played in order. A one-round Verbobonc regional adventure for PC levels 1-8 (APLs 2-6).

Metaorganizational Focus: Mounted Borderers, House Galans

Based on the original DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® rules created by E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson and the new DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game designed by Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, Skip Williams, Richard Baker, and Peter Adkison.

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If you are planning on playing this adventure, stop reading now. The rest of the information in this adventure is for the DM only. If you read farther than this section, you'll know too much about its challenges, which kills the fun. Also, if you're playing this adventure as part of an RPGA-sanctioned event, reading beyond this point makes you ineligible to do so.

Preparing for Play

To get the most out of this adventure, you need copies of the following D&D rule books: *Player's Handbook*, *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and the *Monster Manual*.

Throughout this adventure, text in ***bold italics*** provides player information for you to paraphrase or read

aloud when appropriate. Sidebars contain important information for you, including special instruction on running the adventure. Information on nonplayer PCs (NPCs) and monsters appear in abbreviated form in the adventure text. Full information on NPCs and monsters are given in Appendix 1. For your convenience, that appendix is split by APL

Along with this adventure you'll find a RPGA Session Tracking sheet. If you're playing this adventure as part of an RPGA-sanctioned event, complete and turn in this sheet to your senior GM directly after play. You'll also find a LIVING GREYHAWK Adventure Record (AR).

LIVING GREYHAWK LEVELS OF PLAY

Because players bring their own PCs to LIVING GREYHAWK games, this adventure's challenges are proportionate to the modified average PC level of the PCs participating in the adventure. To determine this modified Average Party Level (APL) follow the steps below:

1. Determine the PC level for each of the PCs participating in the adventure.
2. If PCs bring animals that have been trained for combat (most likely dogs trained for war), other than those brought by virtue of a class ability (such as animal companions, familiars paladin's mounts) or the warhorse of a PC with the Mounted Combat feat, use the sidebar chart to determine the number of levels you add to the sum of step one. Add each PC's animals separately. A single PC may only bring four or fewer animals of this type, and animals with different CRs are added separately.

Mundane Animals Effect on APL		# of Animals			
		1	2	3	4
CR of Animal	1/4 & 1/6	0	0	0	1
	1/3 & 1/2	0	0	1	1
	1	1	1	2	3
	2	2	3	4	5
	3	3	4	5	6
	4	4	6	7	8
	5	5	7	8	9
6	6	8	9	10	
7	7	9	10	11	

- Sum the results of step 1 and 2, and divide by the number of PCs playing in the adventure. Round to the nearest whole number.
- If you are running a table of six PCs, add one to that average.

Throughout this adventure, APLs categorize the level of challenge the PCs face. APLs are given in even-numbered increments. If the APL of your group falls on an odd number, ask them before the adventure begins whether they would like to play a harder or easier adventure. Based on their choice, use either the higher or the lower adjacent APL.

APL also affects the amount of experience and gold a PC can gain at the end of the adventure. If a player PC is three PC levels or more either higher or lower than the APL at which this adventure is being played, that PC receives only one-half of the experience points and gold for the adventure. This simulates the fact that either the PC was not challenged as much as normal or relied on help by higher-level PCs to reach the objectives.

Furthermore, a PC who is four or more levels higher than the highest APL supported by the adventure may not play the adventure.

LIVING GREYHAWK adventures are designed for APL 2 and higher. Four or five 1st-level PCs may find the challenge of an APL 2 adventure difficult. Suggest the following to these groups to help increase their chances of success:

- Enlist a sixth player.
- Advise PCs to buy riding dogs to help protect them and fight for them.

TIME UNITS AND UPKEEP

This is a standard one-round Verbobonc regional adventure. All PCs native to Verbobonc pay 1 Time Units per round; all others pay 2 Time Units per round.

Adventurer's Standard Upkeep costs 12 gp per Time Unit. Rich Upkeep costs 50 gp per Time Unit. Luxury Upkeep costs 100 gp per Time Unit. PCs that fail to pay at least Standard Upkeep will retain temporary ability damage until the next adventure, must buy new spell component pouches and healer's kits, and may suffer other in-game penalties (or possibly gain in-game benefits) as may be detailed in this adventure.

A PC that does not pay for at least Standard Upkeep may also avoid the above-described penalties by living off the wild. If the PC possesses four or more ranks in the Survival skill and succeeds at a DC 20 Survival check, the PC will heal temporary ability damage as if he or she paid

for Standard Upkeep, may refill spell component pouches and healer's kits, and may restock up to 20 arrows or bolts if the PC has at least four ranks in Craft (bowmaking). The player is allowed to Take 10 on this roll.

More information about Lifestyle and Upkeep can be found in the "Lifestyle and Upkeep" section of Chapter 3 of the *Living Greyhawk Campaign Sourcebook*.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Magister Obble Har is an enigma. He came to Verbobonc City in 591 CY and doggedly founded a wizard's school in the middle of a city known for fear and paranoia of wizardry.

Magister Har has developed a far-reaching plan that he hopes to bring to fruition in the next couple of years. First, he became head of the most powerful collection of wizards in all of Verbobonc by founding the Wrinkle Academy. Then, he was able to fashion a vast reservoir of magical power, a Spellpool, in the Wrinkle Academy's hidden halls. Magister Har is now working to activate an ancient system of aerial magical highways around Verbobonc, called the Skyroad. Precisely what Magister Har plans to do with the Skyroad once it is activated is a secret—for now.

In the first adventure of the Skyroad Series, **VER6-02 Delve the Wizard's Dungeon**, the PCs assisted Magister Har in securing an odd arcane rod to the top of the Wrinkle Academy. The PCs then traveled on the Magister's behalf to a gnomish monastery in the south Kron Hills to recover an ancient elven map of Verbobonc showing the location of three anchors of the Skyroad, called the Pylons.

Now that Magister Har has discovered the locations of these power sources, he seeks to activate them. In order to accomplish this he has sent out one adventuring group to each of the Pylons. Magister Har sent his morose familiar Threnodee to Taymouth to find some likely candidates to activate the Pylon in the Gnarley Forest. This sets the stage for this adventure.

CAST OF PCS

The PCs will interact with two main NPCs in the course of this adventure. As these PCs reappear throughout the entire Skyroad Series, it's important that they are roleplayed consistently by all judges, so players will recognize these NPCs when they meet them again.

Threnodee is a dust mephit, and Magister Har's familiar. Threnodee accompanies the PCs on their adventure, and

is therefore quite active in this adventure. Threnodee looks like an ordinary dust mephit, but he wears a tattered brown cloak with holes cut into it for his wings. Threnodee has a morbid and depressing fixation with death. He always thinks any situation will turn out for the worst, probably in a way that will end up killing himself and everyone around him. He mopes a lot. Threnodee has all the statistics of a dust mephit from the *Monster Manual*, but he's practically invulnerable: he has an Armor Class of 27, improved evasion, spell resistance of 25, and several dozen hit points. Despite these qualities, Threnodee spends most days thinking he'll never live to see the next one, so what's the point? Although not a coward, Threnodee isn't particularly brave. In combat, he mostly takes defensive actions or flies off a little ways to observe things from a safe distance (that is, despite his power, Threnodee isn't much help to the PCs). Like Magister Har, he's Neutral in alignment. Threnodee speaks in a dusty rattle, and starts sentences with morbid thoughts like, "I know that it won't matter when we're jumped by bandits and left to die on the road, but..." or "Not that you're anything but dead men walking anyway, but I think..." or "...and then we'll all get killed and can rest in the peaceful sleep of the ages." Play Threnodee like a gloomy mortician.

Despite Threnodee's abilities, he doesn't really help the PCs in this adventure, and is really along to watch what happens and report back to Magister Har

Lord Roland Galans: Lord Roland Galans, known as "the Grand" both due to his girth and his mode of dress, outwardly presents a jovial and welcoming personality. Those that make the mistake of not looking past this friendly exterior miss the cunning business mind he possesses. Lord Galans maintains two very distant holdings: fertile fields in the southern Viscounty, and an immense shipping yard in the northeastern tip of the Viscounty. Lord Galans stays very informed about the goings-on in both of his holdings, but he actually spends most of his time in Verbobonc City. Inside his lands, Lord Galans also has the nickname of "the Sampler" from those merchants who traverse his domain. Lord Galans will 'sample' a small portion of the very best the merchant carries; as recompense, the taxes the merchant pays are significantly reduced. This is a beneficial situation for all parties except the Viscount, who relies on the taxes. As yet, the Viscount's investigators have been unable to uncover any serious corruption, and Lord Galans has become one of the wealthiest nobles in Verbobonc. Lord Galans is also well-known as a trader and breeder of high-quality horses. Most of the horses the Mounted Borderers ride are raised in Lord Galans' southern holdings.

Lord Galans has heard that some sort of ancient magical highway connects a tall tower in the Gnarley Forest to other towers in the Viscounty, including one in the Kron Hills. This highway is an incredible boon for Lord Galans, as he would be able to shuttle goods between his two holdings with ease. Lord Galans sees farther than this, however, and he hopes to activate the entire highway system in order to improve trade throughout all of the Viscounty (under his watchful guidance, of course).

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

Encounter One: See a Mephit about a Job

In the market of the town of Taymouth, Magister Har's familiar, Threnodee, attempts to draft the PCs' assistance in uncovering the Pylon located nearby in the Gnarley Forest.

Encounter Two: Mistaken Identities

The PCs arrive at the Pylon without incident. There, they meet a trio of bandits aided by a druid who have kidnapped Lord Galans' advance surveyors. The bandits warily ask the PCs about their business and, dependent upon the PCs' choices, there may be either a fight or negotiation for release of their prisoners.

Encounter Three: Inside the Pylon

Once the illusion covering the Pylon is penetrated the PCs must contend with the defenses of the Pylon, and discover how to activate it.

Encounter Four: Mistaken Identities Again

Shortly thereafter, Lord Galans arrives with his retinue, expecting to confront the bandits who had kidnapped his men. Instead he finds the PCs, and presumes they are the bandits.

Encounter Five: Judge, Jury, Executioner

The PCs must produce the surveyors and/or bandits to earn the admiration of Lord Galans, or talk fast in order to escape the heavy hand of the law. In either case, Lord Galans insists the PCs investigate the Skyroad on his behalf.

Encounter Six: The Skyroad Revealed

In the morning the mechanics of the Skyroad are revealed, and Galans asks the PCs (or demands) that they assist him to determine just how much time is saved by traveling along the elevated highway. The PCs must transport an expensive water clock in a fast-moving wagon. A few interesting, but not dangerous, encounters ensue as the PCs travel the Skyroad.

Encounter Seven: Smash!

The PCs realize too late that the wagons they are traveling in are not designed to withstand the speed of

the Skyroad, and must resort to some quick thinking, quick action, or quick magic in order to save themselves from wrecking the clock and themselves on the Kron Hills Pylon. In addition, a spy among the PCs takes this opportunity to wreak some havoc.

Encounter Eight: A Taxing Conclusion

Even if the PCs save themselves, they still must contend with tax collectors from House Haxx, waiting for their arrival atop the Kron Hills Pylon.

Conclusion:

Several hours later, Galans arrives at the Kron Pylon. He is overjoyed with the results and heaps praise upon those who served him so well.

PREPARATION FOR PLAY

- **The Family:** Identify PCs that are members of the Family metaorganization, as this will have an impact on their relationship with the bandits in **Encounter Two: Mistaken Identities**
- **Gnarley Rangers:** PCs that are members of the Gnarley Rangers meta-organization receive additional orders at the end of **Encounter One: See a Mephit About a Job**.
- **Mounted Borderers:** PCs that are members of the Mounted Borderers meta-organization receive additional orders at the end of **Encounter One: See a Mephit About a Job**. Additionally, these PCs can more easily earn Lord Galans' respect in **Encounter Five: Judge, Jury, Executioner**. Finally, these PCs receive grudging respect from the House Haxx tax collectors in **Encounter Eight: A Taxing Conclusion**.
- **House Haxx:** PCs that are members of Lord Haxx's noble house receive particularly light treatment from the tax collectors in **Encounter Eight: A Taxing Conclusion**.
- **Law Enforcement:** Identify PCs that are members of metaorganizations with law-enforcement powers, including members of noble houses (particular House Galans) or even Verbobonc City's Gentlemen of the Watch. Lord Galans' respect for PCs from such organizations affects his interactions with the party in **Encounter Five: Judge, Jury, Executioner**.
- **Gnomish Spectacles** (from VER6-02 *Delve the Wizard's Dungeon*): In each adventure of the Skyroad Series, any PC wearing the Gnomish

Spectacles, available in VER6-02 *Delve the Wizard's Dungeon*, earns a special benefit.

In this adventure, PCs wearing the Gnomish Spectacles can easily see the nearly-invisible beam of magic that is the Skyroad. To these PCs, the beam is a clear path extending from the ball atop the Taymouth Pylon to the southwest (to the ball atop the Kron Hills Pylon, once they get there). Such PCs can clearly see where the edges of the Skyroad are. It isn't easy to fall off of the Skyroad (see **Appendix 3: DM's Overview of the Skyroad** for more details), but a PC wearing the Gnomish Spectacles knows right where the edges are just by looking. The spirits within the Gnomish Spectacles have no idea why the Skyroad is so clear when viewed through them. In fact, none of them have heard of the "Skyroad" or the "Pylons" before.

INTRODUCTION

The adventure begins in the town of Taymouth, which is northeast of Verbobonc City along the Velverdyva River.

Read or paraphrase the following:

Taymouth may not be Verbobonc City, but its situation on the trade route from Dyvers means bargains can be found here in abundance. So it is little surprise to find the market packed with adventurers, but what is surprising is the dozens of elven families moving listlessly around the market, some trailing children no more than 40 years old.

"It's the worries and the raids from the Blackthorn Orcs, that is," a vendor grumbles while motioning to yet another group passing his stall. "More and more refugees have been streaming out of the Gnarley. It's a shame they lack the magical means to defend their homesteads. Speaking of which, can I interest you in some of our bat guano? Each pea sized sphere of guano and sulfur is hand rolled for you, so no more embarrassment over discolored and odorous hands. Our components are certified by our team of wizards for maximum arcane potency, why nowhere else on Oerth will you find a better pile of..."

The salesman's spiel is interrupted by a small grayish creature tugging at your clothes.

"Pardon me..." The creature begins with a dry cough. "But you seem to be just the sort of people I've been charged to find. May I have a word with you at that tavern over there?" As the creature turns and plods toward the inn you note what you had taken as dusty cloak is in reality a set of dingy wings sprouting from the creature's back.

At this point, the PCs that have been chosen by Threnodee should introduce themselves to each other. Have the PCs describe their PCs to each other now.

PCs that have played **VER6-02 *Delve the Wizard's Dungeon*** recognize this creature as the dust mephit Threnodee, Magister Har's fatalistic familiar.

Threnodee would very much like to talk with the PCs, however he'd prefer to do so in the tavern, a lonely establishment called the Silent Sparrow. Once the PCs decide to go with him, proceed to **Encounter One: See a Mephit about a Job**.

ENCOUNTER ONE: SEE A MEPHIT ABOUT A JOB

Read or paraphrase the following

Once inside the Silent Sparrow tavern, the drab creature introduces itself as the dust mephit Threnodee and motions you to sit at a table laden with food. "Eat, drink and be merry..." Threnodee says with a thin smile before he begins.

"As some of you may know, the land of Verbobonc was once an elven land and many artifacts of unknown purpose remain from that time. My Master has been researching three such artifacts that he calls the "Pylons," but he needs assistance to determine their precise location and function. His request is that you find one of these Pylons located nearby, within the Gnarley Forest, and find a way to activate it. I am to accompany you, observe, and report your findings.

"I carry no money as a reward, but from what I understand, adventurers make a fair bit of coin by stripping the corpses they create, and I can guarantee that if you are successful my master will look upon you favorably."

Threnodee has a good idea where the Gnarley Forest Pylon is located (as it was marked on the map recovered in **VER6-02 *Delve the Wizard's Dungeon***), so he intends to guide the PCs to the area personally.

Some questions the PCs may have for Threnodee, and Threnodee's answers, are as follows:

- **What's a Pylon?** Threnodee knows that the Pylons are massive towers of ancient elven construction. They are probably well hidden.
- **What do the Pylons do?** Threnodee hasn't been told what the Pylons do, and huffily states that it's not in a familiar's nature to question his master.

- **How will we know the Pylon when we see it?** Threnodee is convinced that there can't be too many elven towers in the area; he thinks they'll know it when they see it.
- **How do we activate the Pylon?** Threnodee isn't certain (as Magister Har himself isn't certain), but he's sure the PCs can figure it out without more than a couple of casualties.
- **What if activating the Pylon is bad?** Threnodee points out that Magister Har has always had Verbobonc's best interests in mind (which is not entirely true, but fairly true), so it's not likely that activating the Pylons would be dangerous. Furthermore, Magister Har is unlikely to put his own familiar in harm's way by having him present when the Pylons are activated.
- **How do we find the Pylon?** Threnodee explains that Magister Har has performed some additional divinations to pinpoint the location of the Pylon after recovering the map from **VER6-02 *Delve the Wizard's Dungeon***. Although he hasn't identified the exact location of the Pylon, he's been able to narrow it down to within a couple of miles or so. Magister Har made Threnodee memorize the approximate area on a map, which is why Threnodee is acting as a guide.
- **What about the other two Pylons?** Threnodee thinks that Magister Har has commissioned other groups to activate the other two Pylons. However, the dust mephit doesn't offer this information unless asked. Threnodee also adds that these groups may have already met with grisly, fatal ends.
- **Is anyone else looking for this Pylon?** Threnodee's group (that is, the player PCs) is the only group Magister Har has sent to seek the Gnarley Forest Pylon. Threnodee doesn't know that other parties (such as Lord Haxx and Lord Galans) know of the locations of the Pylons and are investigating them as well.
- **Can you contact Magister Har for us?** No. Threnodee reminds the PCs that familiars only share an empathic link with their masters when within one mile. Threnodee insists that the only way for him to contact Magister Har would be to make the long trip back to Verbobonc City, which he does not intend to do until the PCs are successful in their mission (or until all

the PCs are reduced to rotting corpses by the dangers of the Gnarley Forest).

