
Symbaroum
THISTLE HOLD
Wrath of the Warden
THE FIRST EPISODE IN THE CHRONICLE OF THE THRONE OF THORNS

”Dreaming I was carried to the hall,
fell with the leaves to mossy floors beneath eerie vaults.

I settled afore a regal seat; of human design,
from oaktree and pine, a terrible thorn-covered throne.

And carried by the seat a being,
the father of ruin and mother of hope, in flesh, in blood.”

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The Flagship is Launched!

FIFTEEN YEARS AGO WHEN WE STARTED WRITING our first major adventure campaign for the Swedish roleplaying game Mutant: Heirs of Doom, we established one primary guideline: we were to design it so that we would love to both read and play it ourselves. Thistle Hold – Wrath of the Warden has been created in that same spirit and we couldn't be happier with the result. Our hope is that this book will be as warmly received internationally as it was upon reaching our Swedish gamers, and that you will yearn for the sequel as intensely as we are yearning to start translating it.

Now, go ahead and enjoy the town of Thistle Hold! And for the sake of Prios, be sure to deal with the circumstances explaining why the warden is so wrathful. If you manage to pull through, new and more demanding challenges will be waiting for you on the cliff of the High Chieftain and the Huldra, Karvosti.

Happy gaming!

TEAM JÄRNRINGEN



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The Battle for...

... THE THRONE OF THORNS BEGINS IN THISTLE HOLD!

It has been said that the town in the shadow of the great forest is like a shielded island located where a foaming ocean breaks against jagged rocks. Ambria, unruly and beset by growing pains, would be the ocean; the unforgiving horrors of Davokar the rocks and the waves would be the flood of humans fleeing north from despair and misery.



THE ANALOGY HAS its merits, but also reflects a romantic idea that a wooden palisade and strict regulations can function as an effective shield against the forces of nature. Sure, Thistle Hold is in many ways both safer and less chaotic compared to the nearby Blackmoor, and it offers comforts which one can only dream of in other parts of the Ambrian realm. But one should absolutely not be duped into believing that the safety and comforts benefit everyone living in the Hold. And, above all, one should never feel confident that serenity is unthreatened.

The book in your hand expands on the description of Thistle Hold included in the *Core Rulebook* and features the first part of Symbaroum's adventure chronicle, *The Throne of Thorns*. It is composed of three sections: the first written to be read by both players and GMs, the second designed for GMs alone, and the final part consisting of the adventure *Wrath of the Warden*.

The initial section is meant to give the players (and GM) a basic understanding of the Hold, as if their characters had lived there for more than a few nights. The idea is that this will make the players (and thereby the player characters) able to navigate the streets and establishments of the town without the GM leading them by the hand. It should be noted that the text assumes the reader is familiar with the Core Book's descriptions of Thistle Hold, even if it repeats or references some details in passing.

THUS SPOKE AROALETA

"... and the malaise lingers, in earth and rock, in water and air; besets all which breathes, which swallows, which wanders and crawls and flies. The gift of Eneáno must not be shunned, nor be seen as the salvation."

Player Preparation

At various download stores, gamers can purchase a standalone eBook containing the first section of this book, The Hunter's Harbor. The GM can use this instead of needing to circulate the entire book among the players for them to have a chance to get to know Thistle Hold as well as their characters probably do.

The second part of the book is aptly called The Game Master's Section and describes the truth behind Thistle Hold's façade. It explains events unknown to the public, regarding Thistle Hold's history and the powerful factions operating in the town. It also lists a great many secrets the GM may use to create homebrew adventures or fuel even longer campaigns.

Additionally, Section 2 includes three chapters not directly tied to the town itself. The first one offers some hints and suggestions on how to use the book's setting for so called Goal Oriented Roleplaying, where the ambitions of the characters decide what happens – in this case, based on the goals to a) establish an outpost, and b) stage an expedition. The chapter that follows presents two ruins waiting to be explored; the Game Master can determine the exact location of the ruins and has great freedom to develop what will happen if the player characters find their way there. Finally, the Game Master's Section closes with a chapter detailing new rules relevant for different parts of the book.

The remainder of the book is dedicated to the adventure *Wrath of the Warden*. Its composition is more closely described on page 80, but for starters: it is mainly set in Thistle Hold and the design is primarily meant to introduce the players (and player characters) to the chronicle's frame story and most prominent factions. Aside from that, our hope is, of course, that the adventure will provide you and your friends with many thrilling, intense and entertaining hours around the gaming table!



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

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



SECTION 1:

THE HUNTER'S HARBOR

The Border Town



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

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

THEN THERE ARE all those who never consider farming or construction work, those whose adamant intent is in contributing to the aim set forth by the Queen – to make the treasures of Davokar the property of the Ambrian realm. This despite the fact that a majority of those trying to realize the dream quickly find it transformed into a nightmare.

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

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

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



First impressions

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

Initially it may seem as if the expectations correspond with reality. No building is more than eight years old, the atmosphere is void of shouting peddlers and noise from building sites, and the main streets are so free from debris that one might suspect someone wipes them clean every morning (which they actually do). However, it does not take more than a couple of days and nights before it becomes obvious this apparent idyll comes at a price.

Each and every day you can witness grim guards of the Town Watch escorting one or more inhabitants, apathetic or furious, to the South Gate. Everyone knows that if the person happened to have some belongings the guards will confiscate these on behalf of the Mayor, as compensation for warranted payments or as punishment for crimes committed. And as soon as the villain emerges onto the Southern Highroad, he or she is forever banned from even visiting the Hold.

Other spots of soot and mildew soon appear on the façade. While public displays of drunkenness and aggression figure frequently upon the street called Haloban's Ring, other parts of town treat such behavior with a stretch on the cold stone floor of the Penitentiary. And even the most compliant visitor can become the target of imprisonment or a flogging, if he displeases the Town Watch or some

"The age-old cauldron hanging over the fireplace at the Ruin Inn is actually a helmet belonging to the arch troll Oxvog. The troll still lives and would no doubt reward whoever returned the powerful artifact to him."

prominent resident. Protesting hardly helps in a town where repeated defiance is enough to become banished.

On the other hand ... if one refuses to give in to the strong arm of the law and stays a while in the town, it will soon become apparent that there are ways to avoid detection. As long as you steer clear of talkative witnesses, place a bribe in the right hand, and carefully consider whom your actions might anger you can often get the job done.

When you hear someone say that *"Thistle Hold lives in the shadows"* this is what they mean – in cover of darkness, in alleys and nooks, behind closed doors and shutters thrives that which would never be allowed under a clear blue sky. Contraband is trafficked in and out of town, artifacts are bought and sold without the Mayor getting his cut, people are murdered or severely beaten, and both stores and residences are burgled. There are even those who, convincingly, claim that both members of the Iron Pact and blight-marked cultists live inside the palisade.

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

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

Memorable Events

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

The incidents described in this section speak both of the history of the Hold and about what it is like to live there. Even if many occurred at a time when Thistle Hold was smaller and less well protected, all of them could be repeated one way or another, something which the residents tend to underline. Because although the palisade stands strong it can be breached, and once the hull has been punctured an intruder can quickly cause catastrophic damage.

THE JEZITES' DOWNFALL (YEAR 10)

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

Most people believe that Queen Korinthia had managed to persuade some members of the clan to betray their master by sabotaging the gates of the fortress, but other stories attribute the sabotage to the heroic actions of a group of Queen's Rangers. And regarding the clan's destruction, several diverse stories are told. Some say that also women and children died fighting, others that most Jezites went up in flames with the hall where they were hiding, and there are even those who maintain that the clan members died in a mass suicide.

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

THE ATTACK OF ELOAN-EO (YEAR 13)

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

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

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

THE BIRTH OF THE BEACON (YEAR 15)

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

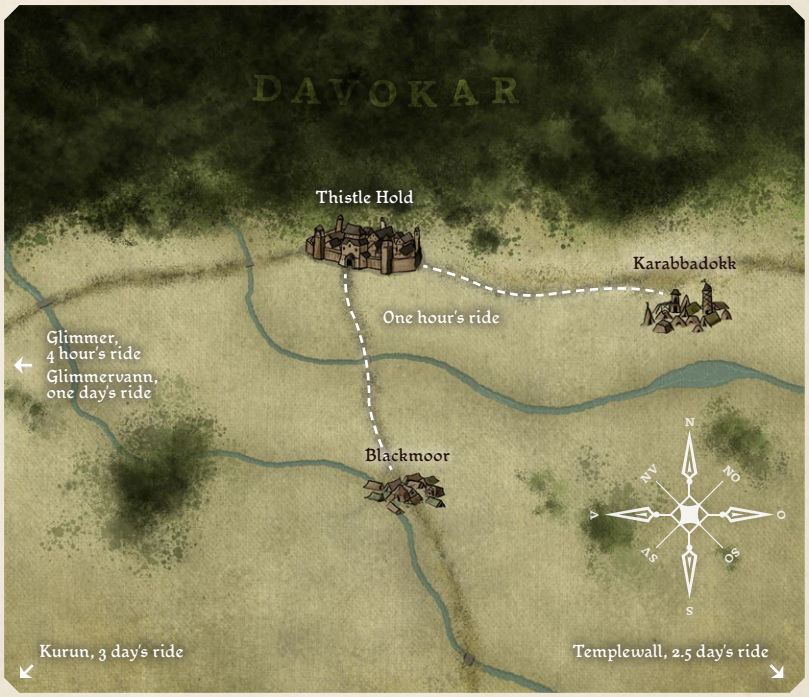
Then the construction claimed numerous lives. The first design was nearly a hundred feet high when it suddenly collapsed – sabotage said the contractor; faulty calculations claimed others. Irrespective of which, two ogres and five goblins died in the collapse, along with four young treasure hunters who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

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

THE TINY GLADIATRESS (YEAR 15)

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

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



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

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

THE BLOOD SPRAY DISEASE (YEAR 16)

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

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



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

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

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

THE TRIUMPH OF IASOGOI (YEAR 16)

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

The trade in antiquities flourished for six months thanks to Iasogoi's bounty. And that is unique. Sure, Lysindra Goldengrasp has contributed to filling the stocks of the antique dealers and Gorakai the Younger returned from the



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

aqueducts of Clearwater laden with treasure. But never again has the market been flooded with items like it was when Iasogoi Brigo returned from Akkona's Catacombs, located under the ruined city of Odaban.

THE MERCHANTS' WAR (YEAR 17)

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

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

AN ABOMINATION AMONGST US (YEAR 17)

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

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

The abomination slew a dozen persons before it almost flew up the palisade and vanished into Davokar. The speculations regarding the event were and remain many. However, the most popular theory has to do with an explorer named Tarleo who had been executed for murdering a greedy antique dealer that same day. Maybe the blight beast was one of the assistants Tarelo lost during his disastrous expedition to the sunken castle Manon Melas?

THE DEATH NIGHT (YEAR 18)

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

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

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

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

Rumors

In the margins of this book you will find a collection of rumors, mirroring what can be heard on the town's streets and squares, often spoken in a whispering voice. Most likely more than half of them are pure fabrications and the rest infected by mix-ups or exaggerations. But who knows, maybe even those rumors contain some grains of truth...

Establishments & Authorities

OVER THE YEARS, THISTLE HOLD has become more and more densely built and with the increasing population the need for taverns, amusements and shops has increased. This chapter presents a collection of popular or for some other reason notable establishments, together with a number of authoritative institutions which are important for running the town.

Taverns

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

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

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

AFADIR'S TRIUMPH TAVERN

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

However, sometimes things go wrong. During the summer of year 18, more than twenty people got sick and four died because an ambitious kitchen hand thought that he had found the perfect surrogate for the herb chervil – often used to flavor buttered turnips. Unfortunately, the substitute



TAVERNS

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

INNS

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

ENTERTAINMENT

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

TRADE

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

OTHER

27. The Town Seat
28. Nighthome
29. The Sun Temple
30. The Queen's Legation
31. Ordo Magica
32. The Mission House
33. Mother Mehira's
34. The Town Watch
35. The Beacon
36. The Merchants' House
37. Monastery
38. The High Chieftain's Envoy
39. The Penitentiary

SQUARES & PARKS

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

Facts on Thistle Hold

Founded: Year 13 after the Victory
Mayor: Lasifor Nightpitch
Law & Order: Town Watch (150 watchmen)
Primary income source: Tolls and taxes
Building technique: Wooden houses, 2–4 stories
Number of residents: about 6 000
Daily visitors: about 4 000
Neighbors: Blackmoor, the goblin tribe Karabbadokk and the villages Glimmer and Glimmervann.
Notable residents: Mayor Nightpitch, the treasure hunter Iasogoi Brigo, the Queen's legate Suria Argona, the heretic Sarvola, the theurg Father Elfeno and the trouble maker Serex Attio.

proved to be toxic and the young boy himself immune to its effects. Instead of a promotion, he suffered ten days in the block before he was executed by hanging. Afadir paid the large fines and swore in the name of Prios never to let anyone repeat such a mistake.

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

BREW

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

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

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

THE SLAUGHTERHOUSE

In two neighboring houses on a back street close to the Toad's Square lays The Slaughterhouse. One is the actual slaughterhouse, the other a tavern that can take about a hundred guests at the long tables. The menu mainly consists of offal – heart, liver, stuffed lung and various pasty stews.

It is cheap but not the least distasteful, and if you are prepared to pay more there is newly butchered fine meats to order, slow cooked or sautéed in sun-yellow butter.

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

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

ODOVAKAR

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

Just like all other barbarian-owned establishments, Odovakar is the target of everything from scorn and derision to pure vandalism. The guilty parties often belong to one of two groups: they are either treasure hunters with scars after encounters with barbarians, or the type of fanatical Prios-followers who regard anything barbarian as an aspect of Davokar's wildness and evil. Mayor Nightpitch has made it clear: all who have been allowed to live inside the palisade are first and foremost to be regarded as residents of the Hold, wherever they come from. On the other hand, such statements are hardly any comfort to the relatives and friends of all those who have been banned or even incarcerated because of their, according to the relatives, reasonable actions.

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

THE GRUBBERY

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

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

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

Entertainment

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

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

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

SPECTACLE

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

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

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

BENEGO'S

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

At the tables on the ground floor the stakes are quite modest, playing dice or Prios' Sun – a strategy game based on an ancient mechanic with bricks of different values, which was developed and grew popular during the war against the Dark Lords. On the upper floor, and especially in the private chambers, there is no limit to the bets placed. A tall tale tells of a game that really went out of control, which ended with the opponents betting their body

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

parts during the final rounds. One of them cut off an ear and added it to the already huge fortune laying on the table; the other one called him on the ear and raised him three fingers from the left hand. And so it continued, with toes, eyes, tongues and lips until one of them decided to live large and literally placed his heart on the table. The loser left with his life and the winner's family could live like nobles for the following six months, until the winnings were spent.

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

LEGENDS

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

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

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

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

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

THE ABOMITORIUM

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

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

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

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

Inns

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

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

THE COURT AND HARP

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

Of course, this requires that you can afford it, and also that you are able to dress and behave like a fairly decent person. The innkeeper Aragina, who has taken over the business from her dead husband, will never accept dirt or bad manners, and she has no problem expressing her opinions publicly. She has given up on getting the Town Watch to help her with difficult guests; it is commonly known that she resorts to other methods for getting rid of them. She orders members of staff not to clean the guest's rooms, to bang at the door with irrelevant questions in the middle of the night and to "happen" to serve moldy bread and watered beverages at supper. In recent days, there have also been rumors saying that some of the more unkempt guests at the Court and Harp have been brutally beaten and robbed. Can it be that the widow has taken to paying less scrupulous individuals to teach the louts a lesson in manners?

THE WINGED LADLE

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

When Nighthome was finished Lasifor left his eagle's nest, but the tree was left standing and since then a second floor and two annexes has been added to the crown house. Today the inn has sixteen rooms, which often are booked in advance by nobles and dignitaries planning to visit the town. However, if you are lucky, a cancellation has been made and left a few beds available for hire. And surely it can be worth both the high cost and the climb up the stair winding along the trunk,

Table 1: The Cost for Lodging in Thistle Hold

QUALITY	EXAMPLE	1 NIGHT	1 WEEK	1 MONTH	OWNERSHIP
Exclusive	The Court and Harp, The Winged Ladle	1 thaler	—	—	—
Fine	The Seamstress' Rest, The Ruin	2 shillings	1 thaler	4 thaler	—
Ordinary	The Witch and Familiar, Arkerio's	1 shilling	5 shillings	2 thaler	—
Simple	The Rose Garden, The Barrack	5 orteg	2 shillings	1 thaler	—
Rent nice	Three rooms at the Antique Plaza	—	2 thaler	10 thaler	—
Rent ordinary	Three rooms at the West Gate	—	1 thaler	4 thaler	—
Rent simple	One room east of the Toad's Square	—	5 shillings	2 thaler	—
Buy nice	Three rooms at the Antique Plaza	—	—	—	500 thaler
Buy ordinary	Three rooms at the West Gate	—	—	—	300 thaler
Buy simple	One room east of the Toad's Square	—	—	—	100 thaler



because even if the final statement is a poetic lie there is some truth to the text painted on the sign at the bottom of the stair: *"Warmly welcome to the Winged Ladle – the inn that offers heavenly dining, divine drinks and beds as soft as clouds at down to earth prices".*

THE WITCH AND FAMILIAR

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

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

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

THE ROSEGARDEN

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

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

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

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

RENT A TENT

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

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

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

Trade

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

When the town was young, only a few artisans had established their business in the area and most of them were occupied producing material for new constructions. Hence, the commoner who wanted to purchase explorer's equipment, household utensils or weapons could have to wait for months. But then a witty man named Marvalom got an idea on how to make some serious thaler from the situation. He sent his oldest daughter to Yndaros, tasked to purchase viable appliances in the capital and send them to be marketed in the Hold. And so the Store was born, a business form which thereafter has been seen to take root all across the Ambrian realm.

The Rope and Axe

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

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

The Queen's Square

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

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

Big-Basher's Smithy

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

Aside from the owner himself, two novices, one adept and three goblins work in the shop – the latter ones claimed to be the most privileged Karabbadokks in town. The goblins handle the bellows, shuffle coal and greet customers, always with a welcoming, pointy-toothed grin. The adept Vania crafts appliances of standard quality and sometimes even the novices perform well enough for their creations to be sold. But if you want weapons or armor of really high standard you have to

order them directly from the master smith himself (see the rule Mastercraft, page 76). The items take longer to make and cost more, but on the other hand they can mean the difference between life and death when facing the horrors of Davokar.