Once the PCs agree to investigate the Pylon with Threnodee, proceed to **Encounter Two: Mistaken Identities**. If they refuse this offer, allow them to return to the market and end the adventure.

Development: Meta-Org Ties: PCs that are members of the Mounted Borderers or the Gnarley Rangers meta-orgs know that they are generally expected to check in with their superiors before marching off into the Gnarley Forest.

- Mounted Borderers are instructed to keep an eye out for recent activity of the Blackthorn Orc tribes moving through the area, and to aid any elven refugees as well as they can. (The PCs won't encounter either of these in this adventure, but the orders still stand.) Furthermore, the Borderer is advised to go on foot through the Gnarley Forest, as this area is particularly treacherous for horses.
- Gnarley Rangers are instructed to report back if they gain any information about movement of the Blackthorn Orcs in the Gnarley Forest.

PCs that are members of the House Galans meta-org are aware that Lord Roland Galans is camped outside of Taymouth, and is preparing for an expedition into the Gnarley Forest. However, all higher-ranked representatives of House Galans are fairly tight-lipped about details of this expedition. The PC has no reason to think that Threnodee's mission and Lord Galans' expedition will intersect (although, of course, they will).

ENCOUNTER TWO: MISTAKEN IDENTITIES

This area of the Gnarley is trackless and overgrown. PCs that decide to bring Large animals or carts are reduced to half speed at best, and have to spend a substantial amount of time hacking through the thick underbrush.

Read or paraphrase the following when the party enters the Gnarley.

The next several hours are hellish as swarms of biting insects, oppressive humidity, and thick brush confound your progress through the Gnarley Forest. Finally, the path opens up into clearing about a hundred feet wide near the trunk of what must have been a truly incredible tree. The trunk, now just a shattered and blackened spire, still rises some 45 feet off the forest floor and is so overgrown with brambles that it obscures where the roots of the tree meet the

ground. Threnodee clears his throat and your attention quickly shifts to the three humans who stand across the clearing from you. The man in the middle takes a step forward, brushing his cloak back and resting his hand on the pommel of his sword. "Afternoon," he grumbles. "I wonder what could bring such a heavily armed group so deep into the forest today."

The way the bandit rests his hand on his sword is a secret sign for members of the Family. Let members of the Family know that the speaker is a fellow member of their organization. The bandits are far more open about their business here if they can speak alone to fellow members of the Family.

The humans are members of a group of bandits who had stumbled across a group of surveyors from House Galans a few days ago. With the help of a local druid opposed to the expansion of the nobles into the Gnarley, they took the surveyors prisoner and sent word to Galans to barter for the surveyors' release. The surveyors lie tied up and gagged 20 feet into the woods (a DC 15 Search check of the general area reveals them; if the PCs are specifically looking to find the surveyors, the DC drops to 5). The bandits are expecting a group of people to arrive and pay a ransom for the surveyors when the PCs arrive. The druid watches from the cover of the trees, hiding and readying to intervene if the negotiations turn sour.

The initial setup of this encounter is found on **Map 3**.

The bandits initially assume that the PCs are here to negotiate a ransom for the surrender of the surveyors, but the bandits don't come right out and say that (as they aren't completely sure that the PCs are who the bandits think them to be). The bandits are not particularly interested in fighting a group of adventurers. Therefore, they speak generally about "negotiating for delivery of the goods," and so forth. It should become fairly clear to the PCs that they aren't the people these bandits were expecting, and it's up to the players to decide whether to confront the bandits or play along.

What the Bandits Know:

- The surveyors were sent by Galans to scout this area of the Gnarley Forest in search of a hidden elven tower.
- The surveyors do not know where the elven tower is.
- The bandits had some time ago penetrated the illusion covering the tower, and believe that it is the structure the surveyors were looking for. (Note that the bandits don't know it's called the "Pylon," but instead refer to it as the "tower.")

- The structure is right at the side of the clearing, disguised as the enormous stump and a mound of brush. In actuality, it's a hollow tower hundreds of feet tall.
- The tower has an opening on the southeast side.
- The tower has a trap inside, but they do not know what it is.
- If asked to describe the trap, the bandits explain that several months ago, they came across a body of an orc which had apparently entered the tower. His body was found inside the tower on the ground. It was scoured and seared, and it looked like he had suffered some broken bones as well. The orc body isn't there anymore; scavengers must have dragged it off.
- The bandits have looked around inside the tower, but they haven't ascended the stairs inside the tower, as they're afraid of trap that killed the orc.

What the Druid knows:

The druid is unlikely to reveal his presence to the PCs at all; he is only watching the proceedings to back up the bandits in case of a fight.

At APL 2, he is hiding in the woods (roll opposed Hide vs. Spot for the druid and for his wolf companion, with a +4 bonus on Hide checks for concealment and a -1 on Spot checks for every 10 feet of distance between the PCs and the druid). At higher APLs, he has taken the form of a tree. If a fight doesn't break out, the PCs may never know the druid is here. Nevertheless, if questioned, the druid knows the following:

- The elven artifact has lain here dormant for many centuries.
- The elven tower is one of several throughout the region (other forgotten elven ruins dot the Gnarley Forest, but none of them have to do with this adventure).
- The elves who disguised the artifact utilized powerful magic in order to keep it from prying eyes. It would be best to leave it alone.
- The druid has never been inside the tower.
- The recent incursions into the Gnarley by certain towns of Verbobonc and Dyvers have upset the natural balance and will no longer be tolerated by those who have sworn to defend the forest.

Interacting with the Bandits:

The following are possible responses the PCs may have in interacting with the bandits:

None of your business! If it becomes clear that the party is not involved in the return of the surveyors and don't know anything about them, the bandits attempt to pose as junior members of the Gnarley Rangers (unless actual members of the Gnarley Rangers are obviously present in the party) and leave. The bandits circle around and collect the tied up surveyors and make their way deeper into the Gnarley. Allow any PC outside the Pylon appropriate Spot checks to notice this unusual activity (modifiers as follows: +4 to Hide checks for cover, -3 to Hide checks for carrying bulky weight (the surveyor's trussed-up bodies), -1 to Spot checks per 10 feet of distance). As each bandit must carry off two surveyors, they make two trips each; therefore, you should roll opposed Hide and Spot checks twice (once immediately, and another about three minutes later, if the PCs are still around).

We're here for business! The bandits may be bluffed into bartering for the release of the surveyors. If the PCs succeed on a Bluff against the bandit's Sense Motive, the bandits demand 100 gold a head for the surveyors (there are six surveyors), and then lead the PCs to where they have the surveyors tied up. However, the bandits are willing to accept as little as 50 gold per head. After being paid, they gladly leave, coin in hand.

We're here on business! If the PCs ask the bandits about the presence of an elven artifact or elven tower, the bandits realize that the PCs have nothing to do with the surveyors and attempt to send the PCs on a wild goose chase. The bandits indicate that they know of a large "elven tower" to the south about an hour through the forest, and provide directions. Allow the PCs a Sense Motive against this Bluff. If the PCs succeed in seeing through the bluff, the bandits quickly change their tune. The bandits point out that such information is valuable, settling for no less than 20 gold to tell the secret of the tower's location. If the PCs pay, the bandits let the PCs know that the tower is right here in the clearing, concealed by an illusion. The bandits do not offer information about the trap, hoping that the PCs will meet an untimely end on the stairs.

After the PCs have entered the Pylon, the bandits round up the surveyors and attempt to leave with them. Allow any PC outside the Pylon appropriate Spot checks, as noted above.

We're here to give you the business! The PCs may attack the bandits at some point. If so, consult the statistics and tactics at the end of this encounter. If the

PCs capture one or more of the bandits, they reveal all they know. Even if captured, the bandits attempt to barter with this information for their release.

Roleplaying Threnodee:

Threnodee remains out of combat. If one of the PCs or bandits falls, Threnodee approaches the person with a pair of copper pieces to be placed over their eyes. He mumbles despondently about being cheated if the PC or bandit fails to die. If any of the PCs or bandits dies, he gleefully sets up impromptu funeral services, extolling the virtues of the fallen, regardless of whether or not Threnodee actually knew them. A DC 20 Knowledge [Religion] check reveals that these services come from the traditions of several death gods, but primarily Wee Jas.

What the Surveyors know:

- The surveyors were sent by Lord Roland Galans to scout this area of the Gnarley Forest in search of an elven tower.
- The surveyors don't know where the elven tower is.
- If the surveyors found the tower, they were to take measurements of it and determine the best way to get to the top of the tower. (*The surveyors have several cases of gear with which to perform this kind of function.*)
- The surveyors do know that Lord Galans is personally coming to inspect their progress, probably sometime later today or tomorrow.
- Lord Galans usually travels with a fairly large number of people in his entourage.

APL 2 (EL 4)

Bandits (3): human Ranger 1; hp 10 each; see Appendix 1.

Kessil the Watcher: half-orc Druid 2; hp 15; see Appendix 1.

Graymuzzle: wolf; hp 13; see *Monster Manual* page 283.

APL 4 (EL 6)

Bandits (3): human Ranger 1/Rogue 1; hp 16 each; see Appendix 1.

Kessil the Watcher: half-orc Druid 4; hp 27; see Appendix 1.

Graymuzzle: wolf; hp 30; see Appendix 1.

APL 6 (EL 8)

Bandits (3): human Ranger 2/Rogue 2; hp 29 each; see Appendix 1.

Kessil the Watcher: half-orc Druid 6; hp 39; see Appendix 1.

Graymuzzle: wolf; hp 45; see Appendix 1.

Roleplaying Notes: The bandits ply their unsavory trade in the northern Gnarley Forest. Two of them are brothers (Endil and Helil) and the other is Endil's girlfriend (Amanthe). They have worked together for several years. Recently, these three bandits joined the Family, Verbobonc's criminal organization. All three tend to act like swaggering toughs.

Kessil, the druid, is a solitary half-orc who rarely interferes in the ways of civilization. He surprised the bandits by offering his support in their endeavor; the bandits have no clue that Kessil seeks only to prevent organized intruders in the Gnarley (which the House Galans surveyors represent). Kessil is unwilling to put himself in any real danger, however, and flees if pressed.

The surveyors are hard-working and dedicated retainers of House Galans. They are used to the comforts of civilized lands and not particularly happy about being sent out to the "middle of nowhere" to work. However, they are treated well by House Galans and think highly of Lord Roland Galans, so they can't really complain.

Tactics: Prior to the party arriving, the druid passed out *potions of barkskin* to the bandits. He then takes up a position in the woods with his wolf animal companion and hides (or if at APL 4 or more, the druid casts *tree shape* on himself and his animal companion).

If fighting breaks out, the druid attempts to catch as much of the party as possible in an *entangle* spell. If the PCs have animal companions or mounts, the druid attempts to *charm animal* or *hold animal*. He then uses the remainder of his spells to *summon nature's ally* to fight the PCs. If the battle turns badly for the bandits, or if the druid suffers more than half his hit points in damage, he attempts to escape by using his *woodland stride* ability. The druid's animal companion does not stay far from the druid, and concentrates its attacks on anyone threatening its master.

The bandits attempt to flank any PC who approaches while relying upon the *entangle* spell from the druid to limit the number of opponents they have to face. A bandit attempts to flee if reduced to less than one-quarter hit points or once the other two bandits fall.

Treasure

Loot the bandits and the druid.

APL 2 and 4: L: 34 gp; C: 0 gp; M: *potions of barkskin* (2), 25 gp per PC each.

APL 6: L: 223 gp; C: 0 gp; M: *potions of barkskin* (2), 25 gp per PC each.

Development: Note that any PC that attempts to take cover in the “brush” surrounding the “blackened stump” finds that the brush is too thick to enter (because it’s really a smooth stone wall). Such a PC should receive a DC 15 Will save to identify the illusion covering the Pylon. The bandits and the druid know about this illusion, and therefore don’t try to enter this area.

ENCOUNTER THREE: INSIDE THE PYLON

At some point the PCs may have the opportunity to interact with the illusion covering the Pylon. Allow them to make a save against the illusion (DC 15 Will save) and then read:

The brambles and tree stump, which once seemed so solid, fade to a dim ghost of what they were. A graceful tower constructed of seamless granite topped by a gigantic platform is revealed, rising above the canopy of the Gnarley Forest. An entrance is visible, and leads into the tower.

The entrance is ten feet wide and ten feet high. Show the PCs the illustration of the Pylon. Read or paraphrase the following once the PCs enter.

The inside of the Pylon is dark and cool compared to the oppressive humidity of the forest. The center of the Pylon may have contained some wooden supports long ago, but now all that is left in the hollow center is a perilously narrow stone spiral staircase. The stairs, barely 5 feet wide, cling to the interior walls of the Pylon, and wind up into the gloom. High above you, the stairs end at a small platform.

The interior of the Pylon contains narrow spiral stone stairs, winding up the interior wall of the tower. The Pylon is about 60 feet in diameter at its base, narrowing to only 30 feet in diameter at its top. The interior of the tower is about 160 feet from top to bottom, but the stairs themselves are about 240 feet long (there are 240 stairs, each about one foot wide and about one foot high).

To represent this winding stairway, and because positioning of each PC on the stairs may be important, you may want to draw a spiral on a battlemat five feet wide and 240 feet long, like that found on **Map 4**.

Moving faster than a single move on the stairs each turn requires a DC 10 Balance check to avoid slipping. A PC that slips can catch the edge of the stairs with a DC 15 Reflex save, and climb back up with a DC 10 Climb

check. Failing the Reflex save (or failing the Climb check by more than 5) results in a fall.

A PC knocked unconscious on the stairs may make an immediate DC 10 Balance check. Failure results in a fall off of the stairs.

If a PC should jump or fall from the stairs, he falls about two-thirds of the distance up the stairs he was located (round down to the nearest 10 feet increment). For example, a PC 90 feet up the stairs falls 60 feet straight down to the floor of the tower. A PC 215 feet up the stairs falls 140 feet straight down to the floor of the tower. As usual, a fall results in 1d6 points of damage per 10 feet fallen.

The Trapped Stairs

Three of the stairs are trapped. Two of the stairs contain a trap with the debilitating, but not lethal, *sandblast* spell. Very near the top, another stair contains a cascading *flaming sphere* trap. The *sandblast* traps automatically and immediately reset. The cascading *flaming sphere* trap resets after an hour.

A PC may jump over a trapped stair with a DC 5 Jump check. However, a DC 10 Balance check is immediately required, or the PC slips, as described above.

The three traps on the stairs are marked on **Map 4**, and are as follows:

- 20 feet up from the bottom of the stairs: a *sandblast* trap, described below.
- 100 feet up from the bottom of the stairs: a *sandblast* trap, described below.
- 235 feet up from the bottom of the stairs (very near the top of the tower): a cascading *flaming sphere* trap, described below (varies by APL).

ALL APLS (EL SPECIAL)

Sandblast*Traps: CR 2; magic device; touch trigger (stair); automatic reset (immediately); spell effect (*sandblast*, 1st level druid, 1d6 nonlethal and stunned for 1 round, DC 13 Reflex save half and to avoid stun); multiple targets (all targets within 10 ft. of the stair, as marked on **Map 4**); Search DC 26, Disable Device DC 26.

* see Appendix 2: New Rules Items

EL Note: As these traps have no chance to kill the PCs, by itself these traps have no EL value and bypassing them earns no XP. However, if these traps are left in place, PCs will have a little bit more difficulty getting down the stairs to escape the *flaming sphere* trap at the top of the stairs. Therefore, the presence of these traps increases the EL of the *flaming sphere* trap by one.

APL 2 (EL 4)

Cascading *Flaming Sphere* Trap: CR 3; magic device; touch trigger (stair); automatic reset (one hour); spell effect (*flaming sphere*, 3rd level druid, 2d6 fire, DC 13 Reflex save negates); multiple targets (all targets on the stairs; see below); Search DC 27, Disable Device DC 27.

Note: This trap triggers a *flaming sphere* that targets the PC that triggered the trap. Have all of the PCs roll initiative. On initiative count 10 each turn, the *flaming sphere* bounces down the stairs until it gets to the next person on the stairs (no matter how far that is) and stops. Once the *flaming sphere* gets all the way to the bottom of the stairs, it disappears.

APL 4 (EL 5)

Cascading *Flaming Spheres* Trap: CR 3; magic device; touch trigger (stair); automatic reset (one hour); spell effect (two *flaming spheres*, 3rd level druid, 2d6 fire each, DC 13 Reflex save negates); multiple targets (all targets on the stairs; see below); Search DC 27, Disable Device DC 27.

Note: This trap triggers two *flaming spheres*. One targets the PC that triggered the trap and the other immediately bounces down the stairs until it gets to the next person on the stairs (no matter how far that is). Have all of the PCs roll initiative. On initiative count 10 each turn, each of the *flaming spheres* bounces down the stairs until it gets to the next person on the stairs (no matter how far that is) and stops. Once a *flaming sphere* gets all the way to the bottom of the stairs, it disappears.

APL 6 (EL 6)

Cascading *Flaming Spheres* Trap: CR 3; magic device; touch trigger (stair); automatic reset (one hour); spell effect (three *flaming spheres*, 3rd level druid, 2d6 fire each, DC 13 Reflex save negates); multiple targets (all targets on the stairs; see below); Search DC 27, Disable Device DC 27.

Note: This trap triggers three *flaming spheres*. One targets the PC that triggered the trap, one immediately bounces down the stairs until it gets to the next person on the stairs (no matter how far that is), and the third bounces down the stairs until it gets to the next person past that. Have all of the PCs roll initiative. On initiative count 10 each turn, each of the *flaming spheres* bounces down the stairs until it gets to the next person on the stairs (no matter how far that is) and stops. Once a *flaming sphere* gets all the way to the bottom of the stairs, it disappears.

THE LANDING

Once the PCs reach the top of the Pylon read or paraphrase the following:

The top of the stairs open onto a small oval landing about five feet in diameter. There are no rails along the edges of the landing; any misstep would mean a long fall through the center of the tower. The ceiling above you bends down in a convex shape, as though you were looking at the underside of a large stone ball. Several dozen small iron levers are set into the convex ceiling in irregular patterns. Elven script of some archaic design is inlaid deeply into each one.