THE THALER'S DRUGSTORE

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

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

THE TREASURY

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

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

KODOMAR'S HUCKERY

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

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

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

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

Knowledge & Information

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

Also, there are lots of ways to gain crucial information in Thistle Hold. It seldom comes for free and



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

you have to be careful not to trust just anyone with your secrets; treasure hunters are often utterly deceived, prior to or after having returned from an expedition into the depths of Davokar. Charlatans claiming to know everything there is to know about the targeted site may very well be full of lies, leading to deficient preparations and thereby to a disastrous outcome. And the explorer who reveals his valuable knowledge to some lore master may be told that it is useless, only to later learn that the same information has been used to guide an expedition that returned laden with treasure. Caution is a virtue to the residents of the Promised Land, in all conceivable ways.

Rules on how to search for information in archives, libraries and the like are found on page 75 of this book.

ORDO MAGICA

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

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

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

THE LEGATION

The Queen's Legation must also be mentioned among the credible sources of information in town, at least in some areas. Suria Argona has two notaries employed, with the express task of



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

recording everything that has to do with Queen Korinthia's grandiose endeavor. Hence, the shelves of the cellar vault are jam-packed with books and scrolls, describing huge as well as small events in the history and development of the region. Searching the archives for information costs one thaler per hour, but an alternative is to trade for the time – that is, you agree to tell the notaries of some more or less significant event that they are interested in preserving for posterity.

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

THE KARABBADOKKS

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

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

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

AGDALA

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

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

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

DODRAMOS

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

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

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

Authorities

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

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

It is said that there are very few conflicts between organizations like Ordo Magica, the Sun Church and the noble houses in Thistle Hold, much fewer than in the other cities of the realm. Of course, the reason for this is that Lasifor Nightpitch has little to no patience with cock fights and that Korinthia allows him to decide who gets to live and function within the palisade. But then there are some know-it-alls who claim that the factions in town indeed are fighting with each other, only that they, chiefly and thus far, do so behind the scenes. And surely there may be some truth to such claims, because no matter how powerful Mayor Nightpitch may be he would hardly stand a chance if the likes of First Father Jeseebegai or Grand Master Seldonio were provoked into action.

THE SUN TEMPLE

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

To the temple anyone can go for spiritual guidance, treatment for diseases and ailments, and not least to have the priests scatter the darkness of a clouded mind. There are also those who turn to the temple after having been exposed to the corruption of Davokar, but for those the priests cannot do much more than pray for the mercy of Prios. What more is, according to gossip, the blight-stricken should really keep away from the temple. If things go badly they can find themselves imprisoned in the catacombs, said to be located beneath the temple, containing people and creatures suffering from corruption sickness. The representatives of the temple have not publicly admitted that this is true, but the black carriages are proof enough for most – carriages manned by grim Black Cloaks that, now and again, stop in front of the temple to be loaded with stone coffins big enough to hold fully grown humans and which always leave town through the South Gate. It is not farfetched to guess that they are heading for the monastery of the Twilight Friars in the Titans.

THE FORTUNE HUNTERS' DISTRICT

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

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

THE MERCHANTS' HOUSE

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

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

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

THE MONASTERY

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

Aside from the permanent residents, the second floor of the building sometimes houses pilgrims headed for the sun temple on Karvosti. Then there is the third floor, accessible only to The Whip of Prios – the section within the order dedicated to tracking down and handling heretics. Other than that, Prior Emundi does not receive any visitors, except under extraordinary circumstances. He who knocks on the door is greeted by the young postulant Adso, who is yet to be consecrated and who has to put up with running errands and being the order's public face. He can talk to the Prior and, if the situation appears serious enough, arrange

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

an audience inside the monastery. However, he who has reason to suspect himself to be even the slightest bit blight-touched is advised to avoid such a meeting.

THE TOWN SEAT

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

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

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

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

THE HIGH CHIEFTAIN'S ENVOY

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

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

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

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

THE PENITENTIARY

There is no great need for prison cells in Thistle Hold, since most criminals are either condemned into exile or directly to death. But none the less, there is a small and closely guarded building at the Garrison which is commonly called the Penitentiary. There the most serious offenders in town are held captive pending Law Enforcer Asmerda's verdict, and it is there troublemakers and drunkards from the dives around the Toad's Square are dragged to sleep it off.

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

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



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



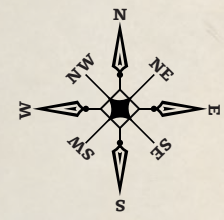
Blackmoor

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



BLACKMOOR

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



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SCALE 1:600

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

One can indeed wonder why anyone willingly would live or even spend a single night in Blackmoor, but that question is misguided. First, there is still some safety in the crowd, not least when the beasts of the forest come creeping out of the woods in search of easy prey. Secondly, there are lots of people who for one reason or another are not allowed to enter Thistle Hold. And thirdly, the Blood Robes and the patrols of Baron Erebus make sure to evict anyone who tries to set up camp somewhere on the surrounding farmlands. No, for those who wish to dwell in the vicinity of the Hold there is but one viable choice.

THE BLACK SQUARE

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

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

her pies; pies that are difficult to chew since the dough is mixed with bark, and that seldom taste of what you have ordered.

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

THE WESTERN MOOR

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

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

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

THISTLE SCOLD

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

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

THE GARBAGE HEAP

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

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

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

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



THE DAYTALERS OF THE SANITARY Commissioner are keeping the town clean from filth, washing the grime from streets and squares. Merchants polish their goods till they shine, bards tune the disharmonious from their instruments and the floor of the Abomitorium is raked smooth as the bottom of a pond. But in spite of the efforts, the truth lingers. In dark corners gathers filth that has been overlooked; the grime merges diluted with the dirt and stones of the streets; the polishing cloths never reach the corruption inside the artifacts; the finely tuned instruments cannot hide the lies in the lyrics; and a rake can never clean the blood out of stamped earth.

All who live in Thistle Hold know that its Ambrian facade hides an inside more influenced by Davokar than anyone wants to admit. Still, maybe one does right in polishing and cleaning and lying? As King Ynedar said when trying to instill courage into an Alberetor beset by the Dark Lords: “A single fearful human can raze the strongest keep, while a human free from fears can live happily in the monster’s den”. But then again, the Hero King should have added that the life of the latter probably will be nipped in its jolly bud …



SECTION 2:

GAME MASTER'S SECTION

In the Shadow of the Beacon

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

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

This chapter, In the Shadow of the Beacon, opens with a segment that accounts for a number of misconceptions regarding the officially accepted version of the town's history, supplemented with some hitherto unspoken truths. After that follows a presentation of the town's factions and leading figures, also describing their relations to each other. The third and final section includes a collection of specific cases where one can say that appearances are at odds with reality – cases which the Game Master can use as a basis for creating his or her own scenarios and adventures, or even lengthy campaigns.

The other chapters of this section are of a diverse nature. The first offers guide-lines on how to use the town of Thistle Hold as a base for so called Goal Oriented Roleplaying; the second presents two unexplored ruins which may be developed into challenging destinations for treasure hunting player characters. Finally, this section ends with a chapter introducing a long list of additional rules, in the form of new abilities, traits, artifacts and so on.



Blood of the Past

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

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

The fact that what has died can be awoken to a kind of halflife is something well known among the barbarian clans. According to the witches there is no real cure, but the symptoms can be mitigated with an elixir made from the rare Twilight Thistle. Lasifor took the opportunity, both to enrich himself and gain a hold on House Kohinoor – today he is the only Ambrian who knows where the Twilight Thistle grows, and one of very few who knows a family secret that the Queen is prepared to safeguard at almost any price. Thus, when Laisfor with an insinuating look *"wished"* to exchange part of the promised reward into a title as Prince of the Realm and the ownership over an area close to Davokar, it is hardly surprising that Korinthia reluctantly went along with the agreement.

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

BY SWEAT AND BLOOD

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

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

Under the supervision of the witch Yagaba, large quantities of the drug called Wild Chew (see page 76) were prepared. The chew was given to the Buhulgs and Skakks, making them docile and also capable of toiling until they literally worked themselves to death. Several thousands of goblins died, whipped by the Karabbadokks, who in turn obeyed the instructions of their human construction masters.

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

ALMOST DOOMED

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

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

Had it not been for the ambitious and treacherous Chieftain Embersind of Odaiova, the two thousand barbarians would likely have burnt Thistle Hold to cinders. But luckily Lasifor was warned

Table 2: Factions and Leaders in Thistle Hold

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

of the incoming threat and travelled to meet the enemy in the woods. And the mayor stood strong in the face of danger. During the tense meeting he made the assembled chieftains understand the futility of attacking the Hold – it would in no way deter the Queen in her ambitions, but on the contrary lead to immediate retributions and that the colonization of Davokar would pick up speed. Additionally, he explained that the Queen would rather see the High Chieftain as an ally than an enemy, and that he and the witch Yagaba would gladly function as intermediaries in the negotiations between the peoples.

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

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

NIGHTHOME'S BLOODBATH

Year 17 the brother of Mayor Nightpitch, Herado, became the commandant of the Town Watch. He assumed the name Duskwatcher and has ever since handled his duties relatively well, despite



A passage from the Garak Scripture, claimed to account for a brutal battle where countless elves were massacred by abominations and blight born humans.

the popular opinion that it was not merit but family relations which led to the appointment. In reality, the story is even more complicated than that.

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

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

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

THE SARVOLA CRISIS

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

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

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

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

THE TRUTH ABOUT HALOBAN

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

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

the Underworld have also given them access to the surface, by way of gorges and small sinkholes inside Davokar.

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

THE ASPIRING EXECUTIONER

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

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

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

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

MASTER OF MANIPULATIONS

Agramai Kalfas, Thistle Hold's immensely popular Sanitary Commissioner and cousin to the commander of the Queen's Rangers, is actually a prominent member of The Sacred of the Old Blood – a cult of Ambrian nobles claiming that the dark power of Davokar can be harnessed and used to ennoble both body and spirit. The cult's existence is so far known by none but the initiated, although fanciful rumors have started spreading through the halls of power. In any case, that such a cult truly exists and that it might have an agent in Thistle Hold is nothing that Lasifor Nightpitch has even considered.

Agramai has orchestrated numerous incidents over the years, to advance the cause of the cult and invite Davokar's powers to town. He calls himself the Prince, acts through manipulation and intricate lies, and is always careful to cover his tracks. Most often he uses drugged agents, or ones ensnared by sorcery, and kills them as soon as they have performed their tasks; preferably persons already involved in some lesser cult. That way, the Town Watch will not have to search for long before believing that they have found the root of evil.

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

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

Colliding Interests

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

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

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

NIGHTPITCH

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

Both Yagaba and Ader Gorinder, Lasifor's right-hand-man at the Town Seat, know the Mayor's mind. There are no real tensions between the three, even if they do not always see eye to eye. The witch wants to do more to get the Ambrians to understand, but Lasifor says that his compatriots cannot be persuaded; that they must reach the right conclusions by themselves. Ader wants to stop the trade in Symbarian artifacts and introduce a prohibition against visiting ruins in the



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



Explorer's License, hoping to reduce the harm Ambrians do to Davokar. Lasifor basically agrees, but maintains that it is better that expeditions are planned and artifacts sold in the Hold under their supervision, than having such business relocated to Kastor or Blackmoor.

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

HUSET KOHINOOR

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

The long term goal of House Kohinoor is to use the abundance of Davokar to make Ambria so grand that it will make all legends of Symbaroum pale in comparison. But regarding Thistle Hold there

are two primary aims: first, Korinthia needs to figure out where in Davokar the Twilight Thistle grows; once that is done Lasifor Nightpitch must die – partly because he knows what plagues her mother Abesina, and partly because Korinthia wants to gain direct control over his town.

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

Regarding the relations to other factions, Korinthia and her subordinates try to appear as friends and allies to everyone but the Iron Pact. However, in reality Korinthia regards all influential groups in the region as tools to employ in the endeavor to build a powerful and prosperous Ambria. If any faction starts to grow worryingly strong, she tries to weaken it by cooperating with the internal opposition to the leaders – as for instance in the case of the Sun Church. But when it comes to the specific situation in Thistle Hold, House Kohinoor strives to keep a low profile, and will do so all the way until the town's mayor has passed on to the life hereafter.

THE NOBLES

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

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



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

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

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

On other conflicts, there are the tensions between House Erebus and the families who have their estates close to Thistle Hold. According to the latter it is a shame that Korinthia allows Blackmoor to exist, and that view grows clearer and clearer for every time its bailiff behaves like a scoundrel in the Hall of Knights.

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

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

THE PRIESTHOOD

Despite the troublesome Sarvola, the Sun Church has got a firm hold on the town residents. Father Elfeno is rightly both admired and feared, not least for his wholehearted love for Prios and the force he puts behind his words. Prior Emundi is also liked, even if he is seldom seen on the streets of town. When he entered through the South Gate for the very first time, he exclaimed that he had come to the place that best exemplifies Prios' determination to subdue and cultivate the wilds – words still proudly remembered by the populace. However, it should be clarified that none of the aforementioned is the strongest representative of the church in town. In the copper dome of the Sun Temple lives Deseba the Old – the only person ever to be appointed Lightbringer before death, after having miraculously healed both Korinthia and Jeseebegai right after the Queen was rescued from the fortress of the Dark Lords.

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

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

About relations to other factions, there is no doubt that the priests of the Sun Church owe their allegiance to Prios. The other factions' quarrels and intrigues belong to the mundane; the duty of the priests is to make everyone accept the commands of the Lawgiver. But then again, it is far from unlikely that when two mundane factions clash, the priests are going to support the party whose ambitions best serve the aims of Prios. It should also be said, that for the majority represented by the First Father, the Iron Pact embody the power of evil. The elves and their conspirators must be captured and set on fire!

THE IRON PACT

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

The experiences of the former treasure hunter Lysindra Goldengrasp have led her to the conclusion that the elves and the witches are correct – the woods must be left in peace or else Ambria will end up as the realm of the Dark Lords. She does not trust Korinthia or anyone else to be able to accept the truth, and she is prepared to do anything in her power to sabotage the projects of both treasure hunters and explorers. To aid her she has the autumn elf Mearoel and a group carefully chosen, previous explorer colleagues that have reached the



THUS SPOKE AROALETA

"... and the soul of the seed was already lost; paternal sins, maternal atrocities tainted the blood of the offspring. To be affected by darkness while wandering life is nothing like carrying it in the flesh; that is evil."





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

same conclusion. The elf and the human agents are hidden in a warehouse close to the palisade where she used to store her exploration gear.

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

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

ORDO MAGICA

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



its effects, and also to examine its potential as a source of power.

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

Eufrynda fumes and calls this the strategy of a coward. And she has both Master Goncai and the newcomer Kullinan on her side – the former because he is seriously infatuated with her, the latter since he wants to seek out any and all sources of corruption. But when the strategy of the Chapter Master is based on the commands of Seldonio, Eufrynda must go behind Cornelio's back when diverting from the plan. Not that she minds, but it certainly makes everything much more strenuous. Her only comfort is that the arrival of Kullinan has made it easier for her to handle Cornelio when he finds her out – as for instance in the case of the recent and anything but successful expedition to the Tomb of Dreams (see the adventure *Tomb of Dying Dreams*).

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

The Secrets

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

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



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

STEWED GOBLIN

Whereever the waste of the Abomitorium goes, master Morlam at the Slaughterhouse does not know. But that does not mean that the rumors regarding his establishment are unfounded. Morlam asserts that no meat should go to waste and has kept to a belief that was far from uncommon when the Ambrians arrived north of the Titans: namely that goblin meat will do just fine for making beef sauces and stews. Furthermore, the meat of fairies is a real delicacy, especially if the specimens are properly fed prior to slaughter. As for meat from humans, he would never accept having such ingredients under the knife – that would of course be barbaric!

Everyone knows that Morlam gladly pays for deceased goblins and spring elves, but it is a well-kept secret that he is after more than their glands for peddling them to the alchemists in town. Another secret is the elf cage in the basement below his home and the two unscrupulous hunters he sometimes hires to hunt goblins when the stock is about to run out. Then again, worst of all is probably that he, out of greed, tends to ignore blight-marks found on some of the forest beasts he butchers. To eat such meats is unwholesome, to say the least ...

REDEYE'S MISTRESS

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

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

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

THE BLOOD DAUGHTER

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

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

SEEDS OF EVIL

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

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

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

THE CALAMITY OF KLAVMAN

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

Klavman's task is to spy on the noble guests at the inn. The upper floor is constructed so that one can move around inside the walls between the rooms, and both hear and see what the guests are up to – Aragina's late husband had plans on earning a little extra through blackmailing but

never had the courage to follow through. Klavman is only supposed to observe and report, but lately he has had a hard time resisting the temptation to use what he learns in order to enrich himself. Together with his young accomplice Sera, he has coerced the Yndaros based merchant Lasunder out of more than a hundred thaler, after having witnessed him utilizing the services provided by The Lindworm's Nest at the inn. Now they have contacted him again with demands for additional payments and Lasunder is starting to search for someone who can help him track down and silence the extortionist.

ENTHRALLED POTIONS

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

Skanander died without making good on his promise and the sisters have no intention of cutting the band. Onrax sits in his chamber, behind a hidden door in the drugstore's basement, again fettered by heavy chains and forced to produce master level elixirs on command. He obeys to survive, and he survives while waiting for a chance to seek vengeance. So far his existence is known to none but the sisters, but that may soon change. His hatred and bitterness sometimes grow so intense that he literally corrupts everything he touches. Every time someone consumes a master elixir purchased at the Thaler's Drugstore, there is a 20% risk that he or she suffers 1D4 of temporary corruption (player rolls the dice). One can only wonder how long it will take before someone starts asking questions about the quality of the Thaler's stock ...

VICTIMS OF NECESSITY

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

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

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

FALSE FEATHERS

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

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



Text found on a stone tablet buried near the Black Pitch Mire, containing a passage interpreted as "Erosagal, master builder ... Citadell Ciratsea."

Revealing Forgery

Forgeries of Ambrian artifacts and curiosities can be found all over Ambria, not least in Yndaros where anything having to do with Davokar is in high demand. To reveal that an artifact is a fake, you perform a normal analysis as described on page 186 in the Core Rulebook. For objects that are not mystical in nature, a fake may be exposed with the ability Loremaster and a *Cunning* test.