There doesn't appear to be any exit from this small landing. This appears to be a dead end.

The levers are part of a complicated mechanism used to activate and deactivate the Pylon. There are dozens of levers, and each must be flipped in precisely the correct combination in order to power up the Pylon.

A DC 20 Knowledge [Arcana], Knowledge [Nature], or Profession [Astrologer] check reveals that the apparently random pattern these levers are in are actually astrological positions that correspond to the night sky several hundred years ago. Several additional levers are set into patterns of ancient magical symbols for travel.

Next to each lever is a small rune, weathered with age and difficult to decipher. Each rune is a date in the Elven script, but the dates are relative (for example, instead of "16 Diamondice", a rune might read "two days after the month before the Handmaiden's fullness in winter"). The levers must be pulled in the order that corresponds to the chronological progression of the dates, taking into account the astrological movements of the patterns. The whole process is incredibly complex.

In short, as far as the PCs are capable, there are three ways to solve this procedure and activate the Pylon. Threnodee helps with this endeavor as much as he can, but he doesn't have the intellect or strength to succeed on any of the required skill checks on his own.

Knowledge: A PC skilled in astrology and chronology can carefully compute the proper order of the levers. This takes a successful DC 20 Knowledge [Arcana], DC 20 Knowledge [Nature], and DC 20 Profession [Astrologer]. Multiple PCs may attempt these checks. Also, any PCs with ranks in these skills can coordinate on these checks. If all three checks succeed, then the PCs determine the proper order after a few hours of careful study and can flip the right combination of levers in only a few minutes.

Finesse: Due to the old construction of the mechanism, the proper lever to pull has a little more “give” to it than the other levers. A PC can manipulate each of the levers to find the loosest one, pull that, and then repeat the process again and again, finding the loosest lever each time. A DC 25 Search check reveals this fact, and the whole procedure takes a couple of hours.

Brute Force: Each lever can be forced into place, regardless of the proper order, with a DC 22 Strength check. Only one PC can attempt this check at a time. A PC may “take 20” to move a lever, which takes two minutes. Therefore, in order to brute-force all of the levers in place takes about two hours.

If it seems like the Pylon takes several hours to activate, that was the designers’ intent. It was not supposed to be easy or speedy to activate or deactivate the Pylons, but a slow process that can be reliably undertaken only by certain elven sages. This may frustrate the PCs, so don’t spend too much real time on it. If the players choose a method that works, go to **Got It!** below.

If the players haven’t found a way to activate the Pylon (by knowledge, finesse, or brute force) in about 15 minutes real-time, assume the PCs haven’t figured it out yet and go on to **Didn’t Quite Get It**, below.

GOT IT!

If the PCs are able to activate the Pylon, read the following to PCs on or near the landing.

The moment the last lever falls into place a palpable sense of arcane energy fills the air inside the Pylon. The air about the sphere shimmers ever so slightly with the energy, like heat waves off of the bright desert. Any further contemplation of this magical effect is broken by the sound of horses far below.

Read the following to PC at the base of the Pylon or outside the Pylon:

As the illusion concealing the tower fades away like mist there is a crashing noise from the direction you came, as several scouts enter the clearing.

Have the PCs make a DC 10 Knowledge [Local: VTF] check, and add for those that succeed: *The scouts are uniformed with a tabard emblazoned with the symbol of House Galans.*

Continue reading below.

The scouts are followed by a contingent of guards. Laboriously following them is a traveling carriage bearing an ornate crest, and three large wagons piled with supplies.

Proceed to **Encounter Four: Mistaken Identities Again.**

DIDN’T QUITE GET IT

If the PCs aren’t able to activate the Pylons within a couple of hours (or 15 minutes or so real time), read the following to any PCs on or near the landing.

Despite your efforts, the secret of the elven artifact eludes you. Any further contemplation of the Pylon is interrupted by the sound of horses far below.

Read the following to any PCs at the base of the Pylon or outside the Pylon:

There is a crashing noise from the direction you came, and several scouts enter the clearing.

Have the PCs make a DC 10 Knowledge [Local: VTF] check, and add for those that succeed: *The scouts are uniformed with a tabard emblazoned with the symbol of House Galans.*

Continue from here:

The scouts are followed by a contingent of guards. Laboriously following them is a traveling carriage bearing an ornate crest, and finally three larger wagons piled with supplies and people enters the clearing.

Proceed to **Encounter Four: Mistaken Identities Again.**

MEANWHILE...

The PCs aren’t the only groups that Magister Har is sending to activate the Pylons. Two other groups were sent out at the same time as the PCs: one to the Pylon in the Iron Wood, and another to the Pylon in the Kron Hills.

The party sent to the Iron Wood failed. Before they could even find the location of the tower, the Mist Children, the tribe of strange, atavistic gray elves inhabiting that wood, captured the group and killed them. The fate of this group will be explored further in the next adventure in the Skyroad Series, *Storm the Dragon’s Bastion.*

The party sent into the Kron Hills succeeded. They were able to bypass the traps in that Pylon and activate it. However, Lord Willem Haxx has caught wind that some type of “super trade route,” not under his vice-like control of trade in the Viscounty, has been discovered. Lord Haxx sent a large team of his most brutish tax collectors into the Kron Hills to intercept the group there. As the party was leaving the Kron Hills Pylon, flushed with their success, the House Haxx tax collectors set upon them and demanded everything the unlucky adventurers

owned as a “lawful tax.” The adventurers resisted, and were clubbed into unconsciousness and stripped bare by the tax collectors. Before the tax collectors left the scene, however, they noticed something very peculiar about the ball atop the tower the adventurers had just left from.

The tax collectors will spend the night hammering a rope ladder into the Kron Hills Pylon, ascending to the exterior platform there and investigating that end of the Skyroad. When the PCs arrive there in **Encounter Eight: A Taxing Conclusion** the following day, the House Haxx agents are there to again mete out their harsh brand of tax collection.

What this means for the PCs now, however, is that the connection from the Gnarley Forest Pylon to the Kron Hills Pylon is the only part of the Skyroad that’s “open,” for now.

ENCOUNTER FOUR: MISTAKEN IDENTITIES AGAIN

Once the party approaches, or is approached by, the House Galans contingent, read the following:

The door to the carriage swings open and the rotund form of Lord Roland Galans emerges. Dressed in a rich velvet doublet and sweating profusely he strides forward while his guards form a skirmish line beside him. “So! These are the cretins who would try and ransom my own men to me?” The Lord’s eyes narrow as he sizes you up. “You demand I negotiate with the likes of you? Here is how I negotiate! You will release my surveyors to me or I will cut you down, drag you behind my carriage to Taymouth and have you drawn and quartered before the cheering crowds!”

Roleplaying Threnodee:

Threnodee takes in the arrival of Lord Galans in stride but perks up significantly at the mention of people being drawn and quartered. He remarks to whomever is attempting to explain the situation (or before hostilities break out) the process of being drawn and quartered, and just how painful being drawn and quartered is supposed to be.

Roleplaying Galans:

Lord Galans was in Taymouth overseeing his own search for the Pylon. Lord Galans is only aware that Magister Har has expressed interest in discovering the location of the Pylons and Galans, looking to curry favor with the preeminent wizard in Verbobonc, was hoping to present its location to Magister Har. When Galans heard that his

surveyors had been taken prisoners by a group of bandits he took offense, thinking (rightfully so) that a noble who has his own people kidnapped under his nose would lose respect. Furthermore, Lord Galans just spent several hours angry and uncomfortable as he traveled through an insect-infested forest. Therefore, Lord Galans is rather more upset than he usually would be.

HANDLING THE SITUATION:

Please refer to the following options for adjudicating the resolution to this conflict:

Fight!

Hopefully, the players understand that it is unwise to attempt to fight Lord Galans and his men. Those who seem to be considering it should be reminded of the number and obvious competence with which the various members of House Galans’ retinue hold their weapons.

If the PCs seem undaunted by this, roll initiative and resolve the conflict, using 20 of the fighter NPC’s listed on **Table 4-16 (pg 117)** of the *Dungeon Master’s Guide*. Use the level of fighter equal to the APL of the adventure. These fighters should strike only for non-lethal damage unless Lord Galans (who retreats into his carriage) is mortally threatened.

Once the PCs are subdued, allow the PCs to attempt to explain their actions, referring to the **Talk!** section of this encounter to resolve the conflict.

Flight!

Some PCs may attempt to flee. If they choose this option, roll initiative and resolve this using the same manner as the **Fight!** section of this encounter. Lord Galans’ guardsmen try to keep the PCs from escaping, and gang up on two or three of the slowest-moving PCs. Once some or all PCs are subdued, continue to the **Talk!** section of this encounter.

Talk!

At some point, the PCs are likely to talk and explain themselves. Lord Galans begins the encounter hostile to the PCs, and any attempts at diplomacy are to be treated as rushed and likely to fail. Lord Galans isn’t a fool, however, and will relent if provided ample evidence that the PCs are not responsible for kidnapping his surveyors. Use your discretion as to what should mollify Lord Galans’ temperament (remembering that Lord Galans is, despite his current mood, a shrewd and reasonable man), but among them should be the following:

- Membership in a law enforcement meta-org, such as the Mounted Borderers or a House Guard
- The presence of the beaten bandits

- The presence of the surveyors
- The activation of the Pylon
- The introduction of Threnodee as Magister Har's familiar
- A very impressive DC 30 rushed Diplomacy check

DEVELOPMENT

Depending on how well the PCs are with convincing Galans that they are not the bandits please follow the path of possible resolutions in **Encounter Five: Judge, Jury, Executioner**.

ENCOUNTER FIVE: JUDGE, JURY, EXECUTIONER

This encounter is split into three different paths, depending upon the circumstances by which the PCs reach this encounter. Use your judgment of the PCs' relative success in convincing Lord Galans that they are not the bandits and proceed to the relevant judgments listed below to adjudicate this encounter.

JUDGMENT A: THAT DIDN'T GO WELL AT ALL

The PCs are unable to convince Lord Galans that they are not the bandits. For instance, if the PCs did not discover the bandits' subterfuge and/or the bandits got away with the surveyors, Lord Galans summarily declares them guilty of (at least) kidnapping and banditry.

Read or paraphrase the following, including as many crimes as you can reasonably add, keeping in mind that Lord Galans is looking to throw the book at somebody, and the PCs are the most obvious suspects. Review **Appendix Five** and note all of the possible crimes that Lord Galans may think that the PCs have committed and insert them into the <insert list of crimes> portion of the text below. Please note the maximum punishment prescribed for each crime and include them where indicated in the text below:

With a sharp crack of his walking stick against the side of his chair Lord Galans addresses you. "I, Lord Roland Galans, invoking the divine and legal authority of high justice within my domain do hereby find you have committed the following crimes: <insert list of crimes>

"Having been found guilty, you are to be <read only the most serious crime's maximum punishment, then break back into the following text> as well as—" Lord Galans is interrupted in his judgment by a middle aged human, who leans to whisper something in Lord

Galans' ear. The noble nods approvingly and then turns back to you. "These are serious crimes, and yet I am not without compassion. So I offer you this: We are unsure of precisely how this elven monolith behind you works. It may be very dangerous, and I have no desire to risk the lives of my men. If you agree to test the artifact and report to me the results, I will consider your punishment served. If not, the gallows in Taymouth await..."

If the PCs choose to go along with Lord Galans' plan, continue to **Encounter Six: The Skyroad Revealed** (but remember that Lord Galans considers the PCs to be little more than common criminals). Otherwise, end the adventure after adjudicating the crimes committed.

JUDGMENT B: CALL THIS A WIN:

If the PCs are moderately successful in convincing Lord Galans that they are not the bandits, either through presenting either the surveyors or the bandits but not both, or who attempt through very convincing diplomacy along with enough evidence (meta-org membership, etc.) to convince Lord Galans that they aren't criminals, then read or paraphrase the following:

Lord Galans purses his lips as he looks over your party, then he leans forward in his chair to address you. "I have my own reasons, beyond the kidnapers bedeviling my men, for riding out into the wood today. The great stonework behind you is a mystery, but one that clearly is of great power. I would know this artifact's function and how it is operated. I will not pretend that I have the funds with me at this time to pay you for your assistance. However, many merchants travel through my land. I could instruct my agents to keep an eye out for an item you may covet, and to provide you access to it at some point in the future. Additionally, I am well-known as one of the finest purveyors of horseflesh in the Viscounty. So, will you aid me?"

If the PCs choose to go along with Lord Galans' plan continue to **Encounter Six: The Skyroad Revealed**. Otherwise, allow the PCs to leave freely, provide them gold and XP for the encounters they completed, and end the adventure.

JUDGMENT C: CLEAR SUCCESS!

If the PCs present to Lord Galans the bandits (alive or dead), his surveyors (all alive), have activated the Pylon, and provide a believable tale as to how they were able to accomplish all this, then Lord Galans is overjoyed. Read or paraphrase the following:

Lord Galans grows more and more joyful as he hears of your encounter with the bandits and your success

in discovering the Pylon and how to activate it. Towards the end he is practically beaming. "I was wrong good, good sirs, to presume your guilt. For that you have my apologies. For now friends, take your rest. I will have my mages and engineers investigate the Pylon, and tonight we will dine on the bounty of the Gnarley Forest."

Galans leans forward and motions you to approach, with a whisper he continues. "I see that you travel with Magister Har's familiar. I would endear myself to the wizard, and request your assistance in doing so. If you determine the function of the Pylon, and impress upon the Magister's little servant my assistance in doing so, I would be very generous. As you may well know, many merchants travel the roads of my lands. I could instruct my agents to keep an eye out for an item you may covet, and to provide you access to it at some point in the future. Additionally, I am well-known as one of the finest purveyors of horseflesh in the Viscounty. Will you do this for me?"

If the PCs choose to go along with Lord Galans' plan, continue to **Encounter Six: The Skyroad Revealed**. Otherwise, allow the PCs to leave freely, provide them gold and XP for the encounters they completed, and end the adventure.

ENCOUNTER SIX: THE SKYROAD REVEALED

Note to the DM: You should read **Appendix 3: DM Overview of the Skyroad**, in order to learn what the Skyroad and the Pylons are like, and some of the mechanics of their operation. However, this material should only be gradually revealed to the players throughout this scene. Work to create a sense of wonder in this marvelous conveyance.

For the next several hours the Galans camp is a flurry of activity. Laborers set up colorful tents, a heavyset dwarf mans a fire pit roasting a variety of game, while a colorful minstrel picks out a jaunty tune on a lyre. Galans' mages inspect the Pylon and conduct experiments, and shortly after their report to Galans carpenters and engineers are sent to construct a heavy crane.

The PCs are encouraged to get some rest. Galans' men aren't unfriendly, but there isn't a lot for the PCs to do. Galans provides a large tent for the PCs to rest in. The night is undisturbed except for the sounds of industry. If the PCs haven't yet activated the Pylon, Lord Galans' men do so during the night.

The work on top of the incredible Pylon continues through the night. By the next morning, a huge crane constructed from heavy timber is propped atop the Pylon, a supply wagon is in the process of being lifted. A clearly panicked teamster sits on it shouting to one of the mages, who is trying to placate the man from where he stands on the stone platform atop the Pylon.

Galans' House Guard summons you into Lord Galans' presence shortly after dawn. Lord Roland Galans has an excited gleam in his eye as he announces, "Good morning to you all. As you can see, we discovered the Pylon's function. I believe that it is a magical conveyance, which allowed the elves to transport resources between the Pylons far faster than overland. I'm due to receive a report this morning from one of the lead engineers, and I'd like you to accompany me."

As long as the PCs are willing, Lord Galans takes them to a wagon on the ground, connected by sturdy ropes to the enormous crane overhead. Once Galans and the PCs are inside, heavy blocks are carefully lowered from the other side of the top of the Pylon, slowly lifting the wagon hundreds of feet in the air.

ASCENDING THE PYLON

The ascent takes about fifteen minutes. Lord Galans discusses minor matters throughout the ascent, asking the PCs how they slept, and whether they've ever seen a tower so tall. If the PCs made a good impression on Lord Galans, he is very complimentary and quite friendly. If the PCs haven't made a good impression on the noble, he is cool but clearly excited.

You should emphasize throughout the ascent the incredible height of the Pylon. It is approximately the height of a twenty-story building, and probably higher than any of the PCs have ever been. Most of the trees of the Gnarley are not quite half as tall as the Pylon, and the ball at the very top is higher than any of the trees. Despite the sturdy construction of the wagon and the ropes, the wind blows fiercely and the entire contraption sways precariously. Lord Galans enjoys every minute of the trip.

Read or paraphrase the following as the PCs reach the top of the Pylon:

Above the canopy of trees the Gnarley Forest stretches out for miles. To the north, a sliver of blue against the expanse of green shows the curve of the Velverdyva River, to the south the forest extends like a great sea. The top of the Pylon consists of an area some 60 feet across, made of the same gray, seamless

stone. Resting at the center of this plateau is a great sphere of stone, worked without a single chisel mark.

Once the PCs arrive at the top of the Pylon, they can see about a dozen people at work. Most move around the platform atop the Pylon, around the wagon that is already present. Some of the people here hang suspended in the air, in the magical zone.

Allow the PCs to make DC 25 Spot checks. PCs wearing the Gnomish Spectacles from VER6-02 *Delve the Wizard's Dungeon* automatically succeed at this check. To those that succeed, read:

You see a sort of distortion, diffraction in the air, as though looking at a nearly-pure sheet of glass. This distortion is about forty feet wide, forty feet high, and extends straight as a taut wire from the ball atop the Pylon to the south-southwest, out of sight.

THE TOP OF THE PYLON

Once the PCs arrive, read the following text:

Hanging suspended in the air to the southwest of the Pylon, several dwarves and humans busily take measurements while drifting gently through the air. Seeing Lord Galans with your group, a bespectacled dwarf walks through the air toward you, as though on solid ground.

"My Lord, its fantastic." says the dwarf excitedly, nothing but air beneath his feet.