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

SIGNS TO DECIPHER

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

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

THE RENEGADE'S SANCTUARY

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

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

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

THE MONSTER MAKERS

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

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

So far, they have only succeeded with the first step, to breathe life into dead creatures like sorcerers do. But Magister Feona's dream may soon come true, with the strange creature coming

together in the laboratory – a human head on the body of a huge ogre, with Elven blood in its veins and the regeneration gland of a rage troll. What they have not considered, is how to keep the creature in check if they are able to make the ancient rituals work ...

THE GUESTS OF THE PEN

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

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

The other inmate held in the basement is the aged thief-queen Voldara. She is the only one who has broken into Nighthome and made it back out alive and with the loot in her possession. What she stole was a bronze necklace, with heavy links and a medallion made from blackened silver and green sapphires. The pendant is a protective amulet, given to a surprised Nightpitch by the eternity elf Aloéna on Karvosti and which he very much would like to see returned (see Aloéna's Amulet, page 73). The problem is that when Voldara was captured, she had already hidden it away. It is up to Pergalo to find out where.

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

The Dark Lords

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

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

THE APOSTATE'S BEST FRIEND

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

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

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

Goal Oriented Roleplaying

THIS CHAPTER OFFERS the Game Master guidelines on how to use Thistle Hold as a basis for goal oriented play – that is, the type of roleplaying where the story is exclusively governed by the player characters striving to achieve their personal and common goals.

THE GUIDELINES ARE based on two possible goals – to establish an outpost and to stage an expedition – and try to describe what types of challenges may appear on the long and perilous road towards reaching those goals. Additionally, there are some suggestions as to what the characters may do to solve the problems standing in their way, but in the end this should be up to the players to decide.

Also, do not forget that when running a goal oriented game, the players should be well acquainted with the setting. Obviously they should have read *The Hunter's Harbor* and pages 38–51 in the *Core Rulebook*, but maybe the experience will be even more intense if they also are allowed to read the first two chapters in this section? How to handle this must be agreed upon by players and Game Master together.

Establishing an Outpost

IN THE SOUTHERN part of Davokar, called Odovakar by the clans, there are plenty of natural resources to harvest. Most obvious are of course different kinds of trees – some for construction works, others for making furniture and bows, still others to use for making cheap variants of blackbrew. Other resources can be valuable herbs, mushrooms and berries; caves close to the surface filled with lichen or bugs with special properties; and ponds or streams whose waters have mystical qualities.

Whoever gets wind of a sought-after resource and who wants to establish an outpost nearby has a long walk ahead, but may eventually be richly rewarded in both thaler and fame. Simply put, the wannabe entrepreneur has five challenges to handle, every one of which may be turned into several gaming sessions. Also, nothing says that



The ruins at the Columns of Haganor have been thoroughly searched, yet new discoveries are made by expeditions daring to face the spiders in the area.

the phases align like knots on a string – on the contrary, it is likely that they will intermingle and that challenges you thought were dealt with reemerge, when you least expect it.

PHASE 1: THE CLAIM

All who wish to establish an outpost in Davokar must have the Queen's permission to do so. Practically this is done by buying an Explorer's License covering the number of people needed to run the outpost and all the amendments you will qualify for (see page 34 in the *Core Rulebook*). Now, this is the easy part.

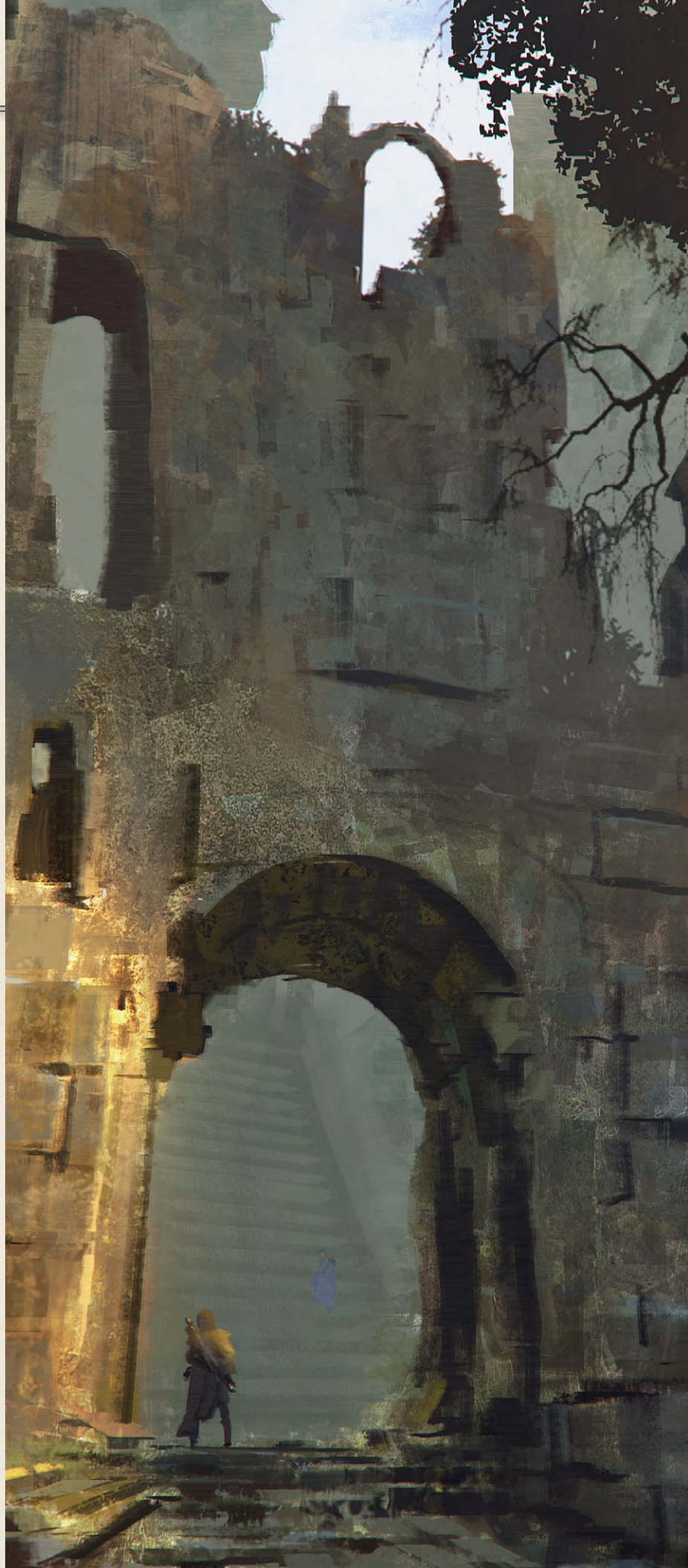
A bigger problem stems from the fact that all interesting sites between the forest edge and River Eanor are much coveted. If competing for a rich spot, you will either have to convince Suria Argona at the Queen's Legation that you are the best candidate; alternately find a way to persuade other stakeholders to revoke their bids. Trying to bribe the widowed Mrs. Argona will get you nowhere. However, she is often in need of someone to perform services for her, which in turn can affect her decision-making. Competitors can be threatened, bribed or maybe scared away. But it may also be required for the characters to find a partner (an influential nobleman, fortune hunter or merchant) who can provide them with support and thaler – naturally in exchange for a share in future earnings.

PHASE 2: CONSTRUCTION

Many outposts are built in or close to different kinds of ruins, simply because this shortens the construction time significantly. No matter if you choose to go that way or start building from the ground up, you first have to secure the area – drive local beasts away, identify and clear away dangerous plant life, cut down all trees near the headquarters and mark out the territory, for instance by coloring or scent-marking tree trunks along the circumference of the site.

When this has been done, building materials and provisions must be transported to the site. The journey itself may be a challenge, but even more so because robbers and barbarians are happy to raid caravans on the move. Additionally, the caravan guards you hired after having asked around inside Haloban's Ring may decide that they would rather lay claim to your goods than work and wait for a niggardly wage.

Then there is the construction itself. The usual is to employ goblins from Karabbadokk or daytalers from Blackmoor – both groups having a tendency to make trouble if they consider themselves to be





treated unfairly. A strike can be handled in various ways, with carrots or the stick. The former can lead to continued refusal to work, in the hope to raise the pay even more, while the latter can result in a bad reputation or even in the making of real enemies among the goblins and/or the people of Blackmoor. Oh, and as if that were not enough, the risk of being attacked by robbers, barbarians or elves is of course much greater until the palisade is in place.

PHASE 3: HARVESTING

A lot of things can happen to an outpost in Davokar. Normally, the resource is spread out across a vast area, meaning that those who harvest it must leave the safety of the headquarters for most of the day – making them attractive prey for beasts and human antagonists. Additionally, there are forces in the woods that do not hesitate to attack a fortified outpost, may it be elves, rage trolls or barbarian raiders.

There are also threats from other sources. Maybe you won the site in some kind of bidding contest, and maybe the loser decides to do all in its might to make you suffer. Or a new interested party may hear about your "gold mine" and become intent on acquiring it for themselves – first by offering reasonable pay but if that does not suffice by employing intrigues, lies and manipulation in order to get the Queen's Legation to revoke the license and pass it on to them instead.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the harvest itself is risky. Maybe it is revealed that the resource you are after is more or less contaminated by the powers of corruption? Or you can happen upon something, or someone, else plagued by corruption. And even if it is not something related to the blight of Davokar, the outpost can be afflicted by other kinds of contaminants, which require you to get medical aid for yourselves and your workers. Davokar is an insidious forest that has a troubling tendency to transform the most beautiful pipe dream into the worst of nightmares.

PHASE 4: VENDING

No matter what the player characters are harvesting there are plenty of potential buyers in and around Thistle Hold. That said, there are also competitors in the region, competitors who shun no means when it comes to win over the customers to their side.

You may come up against rivals who lower their prices to the extent that they sell at a loss. Others dilute the resource with similar substances and materials, and are thereby able to set the prices low. And then there are of course those who do not hesitate to use violent methods to sabotage others, for example by attacking warehouses and transports.

At other times, you may get involved in feuds between two or more customers who are prepared to do whatever it takes to gain hold of your product. It has actually been known to happen, that the peddler of an especially coveted ware has been accused of being an accomplice to everything from murder to public endangerment, only because an avid bidder has gotten rid of its rivals.

PHASE 5: GROWTH

Last but not least, if the characters have the ambition to see their enterprise grow – maybe to acquire more outposts and strive to reach markets in other parts of the realm – all challenges described above will multiply and grow harder to handle. To compete with some other group of entrepreneurs is something entirely different from being the rival of businesses financed by counts, dukes or senior commanders in Queen Korinthia's army. With enemies like that you would likely do best sleeping with one eye open and always making sure to watch what happens behind your back.

If you are to keep your enterprise running for years and years, you must have hard hands and a thick skin; probably also access to protectors in the form of leading representatives of Ambria's power factions. If you are not prepared to take risks and work very hard, you should probably sell your business to the first, best bidder!

Staging an Expedition

MANY ARE THOSE who have arrived at Thistle Hold hoping to win wealth, glory and fame by plundering the ruins of the long lost empire of Symbaroum. Most will never leave town or are so ill prepared that they quickly have to turn back; most of the rest will reach their targeted site but never return. Despite this, the stream of fortune hunters never seems to dry up, probably because the few who actually make it all the way in and out often do so lugging a veritable fortune.

For the group of player characters dreaming about staging an expedition into Davokar, a long and perilous journey awaits, starting long before they even set foot under the trees. And for the Game Master it should not be a problem to provide the players with exciting and testing challenges – on



Writings on a copper tablet that either refers to a historical event or is part of an epos. The torture it describes is brutal beyond belief.

the contrary: adventures and campaigns dealing with treasure hunts is precisely what Symbaroum is built for!

PHASE 1: SELECTING THE SITE

First of all, the player characters have to pinpoint the target of their endeavor. In the *Core Rulebook* several persons with knowledge about ruins in the forest are described, and adding to that there are plenty of both false and true rumors circling the taverns in town. There is also the option to get in touch with Mayor Nightpitch or factions like Ordo Magica and the Merchants' House, in the hope that one of these knows of a promising site and are in need of assistance exploring it.

No matter how you find your target, you can be sure that other groups of explorers also have the same target in sight. It may come to bidding wars or even physical fights over the right to a credible treasure map, so that you will have to resort to lies and manipulation or maybe even use force to lay claim to the piece of cloth, leather or paper. Or the seller may decide to take money from several different groups, which then are left to compete in a race for the treasure.

If you reach out to one of the major factions, it is likely that they already have one or more groups of freelancing explorers just waiting for the next expedition to start. In that case, the player characters need to find a way to come off as more competent than the rivals, while those rivals probably will come after them in force. Maybe two or more freelance groups even join up to sweep the newcomer off the field.

PHASE 2: FINANCING

Of course, anyone can put their boots on and wander off into the forest, but to gain a reasonable chance to succeed the player characters must be prepared to spend a considerable sum of thaler. The cost of the Explorer's License for a month alone, covering five persons aiming to mine the soil of Davokar, can be as high as between seventy and a hundred thaler. Adding to that are the cost of equipment and the salaries for any fellow companions, for example a guide and some extra sellswords.

For a group that does not already have the travel funds secured there are numerous ways to earn thaler in the Hold. The paragraph on page 51 in the *Core Rulebook* and the first chapter of this book list a lot of people and organizations in need of contractors, or they can be blackmailed. Another option is to find a wealthy partner who can fund the project in exchange for a share in future revenues (see page 185 in the *Core Rulebook*). The nobles of the region, the retired fortune hunters in town and its prominent antique dealers are all conceivable options. In the end, maybe you would do best talking to several candidates and then pit them against each other to reach the best possible agreement.

When it comes to negotiating the cost of the Explorer's License, that can be an adventure in itself. There are thaler to earn by convincing Suria Argona and her staff that you possess the competence needed for the expedition and that your activities will not disturb the forest very much. And if you do not work hard to come off as pleasant and forthcoming (for instance by performing some small personal errands for the licensors) the arbitrary post *"Other"* will most likely dig a hole in your travel funds. Great recommendations from other treasure hunters or prominent residents in town – honest ones or skillfully fabricated – can prove to be very valuable in this context.

Gaining hold of trustworthy companions can also lead to some interesting challenges. What do you do if all of Mother Mehira's most skilled guides are already on missions? Well, either you ask around inside Haloban's Ring or you dare turn to Karabbadokk in search of both a guide and workers. What sellswords can you trust, after having heard stories about mercenaries ganging up on and killing their employers in their sleep?

PHASE 3: THE JOURNEY

Lots of expeditions must abort their mission before even reaching the destination, others disappear without trace. In a forest like Davokar, the reasons behind such tragedies can be many. Packs of predators, Elven warbands, roving barbarians, rampaging rage trolls, hidden sinkholes, corrupted nature surrounding the carcass of a dead abomination – the list of dangers in the forest goes on and on.

And if the woods and its inhabitants are not enough to cause trouble, there are plenty of other possible threats. The directions you follow may prove to be misguiding or vague. Treasure hunting colleagues from Thistle Hold may very well trail the expedition, hoping to steal away with your loot. Or it can be that there are two, three or even more groups that already from the get go race to arrive first and that are not afraid to sabotage each other.

Also, problems may arise within the expedition. Infectious outbreaks, lack of discipline and outright mutinies have caused as many failures as threats from outside the group. If you, for instance,

get lost or if it is revealed that what you are searching for cannot be found where you thought it to be, the risk for internal conflicts increase dramatically. All of a sudden you are short on supplies, which can be disastrous if you are in a region with great risks for corrupting contaminations in water, grounds and prey animals. Quarrels may arise about whether the party should return to the Hold or keep going, and in the latter case regarding what area to head for next.

Finally: Even if we would suggest that the player characters who manage to reach the target and harvest its treasure get a chance to breathe easy, everything written above is just as true when it comes to the journey back home.

PHASE 4: THE TREASURE HUNT

Once arrived to the alluring destination of the expedition, the next series of challenges start. The ruins may be difficult to survey or be totally overgrown. The area can be the habitat of a flock of predators, a goblin tribe or a group of rage trolls led by an unwelcoming liege troll. Or you may discover that one or more other expeditions have already found their way to the site – extremely reluctant to accommodate any competition. Irrespective of which, you first need to gain an easily defended foot hold and then use force or negotiations in order to take control of the area.

Once this is done, it is time to take on the ruin or ruins. There awaits treasure in the form of art objects, artifacts and arcane knowledge that the right buyer will gladly purchase for a handsome sum. But there are also fiendish traps, risk of collapsing floors and ceilings, labyrinthine tunnels and well-hidden pathways. And to add to the troubles, there is always the risk that the ruin's former inhabitants linger – in the form of a famished pack of dragouls, as blight born abominations or as a long dead family of cryptwalkers that are opposed to any intrusion into their private sphere.

In the end, it is all about surviving and leaving the place with as many of its valuables as possible. Maybe the showpiece of the ruin is extra hard to reach – hidden beyond a cruel trap, surrounded by a hoard of undead or standing on a rock in an underground, corruption diseased lake. If so, the players must decide if they are to settle for more accessible loot or risk their lives trying to reach the showpiece. Or maybe they are not happy with their initial finds and agree to stay at the ruin, hoping to unearth richer loot behind rubble or some yet uncovered passage – all the while being attacked by a never ending flood of dragouls or while some external threat closes in on the site (rival treasure hunters, attracted abominations or vindictive relatives of the group which was pacified when the player characters arrived to the area).

A totally different kind of challenge may arise for those who have scored the mother lode – deciding what to bring along and what to leave behind. No matter how many are involved in the expedition there is a limit to how much they can carry and still survive the journey home!

PHASE 5: RETURNING HOME

If the player characters manage to get back to the Hold with their loot, they must find a way to turn the valuables into the biggest earnings possible. First, the finds must be registered at the Queen's Legation, and when that is done the problems usually appear. Whichever precautions are taken, there is a risk that rumors start spreading about their catch, and suddenly the characters are transformed from treasure hunters to prey.

All who are occupied in trading with antiquities and treasures of knowledge will try to get their attention. Other fortune hunters will grow jealous and decide to pick a fight, or even worse: they will band together hoping to steal both treasures and lives from the player characters. A financial partner may suddenly put forth a falsified contract by which he or she is entitled to an even greater cut of the loot than what was decided before departure. In such a situation, the group who early on managed to engage a loyal and influential partner will have all the reasons for thanking their lucky star!

However, there are alternatives to the legal way. The character may for instance hide their loot in or somewhere close to Thistle Hold and sell the objects one at a time, inside the palisade or among the tents of Blackmoor. That way they can avoid most of the hysteria, but will on the other hand have to worry about the secret leaking out and that someone will try to locate and attack the hiding place of the valuables.