"Then tell me, man, tell me." replies Lord Galans, smiling.

The dwarf adopts a professorial tone. "There's a magical field here, forty feet in diameter and extending straightaway to the southwest. It's as wide and round as the stone ball, and appears to emanate from it. There's a sort of levitative magic within this field, allowing you to travel within it. You can move laterally as much as you'd like, and up or down at an angle, as though climbing a steep incline." The dwarf steps up a few paces, as though up invisible stairs, rising a few feet as he does.

Allow the PCs to make a DC 19 Spellcraft or Knowledge [Arcana] check. Success reveals that the effects of the field sound like the *air walk* spell, not like a true *levitate* spell.

"Additionally, items are affected identically." The dwarf removes a small wooden ruler, holds it out, and releases it. The ruler hangs in the air, drifting lazily.

"Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this field, though, is what happens at its edges." The dwarf plucks the ruler out of the air and walks to your left,

holding his hand with the ruler out in front of him. "As you note there is a slight thickening of the air...aah, here." The dwarf's hand seems to meet with some resistance, as though up against an invisible wall. [Mime this effect for your players, if you'd like.] "The resistance is enough to ensure you do not accidentally move through it, but any determined effort..." the dwarf gives a hard shove, and his hand jerks forward a few inches. "...allows you to exit the field." The dwarf drops the ruler, and it tumbles, end over end, hundreds of feet to the ground below.

"Furthermore any high velocity object easily exits the field." the dwarf continues, pulling his hand back inside the field.

TESTING THE FIELD

The dwarf looks over the party to see if one of the PCs carries a bow.

SOMEONE HAS A BOW:

If someone in the party carries a bow, the dwarf chooses one randomly. Read the following:

The dwarf looks at your bow. "You there, shoot an arrow that way, across to the far edge of the field.

When the PC does, continue:

Your arrow arcs through the air, its trajectory slowing slightly as it hits the invisible edge on the other side of the field, and continues out and down over the trees.

NO ONE HAS A BOW

If no PC has an obvious bow, continue from here:

The dwarf rummages in his smock, removes a silver coin, and with a grunt, throws it across the field. It arcs through the air, its trajectory slowing slightly as it hits the invisible edge on the other side of the field, and tumbles down to the earth below.

THE THIRD WAGON

Continue from here.

Lord Galans chuckles. "This explains the sentry's reports of dropped tools. So this field, is safe, so long as you don't punch through the edges, and extends all the way from here to some point in the Kron?"

"So far as we can tell, milord." says the dwarf. "As you suspected, it appears to be some sort of ancient magical highway. A very high way." The dwarf grins at his joke.

"Extraordinary!" roars Lord Galans. "Why, this...this...Skyroad will revolutionize travel in the Viscounty—if it's as safe as you say."

“I haven’t gotten to the best part, milord, says the dwarf. “Anders here, discovered a most amazing property of the...Skyroad. He had dropped a marble, and found that the field seems to have a slight downward slant to it. The marble rolled away, getting faster and faster as it did so. We tried to chase after it but finally lost sight of it as it accelerated away.”

Lord Galans points to the southwest. “You’re telling me, to the road, that way is down?”

The dwarf grins, “Actually, sir, to the road, down is everyway. Whichever way you put the marble, it will roll like it’s going down a hill. Either from here to there, or from there back.”

“Then this isn’t just a road,” Lord Galans says, “it’s possibly the fastest means of travel across the Viscounty short of teleportation.” Immediately, the excited noble starts shouting orders to his men. “I want that third wagon brought up here, along with the gnomish water clock. Get me the three best teamsters and two—no, three—engineers. Including you.” Lord Galans points to the dwarf, whose thick eyebrows arch with surprise.

At last, Lord Galans turns to the group of you. “With a water clock, we’ll be able to gauge just how long the trip from here to the Kron would be. If you could assist the teamsters in traveling with my three wagons to the end of the Skyroad, and report back to me how quickly you traveled, it would assist me greatly.

“Such a road could break the increasing dominance of House Haxx over trade in this region, and could vastly expand my own coffers.” Lord Galans adds, his enthusiasm for wealth and the possibility of striking a blow against Lord Haxx equally present on his jovial face.

“And, whatever you do, don’t let my water clock come to any harm. That’s a very expensive piece of equipment.”

Let the PCs discuss this plan. In short, the PCs are expected to guard three wagons that will race down the Skyroad at as fast a speed as they can muster. The PCs are accompanied by three gnomish teamsters, three engineers (one dwarf and two humans, including the spy Ardell), and a very expensive water clock to time the trip. Of course, Threnodee accompanies the PCs, as well.

EVERYTHING IS IN PLACE

Once the third wagon is in place, read or paraphrase:

“My engineers say that you just need to release the brakes.” Lord Galans says gleefully as the third wagon

is put into place on the Skyroad with the other two. “The road will take care of the rest.” Galans steps back an motions for you and your companions to climb aboard.

The PCs decide how to split up among the teamsters and engineers in three wagons (that is, the PCs can split up among the three wagons, all travel in the same wagon, or mix up their travel as they choose). They should also decide which wagon has the water clock. Draw a 40 foot wide path on the battlemat and give the players **Player Handout 1: Traveling the Skyroad**, which allows them to arrange themselves and the wagons as they choose.

ALL APLS

Ellis, Wade, and Gibbin, gnome teamsters (3): male gnome Exp2; hp 11; LN and LG; Profession (teamster) +6, Charisma 10.

Dorg Markblotter, dwarf engineer: male dwarf Exp3; hp 20; LN, Charisma 9.

Wade Kelfson, human engineer: male human Exp2; hp 9; LN, Charisma 11.

Ardell Dresner, posing as an engineer: see **Encounter Seven: Smash**. The PCs have no reason to distrust the engineers right now, and Ardell isn’t evil, so they are unlikely to discover Ardell as a spy until he makes his move in **Encounter Seven: Smash**.

Development: If the PCs choose to ride the Skyroad move on to **Encounter Seven: Smash**. If the PCs refuse, Galans will express his disappointment, but will order his teamsters to attempt to travel the road. Tally the experience the PCs earned to this point, cross off the favors of Galans from the Adventure Record, and conclude the adventure.

ENCOUNTER SEVEN: SMASH

The wagons roll out, driven by the teamsters, and soon reach dangerous speeds (approximately 30 miles per hour, or 180 feet per round). The trip along the Skyroad only takes about two hours at this speed. PCs who have seen the map of the Pylons from **VER6-02 Delve the Wizard’s Dungeon**, or otherwise know that the Pylon they are approaching is in the Kron Hills, can determine that the trip will take about two hours on a DC 15 Intelligence check.

Most of the trip, however, is uneventful. In order to keep the travel on the Skyroad interesting, and to alert the PCs to some of its interesting aspects, use the following brief scenes as the PCs travel along the Skyroad. Ask the players to roll 1d4 to determine the order of these short scenes:

- **Scene 1:** While the PCs are traveling, a sudden rainstorm blows out from the over the Gnarley Forest to the east. As the storm moves over the Skyroad, the rain is deflected around the Skyroad. For the first time, the round tube of the Skyroad is plain to see even for those without Gnomish Spectacles. Although the wagons speed right through the storm, they remain warm and dry.
- **Scene 2:** The PCs pass over a small village in Milinous lands. Playing children look up, point and shout. Townspeople come out from buildings or look up from their daily tasks and stare in wonder. The PCs pass by in only a few minutes. As long as the PCs don't seem to mind, the teamsters and the engineers hoot and wave at the people below, and the people wave back.
- **Scene 3:** The engineer near the water clock notices that the water clock needs a minor adjustment. However, this adjustment requires two skilled engineers. Either one of the PCs needs to help an engineer (which, unless the PC demonstrates some skill in engineering, they won't permit) or the PCs need to help one of the engineers get over to the water clock. The carts can be pulled adjacent with a DC 10 Profession [Teamster] check (which the gone teamsters, with a Profession [Teamster] bonus of +6, can succeed on by taking 10). Then one of the engineers must move into the wagon with the water clock. This requires a DC 0 Jump check (which an engineer can make by taking 10). Alternatively, a PC can lift an engineer from one cart to another with a DC 20 Strength check. Once two engineers can work on the water clock, they can easily fix it without a skill check.

While one of the engineers is working on the water clock, he accidentally drops a large wrench over the side of the wagon. It falls out of the bottom of the Skyroad and smashes against solid stone far below. This scene is crucial, as it shows the PCs that falling from the wagon is very dangerous. Generally, objects in the Skyroad remain where they are put. However, objects moving at a significant speed (such as an object or person dropped out of a wagon) pierce the barrier of the Skyroad and fall all the way to the ground. Point out this significant feature to the players.
- **Scene 4:** As the trip progresses, the Skyroad gets closer and closer to the ground. On a DC 10

Spot check, the PCs realize that the Skyroad itself is perfectly level, but since the ground rises to the south toward the Kron Hills and the Lortmil Mountains, the ground is actually getting closer to the Skyroad.

When the PCs near the end of the Skyroad, several unfortunate things happen at once. First, the PCs may notice the House Haxx tax collectors waiting for them and the unconscious figures on the rocky ground below. Then, the wagon with the water clock snaps its brake. Finally, a spy among the engineers takes this opportunity to sow some discord.

Start by reading the following:

The gentle wind flutters your clothing as you see the end of your path finally coming into view. The Skyroad ends at another Pylon, this one far shorter than the first. The ground, still streaking by at an incredible speed, is about 40 feet beneath you.

Have the PCs make Spot checks. To those that succeed at a DC 15, read the follow:

A group of heavily armed and armored men cluster around the platform atop the Pylon you are approaching, one of them points in your direction and shouts to his compatriots.

To those that succeed at a DC 20, read the following:

At the base of the pylon lie six individuals. From their positioning it appears that most are unconscious, all are hogtied. What appears to be their armor and gear is piled several paces away. You get the impression that the men waiting you at the top of the tower may have had something to do with this.

Continue from here for all:

With the ball on the Pylon growing rapidly as you approach, the teamsters pull on the brakes while the engineers glance toward the water clock to check the time.

A dry snap comes from the wagons and the gnome driving the wagon with the water clock cries out, and holding up the splintered wooden brake handle. The solid stone ball at the end of the road suddenly seems all to close.

At this time, have all the PCs roll initiative, and go into initiative rounds.

The wagons begin some distance away from the stone ball based on the APL, as follows:

APL 2: 900 feet

APL 4: 720 feet

APL 6: 540 feet

Each round, at initiative count 0, the wagons move forward based on their current speed. At the beginning of this encounter, each wagon is moving at 180 feet per round. Of course, the wagons are moving throughout the round, but it is easiest to represent their movement at the bottom of the initiative order.

Brake Points

The wagons cannot be stopped immediately without painful consequences for everyone aboard. To come to a stop, a wagon must accumulate 5 Brake Points. You can mark a wagon's current Brake Points with glass beads, paper chits, or a d6. Once a wagon starts accumulating Brake Points, it begins to slow down, as follows:

Brake Points	Wagon Speed
0	180 feet per round
1	150 feet per round
2	120 feet per round
3	80 feet per round
4	40 feet per round
5	0 feet per round (stopped)

Generally, a wagon accumulates Brake Points when someone skillfully applies the wagon's brake. This and other ways to accumulate Brake Points are mentioned under **What Do We Do?**, below.

The players should know that Brake Points are good, and they want to accumulate them.

Hooked Up

Due to player actions, some of the wagons may be lashed together or otherwise physically attached. In this case, both wagons move at the average speed of the two wagons. For example, if one wagon with 1 Brake Point is attached to a wagon with 2 Brake Points, then both wagons move 135 feet at initiative count 0 (150+120, divided by 2). If the two wagons have very different brake points (such as, if a wagon with zero Brake Points is attached to a wagon with 4 Brake Points), you are free to rule that whatever's attaching the wagons together simply detaches or breaks rather than averaging their speeds.

End of the Line

A wagon hits the ball at the end of the Skyroad as soon as it has traveled the entire distance (540 ft., 720 ft. or 900 ft., based on the APL). When the wagon hits the stone ball, the wagon and everyone in it takes 12d6 points of damage. Subtract 3d6 from this roll for every Brake Point the wagon has. Note that a wagon with 4 Brake Points, even though it's still moving, doesn't hit the ball hard enough to do any permanent damage.

Also, if the wagons smash into the House Haxx tax collectors at the end of the Skyroad, there may be less of them to fight in **Encounter Eight: A Taxing Conclusion**. See that encounter for more details.

Not the Clock!

Lord Galans' water clock takes damage like any other PC in a wagon. If it sustains at least 9 points of damage, the delicate clock is destroyed. Damage to the water clock can be repaired with spells like *make whole*, but cannot otherwise be repaired on the fly.

HEY, ARE YOU GUYS GOING TO DO ANYTHING?

The actions the NPCs take are as follows:

- The gnome teamsters are sturdy and resolute fellows, but once Ardell Dresner makes his move, they become terrified about being pushed out of the wagons. They take cover, shriek for help, and do nothing to help the situation. To get a gnome teamster to do anything requires a DC 20 Diplomacy or Intimidate check. Thereafter, a gnome teamster continues to perform this action without further direction, or can be told to stop as a free action. To get the gnome teamster to do anything else requires another Diplomacy or Intimidate check.

Alternatively, PCs with the Leadership feat may make a DC 20 Leadership check (1d20+Leadership Score) to successfully order all of the teamsters at once (as above).

- The engineers generally panic, flail about, and do nothing to help the situation. Unlike the teamsters, however, the engineers generally do as the PCs command.
- Note the location of "Human Engineer 2." This is Ardell Dresner, the spy among House Galans. When the party rolls for initiative, roll initiative for Ardell as well (but don't reveal this to the players). On his action, Ardell rages (if he is a barbarian) and tries to shove the closest gnome teamster out of the wagon using a bull rush (the gnome has a -5 penalty to avoid such an attempt). If he can't get to a gnome teamster, Ardell instead tries to push out the water clock (which requires him to make a DC 20 Strength check). If he can't get to water clock, he tries to push out the smallest and weakest-looking person he can reach (which may be another engineer, or may be a Small PC). After he has revealed himself as a traitor with this initial surprise attack, Ardell tries pushing out other

Small PCs or attacking with unarmed strikes. If reduced to half his hit points, Ardell leaps from the wagon, hoping to use his Jump and Tumble skills to reduce damage from the fall.

WHAT DO WE DO?

The purpose of this encounter is to avert a catastrophe with fast-paced action. Any reasonable actions the PCs take should at least have a chance at succeeding. That said, here are several actions the PCs might try in the rush to stop the wagon. If a player seems unsure what to do, you might ask what the PC is good at, and provide some suggested actions from this list.

Use the Brakes.

Applying the brake in this situation requires a Profession (teamster) or Disable Device check as a full-round action. A DC 10 check gives the wagon 1 Brake Point, while a DC 20 check gives the wagon up to 2 Brake Points (the PC may elect to take less than 2 Brake Points). Only one of these checks can be made each round. Only PCs adjacent to the brake can try to use it. The brake is by the right-hand driver's seat of the wagon. Only PCs in this square or the square directly behind it can make this check or assist on it.

Obviously, this action can't be used on the wagon with the water clock in it until the brake on that wagon is fixed.

Fix the Brake.

The wagon with the water clock has a broken brake. This brake can be fixed with two successful DC 10 Disable Device checks or DC 15 Intelligence checks (or one of each). Making one of these checks is a full-round action, and only one of these checks can be made each round. Like using the brakes, only someone adjacent to the brake can make this check or assist on it.

Move a Wagon Around.

With a DC 10 Profession (teamster) check as a standard action, a PC can move a wagon 5 feet in any direction (in addition to its speed movement at the end of the round). With a DC 20, the PC can move the wagon 10 feet in any direction. This action is generally used to move wagons close together to make it easier to jump from one to another.

Speed Up a Wagon.

Although it's unlikely that the PCs will want to do so, a wagon can be sped up with a successful Profession (teamster) check as a full-round action. On a DC 10, remove 1 Brake Point from the wagon. On a DC 20, remove up to 2 Brake Points from the wagon (the PC may elect to remove less than 2 Brake Points).

Jump to Another Wagon.

This requires a Jump check as usual. Be sure to double the DCs for all Jump checks as it's not possible to get a running start in the wagons. Also, jumping from one wagon to an adjacent wagon requires a DC 0 Jump check (which plate-mail clad dwarves, or other exceptionally encumbered PCs, might fail and slip between the wagons to their doom).

Fight the Pusher.

Handle combat as usual, except bear in mind that PCs may have to leap around a lot in order to maneuver on the rolling wagons. Any PC in the back of a wagon has cover from all attack coming from the outside of that wagon.

Fight the Tax Collectors.

The PCs may attack the tax collectors with long-range weapons. See their statistics in the next encounter. Generally, the tax collectors hunch down behind their shields and wait for the PCs to come to them.

Bail Out!

Any PC can leap from a wagon intentionally, or may end up doing so on a failed Jump check or if bull rushed off of a wagon. Unless the PC can fly, he plummets to the rocky ground below. This deals 4d6 points of damage to the unlucky PC due to the height, although a PC can try to reduce this damage with Jump and Tumble checks, as normal.

In addition, a falling PC also takes 4d6 points of falling damage due to the forward momentum of the wagon. Reduce this amount by 1d6 for each Brake Point of the wagon the PC jumped (or fell) from.

At APL 2, you may decide that a falling PC is lucky enough to hit a patch of scrub, and all but 3d6 points of the damage from the fall are nonlethal damage instead.

Share Brake Points.

With a DC 10 Profession [Teamster] check as a standard action, a driver of one wagon may share its Brake Points with an adjacent wagon by grinding up against the other wagon and trying to slow it down. For example, two wagons are adjacent at the beginning of the round. Someone makes a DC 20 check to give one of the wagons two Brake Points. Before the end of the round, someone else makes a DC 10 Profession [Teamster] check to share brake points—by jerking one of the wagons into the other, for example.

Wagons that are connected to each other, such as by a rope or other attachment, automatically share Brake Points with each other as evenly as possible (as they must move at approximately the same speed).

Order an NPC Around.