Adventure Pack 1

The guidelines on how to stage and carry out an expedition can be used with the tips and tables included in the eBook Adventure Pack 1, specifically the text Treasure Hunts in Davokar. Together they provide a great foundation for numerous treasure hunt adventures. The eBook can be found at various download stores.

Ruins in Davokar

THIS CHAPTER INTRODUCES two examples on how ruins from the time of Symbaroum may be designed and what they may contain. In this case, both are smaller, still unexcavated ruins and the description is kept short because of the book's space restrictions.

These texts focus on the ruins' history, main challenges and the loot that the player characters can bring back from a visit. You Game Masters are encouraged to work out a more detailed description of the sites and to adjust them to the preferences of your gaming groups.

Green as Copper

THE SORCERESS MENANDRA Na-Yah lived about a millennium ago, before the great empire of Symbaroum had started to crumble. She was one of the most accomplished Morphantics at the time, mystics that not only had deep insights into life and death but who also had the skills and understanding to manipulate them both. Like her colleagues, she saw herself as a creator of life; in reality she was a mutilator of the flesh, blood, glands and shapes that life itself had created.

Her success was not only due to hard work, tenacious studies and an unnaturally long life. No, much of her strength she gathered from the Copper Cypress. The crooked evergreen, full of berries colored like tarnished copper, was found at the bottom of a sinkhole by two lowly hunters. As soon as the sorceress had examined the find she convinced her monarch to make her the steward of the surrounding region. The tree was enclosed by a roundel of stone and its cave was given a roof so that the sinkhole could be filled in. Finally she built her residence, complete with all the facilities needed in order to create the lifeform she had promised her monarch in return for the favor.

The player characters can learn about Menandra's residence in different ways. For instance, they can purchase the information from a treasure hunter who has been there but who did not believe it would be worth the trouble to dig down into the cellar. Another option may be that they or Ordo Magica happen upon cuneiform writings somewhere else, describing Menandra Na-Yah, the Copper Cypress and where she once ruled.

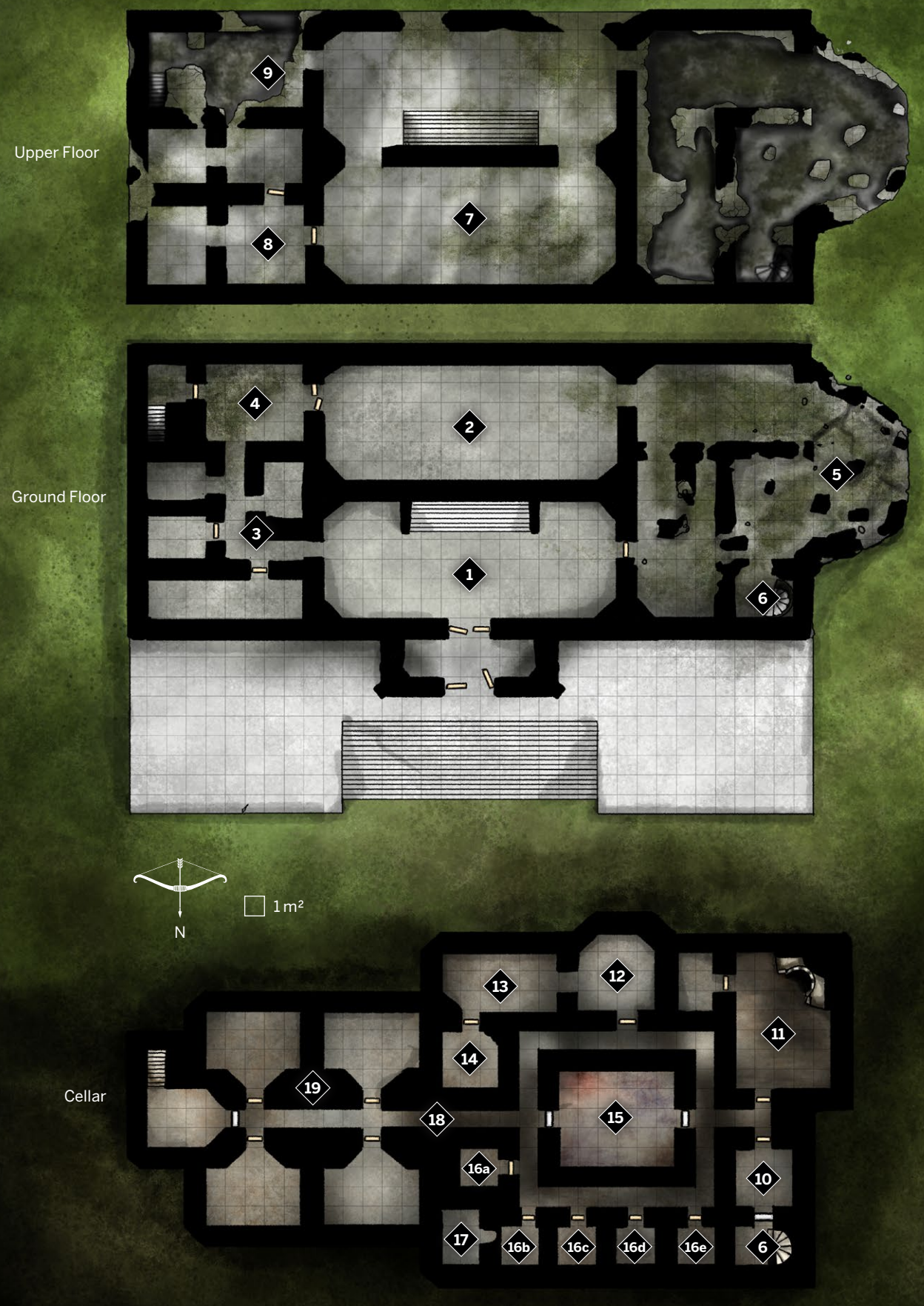
The building itself is the only relatively intact structure in a field of ruins. No trees are growing in the area, only single bushes and pale green grass, as if most of Davokar's greenery avoided or had a hard time taking root on the field. Judging by the layout of the moss-covered, crumbled ruins a great city must have stood on the location a very long time ago.

GREEN AS COPPER

1. Entry Hall
2. Salon
3. Servants' Quarter
4. Kitchen
5. Rubble
6. Stairwell

7. Upper Floor
8. Bed Chamber
9. Razed Nursery Chamber

10. Storage
11. Furnace
12. Office
13. Library
14. Archive
15. Laboratory
16a–e. Cells
17. Hidden Chamber
18. Spirit Portal
19. Storerooms


Upper Floor
9
7
8
Ground Floor
4
2
5
3
1
6
N
1 m²
Cellar
13
12
11
14
19
18
15
16a
10
17
16b
16c
16d
16e
6



OVERVIEW

In its day, the residence was three stories high and had a tower to the west reaching three more stories toward the heavens. Now only the cellar, ground floor and parts of the second floor remain, along with the caves far beneath, containing the Copper Cypress and in which the sorceress has settled in to spend eternity along with the sad remains of her family.

Aside from one room (#9) the middle and eastern parts of the upper level still have floors and walls. The razed room has neither, which is also the case for the western parts of the level. What remains of the floor is covered in rubble that has been overgrown with moss and plant life; walking around up there is almost like hiking through rugged forest terrain, were it not for the spots where it is evident that some treasure hunter or explorer has been digging or poking around in the ruin.

The bottom floor is easier to move around in. What is left of the upper story's floors function as the ground level's roof; earth and debris have drifted in through the gaping windows and through the stairwell upstairs (#1), but in some places you can actually get a glimpse of the old stone floors. The western parts that are without roofs are another story. The walls to the rooms are intact but the floors look very much like those on the upper level. The one exception is the stairwell to the cellar (#6) – when the player characters arrive it has already been cleared of debris so they can see parts of the metal door downstairs.

The cellar is divided into two sections. To the east was storage for food and household goods along with a laundry room (#19). Nothing of value remains on this side and all inventories have long since decomposed or turned to dust. In the western part, Menandra had her laboratory.

The test objects were kept in the cells (#16a–e), before and after they had been injected with various drugs or been subjected to experiments. The bones of what appears to be a three-headed feline are in one of the cells; something looking like a winged human of ogre-size is in another. The chamber in the southwestern corner (#11) is dominated by a huge oven, presumably the place where the sorceress got rid of the laboratory waste.

Finally, there is a natural cave far beneath the residence. In the large chamber one first enters (#B) stands the Copper Cypress, surrounded by a low stone wall. The ceiling is chiefly made from massive blocks of stone, used to cover the bottom of the sinkhole when the rest of the hole was filled in.

THE CAVES

A. Ladder up to #17
B. The Copper Cypress
C. Remains of an Abomination
D. Hidden Passage
E. Krazaragas, the Watcher
F. Treasure Chamber

In the southeastern chamber (#C), Menandra kept one of her most successful experiments locked in, but the creature is long since dead – judging by the remains a small humanoid with abnormally long limbs, fingers like sharp bone claws, intergrown ribs and a skull crowned by a high cockscomb of bone. The sturdy stone door is ajar.

Lastly, the hidden passage (#D) leading to the treasure chamber (#F). Finding the way there requires that the characters expressly search along the walls and succeed with a test against *Vigilant*.

THE RIVALS

As the player characters arrive at the ruin they will soon discover that they are not the first ones there. Another group of treasure hunters has already set up camp in the residence, where they have been for ten days trying to clear all the debris and rubble from the spiral stair to the cellar. They are very close to finishing and will not leave without a fight.

Should the player characters approach the ruin without taking precautions, the lookout of the rivals will see them coming and gather his group for an ambush in the Entry Hall (#1). If they instead try to sneak up on the ruin, the one with the lowest value in *Discreet* must roll against [*Discreet* –3] to avoid detection. If passing that, they also have to make a successful test against [*Vigilant* +1] to spot the lookout and approach the ruin undetected.

The leader of the rival gang is the former highway robber Lamando who has decided to try his luck as a treasure hunter. If the player characters decide to approach under a white flag, he will welcome them in to discuss the situation. Should the characters offer him valuables or coin to a value of 500 thaler he will claim to be willing to leave the ruin; the outcome is the same if he deems that the newcomers are evenly matched to or stronger than the members of his own gang. In reality, he only believes that he has found a great way for he and his friends to avoid the dangers of the ruin. They grab their equipment and say adieu, then search out a place nearby to lay in wait, hoping to be able to rob the player characters of any treasure once they return to the surface.

For the stats of Lamando and his henchmen, see page 215 in the *Core Rulebook* and modify the resistance to suit the player characters.

THE BRONZE GATE

When the stairwell has been cleared all the way to the bottom, a door of blackened metal is uncovered. The only ways to open it is to utter the name of Menandra's husband or to perform a very demanding feat of strength.

It is not easy to figure out that the magically sealed door opens to the name of the husband. The only clue is a symbol carved into the black metal – a horizontal sandglass within a circle, within a horizontal ellipse – and the partially destroyed cuneiform writings on the upper frame of the doorway which roughly translates to "Lover's Gate".

A character with the ability *Loremaster* who succeeds with a *Cunning* test remembers a long list of stories about ruins with doors that open up to the utterance of a particular word or a phrase. The learned one also automatically knows that the symbol on the door is an ancient symbol for love or infatuation, with the approximate meaning *"when I look at you, time stands still"*. The cuneiform writings can only be understood by someone with *Loremaster* at the Master level.

The name of Menandra's husband can be read in one single place. In the Bed Chamber (#8) are the broken remains of a red-stone tablet. The pieces are found with a *Vigilant* test, then pieced together with a *Cunning* test, and the text can be read by a Master *Loremaster*: *"Here dream Domo and Menandra common dreams."* If standing at the gate saying "Domo" you hear squeaks and rattles from a locking mechanism, after which the door can be opened.

Another option is to force the door open using raw strength. In the narrow space, only two people can work together, using sturdy bending tools trying to pry the door from its hinges. To get the door open both players must succeed with a [*Strong* –3] test the same turn. They get three shots at it before they are forced to call it quits.

The Copper Cypress

The Copper Cypress is the last remaining specimen of an extinct species that grew in the Davokar region before the forest started spreading. This particular seed was carried by the winds to land and take root at the bottom of a sinkhole. Under normal circumstances, it would not have been able to grow in the dark, but the place was blessed by mystical powers from which the seed could draw the energies it needed.

Aside from being nourishing enough to replace a day's ration of food, the fruits of the tree have a protective effect against corruption. If consuming a fresh berry (free action), you will only suffer one temporary corruption from using mystical powers or artifacts during the rest of the scene. For dried berries or those harvested more than 24 hours ago the effect is weaker – temporary corruption is cut in half, rounded up.

The tree carries fruit all year long but only produces one new berry per month. And all attempts to move the tree lead to its death, which can be realized by someone with the ability Alchemy who succeeds with a *Cunning* test.

A Third Way Inside

If the characters fail to get either of the two paths open, the Game Master may offer them a third alternative. The stone wall between the stairwell and one of the cells (#16e) can be breached, if you but take the time. For two persons with pickaxes it will take three days to open up a hole big enough to pass through.

It is recommended that the characters are not left to work in peace. If they somehow made Lamando and his gang retreat, the rivals may lose their patience and attack. Otherwise, it is highly likely that those who stay in the same spot for several days, and who also make a lot of noise, will attract the attention of predatory beasts, hungry rage trolls or even an elven warband.

THE SPIRIT PORTAL

There is a second and for some individuals easier path into Menandra's laboratory. It was constructed as a quick escape route, to use if some of the sorceress' creations could not be controlled. At first glance, the portal separating the basement's store-rooms from the laboratory (#18) appears to be open, but in reality passage is hindered by an invisible mountain spirit – which will show as soon as someone tries to walk through the vault, instead coming to a halt as if hitting a glass wall.

To be able to pass through the portal you either have to carry one of the medallions that the spirit has learned to recognize, or drive the spirit away. There are two copies of the inconspicuous medallion still around – one carried by Menandra where she sits by the Copper Cypress; one that can be found by digging in the dirt in one of the slave chambers (#3), where it sits around the skeletal neck of its wearer (requires a *Vigilant* test).

To banish the spirit you first have to realize that it is there, which is done with a successful *Vigilant* test by someone having the ability *Witchsight*. After that, there are two ways to handle the challenge. You can either perform the ritual *Exorcism* and succeed with a roll against *Resolute*, modification ±0; or you can pass a [*Vigilant* –5] roll to notice a thin silver wire running along the frame and threshold of the portal. The spirit is bound to the silver and if you destroy the wire – for example using the sharp tip of a sword – the spirit is set free.

THE HIDDEN DOOR

Gaining entrance to the caves below the basement and the treasure waiting there is far from impossible, provided that the characters are observant. After having looked inside cell 16a and 16b they probably realize that there should be another room in the corner – if not, let the players roll against *Cunning* to reach this conclusion.

In cell 16b there is a hidden door, difficult to discover and also armed with a still functioning trap. If you put pressure on the right brick you can open the door without problems; put pressure anywhere else and the trap is sprung – four spears being launched out of the floor, aimed at where the one trying to open the door is standing.

He who springs the trap must roll *Defense* (±0) against four separate attacks; if they are two they make two tests each. The spears deal 6 in damage.

Finding the door requires a test against *Vigilant*. He who then expressly wants to examine the door more closely and who succeeds with a roll against [*Vigilant* –5] discovers the trap and which brick to put pressure on.

THE NECROMAGE

Down in the cave (#B) dwells Menandra Na-Yah, now a powerful necromage. With her are her family, husband Domo and their triplet daughters, reanimated as dragouls (for stats, see page 230 in the *Core Rulebook*). They are spending eternity sitting on the stone wall surrounding the Copper Cypress, but arise in unison when the characters come close.

The necromage will not initiate combat. To talk to her (in the Symbarian tongue) you need the ability *Loremaster* at the Master level. She is not interested in any long conversations but says that the characters may do anything they wish so long as they refrain from approaching her precious tree or trying to harm her family. And should talking be out of the question, she is content with just staring at them with her big, shiny black eyes.



Menandra Na-Yah, necromage

"Life lasts a moment, eternity can no one steal from us."

In life Menandra was both feared and celebrated, with access to the halls of power and surrounded by a court of servile subjects. Also in death she expects to be treated with respect, but she has long since accepted the fate of her and her family and feels no need to defend anything but her husband and daughters and her fruit tree – all else is irreverent and easily forsaken in the aim to protect her family.

Manner	Proud, protective
Race	Spirit
Resistance	Challenging
Traits	*Alternative Damage* (III), *Spirit Form* (II), *Terrify* (II)

Accurate 13 (–3), **Cunning** 9 (+1), **Discreet** 11 (–1), **Persuasive** 10 (0), **Quick** 10 (0), **Resolute** 15 (–5), **Strong** 7 (+3), **Vigilant** 5 (+5)

Abilities	*Alchemy* (master), *Bend Will* (adept), *Natural Warrior* (novice)
Weapons	Ghost Claws 6 (damages Resolute, ignores Armor)
Armor	None, takes half damage from mystical powers and magical weapons
Defense	0
Toughness	10 **Pain Threshold** –
Equipment	None
Shadow	Streaks of black and purple, like a lilac rain on a starless night (thoroughly corrupt)

Tactics: If the player characters threaten Menandra and her family, she starts by trying to terrify them after which she tries to bend the strongest one to her will.

THE WATCHER

Between the player characters and Menandra's treasures (#E) stands the primal blight beast she has named Krazaragas, luckily weakened after having spent a millennium surviving on water and berries from the cypress. The shape-shifting creature feels most at home in the form of a monstrous, horned wild boar, and it is like that she will greet the player characters once they enter her cave.

There are no alternatives to battle in this case – if the characters want to go further into the tunnels the creature must be bested. The abomination is restrained by a mystically strengthened chain, long enough for it to attack persons standing at the entrance of the cave (#E).

"Krazaragas", primal blight beast

A grim growl that sends smoke coiling from its nostrils.

Manner	Raging
Race	Abomination
Resistance	Strong
Traits	*Metamorphosis* (III, *Fire Breath* II, *Armored* II), *Natural Weapon* (III), *Regeneration* (I), *Robust* (III)

Accurate 13 (–3), **Cunning** 9 (+1), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 7 (+3), **Quick** 11 (–1), **Resolute** 10 (0), **Strong** 18 (–8), **Vigilant** 10 (0)

Abilities	*Berserker* (adept), *Exceptionally Strong* (master), *Iron Fist* (master), *Natural Warrior* (adept)
Weapons	Tusks (long), two attacks at the same target 15/11; Fire Breath 6 (chain)
Armor	Tough skin 9
Defense	+9
Toughness	18 **Pain Threshold** 9
Equipment	None
Shadow	Black with a barely visible undertone of flaming red (thoroughly corrupt)

Tactics: As someone shows himself at the entrance Krazaragas breathes a cone of fire, after which she puts her trust in her tusks and her rage.

LOOT

The upper level is wrecked and searched by other explorers, so there is nothing to be found. But if you dig in the dirt covering the floors at the ground level, you can find a six-branched golden candlestick (value: 17 thaler), a fist-sized toad figurine in green-speckled onyx (value: 13 thaler) and an abacus with pearls of gold, silver, copper, brimstone and rubies (value: 52 thaler).

The laboratory section also contains some respectable finds. In the chamber of the furnace (#11) is a simple bowl holding twelve golden teeth, two of which are long and pointy like fangs (value: 14 thaler). In the laboratory itself (#15) stands two urns that once contained the elixirs Shadow Tint and Spirit Friend. All liquid has evaporated but if water is added a person who has the *Alchemy* ability at Master level can learn how to make the drugs (value: 55 thaler for a Master alchemist, 35 thaler for other buyers). An important find can also be made in the library (#13). Most of the books that stood on the shelves have been destroyed by mildew, but a successful test against [*Vigilant* –5] lets you find a hidden compartment in the north wall. In there is a volume containing Menandra's private contemplations on her work as a morphantic – something which, for instance, Ordo Magica would love to read (value: 45 thaler, or twice as much for wizards or sorcerers able to read Symbarian writings).

Finally, the treasure chamber (#F). Two bronze chests stand on the ground, one filled with nothing but unreadable remains of books and scrolls. In the other one are the artifacts Yarego's Iron Fist and Peatro's Flask along with the family savings: a jar of Symbarian gold coins (value: 150 thaler), another jar containing mixed gemstones (value: 220 thaler) and finally Adaman-Saar, in the legends spoken of as the blood-stained diamond (value: 300 thaler).



A Blooming Vale

IN A VALE deep inside Davokar is the ruin of a Symbarian castle – a handful of well-preserved stone structures, framed by a towering wall, which long ago was the high seat of the family Ambreagos. The vale is still blooming but more wild than beautiful and also so densely vegetated that its floor can hardly be glimpsed during the summers. This is the reason why so few Ambrians have found the place – most expeditions, especially the larger ones, depart during summer when the sea of leaves makes it impossible to see even the high central tower of the main building from a distance.

However, one early summer's day fourteen years ago, a trio of amateur explorers were travelling the region before the greenery had awoken. They spotted the tower, repelled down the steep wall of the cliff and marched through the thicket all the way to the gates of the castle. One of them died in combat with the pack of mare cats living in the overgrown courtyard, but the two survivors could then start exploring the ancient structure. Other fortune hunters had told them that the most remarkable finds were always made in tombs and mausoleums, so they decided to start at that end. This proved to be a bad idea. The intrusion woke the embalmed remains of Na-Ethikel Ambreagos to life and to a thirst for blood even grimmer than what he experienced before dying.

Filled with warm juices of life, the undead left the crypt and settled down in his old castle. He reanimated the two explorers and had them clean out the building – tow away dirt and debris, scrub and sweep and polish up the metal objects still remaining. As more and more expeditions departed from Thistle Hold, more humans found their way to the bottom of the ravine. Blood flowed and Na-Ethikel's hoard of undead grew larger and larger. Still, the Lord of the castle was not satisfied.

Little more than four years ago, he decided to capture, rather than kill, the next group of humans to arrive at his doorstep. This proved to be Trobela, a Master of Ordo Magica, and her three novices; come to the vale intent on cataloging its plant life. Trobela was versed in Symbarian writings and with her enforced help Na-Ethikel started to rediscover the world. And when the wizard wrote to him about Thistle Hold he had an idea.

He selected one of Trobela's novices who seemed to love his Master the most, and sent him to the Hold with a mind full of horrible visions of what would happen to his beloved if he did not obey. Since then, the novice Ranfalt has sold information about *"The Blooming Vale"* to parties of wannabe treasure hunters, actually also to a group of templars out to search for ancient sun temple ruins. This way the loyal subjects of Na-Ethikel Ambreagos have continued to grow in numbers.



The colonnade up to Ambreago's high seat is magnificent in its overgrown splendor.

OVERVIEW

The vale where the castle is situated appeared thousands of years ago after a subsidence in the ground. Elliptical in shape, it is at its widest a couple of thousand paces from long side to long side, but grows narrower in the northwest and southeast as a squinting cat eye. The cliffs for the most part plunge steeply and are between fifty and a hundred paces high, but the narrower the vale is the lower and less steep are the walls. To get down at those places is easy, but then you must be ready to fight your way through the dense and beast plagued forest for at least a whole day's walk.

Thanks to warm and nutritious water bubbling up from the Underworld, the vale is even more verdant than the surrounding forest. The trees are high and lush, the undergrowth is rich even though the foliage steals most of the sunlight, and among the many species of the vale there are some that are literally unique. At its northwestern end lives the cannibalistic goblin tribe Arekkegald as obedient followers of the Liege Troll Galde, and in the southeast a family of aboars have their hunting grounds. However, close to the castle, there is no wildlife except for birds and insects.

The castle is covered in vines, moss and lichens. The blue-glazed stone wall is at least the height of three men but is no obstacle – both because the gates (#1) are wide open, and because virtually all trees near the wall are even higher

The Buildings in the Courtyard

One of the buildings on the south side (#4) is full of explorer's equipment in varying degrees of decay, while the other (#3) functions as provisions storage, containing about two dozen carcasses of goblins and smaller beasts, and a stupidly staring aboar whose skull is untouched but who is otherwise eaten to the bone. In the northern building (#2) lives Na-Ethikels hoard of undead – roughly two hundred women and men, so jam-packed that they can hardly sit on the dirt floor. Player characters who lean their head against the door can easily determine that a huge crowd of people is inside the building. They may also remove the bolt from one of the doors and have a quick peak without the undead having time to react. Oh, and should they be stupid enough to leave the door open they have themselves to blame ...

and have branches reaching out over the courtyard. Trees also cover everything inside the wall, except for where it has been cut down on the order of the undead Lord, leaving nothing but stubs, moss and wild berry bushes on the ground. Trodden paths lead to the four central buildings and the mausoleum.

Described below are a number of challenges that the player characters must face to make it in and out of the castle alive. The Game Master is of course welcome to add to or modify these challenges. But more importantly, he or she should take the time to figure out what hides inside the buildings that are not described below and add some more details to the setting. As a point of departure it can be said that the Symbarian family Ambreagos worshiped the Bull God Eox and that they were fierce warriors, rather than a family consisting of bookworms and mystics.

THE DESCENT

Even if it is fully possible that the player characters happen upon the vale by chance, it is more likely that they purchase the information from Ranfalt. If so, he will warn them of the northwestern and southeastern ends and suggest that they climb down the cliff somewhere along the sides.

Centuries of erosion have made the rock easier to climb than it once was, but it is still a very difficult climb (provided that they do not bring along lots and lots of rope on the journey). The one who makes a successful *Vigilant* test can after a bit of searching find a place that looks passable. If choosing that way, all player characters that do not have *Acrobatics* must make five rolls against *Quick* during the descent. A failure means a fall of 1D10 meter down the cliff-side and a risk of being damaged (see page 177 in the *Core Rulebook*).

Should they instead keep searching for an even simpler path, one can be found if someone succeeds with a [*Vigilant* –5] test. In that case the descent is handled as above, with the exception that the five rolls are made against [*Quick* +5] and that the fall is never more than 1D6 meters.

THE TEMPLARS

Just like the gates in the wall, the twin-doors of the main building (#6) stand wide open. The great entry hall is totally bare and clean, and the walls are free from greenery. Should the player characters arrive at night, they will find the hall illuminated by oil burning along the rim of a great iron chandelier.

Four living persons are awaiting the characters in the hall – two templars in shining plate mails and their two squires. One of the sun knights introduces himself as Eran Kalfas and orders the characters to lay down their arms. They are now the guests of Na-Ethikel Ambreagos and if they appear capable and compliant, he suggests that they will obtain prominent positions in the army of their Lord. Should they for some reason decline the offer, they will die and be forced to join the army's vanguard.

A successful use of the ability *Witchsight* reveals that all four of them are under the influence of slave runes – they will die fighting if their master orders them to do so.

A character passing a *Vigilant* test notices some strange distortions in the stone floor, suggesting that it hides a pitfall. If this is not discovered and the characters charge at the templars, everyone moving forward must pass a *Quick* test or trample through the floor. The fall is five meters and once down there is no way of getting back up without help from others.

Removing the influence of the slave runes requires the use of the rituals *Break Link* or *Exorcism*, alternately that someone cuts the actual rune from the skin of the victim (see page 142 in the *Core Rulebook*). Hence, combat against the templars is more or less unavoidable. But if any of them are captured alive and freed from the spell they will undoubtedly become valuable companions during what remains of the scenario.

Templars

"Apologies, but you have to die ..."

Two once upon a time proud sun knights who have been caught by Na-Ethikel's enslaving runes. They perform their duties fanatically but are tormented by every move, so much in fact that they are longing for death. Every wound they receive is greeted with a smile, the more severe the better.

Manner	Sad eyes		
Race	Human (Ambrian)		
Resistance	Challenging		
Traits	*Contacts* (the Sun Church)		
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 9 (+1), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 10 (0), **Quick** 13 (–3), **Resolute** 11 (–1), **Strong** 15 (–5), **Vigilant** 7 (+3)			
Abilities	*Iron Fist* (adept), *Beast Lore* (novice), *Man-at-arms* (adept), *Steadfast* (master), *Witch Hammer* (adept)		
Weapons	Bastard Sword 7 (precise) +2 (Witch Hammer		
Armor	Full Plate 5 (Flexible)		
Defense	–3		
Toughness	15	**Pain Threshold**	8
Equipment	None		
Shadow	Drably yellow, like unpolished gold (corruption: 4)		
Tactics: The templars fight side-by-side or back-to-back to avoid being flanked, always with their bastard swords enveloped in holy fires.			

Squires

"Resistance is futile ..."

A boy and girl of noble blood that both hoped to grow into fully-fledged knights of Prios. Now, they are marked with slave runes and are fighting sword and shield for their undead master, instead of spreading the light of the Lawgiver.

Manner	Staring, grim		
Race	Human (Ambrian)		
Resistance	Weak		
Traits	*Contacts* (the Sun Church)		
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 9 (+1), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 10 (0), **Quick** 13 (–3), **Resolute** 11 (–1), **Strong** 15 (–5), **Vigilant** 7 (+3)			
Abilities	*Beast Lore* (novice), *Man-at-arms* (novice)		
Weapons	Sword 4		
Armor	Chain Mail 4		
Defense	–1 (shield)		
Toughness	15	**Pain Threshold**	8
Equipment	None		
Shadow	Gold in lighter and darker nuances, like a crude nugget (corruption: 0)		
Tactics: The Squires have no tactical schooling and only obey the commands of the templars.			



A BLOOMING VALE

1. Gates
2. Servants Housings
3. Residential building
4. Residential building
5. The Mausoleum
6. Keep
7. Undomesticated Garden
8. Storage/Warehouse

THE COURT

The court of Ambreagos is assembled on the third floor of the central tower (#6) – undead women and men dressed up in whatever they could find. Their faces are painted white with chalk, their lips red with rust-colored oil; they wear mismatching, dirty and often ill-fitting clothes selected from what the "guests" of the castle had in their backpacks upon arrival; the hair of the women is set in sloppy styles, decorated with drooping flowers or withered leaf laurels.

The robust door between the stairwell and the floor is closed. A successful *Vigilant* test reveals that a large crowd of people shuffles about on the other side.

By smearing oil on the hinges and passing a test against [*Discreet* +3], the door can be pushed ajar without attracting attention. Then, if someone succeeds with a [*Vigilant* –1] test, he or she discovers a winch contraption right outside the door; releasing the sprint will make a massive chandelier fall to the floor.

Fifteen undead members of the court are in the room, but if the characters start their attack by releasing the chandelier 2D4 of these will a) have their *Toughness* halved, and b) become caught under the heavy iron piece. Starting on the second turn, the ones caught may try to break free by passing a *Strong* test (let the players roll the die/dice).

Lady/Lord in Waiting

Hisses hospitably with dry throats.

Manner	Overly genteel		
Race	Undead		
Resistance	Ordinary		
Traits	*Natural Weapon* (II), *Undead* (I)		
Accurate 9 (+1), **Cunning** 5 (+5), **Discreet** 10 (0), **Persuasive** 15 (–5), **Quick** 10 (0), **Resolute** 13 (–3), **Strong** 7 (+3), **Vigilant** 11 (–1)			
Abilities	*None*		
Weapons	Bone nails 4		
Armor	None		
Defense	0		
Toughness	10	**Pain Threshold**	–
Equipment	None		
Shadow	Bluish black like boils of the plague (thoroughly corrupt)		

Tactics: The court aborts its stumbling parody of dancing when the characters make themselves known and attack at random with long claw-like nails.

THE STAIR TRAP

The throne room of Na-Ethikel Ambreagos is on the fifth floor. Long ago it was furnished as the bedchamber of the gentry, and the ancient traps that once were designed to stop wrongdoers from reaching the chamber have been restored.

There are three traps in the stair leading up to level five, which are sprung if you put your weight on the wrong step. The first two fire four poison-tipped arrows each; four separate *Defense* rolls must be made. A failure means that the arrow deals 3 in damage, and if any tip penetrates the armor value, the victim also suffers 3 damage for 3 turns from poison.

Discovering the first poison trap requires someone successfully rolling against [*Vigilant* –3]. When that one has been exposed, a [*Vigilant* +5] test is all it takes to find the one ten steps further up the stair.

Finally, close to the top there is a pitfall – if someone takes a wrong step, a 1x1 meter hole opens in the stair, to a fall of four meters towards the iron spikes waiting at the bottom. A normal test against *Vigilant* is enough to notice the suspicious notches in the design of the steps and realize exactly which step will spring the trap.

If the trap is sprung, the one stepping on it may make a *Quick* test, trying to catch hold of the edge and stop the fall. If that fails, the character suffers damage from a four meter fall and also hits 1D4 spearheads dealing 4 points in damage each. Any armor worn protects as usual.

NA-ETHIKEL AMBREAGOS

When the characters finally enter the throne room of the Crypt Lord, they find him standing on the balcony with two servants. He taps them on the shoulder, after which they let themselves fall over the rail. Then he walks to the throne with a sly smile on his chapped lips.

Na-Ethikel has forced his subjects to teach him the Ambrian tongue. With a harsh voice he asks the characters to put their weapons away. Should they refuse, he says that he only wants to talk and that they should take a look from the balcony. If they do, the sky-diving servants are either seen running towards or arriving at the building where Na-Ethikel's horde is imprisoned. Before long, the courtyard will swarm with thirsty troopers and should anything happen to their lord and commander they will storm the central tower.

If the characters let the undead lord continue to speak, he will offer them the chance to join his army and help him rise as the sovereign ruler of Symbaroum reborn. They will not even have to

become his slaves, nor undead. Instead they are welcome to join of their own free will – all they need to do is bend their heads and to fall to their knees at his feet.

If, and in that case when, it becomes apparent that the characters cannot be convinced, Na-Ethikel engineers his escape. High up under the dark ceiling hang three small urns containing a soporific powder (see Drone Spores on page 75). A thread runs down the wall, over the floor and to the throne of the Lord – a slight tug is all it takes for the content of the urns to fall on those standing beneath.

Noticing the contraption without any indication of its existence is hard; it requires a test against [*Vigilant* –5]. However, anyone passing an unmodified *Vigilant* test detects when Na-Ethikel grabs the end of the thread, making it much easier to avoid the dizzying effect of the poisonous cloud.

Whatever else happens, Lord Ambreagos will try to flee once the poison falls through the air – he activates the artifact Orkan's Ring (see loot below) and uses his movement action to run past the characters towards the stairs.

Player characters who are not prepared must pass a roll against [*Quick* –5] in order to avoid the soporific cloud; for those who noticed when Na-Ethikel grabbed the thread, a roll against *Quick* without modifications will suffice. The ones who are affected by the cloud become dazed and lose one of their upcoming actions. And should they also fail a test against *Strong*, they will immediately fall into a deep sleep, lasting to the end of the scene or until they are hurt.

Na-Ethikel Ambreagos

"Fall to your knees, insect!"

Na-Ethikel has decided to rebuild Symbaroum and refuses to accept that it cannot be done. But then again, he has all the time in the world to gather his forces, and truth be told: the dream is more important than making an actual attempt. The Crypt Lord is basically happy just to rule once more, even if over a very tiny realm.

Manner	Arrogant, hostile
Race	Crypt Lord
Resistance	Strong
Traits	*Armored* (III), *Gravely Cold* (I), *Undead* (III)

Accurate 7 (+3), **Cunning** 5 (+5), **Discreet** 10 (0), **Persuasive** 10 (0), **Quick** 9 (+1), **Resolute** 14 (–4), **Strong** 16 (–6), **Vigilant** 11 (–1)

Abilities	*Alchemy* (master), *Dominate* (master), *Exceptionally Resolute* (novice), *Exceptionally Strong* (novice), *Iron Fist* (master), *Ritualist* (adept: *Enslave, Possess, Raise Undead*), *Recovery* (master), *Unholy Aura* (adept)
Weapons	The War Club Soul's Bane 10 (+3 temporary corruption)
Armor	Mummified Skin 5, half damage from anything but magical weapons and holy powers
Defense	+1
Toughness	16 **Pain Threshold** –
Equipment	The War Club Soul's Bane (heavy weapon, Deep Impact, Corrupting Attack II), various jewelry (value: 300 thaler)
Shadow	Grainy black, like sand made from crushed onyx (thoroughly corrupt)

Tactics: Na-Ethikel first tries to flee. If that is not possible he veils himself in a black aura, continues by trying to dominate/subjugate the worst enemy, then starts drumming away with Soul's Bane.

SURROUNDED BY DEATH

Whether or not the characters manage to slay Na-Ethikel, they are at risk of becoming stuck in a tower invaded by hundreds of dragouls executing the (possibly last) command of their Lord. They have no other option besides trying to punch through and escape.

Running down the stairs is possible but hardly recommended. About 100 undead warriors will try to stop them – fifty while descending the stairwell and fifty awaiting them in the entry hall at the ground level. If the player characters choose that strategy, the Game Master should reward all good ideas but also punish them harshly for bad ones. Sure, they can throw or roll heavy objects ahead of them down the stairs and maybe make it to the ground floor. But there they will be greeted by five rows of ten enemy warriors, weapons drawn.