As described above, the teamsters and engineers won't do anything on their own unless ordered to. With a DC 20 Diplomacy or Intimidate check as a standard action, a PC can successfully order one teamster or engineer to do something (such as to try to apply the brakes). Alternatively, PCs with the Leadership feat may make a DC 20 Leadership check (1d20+Leadership Score) to successfully order any number of teamsters or engineers at once (as above).

Damage a Wagon.

If a PC does at least 10 points of damage to a wagon in a single attack with the intent to stop it (such as by attacking a wheel) with a slashing or bludgeoning weapon, then the wagon gets a Brake Point. However, everyone on board that wagon when it moves at the end of each round takes 1d6 damage from the bumpy ride. Wagons can be slowed multiple times this way (there are four wheels on each, after all), but the damage remains at 1d6 points per round.

Haul a Willing PC Into Your Wagon.

If a PC is willing to be pulled from an adjacent wagon into yours, then you need to make a DC 10 Strength check to pull him into a different square adjacent to you (or clinging to the side of the wagon, if you prefer). All of the NPCs, except Ardell, are willing to be pulled around like this.

Haul an Unwilling PC into Your Wagon.

To pull someone unwilling into your wagon, you must make a touch attack to successfully start a grapple, then succeed on a DC 15 Strength check.

Pull the Water Clock into Your Wagon.

If the water clock is adjacent to a PC, he may pull it into his square with a DC 20 Strength check. If the check fails, the water clock won't move. If the check fails by more than 10, the water clock also takes 1d4 points of damage from the rough handling.

Put Something in Front of a Wagon.

The PCs might have some way of putting something substantial in front of a wagon in order to slow it down (generally, this would be a summoned animal or a brave PC). Generally, you should pick a number of Brake Points this gives to the wagon. Something small, like a dog or a halfling, might give the wagon that hits it 1 Brake Point (and do 3d6 damage to the creature hit!). Something larger, like a human or a wolf, would give the wagon 2 Brake Points (and, do 6d6 damage to the creature hit). Something substantially bigger, like a horse, could give a wagon 3 Brake Points (but do 2d6 damage to everyone in the wagon and 9d6 damage to the creature hit). Something even more substantial than that, such as a *wall*

of stone or a *Daern's instant fortress*, would stop the wagon completely—treat it as though it hit the stone ball at the end of the Skyroad.

Note that smashed tax collectors right in front of the stone ball don't count for the purposes of giving the wagon Brake Points; they're automatically killed in the instant the wagon careens into the stone ball.

Cast a Spell.

Any number of spells may be handy here, such as *feather fall* (which eliminates all damage from bailing out of a wagon), *solid fog*, or *web* (which must have anchor points, such as the Pylon or the other wagons). Use your discretion with these strategies, but give the PCs the benefit of the doubt, particularly when they are only a round or two from smashing the wagons into the stone ball.

Warn the Tax Collectors.

Some PCs may see the inevitable collision with the stone ball and the tax collectors milling about in front of it, and shout to warn the tax collectors. For their part, the tax collectors are very unlikely to move. First of all, they can't get a good sense of how fast the wagons are approaching from their point of view. Also, they don't know that the brake is broken on one of the wagons. Furthermore, they can see the PCs trying to stop the wagons, and assume that the PCs are in control of the situation and will stop the wagons in plenty of time. Finally, even upon fairly plain evidence that they're going to be hit by a wagon, the suspicious brutes assume that it's some sort of trick, and they're not about to fall for it.

THE PUSHER

As discussed above, Ardell Dresner tries his best to wreak havoc with the PCs' plans.

APL 2 (EL 1)

Ardell Dresner, the Pusher: human Fighter 1; hp 11; see Appendix 1.

APL 4 (EL 2)

Ardell Dresner, the Pusher: human Fighter 1/Rogue 1; hp 16; see Appendix 1.

APL 6 (EL 3)

Ardell Dresner, the Pusher: human Fighter 1/Rogue 1/Barbarian 1; hp 24; see Appendix 1.

Roleplaying Notes: Ardell is not a bad man, but he's stuck in a bad circumstance by bad people. Ardell lived in Langmuir lands with his wife and his sister. All were very poor. Just over a year ago, Ardell was investigated for stealing a traveling merchant's goods. The skill and daring of the theft impressed the Langmuir authorities. Rather than incarcerate the man, the Langmuir

authorities kidnapped Ardell's wife and sister and told Ardell that if he didn't comply with House Langmuir's demands, he would never see his family again. Since then, Ardell has undertaken several covert (but low-priority) missions for House Langmuir. Most recently, Ardell has infiltrated House Galans, posing as a skilled engineer raised in Veluna. As the Langmuir authorities told Ardell that his family would be killed if he ever revealed his shadowy patrons, Ardell is unlikely to ever disclose the above information.

ENCOUNTER EIGHT: A TAXING CONCLUSION

No matter how the PCs end up at or near the end of the Skyroad, read:

Several men raise shields defensively and grip large, heavy saps. All of them wear identical tabards.

A DC 10 Knowledge [Local: VTF] identifies these men as agent of Lord Haxx.

One of the men shouts through his visor, "Throw down your arms and submit to a search and a lawful tax collection...or face the wrath of House Haxx!"

These are the House Haxx tax collectors, and they are not in the mood to talk (for their story, see the **Meanwhile...** encounter between **Encounter Three: Inside the Pylon** and **Encounter Four: Mistaken Identities Again**).

The tax collectors expect the PCs, teamsters and engineers to lay down their arms and submit to a search, inventory and tax determination. If the PCs are wounded, so much the better; the tax collectors think it's more likely that wounded PCs will comply. Dead PCs are stripped entirely of valuables, but only after the tax collectors have dealt with the living.

SUBMIT TO A SEARCH

If the PCs submit to a search, the tax collectors first take anything that is or resembles a weapon, and puts it into a large sack. Then, anything else that looks remotely valuable is stripped from the PCs and tossed in the sack. The tax collectors intend to take most, but not all, of the worldly possessions of the PCs. In addition to taking all cash on hand the PCs have (check their most recent Adventure Record for this amount), look over the MIL of each PC, and choose a few items that you think the tax collectors would think valuable and the PC would probably hate to lose. Remember, these tax collectors are mean and greedy, so be mean and greedy.

As two or three of the tax collectors put the items in the sack, most of the others stand guard and glare

suspiciously at the PCs. One tax collector keeps a careful inventory in a ledger he removes from a small strongbox.

RESIST BEING SEARCHED

If the PCs resist, the tax collectors point to the bodies of the adventuring group spread out on the ground below, unconscious and bloody (but clearly alive), to show what happens to those who resist a "lawful tax collection."

The tax collectors do not want to hear arguments or excuses. Some excuses the PCs might use are answered as follows:

"How much is the tax?"

The tax collectors respond that it depends on what they've got, and insist on an inventory. Any PC that makes a DC 15 Knowledge [Local: VTF] is aware that a tax is normally a small percentage of a person's wealth, and an inventory is not inappropriate.

"Hey, you're taking everything I've got..."

The tax collectors just guffaw and confirm that they're only taking what the law allows. This is true only in the most liberal sense of the law: the tax collectors are allowed to "overcollect" if they think someone is hoarding or hiding wealth. There are specific legal limits on the amount of "overcollection" a tax collector is allowed to perform, but these bullies haven't been told and don't care about the limits; they just take everything that looks good.

"But that's not legal."

The tax collectors respond with something like "Legal, shmegal. You can take it up with Lord Haxx, and see whether he gives you a refund. Har, har."

"But I'm affiliated with House Haxx!"

PCs that are members of the House Haxx meta-org are not subject to any abusive taxation or any mistreatment from the tax collectors. One of the tax collectors looks the House Haxx-affiliated PC up and down and declares a tax of just one gold piece.

These House Haxx tax collectors take care of their own, and they expect the same treatment in return. In fact, the tax collectors expect the House Haxx-affiliated PC to aid them in their "lawful tax collection" against the rest of the party, and become suspicious and belligerent if the PC doesn't aid them.

"But I'm affiliated with the Mounted Borderers!"

PCs that are members of the Mounted Borderers meta-org are treated with grudging respect by these tax collectors. They collect only 5% of the Borderer's cash on hand (check his or her most recent Adventure Record for

this amount) and otherwise leave him alone. This kind of treatment doesn't extend to the Borderer's companions, however.

"But I'm affiliated with [insert another meta-org]!"

The tax collectors respond with "Good. Then you've got friends to keep you out of the poorhouse" before continuing with their mistreatment of the PCs.

"I'm going to report you!"

The tax collectors nod at each other. One says, "Looks like we've got a fellow here resisting a lawful tax collection..." and they club the offender into unconsciousness. In truth, these men don't care if they're reported, since overeager tax collection is rewarded by Lord Haxx, not punished.

"But we're not on House Haxx land!"

This excuse is one the tax collectors particularly hate—and they respond smugly that Lord Haxx enforces the Viscount's tax collection in all of the Viscounty, not just his own holdings. Any PC that makes a DC 10 Knowledge [Local: VTF] is aware that this is true.

DEVELOPMENT:

Unless the PCs immediately comply, and subject themselves to being stripped of most of their worldly possessions in the name of House Haxx, they are in for a fight. The PCs don't have to have a fight here, but they're likely to.

Note: the ELs for this encounter have all been reduced by 1, as the opponents inflict only nonlethal damage on the PCs.

APL 2 (EL 3)

House Haxx Tax Collectors (8): human War1; hp 6 each; see Appendix 1.

APL 4 (EL 5)

House Haxx Tax Collectors (8): human War2; hp 11 each; see Appendix 1.

APL 6 (EL 7)

House Haxx Tax Collectors (8): human War3; hp 18 each; see Appendix 1.

Roleplaying Notes: These brutish bullies are among the most callous of Lord Haxx's tax collectors. They love girding themselves in thick armor and beating unarmored people into unconsciousness. The fact that they can do so while pursuing legitimate-seeming ends (such as "tax collection") has made them all very loyal to Lord Haxx. They expect to be obeyed, not argued with, and lose patience easily.

Treasure

Loot the tax collectors.

APL 2: L: 389 gp; C: 0 gp; M: 0 gp

APL 4 and 6: L: 622 gp; C: 0 gp; M: 0 gp

Development: Smashed Wagons: If the PCs accidentally (or intentionally) let a wagon plow through this group, then half of the tax collectors are already killed, but the other half leaps right into combat to avenge their fellows. If the PCs drove two wagons into the group, all but one of the tax collectors are killed by the runaway wagons, and the last one gives up without a fight.

Development: Looting the Tax Collectors: One of the tax collectors carries a small strongbox containing several hundred gp and a carefully-written ledger recording the amounts as taxes collected on behalf of Lord Haxx. Keeping even a portion of this money has very serious consequences for the PCs.

Development: The Adventurers' Loot: At the base of the Pylon, hidden in some scrub, is a large sack filled with various types of armor and weapons. This is the gear of the adventurers, who insist on having it back. None of the items are particularly noteworthy, and you're free to make up names and personalities of the other adventurers as you see fit (you can even use your own PC, or other PCs you know, if you'd like).

CONCLUSION

Many hours later, Lord Galans arrives along the Skyroad on horseback, along with several guards. He is excited to know precisely how long the trip took; as long as the water clock was not destroyed, he grants each of the PCs a mithral chit stamped with the House Galans seal (this is a Galans Token, a reward on the AR) and small gems worth 200 gp. He has healing for those who need it, and he intends to make the trip back to his lands and then on to Verbobonc City to claim the right of taxation of the Skyroad to the Viscount (not being nobles, the PCs can't claim such rights, but Lord Galans is glad to have them along).

Any PC that submitted to the House Haxx tax collectors should receive the *Complied with the Tax Collectors* on the AR. Very few PCs are likely to end up with this "reward."

You should award *Tax Thief* to any PC that kept part of the taxes in the House Haxx strongbox. Only those PCs get this item on their AR. The amount of money listed assumes that the PCs divide up the share fairly evenly. It isn't possible to keep more than this amount, but it's possible to earn less (for example, a PC may take only 10 gp out of the strongbox, thinking—erroneously—that it

won't be missed). If a PC earns less, cross out the 200 gp and write in the amount earned. It isn't possible to get more than 200 gp, even if a PC steals the entire strongbox for himself.

Finally, the PCs bid farewell to Threnodee, who returns to report to Magister Har in Verbobonc City. If Lord Galans asked the PCs to speak well of him to Threnodee (in order to curry favor with Magister Har), the noble encourages the PCs to say a few good words about him to Threnodee before the mephit leaves.

Your adventures done at last, you can't help but feel a rush of pride at being among the first to experience the reawakened Skyroad. What further adventures this fantastic conveyance holds in store, only time will tell.

Threnodee gives you a grim farewell, stating that he's sure to see you again unless your adventures result in your gruesome and untimely demise. Lord Galans seems lost in contemplation as he looks toward the northwest, his eyes on the far-off smudge of green that is the foreboding Iron Wood. Lord Galans promises that he will call upon the group of you again...and soon.

The End

EXPERIENCE POINT SUMMARY

To award experience for this adventure, add up the values for the objectives accomplished. Then assign the experience award. Award the total value (objectives plus roleplaying) to each PC.

To award experience for this adventure, add up the values for the objectives accomplished. Then assign the experience award. Award the total value (objectives plus roleplaying) to each PC.

Encounter Two: Mistaken Identities

Defeat or negotiate with the bandits:

APL 2	120 XP
APL 4	180 XP
APL 6	240 XP

Rescue the surveyors:

APL 2	30 XP
APL 4	45 XP
APL 6	60 XP

Encounter Three: Inside the Pylon

Survive, disable or bypass the flaming sphere trap:

APL 2	120 XP
APL 4	150 XP
APL 6	180 XP

Activate the Pylon:

APL 2	30 XP
APL 4	45 XP
APL 6	60 XP

Encounter Seven: Smash!

Defeat or deal with the Pusher:

APL 2	30 XP
APL 4	60 XP
APL 6	90 XP

Encounter Eight: A Taxing Conclusion

Defeat or deal with the House Haxx tax collectors:

APL 2	90 XP
APL 4	150 XP
APL 6	210 XP

Story Award

The water clock survives the trip along the Skyroad:

APL 2	30 XP
APL 4	45 XP
APL 6	60 XP

Total Possible Experience

APL 2	450 XP
APL 4	675 XP
APL 6	900 XP

TREASURE SUMMARY

During an adventure, PCs encounter treasure, usually finding it in the possession of their foes. Every encounter that features treasure has a "treasure" section within the encounter description, giving information about the loot, coins, and magic items that make up the encounter's treasure.

The loot total is the number of gold pieces each PC gains if the foes are plundered of all their earthly possessions. Looting the bodies takes at least 10 minutes per every 5 enemies, and if the PCs cannot take the time to loot the bodies, they do not gain this gold. If you feel it

is reasonable that PCs can go back to loot the bodies, and those bodies are there (i.e., not carted off by dungeon scavengers, removed from the scene by the local watch, and so on), PCs may return to retrieve loot. If the PCs do not loot the body, the gold piece value for the loot is subtracted from the encounter totals given below.

The coin total is the number of gold pieces each PC gains if they take the coin available. A normal adventuring party can usually gather this wealth in a round or so. If for some reason, they pass up this treasure, the coin total is subtracted from the encounter totals given below.

Next, the magic items are listed. Magic item treasure is the hardest to adjudicate, because they are varied and because PCs may want to use them during the adventure. Many times PCs must cast identify, analyze dweomer or similar spell to determine what the item does and how to activate it. Other times they may attempt to use the item blindly. If the magic item is consumable (a potion, scroll, magic bolts, etc.) and the item is used before the end of the adventure, its total is subtracted from the adventure totals below.

Once you have subtracted the value for unclaimed treasure from each encounter add it up and that is the number of gold pieces a PCs total and coin value increase at the end of the adventure. Write the total in the GP Gained field of the adventure certificate.

Loot = Looted gear from enemy; Coin = Coin, Gems, Jewelry, and other valuables; Magic = Magic Items.

Encounter Two: Mistaken Identities

Loot the bandits and the druid.

APL 2 and 4: L: 34 gp; C: 0 gp; M: *potions of barkskin* (2), 25 gp per PC each.

APL 6: L: 223 gp; C: 0 gp; M: *potions of barkskin* (2), 25 gp per PC each

Encounter Seven: A Taxing Conclusion

Loot the tax collectors.

APL 2: L: 389 gp; C: 0 gp; M: 0 gp

APL 4 and 6: L: 622 gp; C: 0 gp; M: 0 gp

Conclusion

Reward from Lord Roland Galans.

All APLs: L: 0 gp; C: 200 gp; M: 0 gp.

Maximum Possible Treasure

APL 2: 450 gp

APL 4: 650 gp

APL 6: 900 gp

Special

Gnomish Spectacles Upgrade: Based on experiences in this adventure, this PC may upgrade the Gnomish Spectacles from *VER6-02: Delve the Wizard's Dungeon* with the following powers at the following cost after any Verbobonc regional adventure:

- +2 Intelligence. Cost: 1,500 gp; +1 to Ego score. If this raises two attributes to 14 or more, the spectacles gain the power of speech (Common, Gnome and Dwarf), 120 ft. low-light vision and hearing.
- 10 ranks in Knowledge [Geography] if the spectacles didn't already have ranks in this skill. Cost: 4,000 gp; +1 to Ego score. If the Gnomish Spectacles cannot speak, it can only relate the results of successful checks with this skill empathically.
- Expeditious retreat* on the wearer 1/day. 1,000 gp; +1 to Ego score.

Galans Token: For aiding Lord Galans, each PC earns a Galans Token. This token may be traded in at any time for any of the following:

- Three (3) influence Points with Lord Galans.
- A single pony, horse (light or heavy), or warhorse (light or heavy) with maximum hit points.
- One-time access to any wondrous item from the DMG valued at 3,000 gp or less. Galans Tokens used for this purpose stack; for example, spending three Galans Tokens allows one-time access to any wondrous item from the DMG valued at 9,000 gp or less (but voids all three Galans Tokens).

Complied with the Tax Collectors: This PC gave up a substantial amount of worldly possessions to Lord Willem Haxx's tax collectors.