A more reasonable strategy is to use the vines on the façade and climb down to the roof of the main building, about fifteen meters down. The climb will take five turns to complete and to get down safely each player must make two tests per turn. The first test is made against [*Vigilant* +3] and determines if the character grips the right vines – a failure means that the character falls onto the stone roof below (the height is reduced by 3 meters per turn). The other test is a roll against *Discreet*.

The Lord's Prisoners

Should all player characters fall asleep in the throne room, Na-Ethikel will of course stop his escape. When they awake, they will find themselves locked inside one underground prison cell each, with the corroded iron bars replaced by sturdy wooden doors. And in the corridor outside are ten armed dragouls.

The lord of the manor will try to mark them all with the ritual Enslave. But if the players are smart, it should not have to come to that. Let the players be creative and be sure to reward any good ideas. Maybe the not very cunning and oh so narcissistic ruler can be convinced to actually set them free, if they promise to spread word about his greatness to Ambrians and barbarians in Thistle Hold? Maybe they can find parts of the old iron bars trampled into the dirt floor of the cells and use them to remove the cross-beams or get the doors open some other way? Or maybe, one of the cells has a hidden door, making it possible for one of the characters to save himself and then try to get the others out?

Should any character fail, he or she makes a sound or causes a small rock slide which is noted by the enemies roaming around in the courtyard. If so, the dragouls will start making their way to the roof in order to greet them – 1D4 undead reach the roof each turn, starting the turn after the player characters were exposed. You can also expect that the fifty dragouls standing in the entry hall will understand what is happening and that they soon will start pouring out into the courtyard.

Making it down from the roof is not very hard, since the height is not more than five meters. But they have to make a choice: either they run for the back wall, or they try to push their way to the gates. Should they go for the first option, they must strike down two enemies in their path and then start climbing with the horde closing in from behind.

They have five turns to work with before the enemies arrive, numbering 1D8 per turn. This time it is enough to roll against [*Vigilant* +5] in order to avoid treacherous branches, and two successful tests take them to the top. An alternative for some characters may be to wait on the ground and then be hoisted to the battlements, but that requires that two friends have made it up there.

LOOT

The characters have most likely been lured to the site, which is far from unheard of when following directions purchased in Thistle Hold. It is also something that should be taken into account when deciding how much loot they will find.

If they in some mysterious way manage to slay the entire hoard, they will of course be able to make some serious money off the weapons and armor of the dragouls, but that outcome is not very likely. Instead, the main question is what they can grab before they reach the throne room and if they have time to find the treasures resting in the chamber at the top of the tower.

Among the explorer's equipment collected in a building on the courtyard (#4) there are several copies of all items that usually accompany expeditions into the woods. Only two of these are of special interest. If the player characters take some time to search the storage, he or she who succeeds with a *Vigilant* test finds a small shoulder bag, containing 1D6 Herbal Cures and 2 doses Elixir of Life. The one who in addition passes a test against [*Vigilant* –5] manages to find something of even greater value – a mystical and clearly useful artifact, in the shape of a tiny brass bell (for information on the artifact, see Eamon's Bell on page 73).

At the northern corner of the courtyard was once an herbal garden (#7). The plants cultivated there have over the centuries run wild and spread across the area. Unfortunately, this means that the garden is full of soporific bombs that erupt if you step on them, releasing the same type of particles found in the throne room (see Drone Spores on page 75). He who enters the garden looking for usable herbs must make three *Vigilant* tests; a failure means that a cloud of Drone Spores is released; a success gives the character a chance to harvest the spore capsule – a procedure requiring a test against *Cunning*, or else the capsule will erupt in a cloud of spores. Moreover, a character who succeeds with a roll against [*Vigilant* –5] will be able to collect a small bouquet of the so far undiscovered herb Malvom. To an alchemist or botanically versed wizard the bouquet is worth about 20 thaler.

Na-Ethikel keeps his treasure at the back of the throne room. There are two urns full of gold objects collected from the mausoleum (value: 84 thaler) and a stone coffin filled with coin assembled from the members of his hoard (156 ortegs, 201 shillings and 400+2D12 thaler). Finally, the crypt lord himself is wearing Orkan's Ring, taken from one of the wilderness guides now fighting in his army (see page 73 for information).

New Mechanics

IN THIS CHAPTER you will find information on new rules, traits, creatures, artifacts and more, related to the campaign material and to the adventure *Wrath of the Warden*. Some of these have featured in earlier publications but are repeated here for the sake of the gaming groups that have not acquired *Adventure Pack 1*, *The Mark of the Beast* or *Tomb of Dying Dreams*.



These letters are part of a text found close to Karvosti. The text as a whole tells the tale of the witch Arbusal's attempt to murder High Chieftain Maiesticar.

Additional Rules

THE FIRST RULES section introduces a number of abilities, rituals and traits. All of them are put to use somewhere in this book but they can also be used in other situations, for example in the development of player characters or as a basis when creating homebrew adventures and campaigns.

FIRE BREATH, MONSTROUS TRAIT

The creature has the ability to breathe fire, so hot that it can burn the enemy to cinders or at least give them serious burn wounds.

I **Active**. The creature aims its fire breath at a single target. If successfully passing a *[Accurate←Quick]* test, the puff deals 6 in damage. If failed, the damage is 3.

II **Active**. The creature keeps the fire breath ongoing. If successful with a *[Accurate←Quick]* test, the puff deals 6 in damage; if failed, the damage is 3. If the target takes full damage, the creature may try to direct the flaming fire towards another target, and so on until the creature fails its *[Accurate←Quick]* test.

III **Active**. The creature exhales a storm of fire. If successful with a *[Accurate←Quick]* test, the puff deals 6 in damage; if failed, the damage is 3. The chain continues even if the creature fails the test once; it is broken at the second failed test against *[Accurate←Quick]*.

METAMORPHOSIS, MONSTROUS TRAIT

The creature has no fixed shape but may adapt its form to the surroundings and the challenges it faces. Through the process of metamorphosis, the creature can take on a form giving it characteristics that correspond to one or more monstrous traits: *Acidic Attack*, *Armored*, *Fire Breath* (see above), *Natural Weapon*, *Poisonous*, *Robust*, *Swarm*, *Web*, *Wings*.

I **Active.** The creature can simulate one of the listed traits, corresponding to level I.

II **Active.** The creature can simulate two of the listed traits, corresponding to level I.

III **Active.** The creature can simulate two of the listed traits, corresponding to level II.

FLESH CRAFT, RITUAL

Tradition: Sorcery

The mystic temporarily transforms its hands to flesh crafting and bone sculpting claw-like instruments, put to work on a more or less willing victim. The work transforms the victim into a grotesque

image of itself, possessing one or more monstrous traits at level I from the following list: *Acidic Blood*, *Acidic Attack*, *Armored*, *Corrupting Attack*, *Natural Weapon*, *Poisonous*, *Poison Spit*, *Regeneration*, *Robust*, *Wings*. Later, the victim may develop the traits granted by the ritual with *Experience*, as if they were normal abilities.

A voluntary victim gains 1D4 in permanent corruption per trait, but is only affected by the part that transcends its current value in permanent corruption. An involuntary victim gains 1D4 in permanent corruption, which are added to the corruption it already has.

Since the risk of the victim becoming blight born is high, the careful sorcerer always starts off by binding the victim with the ritual *Enslave*. With that precaution taken, the newborn abomination will obey its creator after its fall into darkness.

Example: *The sorceress Agathara uses Flesh Craft on one of her servants, who voluntarily accepts to be "exalted". She does not know the ritual Enslave, but chains her victim to the wall, just to be on the safe side. The underling has Resolute 12 and permanent corruption 4 when the ritual begins. Agathara opts to give him three monstrous traits, at a total of [3D4–4] in permanent corruption. Agathara rolls 7 on 3D4, giving him 3 more points in permanent corruption, 7 in total. This exceeds his corruption threshold, immediately resulting in an additional 1D4 in permanent corruption. The roll is 3, hence the victim's permanent corruption is 10. Agathara's loyal follower is transformed into an exalted version of himself with three monstrous traits at novice level, without becoming thoroughly corrupt.*

If Agathara had tried to do the same thing to an involuntary victim, the mathematics of corruption would have been grimmer: first, the victim would have suffered 7 in permanent corruption, in addition to the 4 it had, 11 in total – and then suffered 3 more when exceeding the corruption threshold, for a total of 14. Sure, the victim would have received three monstrous traits, but would also have turned into a howling blight beast, out of control. Were it not for the chains, Agathara would most likely have become the newborn's first meal.

NIGHT PERCEPTION, MONSTROUS TRAIT

The creature has been gifted with abilities making it able to perceive its surroundings using sound waves – it emits sound pulses that bounce off nearby objects and return to the creature that then can form an image of what the surroundings look like. Because of this, the creature can act normally even in complete darkness.

FLEET-FOOTED, TRAIT

The creature moves at an unusually high speed. In situations where precision counts, the movement is 13 meters per turn. And in connection to the rule on Flight & Hunt, the trait gives a +3 *Quick* bonus.

BLACK BREATH, MYSTICAL POWER

Tradition: Sorcery

The mystic can spew out its inner darkness and infect others with corruption, or heal already corrupt creatures. The mystic must have permanent corruption in order to learn this mystical power.

Novice	**Active**. One (1) creature is hit by the gust; roll 1D4 against its total corruption. If the roll is equal to or lower than the corruption value, the creature is healed with the outcome of the roll; if higher, the creature suffers the outcome in temporary corruption.
Adept	**Active**. Same as Novice level, but the test is made with 1D6.
Master	**Active**. Same as Adept level, but the attack is made in a chain, where another target is hit if the previous one suffered corruption. When someone is healed, the chain is lost.

SLOW, TRAIT

The creature moves at an unusually slow speed. In situations where precision counts, the movement is 7 meters per turn. And in connection to the rule on Flight & Hunt, the trait gives a –3 *Quick* penalty.

RAISE UNDEAD, RITUAL

Tradition: Sorcery

The mystic has the ability to grant permanent (un) life to a newly dead creature, perished not more than seven days earlier. For the undead to surely be under the mystics control after the ritual's completion, the mystic must successfully roll a test against [*Resolute*←*Resolute*]. Should the test fail, the undead awakens with its own will intact and is then free to decide for itself whether or not to follow the mystic. If the test is successful, the creature must obey the mystic as if it was bound by a slave rune, and can only be freed by the death of its master.

The creature keeps all values and abilities it had in life and is also gifted with the monstrous trait *Undead* at level I. It does not age but will not go on forever, since its body is in a constant state of slow decomposition. The creature must make a test against *Strong* each year – if the test fails the creature's value in *Strong* is reduced by one point. When the *Strong* value reaches 0, the body finally falls apart and the creature meets its final death.

Artifacts

WITH FEW EXCEPTIONS, the artifacts covered by this section appear in the adventure *Wrath of the Warden*. Should some of them not come into play, the Game Master is of course welcome to use them in any other context, save the artifacts owned by some non-player character since they are likely to reappear in future adventure modules.

ALOÉNAS AMULET

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

Spirit Shield: Once per turn, the master of the amulet can ask the spirit to enclose him in an extra layer of protection. This must be done before rolling the *Defense* test and if the attack hits, the wearer may ignore 2 points in damage.
Action: Reactive
Corruption: 1D4

Spirit Dance: Once per scene, the master of the amulet can ask of the spirit to dance around him like a whirling wind, lasting a full turn and averting any incoming attacks made with ranged weapons. Note that the wearer cannot fire or throw any ranged weapons while the power is active. Melee weapons are not affected by the dance.
Action: Free
Corruption: 1D4

Sacrifice: The one who is bound to the amulet can demand the ultimate sacrifice of the spirit. It completely protects the wearer against all forms of attacks during one turn, while the wearer can act normally. When the turn is over, the amulet shatters and cannot be used again.
Action: Free
Corruption: 1D8

THE DAGGER BLACK EDGE

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

Exhaust: The master of the dagger can use it to weaken his or her opponents. When the weapon deals damage, its wielder can activate an effect making the victim incapable of making use of its abilities during the current and the following turn.
Action: Reactive
Corruption: 1D4

Paralyse: Like Exhaust, but the victim becomes totally paralyzed during the current and the following turn.
Action: Reactive
Corruption: 1D6

EAMON'S BELL

The comical stories about the master thief Eamon who always went after Symbaroum's rich and powerful have survived in a series of barbarian tall tales. Especially popular is the tale of when he stole the festive attire of the matriarch Clorandia, complete with gemstone adorned petticoats and gaudy jewelry – accomplished by using his legendary bell to keep her immobilized, while using his free hand to remove her clothes down to her bare skin.

Bewilder: The master of the bell can use it to put his victim in a state of utter bewilderment, making it unable to act until passing a test against *Resolute* (the owner of the bell makes the test, one roll per turn) or until suffering any damage.
Action: Active
Corruption: 1D4

Annoy: When in close combat, the master can choose to fight with the bell in one hand (makes it impossible to use a shield, heavy weapons and two weapons). As long as the bell tingles, its carrier gets a second chance to succeed with *Defense* tests. The effect lasts the whole scene or till the bell goes silent.
Handling: Passive
Corruption: 1D4

OKRAN'S RING

It is not often that elves are portrayed as anything other than frightening and hostile in barbarian tales. One of few exceptions is the abomination hunter called Okran, who according to the legends saved the lives of innumerable clan folks over the years.

He was finally slain by a woman whose husband professed his love for the elf again and again while dreaming. What happened to his legendary ring, no stories can tell.

Guided by Light: The master of the ring can let the light of the artifact reveal the weak spots of any abomination. All attacks on that creature deal +1 in damage thereafter.
Action: Active
Corruption: 1

Rays of Light: On the master's command, the ring can emit a ray of holy light that damages a single abomination. The damage is 1D8 and armor provides no protection.
Action: Active
Corruption: 1D4

PEATRO'S FLASK

This small and engraved tin flask may very well be the one that according to legends was carried by the priestess Peatro. She is mentioned in some songs, claimed to originate from the final days of Symbaroum, as a cautionary example that acts of kindness can have dire consequences if performed with the help of mystical powers.

The flask can contain two doses and has the ability to endow any liquid with healing properties. But at a cost: first, the mystic suffers corruption when the liquid is transformed, then the elixir has a corrupting effect on anyone drinking it.

Dark Cure: The master of the flask can make the liquid inside it gain healing properties. The elixir is active for 1D4 turns, and each turn he who has consumed a dose of the concoction regains 1D4 of *Toughness*, but also suffers half of the outcome of the healing roll in temporary corruption (rounded up).
Action: Active
Corruption: 1 (when transformed)

Anti-Darkness: The master of the flask can make the liquid inside it counteract damage from poisons. The elixir halves the outcome on the damage die for all kinds of poison (rounded up), but the damage so avoided will instead affect the drinker in the form of temporary corruption.
Action: Active
Corruption: 1 (when transformed)

THE BATTLE AXE HUNGER

There are tales of a barbarian ruler named Yakobor who was tricked into entering into an alliance with the Spider King. In exchange for his loyalty, Yakobor got a battle axe and a chest full of red gold coins. According to the legend, everything bought with the coins was soon destroyed – meat rotted, butter went rancid, iron rusted and slaves withered into crippled elders in a day. And the axe that was to make Yakobor into the greatest of all, instead darkened his soul. Hunger is a battle axe with Deep Impact (+1 in damage), made to corrupt both wielder and enemy.

Night Bite: The master of the axe can have it radiate corruption when it hits the enemy in combat. Activating the power (which lasts to the end of the scene) only costs 1 corruption, but with every hit 1D4 is rolled. The wielder suffers the outcome of the roll in temporary corruption, the victim suffers the outcome in both corruption and extra damage.
Action: Free
Corruption: 1

YAREGO'S IRON FIST

The object called Yarego's Iron Fist is mentioned in dozens of legends from the early days of Symbaroum and its battles, as belonging to different owners in different locations. The artifact is truly a marvel of mystical crafting skills but also demands much from he or she who wants to be its master – his or her arm must be cut off right below the elbow so that the item can merge with the stump. When in place, the awkward thing is just about flexible enough to perform daily activities like gripping a dining knife, but its grip will not allow the effective use of any kind of weapon.

As the name suggests, the foot-long Iron Fist is made from iron that in time has been marked with spots of rust and innumerous cuts from parried blades. In combat, long spikes extend from the knuckles and an iron collar unfolds to encircle the arm near the elbow, to be used as a quillion. In combination with its weight, this gives the Iron Fist a permanent +1 bonus on *Defense* and in damage. Adding to that, the artifact has the following powers:

Stun: With a hit that deals damage after Armor has been subtracted, the Iron Fist can stun the enemy. The power may be used once per scene and requires the master to make a [*Strong*←*Resolute*] test. If successful, the victim loses both his upcoming actions.
Action: Reactive
Corruption: 1D4

Push: Once per scene and with a hit that deals damage after Armor has been subtracted, the fist can give the target an added push. With a successful [*Strong*←*Strong*] the thrust makes the target fall to the ground.
Action: Reactive
Corruption: 1D4

Break: Once each turn, the master of the Iron Fist may attack the enemy's weapon instead of the enemy itself. First, a successful attack test must be made to get a grip on the weapon; then the wielder of the fist must succeed with a test against *Strong* to break the weapon asunder. A weapon which is considered magical (i.e. is an artifact which can be bound to a master) cannot be destroyed like this – if so, the target is disarmed.
Action: Active
Corruption: 1D4

Other

ADDITIONAL RULES THAT do not fit the categories Abilities/Traits or Artifacts are assembled under the header Other. In this case, we are talking about everything from new elixirs to new creatures and rules for special actions.

SPIRIT FRIEND, ELIXIR

The miraculous drug called Spirit Friend can only be crafted by someone having the ability *Alchemy* at master level. The concoction is cooked in a cauldron, but it is not the liquid that is bottled up, but the vapors. The gray-white smoke is captured in small ceramic jars and inhaled when needed.

Spirit Friend gives the user level I in the trait *Spirit Form*. The effect lasts for 1D4 turns, to the price of as many points in temporary corruption.

DRONE DEW, ELIXIR

Drone Dew is an elixir made from drone spores (see below) also containing accelerants, meaning that the maker of the concoction must have the ability *Alchemy* at Adept level.

A person who ingests a dose of the elixir immediately falls asleep if he or she does not pass a *Strong* test, and stays asleep for an hour or until suffering any damage. If the test is passed, the person is instead dazed, with the effect that he or she only has one action per turn and cannot use any active abilities for an hour.

DRONE SPORES, ELIXIR

Drone spores are naturally occurring, encased in a puffball mushroom called Kabamon by the barbarians. The mushroom is edible for most of its life cycle, but near the end it transforms into a veritable spore bomb.

The spores can be harvested (requires a successful *Cunning* test per dose), and may then be used just like the Choking Spores (see the ability *Strangler* on page 123 in the *Core Rulebook*).

The victim of the cloud becomes dazed and immediately loses one of its upcoming actions. Should the victim also fail a test against *Strong*, he or she will fall into a deep sleep lasting for the remainder of the scene, or until suffering any damage.

RESEARCH

All player characters can search for information in archives and libraries, but to find anything at all they obviously need to search in a place where the desired information can actually be found (in other words, searching for directions to Symbar at the town archives of Thistle Hold is hopeless). The Game Master must decide what is possible to find, and also how detailed the information is.

In practice, the search is based on the player characters directing a question to the collection of documents. If the Game Master deems that the documents may contain some relevant information, a character with the ability *Loremaster* rolls against *Cunning* while the others roll a test against [*Cunning* –5]. If everyone fails the test, they find nothing and have to move on to somewhere else. But if someone passes the test, the Game Master delivers a response to the question and the characters may continue searching the archive for answers to any supplementary questions. This goes on until all characters fail or the Game Master decided that no additional information can be found.

FLIGHT & HUNT

When the characters are trying to escape anyone or anything hunting them, it is suggested that the Game Master handles it based on the attribute *Quick*. If the characters decide to stick together, he or she with the lowest value in *Quick* must make a test, modified by the *Quick* of the fastest hunter. Should they split up, all of them need to make a test, again modified by the *Quick* of the fastest hunter. And if it is the other way around, if the characters are on the hunt, the same formula is used but instead with a modification based on the slowest prey.

During the hunt, one test is made each turn – if the prey succeeds it pulls away one step, if the prey fails the hunter comes one step closer. To finally get away, the hunted must reach an advantage of 3, in other words, he or she must succeed at three rolls more than he or she fails. And the prey who fails at three rolls more than he or she succeeds will of course get caught.

Example: *The barbarian thief Hoska almost got away scot-free after a burglary in Thistle Hold when a lone watchman saw him exiting the building – the hunt is afoot! Hoska has Quick 13 and the guard Quick 9 (+1), meaning that Hoska's player must roll against 13+1=14 in the attempt to escape the hunter.*

In the first turn, the player rolls a 7 – Hoska pulls away and has advantage 1. The luck holds and the second dice roll lands on 13: advantage 2. One more successful roll and Hoska is free. But unfortunately, the third roll is 17; the guard comes closer and the advantage is 1. Hoska's player sighs nervously. The hunt goes on!

COST OF ELIXIRS

Spirit Friend	12 thaler
Drone Dew	4 thaler
Drone Spores	5 thaler
Shadow Tint	3 thaler
Wild Chew	1 thaler

CRYPT LORD, NEW MONSTER

They are called Crypt Lords, the mighty, mummified creatures that Ambrian explorers sometimes come across on their expeditions. Survivors from such encounters describe them as dehydrated, embalmed corpses dressed in rags or armor whose dilapidated splendor suggests that the owner once was very wealthy.

According to the speculations of Ordo Magica, Crypt Lords were persons of stature whose remains were prepared with ointments and oils that have reacted to the dark energies of the forest, thereby waking them up as undead. But no matter how and why the Crypt Lords have reawakened they provide a dreadful and lethal surprise for many parties of treasure hunters, not least in the cases when they also surround themselves with a guard consisting of hungering dragouls.

CRYPT LORD			
Race	Undead		
Resistance	Strong		
Traits	*Armored* (III), *Gravely Cold* (I), *Undead* (III)		
Accurate 7 (+3), **Cunning** 5 (+5), **Discreet** 10 (0), **Persuasive** 15 (–5), **Quick** 9 (+1), **Resolute** 10 (0), **Strong** 13 (–3), **Vigilant** 11 (–1)			
Abilities	*Dominate* (master), *Iron Fist* (master), *Man-at-arms* (novice), *Recovery* (master), *Two-handed Force* (master).		
Weapons	Bastard Sword 10 (precise)		
Armor	Mummified Skin 5, half damage from anything but magical weapons and holy powers		
Defense	+1		
Toughness	13	**Pain Threshold**	–
Equipment	Valuables (1D100 thaler)		
Shadow	Flaking black, like layer upon layer of burnt paper (thoroughly corrupt)		

Tactics: The Crypt Lord starts by trying to dominate/subjugate the most dangerous looking enemy that has not been affected by the Gravely Cold. Then it attacks its enemies in the order of descending size.

MASTER CRAFTS, EQUIPMENT

During their adventures, the player characters may happen upon master crafted weapons and armor, and should they instead find valuables or coin they have the opportunity to buy master crafts from especially skilled blacksmiths.

The master smith has the ability to add one or more qualities to the object in question, or alternatively remove negative qualities. For every added or removed quality, the cost/value of the item is cumulatively increased by x5. If a sword costs five thaler, a master craft version with the quality Deep Impact would be worth 25 thaler. And if you also want that sword to be Precise, the value is ramped up to 125 thaler. Costly for sure but maybe worth it, since this fine master craft gives +1 on both damage and chance to hit.

SHADOW TINT, ELIXIR

The horribly sickening and oozing elixir Shadow Tint requires the Adept level in *Alchemy* to be made. Long ago, it was used by mystics wanting to hide just how close they were to becoming thoroughly corrupt and it would surely be a welcomed addition to all sorcerers' collections of mystical decoctions.

Whomever forces down the sludge, distorts his or her shadow for a whole scene, making it appear as if the value in total corruption is 1D6 points lower.

WILD CHEW, ELIXIR

The red chewing resin called Wild Chew is a strong stimulant making the chewer more alert, less cautious and much more aggressive. One dose of Wild Chew moves 2 points in *Discreet*, *Cunning* and *Resolute* to *Quick*, *Strong* and *Accurate* for the rest of the scene. During the upcoming scene, the user feels weak and has –2 on all attributes.

With time, Wild Chew is highly addictive and severe withdrawal symptoms will occur unless the user consumes one dose each week, with the risk of permanent madness or death. No known drugs can counteract this.

The Throne of Thorns – Campaign Overview

The barbarian legend to the right gives voice to an allegory describing the basic design of the world. The verse is included in a document entitled The Throne of Thorns – Campaign Overview, which can be found at various download sites.

In the fourteen page document you will find information about the Chronicle of the Throne of Thorns, focusing on its main theme, agents and episodes. Please note that the text is only meant to be read by Game Masters.

THUS SPOKE AROALETA

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

... but out of the untamed Wielda appeared, the power that rules:
the power of willful violence, that bends here and there,
that curves now and then according to ideals and cravings;
that harvests the one and rejects the other.
With time, Wielda's appetite grew,
and the birth was inevitable ...

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

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



THE RAIN BEATS down on the Toad's Square and dawn comes creeping like a barely noticeable shift behind heavy skies. Autumn has arrived in Narugor and in Thistle Hold. It is a time for the successful to sit back and wait for more favorable traveling weather, a time for the families of the diseased to fear the hardships to come, a time for the desperate to make a final attempt – in other words, a typical autumn among those living in the shadow of Davokar.

But despite everything being as usual, the past few days have been characterized by a strangely subdued, almost sinister atmosphere. Everyone feels it, even the successful ones who should have nothing to worry about – a lump in the throat, a fiery ache in the belly. Most keep the feeling to themselves, thinking it is caused by the shifting weather. The rest says a few words to their neighbor, friend or lover but let it rest once they have been assured that everything is as it should be.

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

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



SECTION 3:

WRATH OF THE WARDEN

Introduction

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

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

And if you for a second lower your eyes from the grander scale of events, you will see that *Wrath of the Warden* is a fairly straight forward adventure, primarily dealing with the hunt for the identity of a diseased quest giver and the subsequent showdown with a group of local cultists in Thistle Hold. Hence, the idea is that the insights mentioned in the previous paragraph will be made while the player characters are occupied dealing with a series of very specific challenges in and outside of town – challenges related to the mutilation of a now dying forest god ...

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

The final chapter of this book deals with what happens in the wake of the adventure and offers ideas on various interludes – that is, adventures and other activities which may occupy the characters while waiting for the next episode. An appendix with new rules and the like is not included in the adventure section of the book, since all such content can be found in the Game Master's section on page 71 to 76.

Background

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

Wrath of the Warden is about what happens when one such cult is lured (or tricked) into contributing to exploring the darkness of the world. They call themselves the Midnight Cult, led by the antique dealer Erlaber and include the ogre witch Manaloum, the wizard Desidera, the changelings Klagander and Sibela, and the youngling Gardai, Erlaber's servant, as members. Aside from Erlaber, the cult members are described in the scenes in act 3 where the player characters are likely to face them (pages 163–164).

The aim of the cult is naturally to grow in strength and gain greater influence thanks to their powerful benefactor. But things will not turn out as they hoped, no matter whether the player characters thwart their plans or if they are forced to realize that what was presented to them as a gift instead was predestined to become their doom.



Erlaber Ambreagos

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

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

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

Manner	Big gestures, burning gaze
Race	Human (Ambrian)
Resistance	Challenging
Traits	*Privileged*
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 14 (–4), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 17 (–7), **Quick** 10 (0), **Resolute** 11 (–1), **Strong** 7 (+3), **Vigilant** 9 (+1)	
Abilities	*Bend Will* (adept), *Exceptionally Cunning* (novice), *Exceptionally Persuasive* (adept), *Larvae Boil* (adept), *Leader* (master), *Loremaster* (master), *Ritualist* (adept, *Desecrating Rite, Possess, The Exaltation Ritual*), *Sorcery* (adept)
Weapons	Black Edge 3 (Short)
Armor	Witch Gown 2 (Flexible)
Defense	0
Toughness	10 **Pain Threshold** 4
Equipment	Ritual Codex for The Exaltation Ritual (value: 500 thaler), the dagger Black Edge (page 73)
Shadow	Black flakes on smoldering white, like liquid iron starting to cool (corruption: 5)

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

The Exaltation Ritual

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

HARVESTING A SKULL

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

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

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

As if this was not enough, Erlaber was given resources to stage an expedition to the territory of the forest spirit. Beheading the peaceful ox-god proved to be easy, but killing is was an entirely different matter. The cultists and the contracted mercenaries tried piercing it with their spears but the heart kept on beating; they hauled the headless carcass onto a flaming bonfire but it would not burn.

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

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

THE IRON PACT REACTS

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

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

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

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

Unfortunately, the followers of Erlaber discovered the curious scout, so when Anadea meets with her potential assistants at the start of the adventure, she and the characters are watched by the cultists – something which will adversely affect their chances of safely moving around in Thistle Hold.

The Structure of the Adventure

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

ACT 1: THE BELL TOLLS

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

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

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

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

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

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

ACT 2: LAW OF NECESSITY

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

In any case, it is now up to the players and their characters to assume control and decide how the second act progresses. They have the whole town at their disposal. The chapter describing Act 2 is divided into sections that account for the other agents moving in and around the Hold – how they react to what has happened, what help they may be able to give the player characters and what they want in return for the information or services. Most space is devoted to Ordo Magica, the Sun Church and the Queen's Legation.

The Part of The Prince

Agramai Kalfas (see page 41) plays a very obscure role in this adventure, even if it was he who set the chain of events in motion. The player characters may come across the name The Prince on one single occasion, and then in a context where it is not clear that such a figure even exists. The fight of the characters is solely against Erlaber and his Midnight Cult – an encounter and a possible clash with Agramai will have to wait until future episodes of the adventure chronicle.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ACT 3: MIDNIGHT IN THISTLE HOLD

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

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

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

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

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

The Player Characters

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

- They have adventured enough to have earned about 50 *Experience* each and spent it on abilities making them more skilled in combat.
- They are (right or wrong) moderately known for being capable and daring.
- They are (right or wrong) moderately known for having confronted and battled the corrupt powers of Davokar.

If the players start with completely new characters, it is suggested that they start with 50 extra *Experience* and are equipped with a background similar to the list above. However, the smoothest startup can be achieved by using characters who have played *The Mark of the Beast* and been involved in finding Master Vernam's killer. *Wrath of the Warden* kicks off with the player characters being approached by Vernam's successor as the contact person of the Iron Pact member Teara-Téana; hence, if the player characters were engaged in the hunt for the tutor's murderer, it is quite natural that his successor reaches out to them when she needs help.

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

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

THE PROMISES OF ANADEA

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

A SERIOUS THREAT

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

FRIENDS AND FAMILY

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

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

MOVING UP THE LADDER

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

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

Table 3: Adventure Time-Line

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

What follows is an example of the order the different scenes of the adventure may be played in, provided that the characters choose to adhere to the commands of an outside quest giver. The Game Master is prompted to return to this flow chart after having read through the adventure text.

1–2
The player characters are contacted by and meet the anonymous quest giver

3
The witches arrive; the characters accompany the delegation greeting them

4
The well "speaks"; the sinkhole appears; the characters fight in the defense

5
Intermission where the characters meet NPCs and tend to their wounds

6
The characters are lured into the trap set by the Midnight Cult, inside Haloban's Ring

7
Meeting at Ordo Magica where it is decided that the characters shall make an initial investigation of the sinkhole

8
Down they go. In the hill of rubble they find Anadeas corpse and the clues in her belt purse

9–11
Investigation. Combat with the vearons, a search of the beast clan's lair and finally an encounter with Bayela and the Beast Wraiths

12
Inquiries about Anadea's sun medallion with Elfeno at the Sun Temple

13
They are called to Deseba the Old in the copper dome of the temple, where the characters are asked to eliminate the threat against Sarvola in exchange for information on Anadea

14
Questions about corruption in town inspires Deseba to take them along to meet the blight-marked Orai

15
A walk to Sarvola's Mission House for an audience, but the priest is occupied with townsfolk seeking comfort

16–17
Reconnaissance in and around the Mission House. The characters discover two suspects but have no time to act before the Sellswords of the Sun attack with taunts and firebombs

18–19
Pursues or interrogates the sellswords; finds their headquarters where the Black Cloak Dolani awaits (combat)

20
Examination of the upper floor of the headquarters, where they find clues pointing towards a group of war veterans led by Kargoi Salamos

21–22
A group of cultists attack the characters just when they leave the headquarters. An interrogation with a cultist leads to a tense meeting with Red Eye in Blackmoor

23
Back to Deseba the Old who says that they now have to deal with Kargoi Salamos and get him to back off from harassing Sarvola

24
The characters receive an anonymous letter (from Elfeno), explaining how they can get the information on Anadea without expelling the threat against Sarvola. They are advised not to make an enemy of Deseba the Old

25
Break-in to the house of Kargoi Salamos, find his undead family in the cellar

26
Writes an anonymous message to Kargoi, where the noble is forced to leave Sarvola alone in exchange for the characters' silence regarding the content of his cellar

27
Are given access to the clues found in Anadeas bedchamber in the temple annex

28
The characters are recommended to visit the Queen's Legation to find information on Anadea in its archive and to try to figure out in what lock the key they found in Anadea's belt purse fits

29
Searching the archives and speaking to notaries. Finds the fortune hunter Geleto's statement (pointing to the sun priest Arkel), and asking for an audience with the Legate regarding the key

30–31
Finds Geleto at the Rose Garden, and asks about Arkel at the Sun Temple where they learn that the priest has moved back to his parent's house outside the village Glimmervann

32–33
Journey to Glimmervann, meeting with Arkel's family and interview with the boy

34
A large group of cultists led by the Night Cape strikes

35
Back in Thistle Hold and an audience with the Legate. Are promised information about the key if they break into The Winged Ladle Inn and rob a trio of Sun Knights off a wooden crate

36–37
Reconnaissance, break-in and meeting with the wounded templar Leohan (combat or talk). It is revealed that the loot is somewhere else, with the pensioned sun knight Alamei Sevio

38
The player characters wait until Alamei Sevio is alone before moving in; they best the knight and find the crate under the floorboards – the copper tablet inscribed with Sarkomal's Prophecy

39–40
The tablet is handed over and the characters are pointed towards Anadea's storage. Examining the site leads to the conclusion that her employer is in The Halls of a Thousand Tears

41–42
On suggestion by the quest giver, the characters get an audience with Nightpitch who allegedly knows how to reach the elven halls. They learn what it takes to find the way to the place, among other things a live mare cat, jakaar or some similar small predatory beast

43–45
Journey through Davokar to the Halls of a Thousand Tears

46
Meeting with Teara-Téana in the Halls, where they learn what has happened and that the main suspect is named Erlaber Ambreagos

47–48
Back in town to gain additional information on the enemy. Also, the characters will most likely reach agreements with one or more allies before the attack

49
A thundering battle against a huge number of cultists, succeeded by the insight that the skull of the bull and Erlaber Ambreagos are somewhere else

50
Clues suggest that the cult leader has relocated to the caverns beneath the sinkhole; signs are indicating that the ritual has commenced

51
The characters take action and head down into the Underworld alone, where they first have to deal with the members of the Midnight Cult

52
The final battle against the main villain, in a form decided by how quickly the characters have acted on their way to where he is

53–?
Epilogue, including the return of the skull to the forest and concluding meetings with Teara-Téana and other allies

ACT ONE:

The Bell Tolls

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

Game Opening

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

Characters who have faced the Beast

If some of the player characters have played The Mark of the Beast, Anadea has heard about them and assumes, based on earlier events, that they are no worshipers of darkness. But that does not mean that she dares trust them wholeheartedly, at least not immediately.

For one thing, she knows nothing about what the characters have experienced after The Mark of the Beast – the power of corruption must not be underestimated and also very strong individuals may fall victim to the alluring power of the dark. Hence, Anadea will not divulge who she is and what she knows about the characters until she absolutely has to.

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

There is a letter in the tube:

Dear soon to be friend,
Meet me with haste at the Fern Tavern in the district northwest of the intersection Ynedar's Road/The Promenade. My errand is urgent and of a nature best discussed eye to eye. Of you and your friends I ask only that you take a leap of faith and that you listen to my proposal. In return, I promise to not disappoint. I and the people I represent have vast resources and are prepared to offer a royal compensation for your services.

Whispers for Breakfast

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

As the characters arrive the door is ajar. Through the crack they can see a lone figure, sitting by a table at the back of the tavern, illuminated by a flickering candle flame. It is a woman in her thirties, dressed in a simple bone-white wool tunic and a dark brown cloak. She spends the wait picking her fingernails with a sturdy knife.