Tax Thief: This PC gains 200 gp to be added to the "Items Sold" box below at no charge. However, this PC stole taxes lawfully collected by agents of Lord Willem Haxx, which may have legal repercussions.

Metaorganizational Access: Items marked with an asterisk (*) are treated as frequency: Regional access for members of the Mounted Borderers, House Haxx or House Galans.

APPENDIX 1: APL 2

ENCOUNTER TWO: MISTAKEN IDENTITIES

Bandits: male and female human Ranger 1; CR 1; Medium humanoid (human); HD 1d8+2; hp 10; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 18 (+2 Dex, +4 chain shirt, +2 shield), touch 12, flat-footed 16; Base Atk +1; Grp +3; Atk +4 melee (1d6+2/19-20, short sword); SA favored enemy (humans +2); SQ wild empathy +0; AL CN; SV Fort +4, Ref +4, Will +3; Str 14, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 9.

Skills and Feats: Bluff +1, Hide +2, Jump +2, Listen +5, Move Silently +2, Spot +5, Survival +5; Iron Will, Track, Weapon Focus (short sword).

Possessions: chain shirt, heavy wooden shield, short sword, dagger, explorer's outfit.

Power-up Suite: Each bandit has consumed a potion of *barkskin*, changing the statistics above as follows: AC 20 (+2 Dex, +2 natural, +4 chain shirt, +2 shield), touch 12, flat-footed 18.

Kessil the Watcher: male half-orc Druid 2; CR 2; Medium humanoid (orc); HD 2d8+2; hp 15; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 14 (+2 Dex, +2 leather armor), touch 12, flat-footed 12; Base Atk +1; Grp +1; Atk +1 melee (1d6/18-20, scimitar); SA spells; SQ animal companion (Graymuzzle), darkvision, wild empathy +1, woodland stride; AL N; SV Fort +4, Ref +2, Will +5; Str 10, Dex 14, Con 12, Int 11, Wis 15, Cha 8.

Skills and Feats: Concentration +6, Knowledge (nature) +3, Hide +4, Spot +7, Survival +9; Spell Focus (transmutation).

Possessions: leather armor, scimitar, traveler's outfit, 2 *potions of barkskin*.

Spells Prepared (4/3; base DC = 12 + spell level, DC 13 + spell level for Transmutation spells): 0—*create water, detect poison, flare, light, 1st—charm animal, entangle, longstrider*.

Power-up Suite: Kessil has cast *longstrider* on himself and consumed a potion of *barkskin*, changing his statistics as follows: Spd 40 ft., AC 16 (+2 Dex, +2 natural, +2 leather armor), touch 12, flat-footed 14.

Graymuzzle: wolf (Kessil's animal companion): See *Monster Manual*.

ENCOUNTER SEVEN: SMASH

Ardell Dresner (the Pusher): male human Fighter 1; CR 1; Medium humanoid (human); HD 1d10+1; hp 11; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; AC 11 (+1 Dex), touch 11, flat-footed 10; Base Atk +1; Grp +4; Atk +4 melee (1d3+3, unarmed strike); SA bull rush (+7 modifier); AL N; SV Fort +3, Ref +1, Will -1; Str 16, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 12, Wis 8, Cha 10.

Skills and Feats: Bluff +2, Intimidate +2, Jump +7, Knowledge (architecture and engineering) +2, Tumble +3; Improved Bull Rush, Improved Unarmed Strike, Power Attack.

Possessions: traveler's outfit, engineering tools.

ENCOUNTER EIGHT: A TAXING CONCLUSION

Tax Collectors: male human Warrior 1; CR 1/2; Medium humanoid (human); HD 1d8+1; hp 6; Init +0; Spd 20 ft.; AC 20 (+6 armor, +4 shield), touch 10, flat-footed 20; Base Atk +1; Grp +2; Atk +1 melee (1d8+1 nonlethal, truncheon*); AL LN; SV Fort +3, Ref +0, Will +1; Str 13, Dex 10, Con 12, Int 9, Wis 8, Cha 11.

Skills and Feats: Gather Information +2, Intimidate +4; Iron Will, Tower Shield Proficiency.

Possessions: banded mail, tower shield, masterwork truncheon*, spare truncheon*, House Haxx tabard, writ of authority. One of the tax collectors carries a small strongbox containing several hundred gp and a carefully-written ledger recording the amounts as taxes collected on behalf of Lord Haxx.

* see Appendix 2: New Rules Items

ENCOUNTER TWO: MISTAKEN IDENTITIES

Bandits: male and female human Ranger 1/Rogue 1; CR 2; Medium humanoid (human); HD 1d8+1d6+4; hp 16; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 18 (+2 Dex, +4 chain shirt, +2 shield), touch 12, flat-footed 16; Base Atk +1; Grp +3; Atk +4 melee (1d6+2/19-20, short sword); SA favored enemy (humans +2), sneak attack +1d6; SQ trapfinding, wild empathy +0; AL CN; SV Fort +4, Ref +6, Will +3; Str 14, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 9.

Skills and Feats: Bluff +4, Diplomacy +2, Hide +3, Intimidate +1, Jump +2, Listen +5, Move Silently +3, Spot +6, Survival +5, Tumble +3; Iron Will, Track, Weapon Focus (short sword).

Possessions: chain shirt, heavy wooden shield, short sword, dagger, explorer's outfit.

Power-up Suite: Each bandit has consumed a potion of barkskin, changing the statistics above as follows: AC 20 (+2 Dex, +2 natural, +4 chain shirt, +2 shield), touch 12, flat-footed 18.

Kessil the Watcher: male half-orc Druid 4; CR 4; Medium humanoid (orc); HD 4d8+4; hp 27; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 14 (+2 Dex, +2 leather armor), touch 12, flat-footed 12; Base Atk +3; Grp +3; Atk +3 melee (1d6/18-20, scimitar); SA spells; SQ animal companion (Graymuzzle), darkvision, resist nature's lure, trackless step, wild empathy +3, woodland stride; AL N; SV Fort +5, Ref +3, Will +7; Str 10, Dex 14, Con 12, Int 11, Wis 16, Cha 8.

Skills and Feats: Concentration +8, Knowledge (nature) +5, Hide +4, Spot +10, Survival +12; Brew Potion, Spell Focus (transmutation).

Possessions: leather armor, scimitar, traveler's outfit, 2 *potions of barkskin*, seven *goodberries*.

Spells Prepared (5/4/3; base DC = 13 + spell level, DC 14 + spell level for Transmutation spells): 0—*create water*, *detect magic*, *detect poison*, *flare*, *light*, 1st—*cure light wounds*, *entangle*, *longstrider*, *produce flame*; 2nd—*flaming sphere*, *hold animal*, *tree shape*.

Power-up Suite: Kessil has cast *longstrider* on himself and consumed a potion of *barkskin*, changing his statistics as follows: Spd 40 ft., AC 16 (+2 Dex, +2 natural, +2 leather armor), touch 12, flat-footed 14. He begins combat in *tree shape*, which he shares with Graymuzzle.

Graymuzzle: wolf (Kessil's animal companion): CR —; Medium animal; HD 4d8+12; hp 30; Init +2; Spd 50 ft.;

AC 17 (+3 Dex, +4 natural) touch 13, flat-footed 14; Base Atk +3; Grp +5; Atk +6 melee (1d6+3 plus trip, bite); SA trip (+2 check modifier); SQ evasion, low-light vision, scent; AL N; SV Fort +7, Ref +6, Will +5; Str 14, Dex 16, Con 16, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 6.

Skills and Feats: Hide +3, Listen +3, Move Silently +4, Spot +3, Survival +3 (+7 when tracking by scent); Lightning Reflexes, Track, Weapon Focus (bite).

Power-up Suite: Graymuzzle begins combat in *tree shape*, which Kessil shares with him via his share spells ability.

ENCOUNTER SEVEN: SMASH

Ardell Dresner (the Pusher): male human Fighter 1/Rogue 1; CR 2; Medium humanoid (human); HD 1d10+1d6+2; hp 16; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; AC 11 (+1 Dex), touch 11, flat-footed 10; Base Atk +1; Grp +4; Atk +4 melee (1d3+3, unarmed strike); SA bull rush (+7 modifier, no AoO), sneak attack +1d6; SQ trapfinding; AL N; SV Fort +3, Ref +3, Will -1; Str 16, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 12, Wis 8, Cha 10.

Skills and Feats: Balance +3, Bluff +5, Diplomacy +2, Gather Information +2, Intimidate +5, Jump +10, Knowledge (architecture and engineering) +2, Tumble +8; Improved Bull Rush, Improved Unarmed Strike, Power Attack.

Possessions: traveler's outfit, engineering tools.

ENCOUNTER EIGHT: A TAXING CONCLUSION

Tax Collectors: male human Warrior 2; CR 1; Medium humanoid (human); HD 2d8+2; hp 11; Init +0; Spd 20 ft.; AC 21 (+7 armor, +4 shield), touch 10, flat-footed 21; Base Atk +2; Grp +3; Atk +2 melee (1d8+1 nonlethal, truncheon*); AL LN; SV Fort +4, Ref +0, Will +1; Str 13, Dex 10, Con 12, Int 9, Wis 8, Cha 11.

Skills and Feats: Gather Information +2, Intimidate +5; Iron Will, Tower Shield Proficiency.

Possessions: half-plate armor, tower shield, masterwork truncheon*, spare truncheon*, House Haxx tabard, writ of authority. One of the tax collectors carries a small strongbox containing several hundred gp and a carefully-written ledger recording the amounts as taxes collected on behalf of Lord Haxx.

* see Appendix 2: New Rules Items

ENCOUNTER TWO: MISTAKEN IDENTITIES

Bandits: male and female human Ranger2/Rogue2; CR 4; Medium humanoid (human); HD 2d8+2d6+8; hp 29; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 16 (+2 Dex, +4 chain shirt), touch 12, flat-footed 14; Base Atk +3; Grp +5; Atk +7 melee (1d6+2/19-20, short sword); Full Atk +5 melee (1d6+2/19-20, short sword) and +5 melee (1d6+1/19-20, short sword); SA favored enemy (humans +2), sneak attack +1d6; SQ evasion, trapfinding, wild empathy +0; AL CN; SV Fort +5, Ref +8, Will +3; Str 14, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 10.

Skills and Feats: Bluff +7, Diplomacy +2, Hide +8, Intimidate +2, Jump +8, Knowledge (local) +3, Listen +8, Move Silently +8, Spot +8, Survival +6; Tumble +8; Dodge, Iron Will, Track, Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Focus (short sword).

Possessions: masterwork chain shirt, masterwork short swords (2), dagger, explorer's outfit.

Power-up Suite: Each bandit has consumed a potion of *barkskin*, changing the statistics above as follows: AC 18 (+2 Dex, +2 natural, +4 chain shirt), touch 12, flat-footed 16.

Kessil the Watcher: male half-orc Druid6; CR 6; Medium humanoid (orc); HD 6d8+6; hp 39; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 14 (+2 Dex, +2 leather armor), touch 12, flat-footed 12; Base Atk +4; Grp +4; Atk +4 melee (1d6/18-20, scimitar); SA spells; SQ animal companion (Graymuzzle), darkvision, resist nature's lure, trackless step, wild empathy +3, wildshape (2/day), woodland stride; AL N; SV Fort +6, Ref +4, Will +8; Str 10, Dex 14, Con 12, Int 11, Wis 16, Cha 8.

Skills and Feats: Concentration +14, Knowledge (nature) +8, Hide +4, Spot +12, Survival +14; Brew Potion, Combat Casting, Spell Focus (transmutation).

Possessions: leather armor, scimitar, traveler's outfit, 2 *potions of barkskin*, seven *goodberries*.

Spells Prepared (5/4/4/3; base DC = 13 + spell level, DC 14 + spell level for Transmutation spells): 0—*create water, detect magic, detect poison, flare, light*; 1st—*cure light wounds, entangle, longstrider, produce flame*; 2nd—*flaming sphere, hold animal, resist energy, tree shape*; 3rd—*poison, spike growth, wind wall*.

Power-up Suite: Kessil has cast *longstrider* on himself and consumed a potion of *barkskin*, changing his statistics as follows: Spd 40 ft., AC 16 (+2 Dex, +2 natural, +2 leather armor), touch 12, flat-footed 14. He

begins combat in *tree shape*, which he shares with Graymuzzle. He has also cast *spike growth* on a wide swath of area around himself and Graymuzzle.

Graymuzzle: wolf (Kessil's animal companion): CR —; Medium animal; HD 6d8+18; hp 45; Init +2; Spd 50 ft.; AC 19 (+3 Dex, +6 natural) touch 13, flat-footed 16; Base Atk +4; Grp +6; Atk +7 melee (1d6+3 plus trip, bite); SA trip (+2 check modifier); SQ devotion, evasion, low-light vision, scent; AL N; SV Fort +8, Ref +7, Will +6 (+10 vs. enchantment effects); Str 15, Dex 17, Con 16, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 6.

Skills and Feats: Hide +5, Listen +5, Move Silently +4, Spot +5, Survival +3 (+7 when tracking by scent); Alertness, Lightning Reflexes, Track, Weapon Focus (bite).

Power-up Suite: Greymuzzle begins combat in *tree shape*, which Kessil shares with him via his share spells ability.

ENCOUNTER SEVEN: SMASH

Ardell Dresner (the Pusher): male human Fighter 1/Rogue 1/Barbarian1; CR 3; Medium humanoid (human); HD 1d10+1d6+1d12+3; hp 24; Init +1; Spd 40 ft.; AC 11 (+1 Dex), touch 11, flat-footed 10; Base Atk +2; Grp +5; Atk +5 melee (1d3+3, unarmed strike); SA bull rush (+7 modifier, no AoO), rage 1/day, sneak attack +1d6; SQ trapfinding; AL N; SV Fort +5, Ref +3, Will +1; Str 16, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 12, Wis 8, Cha 10.

Skills and Feats: Balance +3, Bluff +6, Diplomacy +2, Gather Information +2, Intimidate +5, Jump +15, Knowledge (architecture and engineering) +2, Tumble +9, Survival +0; Improved Bull Rush, Improved Unarmed Strike, Iron Will, Power Attack.

Possessions: traveler's outfit, engineering tools.

Rage 1/day: In a rage, Ardell's statistics change as follows: hp 30; AC 9 (+1 Dex, -2 rage), touch 9, flat-footed 8; Base Atk +2; Grp +7; Atk +7 melee (1d3+5, unarmed strike); SA bull rush (+9 modifier, no AoO); SV Fort +7, Ref +3, Will +3; Str 20, Con 16; Bluff —, Diplomacy —, Gather Information —, Intimidate +7, Jump +17, Tumble —.

ENCOUNTER EIGHT: A TAXING CONCLUSION

Tax Collectors: male human Warrior 3; CR 2; Medium humanoid (human); HD 3d8+3; hp 18; Init +0; Spd 20 ft.; AC 21 (+7 armor, +4 shield), touch 10, flat-footed 21; Base Atk +3; Grp +4; Atk +3 melee (1d8+1 nonlethal,

truncheon*); AL LN; SV Fort +4, Ref +1, Will +2; Str 13, Dex 10, Con 12, Int 9, Wis 8, Cha 11.

Skills and Feats: Gather Information +3, Intimidate +6; Iron Will, Power Attack, Tower Shield Proficiency.

Possessions: half-plate armor, tower shield, masterwork truncheon*, spare truncheon*, House Haxx tabard, writ of authority. One of the tax collectors carries a small strongbox containing several hundred gp and a carefully-written ledger recording the amounts as taxes collected on behalf of Lord Haxx.

* see Appendix 2: New Rules Items

APPENDIX 2: NEW RULES ITEMS

SANDBLAST [NEW SPELL] (FROM SPELL COMPENDIUM)

Evocation

Level: Druid 1
Components: V, S, DF
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: 10 ft.
Area: 10-ft.-radius burst centered
on you
Duration: Instantaneous
Saving Throw: Reflex half
Spell Resistance: Yes

Whipping your hand in a wide arc, you spray sand from your fingers in a powerful blast.

Creatures in the area take 1d6 points of nonlethal damage. Any creature that fails its Reflex save is also stunned for 1 round. You are not harmed by the spell.

TRUNCHEON [NEW WEAPON] (FROM BOOK OF EXALTED DEEDS)

Martial Weapon	Cost	Dmg (S)	Dmg (M)
Crit Weight		Type	
<i>One-Handed Melee Weapons</i>			
Truncheon	2 gp	1d6*	
1d8*	x2	12 lbs	
Bludgeoning			

* The weapon deals nonlethal damage rather than lethal damage

APPENDIX 3:

DM OVERVIEW OF THE SKYROAD

WHAT IS THE SKYROAD?

The Skyroad is a system of three magical, aerial causeways built to facilitate trade around the lands now known as Verbobonc.

Three massive stone towers stand in far-flung spots of the Viscounty. These towers are called Pylons. The Pylons have been obscured by powerful and ancient illusion magic for years, but the old illusions are easily disbelieved once interacted with. Each Pylon looks like an immense chess pawn: it is a thick tapering shaft crowned by a flat platform upon which sits a stone ball forty feet in diameter. The interior of the Pylon is an open area, like would be found in a tall tower or keep. The platform and stone ball are dozens or hundreds of feet off the ground. It is not easy to reach the platform (usually, it requires a long ladder, massive lifting cranes, or magic), but the platform of a Pylon is a safe place. The platforms are sixty feet square, providing plenty of room around the huge sphere attached to the center of the platform. Objects and creatures that walk to the edge of the platform experience a light but strong gust of air that gently pushes them back from the edge. This gust is not strong—a halfling could jump from the platform, if he really wanted to—but it's powerful enough to keep most objects or creatures from accidentally falling off the platform.

The ball is the center of the Pylon's power. Extending out in a straight line from the ball atop each Pylon is a column of magical energy forty feet wide. This beam of energy is arrow-straight over a hundred miles, connecting each ball to the others. Since there are three Pylons, each Pylon has two beams extending from it to the other two Pylons. These beams create a triangle of magical energy, like aerial ley lines, over the Viscounty.

These beams of magical energy are semisolid cylinders of air forty feet wide. These beams are normally invisible, but they show up clearly against mist or rough weather, as the air within the beams is always calm and clear. Items and creatures within the beams are subject to a magical effect much like the air walk spell, allowing them to move within the airy beams as though on solid ground. Creatures can walk up, down, forward or backward within the cylinder quite easily. Unattended objects generally hang in the air wherever they are placed, but they do have momentum; you could throw a rock at someone else while in the column, for example. Pushing into the beam is easy, but pushing back out again is more difficult. Creatures and objects attempting to leave the

cylinder experience a gust of air similar to, but more powerful than, the gusts that ward the edges of the platforms on the Pylons. Pushing out of a beam from the inside, or pushing an item out, requires a DC 12 Strength check.

The air within the beams is always calm, dry and slightly warm. Rain striking the beam rolls off its sides, keeping those within dry. Strong winds are deflected by the beam, as the air within is always calm. Unpleasant weather effects are an exception to the general rule that items can easily enter one of the beams. This weather-deflecting effect is why the beams are easy to discern in bad weather although they are normally invisible (as they are made of only air and magical energy). Weather effects created within the beams—such as from a gust of wind spell—work normally, but if the effect leaves the beam it cannot reenter.

TRAVEL ON THE SKYROAD

A traveler can easily walk any direction, including up and down, within the beam. Although he is walking on air a hundred feet or more above the ground, he feels firm ground beneath his feet, angled slightly down as though to make walking easier. Even animals can walk within these beams, although most require a little extra training or encouragement in order to overcome the unfamiliar sensation of being high above the ground.

Birds and other flying creatures can travel in the beams easily by simply flying, but the gusts of wind can keep very small and weak birds from leaving the beams. Travelers can trap birds captured within the beams fairly easily, and therefore travelers along the beams have a ready source of food while in the beams. Thrusting a hand or a cup outside the beams during a rainstorm allows a traveler to collect clean rainwater to drink.

Wagons and carts are particularly easy to use in the beams, since the slight downhill grade makes pulling them easier. Reduce the weight of a wagon, cart, or anything carried inside a wagon or cart by half for the purposes of pulling it, to reflect the ease in pulling it along in the beams. More impressively, a four-wheeled vehicle—such as a wagon or carriage—given a good shove will roll on its own along the beam, picking up speed as it goes. The gust of air is generally sufficient to nudge a wagon straying near the edge of the beam back on track. A wagon will quickly pick up speed over about fifteen minutes until it reaches a top speed of about 30 miles an hour (or 300 feet per round). Any conveyance had best have good brakes, or the wagon is sure to smash

into splinters against the ball at the other end of its journey.

One of the Pylons is found in the Gnarley Forest, several miles east of the town of Taymouth. Another is found high in the Kron Hills, in the isolated hills between the town of Kron and Gallow's Corner. The third is deep in the Iron Wood, several miles northwest of the town of Glory. The beams are perfectly straight and perfectly horizontal, so the Pylons anchoring the beams to the ground are of different heights. The Pylon in the Gnarley Forest is the tallest, at just under two hundred feet. It rises above all but the tallest trees of that vast wood. The Pylon in the Iron Wood also rises above the mist-shrouded trees of that wood, just over one hundred and fifty feet tall. The Kron Hills Pylon is the shortest, as it is set high in the hills, and is only seventy feet above the ground; the ball is larger than the tower it sits on, making this tower look like a huge stone ball on a tall, round base.

Traveling the beams is safe and fast. Bandits, rough terrain and bad weather pose no difficulty. At a moderate walking pace, a journey of 100 miles along a beam (from one end of the Viscounty to the other) takes a walking man only four days. In a wagon rolling along on its own, but kept to a reasonably safe speed of 10 miles per hour by regular braking, the journey can be made in a single day. For all these reasons, the beams are popularly called the Skyroad.

WHO MADE THE SKYROAD?

The Pylons and the Skyroad were built by elven artificers long before the coming of man to the region now called Verbobonc. The elves would lift themselves and their cargo to the tops of the Pylons with a kind of mystic elevator, a modified version of Tenser's floating disk.

The Skyroad was used for generations by the elves, but resistance to its use grew over time. Elven druids saw the artificiality of the Skyroad as a danger, as the Skyroad disrupted natural weather patterns. Worse, some terrible tragedy occurred to the Skyroad system. Perhaps an evil creature siphoned off the immense energies powering the Skyroad and enacted some terrible, long-forgotten ritual. Perhaps the druids sabotaged the Skyroad, causing catastrophic failures (and many deaths by falling). In any case, the Pylons were shut down by the elves and trapped by the druids to prevent anyone from reactivating the Skyroad again. The Pylons were concealed by powerful illusions.

In time, knowledge of the Pylons and the Skyroad faded. The once-proud elves retreated into isolated communities. Only a few of their number now remain as the Mist Children elves of the Iron Wood. Their

ancestral legends speak, but only in the vaguest terms, of the danger the Pylons represent.

The Pylons have stood for hundreds of years, thought by most that have discovered them to be just three more of the mysterious elven ruins that dot the forgotten places of the Viscounty of Verbobonc. None remembered their interconnectedness and significance as the anchors of the Skyroad.

MAGISTER HAR AND THE SKYROAD

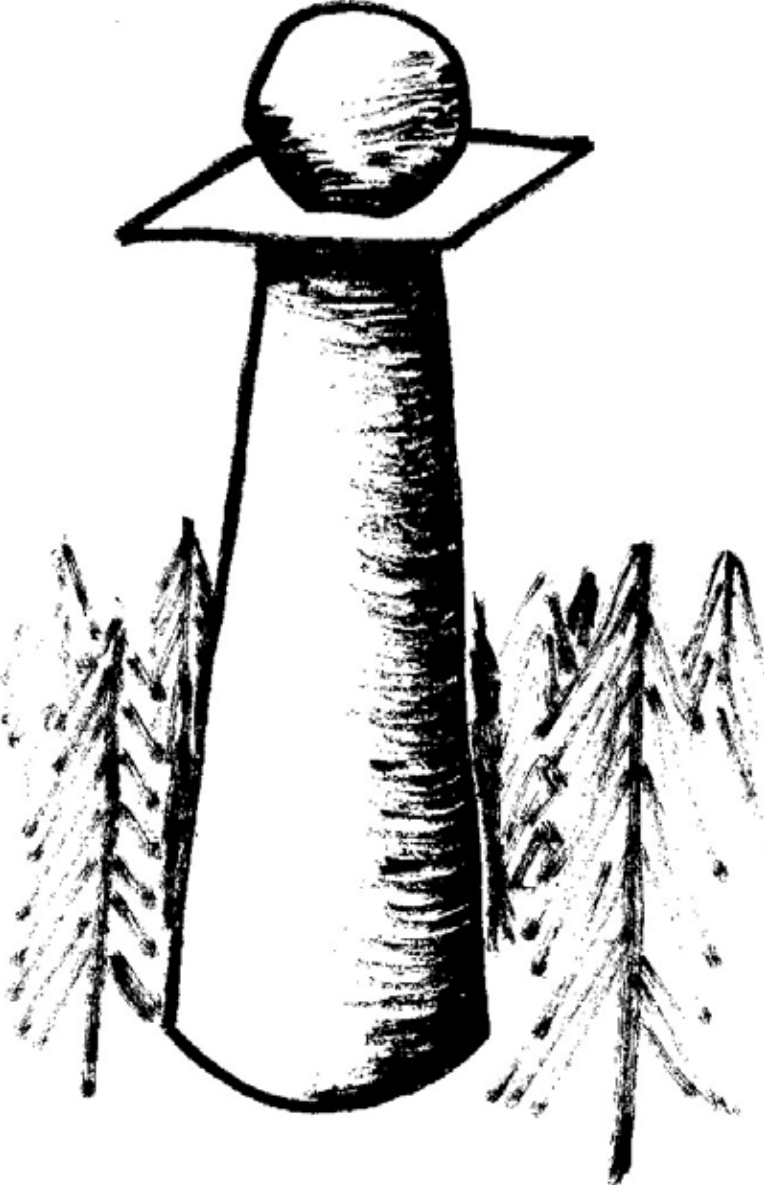
Forty years ago, a young gnome wizard working in a secluded library in the Kron Hills learned of the Skyroad from an ancient elven text. This gnome, named Obble Har, had been performing experiments in collecting the residual magical energies of Verbobonc for years. Obble Har had already discovered that three immense beams of magical energy had been seared through the skies of Verbobonc, centuries old but now powerless. He learned of the Skyroad, the Pylons, and the boon to travel they had been. The clever gnome also realized the Skyroad might have another effect as well, but he kept all of this lore to himself. Perhaps, after many years of preparation, Obble Har could empower the Skyroad again and set his plans into motion...

APPENDIX 4: ILLUSTRATIONS

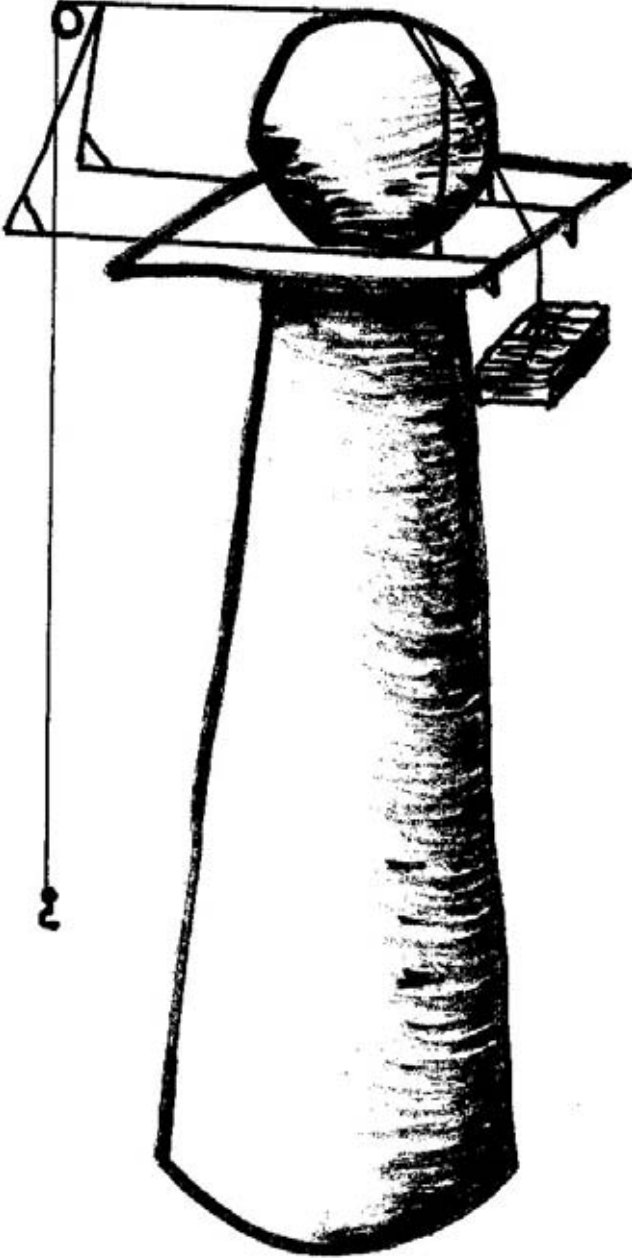
LORD ROLAND GALANS



PYLON NEAR TAYMOUTH – INITIAL VIEW

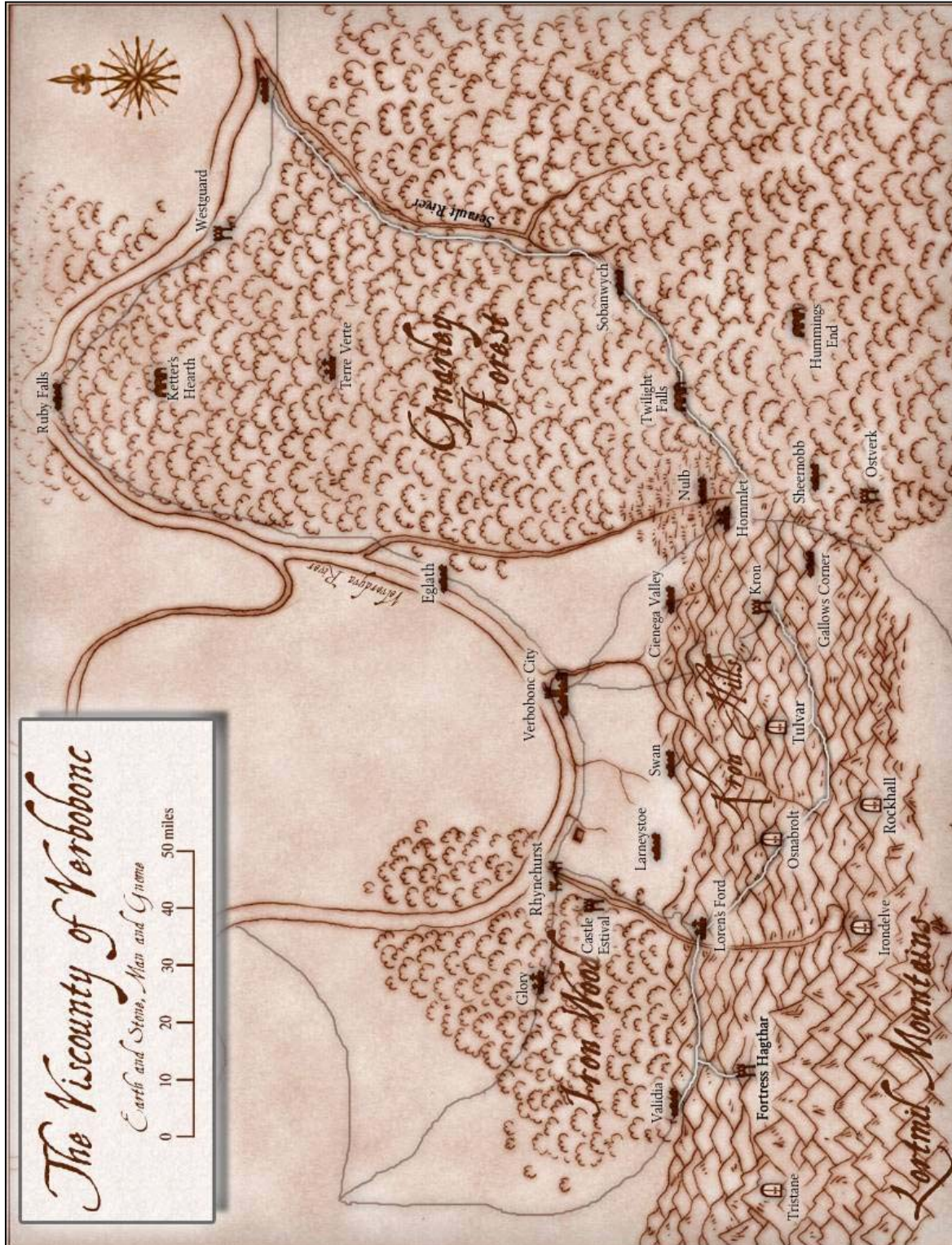


PYLON NEAR TAYMOUTH – VIEW WITH CRANE IN PLACE



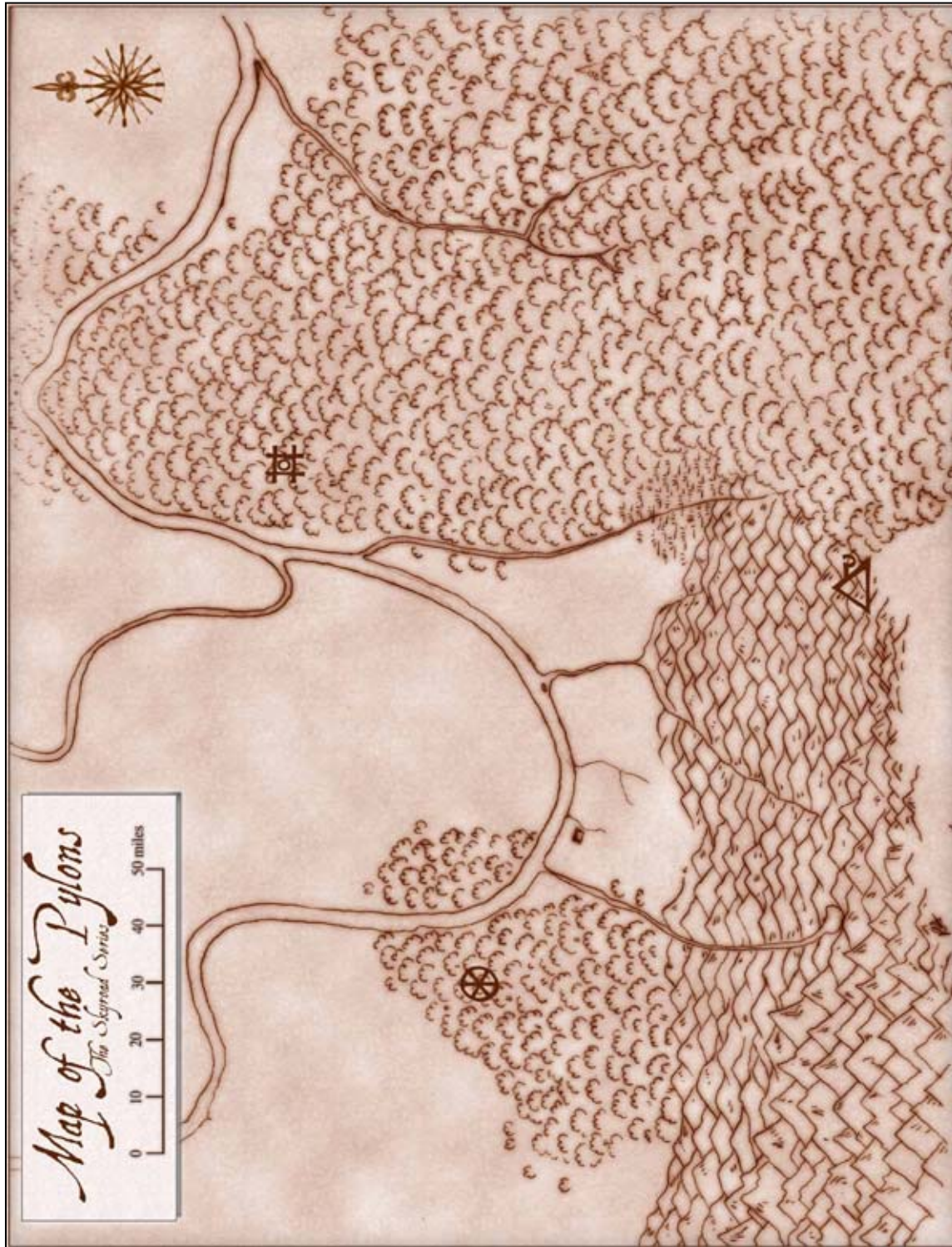
MAP 1: MAP OF VERBOBONC

This map shows the layout of the Viscounty of Verbobonc. The adventure begins in Taymouth, and ends in the Kron Hills near Gallow's Corner.

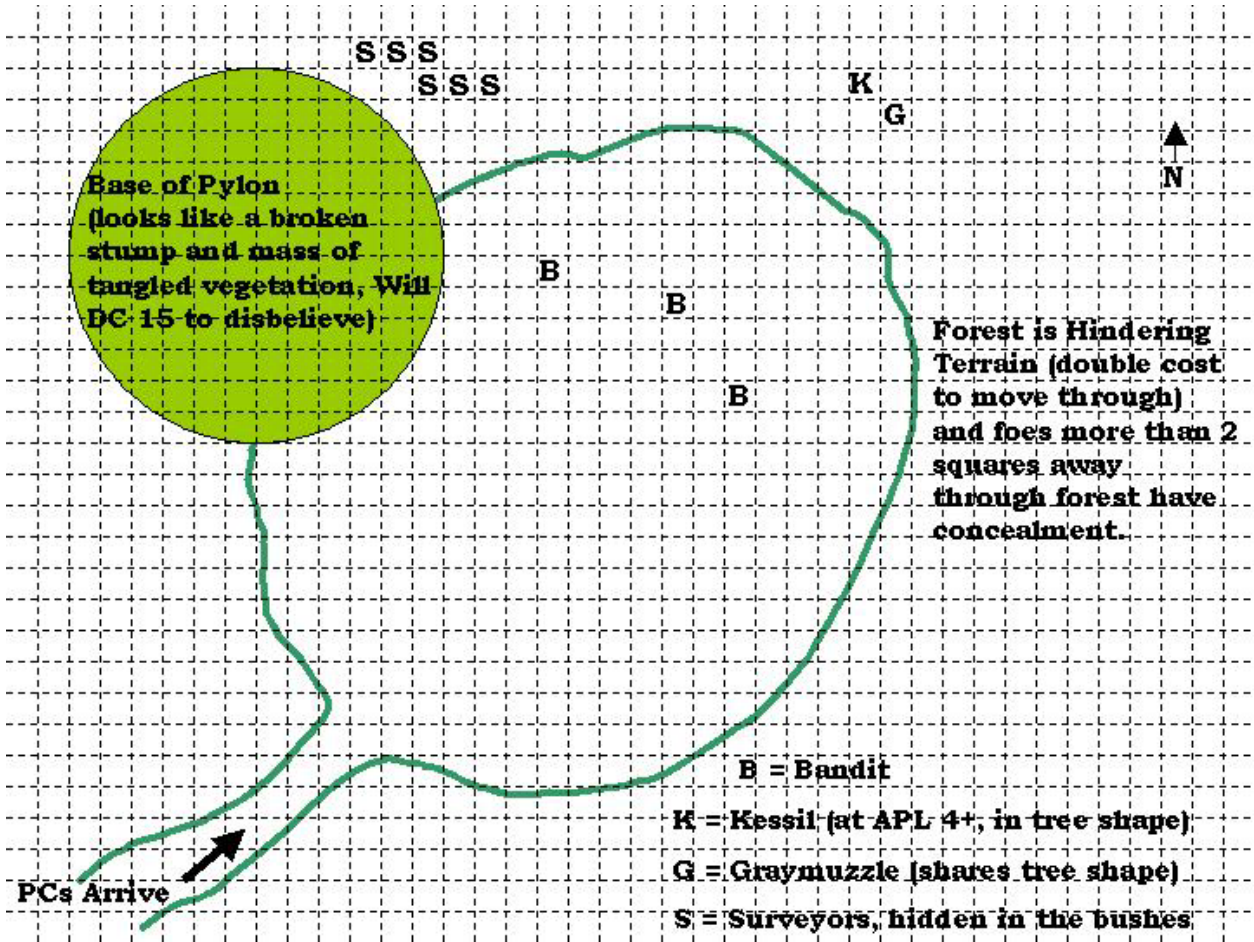


MAP 2: PYLONS MAP

This map shows the locations of the three Pylons. On this adventure, the PCs travel along the Skyroad from the Pylon near Taymouth to the Pylon in the Kron Hills.

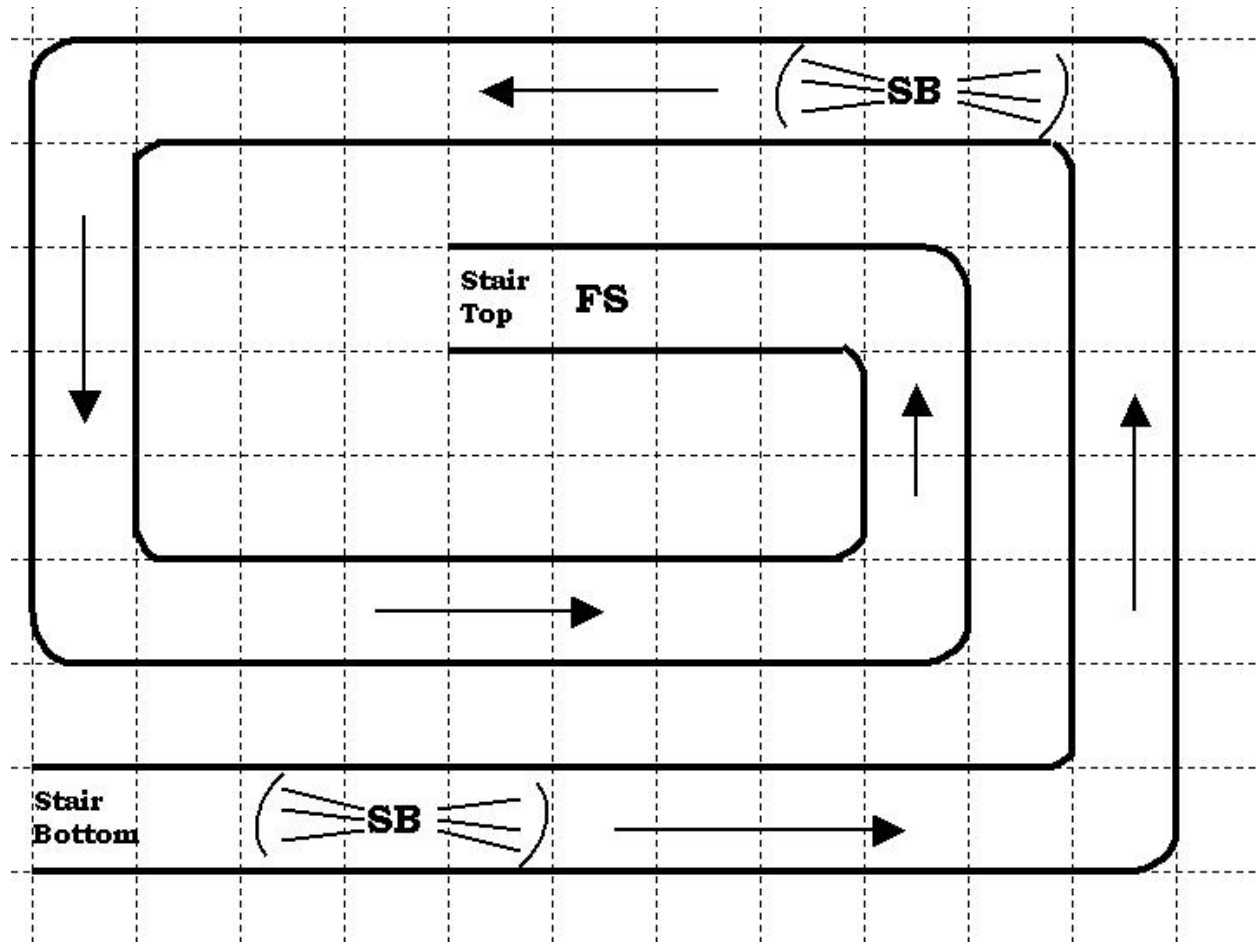


MAP 3: ENCOUNTER TWO



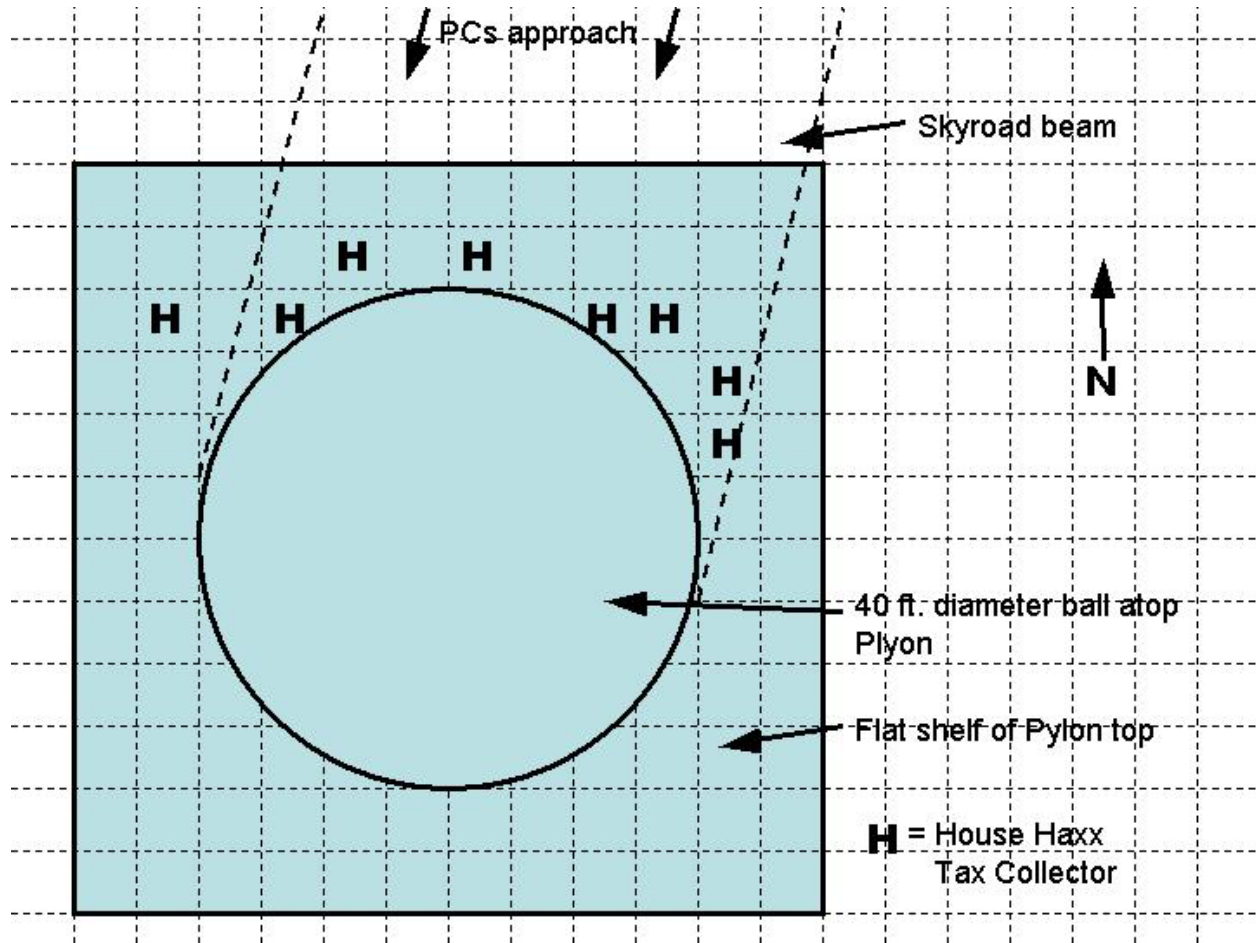
MAP 4: INSIDE THE PYLON

A setup like this can help you keep track of which PC is where on the stairs winding up the inside of the Pylon. This map helps with positioning only; the interior of the Pylon is circular and spirals around above itself. The two *sandblast* traps ("SB") and the *flaming sphere* trap ("FS") are indicated on this map. If a PC should jump or fall from the stairs, he falls about two-thirds of the distance up the stairs he was located (round down to the nearest 10 feet increment). For example, a PC 90 feet up the stairs falls 60 feet straight down to the floor of the tower. A PC 200 feet up the stairs falls 130 feet straight down to the floor of the tower.



MAP 5: ENCOUNTER EIGHT

Note: A fall off the flat top of the Pylon results in a 30 ft. fall to the ground.



APPENDIX FIVE: SUMMARY OF VERBOBONC CRIMES

The following is a summary of crimes and penalties in Verbobonc. For more information, refer to the regional campaign document: *Laws of the Viscounty: A Guide to Justice in the Viscounty of Verbobonc*.

Crime	Class	Penalty
Arson	High	500 gp +, 1 TU
Assault	Low	50 gp OR 1,000 gp, 2 TU
Banditry	High	Forfeiture of all possessions, 1 TU per 100 gp of stolen goods.
Battery	Low	200 gp OR 2,000 gp, 10 TU
Blackmail	High	90% of wealth, 26 TU
Blasphemy	High	Public whipping
Burglary	Low	200 gp, 2 TU OR 1,000 gp, 10 TU
Destruction of Noble's Property	High	Cost of repairs, 1 TU per 1,000 gp of damage
Disturbing the Peace	Low	Up to 450 gp and/or 1 TU
Extortion	High	90% of wealth, 26 TU
Forgery	Low	Confiscation of all possessions, 13 TU, loss of finger
Fraud Against a Noble	High	Forfeiture of all possessions, 26 TU OR death
Grave Robbing	Low	Confiscation of carried goods, 1,000 gp, 5 TU OR confiscation of carried goods, 5,000 gp, 13 TU
Impersonation of a Noble	High	Forfeiture of wealth and all possessions, 52 TU OR death
Interfering with the Representative of a Noble	Low	Up to 300 gp, 4 TU
Kidnapping	High	Confiscation of goods carried, 1,000 gp, 26 TU OR confiscation of goods carried, 10,000 gp fine, 104 TU, and loss of eye and hand.
Magical Assault	High	Confiscation of spellbooks, 500 gp, 4 TU OR confiscation of spellbooks and goods carried, 2,000 gp, 13 TU, and loss of ear.
Malicious Mischief	Low	Up to 1,000 gp, up to 4 TU, and full reimbursement of property value
Manslaughter	High	Forfeiture of all equipment, property, and wealth, 52 TU.
Murder	High	Death
Negligent Use of Magic	High	Confiscation of spellbooks, 500 gp, 4 TU OR confiscation of spellbooks and goods carried, 2,000 gp, 13 TU, and loss of ear.
Ownership of Illegal Goods	Low	Varies
Perjury	High	600 gp, 8 TU
Piracy	High	Confiscation of all wealth, 500 gp, 10 TU OR confiscation of all wealth, 2,000 gp, 26 TU, and loss of eye.
Robbery	High	Confiscation of goods carried, 1,000 gp, 10 TU OR confiscation of goods carried, 5,000 gp, 26 TU, loss of hand
Sedition	High	13 TU
Theft	Low	Confiscation of goods carried, 200 gp, 5 TU OR confiscation of goods carried, 1,000 gp, 12 TU, loss of finger
Treason	High	Forfeiture of all possessions, property, and wealth, and death by hanging, draw and quartering, or stoning.
Trespassing	Low	20gp – 500 gp

PLAYER HANDOUT 1: TRAVELING THE SKYROAD

Fun with cutouts! The Skyroad is forty feet wide. You will be traveling with the three carts depicted on the next page. You will also be traveling with three gnome teamsters, three engineers (two humans, one dwarf—“Engineer 1” is the dwarf), and an enormous water clock to mark the passage of time and, of course, Threnodee the dust mephit. Use the cutouts on the next page and the following guidelines to show the DM the setup of your travel down the Skyroad:

1. The wagons are 2 squares wide and 3 squares long. The lighter-colored squares are the front seats, and are slightly higher than the 10 ft. square area in the back. The wagons have shallow sides, so there isn't any worry about rolling out of them.
2. One gnome teamster must be in one of the lead squares in each wagon (preferably the one to the right, but they'll take either). This is the driver of the wagon. The three gnomes prefer to drive, one to each wagon, but let a PC with at least 4 ranks in Profession (teamster) drive, if the PC really insists. Although the wagons won't have horses, the gnome teamsters control the steering of the wagon by traces attached to the shafts connected to the front axle and the brake on the right front wheel.
3. The engineers prefer to split up among the carts to take measurements and the like, but they don't really care where they're put. However, at least one engineer must be adjacent to the water clock, to keep an eye on it (it doesn't matter which one).
4. All of the NPCs prefer the wagons to be at least five feet apart from each other (that is, not adjacent), or they're worried that the wagons will bump into each other. At high speeds, that's not good. The wagons can travel in a line or side-by-side, or a combination of the two, as you see fit.
5. If you are clever at 3-D modeling, and if your DM decides to allow this level of complexity, count the wagons as 10 feet high each (to account for the height of the passengers, height of the wheels, and so on) and determine whether you want any carts higher than the others (even on top of each other). Again, the carts probably shouldn't be adjacent (they have to have a 5 ft. space between them for comfort). The teamsters are not exceptionally brave and prefer flat ground, so they aren't comfortable with this. Unless you're fairly persuasive, they'd rather ride on the same plane as the other wagons, just like they were on the ground together.