When the characters make themselves know she stands up, with a wordless gesture asking them to come closer. She smiles but a successful test against *Vigilant* says that she seems to be very nervous – drops of sweat gleam on her forehead despite the tavern being just as chilly as the street outside.

How the conversation proceeds mainly depends on the characters demeanor. If they act hostile or suspicious Anadea starts doubting that they are suited to be her assistants, but she will not leave the place until she really feels threatened. She is not willing to answer any questions about herself or the nature of the mission until she is more or less convinced that it will be possible to reach an agreement. Before then she says nothing more than the following:

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

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



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

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

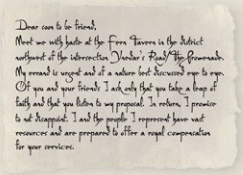
Once the final character is stating his or her demands, a lone bell is heard chiming. Anadea raises her head and if none of the characters have lived in Thistle Hold for long she can inform them that it is the alarm bell by the North Gate that tolls – for the first time in more than four years! Shouting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

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

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

Optional intro

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



Anadea's letter to the characters can be found as a handout at the back of the book



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

To the Rescue

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

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

Depending on the attribute values of the characters there are different ways to get a good view of what is happening. If any of them has 13+ in *Strong*, he or she can make way for them all so they can reach the battlements; characters with the ability *Acrobatics* can climb to a roof and throw down a rope for the others to use. However they do it, the Game Master should allow them to get a clear view of the area north of the town.

Shortly after the characters have found their spot, loud creaking and crashing is heard from the forest edge, about two hundred paces away. The silence that settles among the assembled quickly turns into a collective inhalation when the cause of the alarm emerges – two colossi, at least the height of three men, like enormous oxen but with bodies made from plant fibers instead of from flesh and muscles. Standing on their backs are two barbarian witches, dressed in multicolored felt dresses and with primitive masks covering their faces.

The colossal mounts come to a halt about fifty paces from the palisade. Down in the square, the captain has watched the whole thing through a window and reached the conclusion that this is



The Law of Compliance

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

not an assault. Instead he starts putting together a delegation to walk out and meet with the witches. The player characters have a chance to get onboard.

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

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

Since the situation has evolved so suddenly and because far from everyone present in or by the Toad's Square feels tempted to participate in the delegation, there are not many volunteering for the task. But should one or more of the player characters step forward and offer their services they still have to convince Marvello that they are learned and/or prominent enough to represent the people of the Hold. To succeed, all characters must make a test against *Persuasive*, modified by +5 if they have the ability *Loremaster* at adept level or the trait *Contacts* linked to the faction they claim to represent.

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

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

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

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

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

Accepting the offer

During the events at the sinkhole, the player characters may happen to save the life of Erlaber Ambreagos (see item 3 under The First Wave). At this stage, Erlaber has no idea who the characters are and is in the area only in the hope to get a glimpse of the sinkhole. Should the characters accept his offer and ask for him at the Antique Plaza sometime during the adventure, the one they are talking to (for example the barbarian Elda, page 47 in the Core Rulebook) can tell them where he lives. If they ask for more information he will be described as *"an ambitious and educated loremaster with an interest in the grotesque"*. At his house they find that no one is home and a neighbor can inform them that Erlaber has not been seen since the sinkhole appeared. Maybe the poor antique dealer happened upon more predatory Clan Beasts after he said thanks and goodbye to the characters ...

The Well Speaks

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

When the spheres hit the bronze pipe of the well it generates a sound which makes the ground shake and the world resound with a clangor so powerful that many who are on or close to the Antique Plaza are hurt by the blast. Even those standing further away are at risk of suffering damage. If the player characters are within the Hold's palisade, they all have to make a test against *Strong*. A failure means that they suffer 1D4 damage (armor does not provide protection), from burst eardrums, gushing nose bleeds and bloodshot eyes. The worst cases start coughing up blood due to internal bleedings.

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

It is assumed that the characters will start running towards the area and meet the series of challenges described below. Should they instead do something else (for instance make a run for it or stay hidden) they are of course allowed to do so – nothing of what happens on the way to the sinkhole must be experiences directly; it can be retold by others at a later time. However, this would mean that the characters miss the opportunity to meet and acquaint themselves with some key figures of the adventure, which may make things more difficult later on.

CHILDREN OF THE ABYSS

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

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

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

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

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

After these skirmishes, the characters encounter the biggest challenge of the first wave. The onrushing enemies are monstrous Clan Beasts that show no mercy, and Beast Clan Warriors who primarily are trying to provide the clan with able-bodied slaves. The group is made up of [PC –2] Clan Beasts and two Beast Clan Warriors.

Clan Beasts

Sniffs the air, gurgling greedily

The raging creatures called Clan Beasts are all human beings corrupted and twisted by the use of the ritual Flesh Craft. All of them are wearing iron slave collars and are more or less physically deformed. Some have their forearms transformed into bone blades or spiked bone clubs, some have one or more horn-like outgrowths on the cranium and all display damning blight-marks of a beastly kind – fur-like hair growth, predatory jaws, yellow cat or snake eyes. Also, they suffer from a hunger for lukewarm flesh.

Manner	Growling, sniffing, clawing		
Race	Abomination		
Resistance	Weak		
Traits	*Natural Weapon* (I)		
Accurate 11 (–1), **Cunning** 9 (+1), **Discreet** 13 (–3), **Persuasive** 5 (+5), **Quick** 10 (0), **Resolute** 7 (+3), **Strong** 10 (0), **Vigilant** 15 (–5)			
Abilities	*Berserker* (novice)		
Weapons	Bone Crafts 6		
Armor	None		
Defense	+5		
Toughness	10	**Pain Threshold**	5
Equipment	Slave collar (causes intense pain if the wearer attacks members of the Beast Clan.		
Shadow	Black as night (corruption: thoroughly corrupt)		

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

Beast Clan Warrior

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

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

Dawdling energies

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

Manner	Raging and roaring		
Race	Human (barbarian)		
Resistance	Ordinary		
Traits	*Natural Weapon* (I), *Robust* (I)		
Accurate 15 (–5), **Cunning** 5 (+5), **Discreet** 7 (+3), **Persuasive** 9 (+1), **Quick** 10 (0), **Resolute** 10 (0), **Strong** 13 (–3), **Vigilant** 11 (–1)			
Abilities	*Natural Warrior* (novice), *Poisoner* (adept)		
Weapons	Bone Crafts 6 (+ poison, 2 in damage for 2 turns		
Armor	Leather 2 (+2 Robust)		
Defense	+3		
Toughness	13	**Pain Threshold**	7
Equipment	2 doses poison (weak		
Shadow	Dark purple streaked by black, pulsating veins (corruption: 7)		

Tactics: The warriors let the Clan Beasts move in first. After having applied poison to their natural weapons (requires passing a *Cunning* test, the players roll) they join the fight in places where they have the possibility to flank the enemy.

The Second Wave: During the final turn of the fight described above, a larger gathering of enemies arrives. Fortunately, reinforcements appear when the situation is about to overwhelm the characters – in the form of the brothers Leohan, Hen-Loan and Venhal Mekele (see page 134). The three templars enter combat, their weapons burning with holy rage and voices echoing with the power of Prios.

The second wave consists of Clan Beasts (as many as PC) and (PC –1) Beast Clan Warriors. The characters must handle half of them, rounded up; the rest are dealt with by the templars.

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

Someone mastering the ability *Beast Lore* and succeeding with a *Cunning* test can reach a terrifying conclusion from studying the fallen Clan Beasts: There seems to be a purpose behind the monstrous deformations of these human bodies, as if they have been blight-born in a conscious and controlled manner.

A passed *Cunning* test with the ability *Ritualist* provides further insight. There exist obscure references to rituals said to channel corruption and its effects into living bodies. Such fleshcraft belongs to the worst kind of sorcery.

AT THE RIM OF THE SINKHOLE

A terrifying sight awaits the characters. A sinkhole, just about eighty paces across, has opened up and swallowed almost the whole block. Aside from a growing number of town guards, the wizards Kullinan Furia and Eufrynda are there (see page 106 and 47). A dozen town guards lay on the ground along with a couple of Beast Clan Warriors.

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

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

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

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

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

The conversation does not last long before Kullinan Furia silences anyone present with a solemn *"shush!"*. First nothing but small slides are heard from the deep, accompanied by creaks from the bedrock. However, anyone standing by the rim and who succeeds with a test against [*Vigilant* –3] will soon hear the sound of clicking and scraping, as if something is clawing up the walls of the hole. One turn later, a test against [*Vigilant* +3] is enough to register the oncoming danger – a hoard of humanoid but horribly twisted creatures that rush towards the surface with the aid of their long bone-claws.

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

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



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

The enemies the characters must deal with during the fight at the sinkhole consist of Clan Beasts (PC +1 in total), Beast Clan Warriors (PC –1 in total) along with a leader in the form of a Beast Clan Guardian. First up the wall are the Beast Clan Guardian, two Beast Clan Warriors and two Clan Beasts. The following turn they are joined by two Beasts and one Warrior. Any remaining Warriors arrive in the third turn and remaining Beasts at the start of the fourth.

Note that the members of the Beast Clan never stop to deal any killing blows, so even if the player characters should fall they have a chance to crawl to safety. Provided that they pass their Death Tests, two panicked priest initiates comes running to stabilize their wounds with herbal cures; this happens two turns after the final character reaches 0 in *Toughness*. For what happens next, this outcome counts as if the characters escaped or lost.



Beast Clan Guardian

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

The most prominent fleshcrafts of the clan are given the title Guardian and act as chieftain Helionor's officers in combat. They have all proven to withstand the corruption of the sculpting and are therefore blessed with multiple traits, which they have developed and refined. Unlike Beasts and Warriors they have weapons: great swords, axes or clubs. They wear no armor, instead trusting in their speed and their fleshcrafted, hardened skin.

Manner	Proud, indifferent, superior
Race	Human (barbarian)
Resistance	Challenging
Traits	*Acidic Blood* (I), *Armored* (II), *Regeneration* (I)

Accurate 15 (–5), **Cunning** 10 (0), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 9 (+1), **Quick** 10 (0), **Resolute** 13 (–3), **Strong** 11 (–1), **Vigilant** 7 (+3)

Abilities	*Man-at-arms* (novice), *Two-handed Force* (master)		
Weapons	Heavy Weapon 6 (ignores Armor) + Acidic Blood that deals 3 in damage for 3 turns		
Armor	Rough hide 4 (+ heals 2/turn)		
Defense	0		
Toughness	11	**Pain Threshold**	6
Equipment	None		
Shadow	Scaly and greasy like a blackish green snakeskin (corruption: 9)		

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

The Goal of the Beast Clan

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

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

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

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

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

BEASTS BEHIND THE BARRICADE

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

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

Whatever happens, the player characters are not first to arrive. The very hungover war veteran Serex Attio (see page 128) is already standing in the middle of the street, hacking away at enemies – it is unclear if he is fighting for the good cause, for enjoyment or because the enemy's clamor is worsening his headache.

The foes welling up from the basement are many and the characters must face them in two waves: the first consisting of nothing but Clan Beasts [PC×2]; the second arriving five turns later and made up of [PC –2] Beast Clan Warriors and a Beast Clan Mystic, led by a Beast Clan Guardian.

Beast Clan Mystic

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

The Jezites have a strong tradition of Witchcraft, but nowadays the witches have the company of darmans – mystics influenced by the raw power of the Crystal Isle (see page 108 for further information). Among the darmans are both the fleshcrafters and the combat-oriented mystics of the clan, functioning as support for Warriors and Guardians on the battlefield. Their philosophy is all about gaining power through suffering, which is why they are often malnourished and covered in self-inflicted wounds. The amount of scar tissue on visible parts of the body often coincides with the age and strength of the darman.

Manner	Crooked and intense		
Race	Human (barbarian)		
Resistance	Ordinary		
Traits	*Corrupting Attack* (I), *Natural Weapon* (I)		
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 13 (–3), **Discreet** 7 (+3), **Persuasive** 9 (+1), **Quick** 10 (0), **Resolute** 15 (–5), **Strong** 5 (+5), **Vigilant** 11 (–1)			
Abilities	*Bend Will* (adept), *Black Breath* (adept), *Sorcery* (adept)		
Weapons	Claws 3 (+1D4 corruption		
Armor	Black Gown 2 (Flexible)		
Defense	0		
Toughness	10	**Pain Threshold**	3
Equipment	None		
Shadow	Gleaming and shimmering black, as a moonlit waterfall (corruption: 8)		

Tactics: The Darmans keep to the background, protected by their guardians. They support the clan beast with their Black Breath (healing) and the guardians by making it so that they get to fight one enemy at a time (Bend Will) – though without pacifying the main opponent of the guardian.

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

Should the characters flee or lose the fight, the enemies will breach the line of defense and the champions of Thistle Hold must leave the barricade for postings further away from the hole, behind

the main streets surrounding the block. The Beast Clan heads out on raids in all directions, robbing and kidnapping. Next scene will be Reclaiming the Barricade.

RECLAIMING THE BARRICADE

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

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

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

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

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

Number of arriving enemies per group and turn

Turn 1
Beasts, as many as PCs
One Warrior

Turn 6
Beasts, PC –2
Warriors, PC –2

Turn 11
Warriors, as many as PCs
One Guardian

Turn 16
Beasts, PC –2
Warriors, PC –2
Guardians, PC –3
One Mystic

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

Attack in the front line: Side by side with the leaders of other factions (for example the Mekele brothers, Kullinan Furia, Father Elfeno, Serex Attio and the Guard Captain Marvello) the player characters storm the enemy line. The Game Master should describe at least two fights close to the characters, involving named heroes – this is an epic moment that will be remembered forever, and the characters will be part of the legend.

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

Provide support: Lysindra Goldengrasp (an agent for the Iron Pact, see page 143) and other "concerned citizens" are in trouble and the player characters are in the best position to offer them aid. Goldengrasp has assembled a rapidly declining number of residents, fighting desperately against an enemy that surrounds them. The characters have the *Advantage* against the enemies, composed of nothing but Clan Beasts (PC×2 in total). When Goldengrasp and her companions are rescued the battle is over and the barricade reclaimed.

Save their Strength: The characters lick their wounds or hunkers down like cowardly wimps, while the champions of town push the enemy back into the Abyss.

ANTICLIMAX AT THE SINKHOLE

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

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

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

Helionor

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

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

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

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

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

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

Time for Reflections

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

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

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

Captain Marvello
Faction: The Town Watch
The Guard Captain is totally focused on getting the palisade in place. Getting him to spare a moment will require a passed test against *Persuasive* by someone connected to the Ambrian army or Thistle Hold's Town Watch (the trait *Contacts* with the right profile), or that they have had dealings with him before (for instance when the witches came or during the adventure *The Mark of the Beast*). If the test fails they get to talk to one of his sergeants, who takes notes for a report on the events. But that report will not be read by anyone until much later.

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

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

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

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



TAVERNS

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

INNS

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

ENTERTAINMENT

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

TRADE

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

OTHER

27. The Town Seat
28 Nighthome
29. The Sun Temple
30. The Queen's Legation
31. Ordo Magica
32. The Mission House
33. Mother Mehira's
34. The Town Watch
35. The Beacon
36. The Merchants' House
37. Monastery
38. The High Chieftain's Envoy
39. The Penitentiary

SQUARES & PARKS

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

Adventure Locations

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

ACT TWO:

Law of Necessity

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

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

At their disposal the characters have the representatives of a number of factions, some of which have access to valuable information – information that they are not willing to share other than in return for a considerable favor. It is up to the players to decide if the need for knowledge is great enough to balance the risks posed by the demands. Is it really worth making an enemy out of one faction in the aim to gain information from another? Who must be handled with care and who can they afford to antagonize?

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

Structure

THIS SECOND ACT goes on until the characters have found enough information to understand that the answers to their questions can be found in a place called The Halls of a Thousand Tears. The most important clues are summarized below and how to analyze them is further detailed on page 145, under the header The Clues:

- Down in the sinkhole is the battered body of Anadea, possible to dig out from the rubble. In her belt purse is a pearl of gold, a crude key, a sun symbol and a carefully folded letter, written in Ambrian but with letters similar to cuneiform writing. Entangled in the hair of her corpse is a broken necklace.
- In Anadea's abandoned bed chamber at the Sun Temple are both a hidden book and a wooden briefcase containing paper, crayons and some drawings.
- Anadea's name is mentioned in a report kept at the archive of the Legation. It describes a brawl at the Salons of Symbaroum,

which according to the statements started with an argument between two initiates, Anadea and Arkel, one of which claimed that the church is wrong about Davokar. Arkel can be found in the village Glimmervann.

- The secret storage of Anadea is tricky to locate, but if the characters succeed they will find a number of informative items. In the cramped space are for instance a very sickly mare cat in an iron cage and a strange truffle-like substance which a master alchemist can identify as related to Davokar's elves. Adding to that, there is a map sketch and a newly commenced journal to be found. The journal indicates that Lasifor Nightpitch and Lysindra Goldengrasp may have further information.

The Midnight Cult

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

During the second act of the adventure, the Midnight Cult will pose a hidden threat. The abandoned tannery where Erlaber stores the skull of Eox and where the ritual will take place are described in Act 3, while the texts in this section focus on the challenges that the cult members will throw at the characters if they persist in trying to dig deeper in the story.

AN OFFER

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

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

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

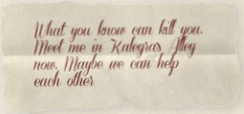
What you know can kill you. Meet me in Kalegra's Alley now. Maybe we can help each other.

The note is written by Erlaber Ambreagos, handed to the changeling Sibela (see page 164), who in turn paid and instructed an old drunkard to give the task to the goblin boy. The idea behind the note is of course to lure the player characters into an ambush, thereby quickly disposing of a probable threat or scaring the characters into abandoning their quest.

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

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

A woman dressed in a worn leather armor can be seen waving at them, from a nook about ten paces in. If the characters approach her the trap slams shut. The woman's companions appear, in total twice as many as the characters; some emerge behind her, others behind the characters and two lurk in the windows on the second floor of the house facing the alley.



Erlaber's note to the characters can be found at the back of this book

A First Sign

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

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

Ruffians, PC×2 in total

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

A group of less fortunate women and men who believe they have made a great deal, especially since their intended victims are much fewer than them. They regard themselves as fairly seasoned and capable, after having been on a couple of trips in Bright Davokar, but they are probably no match for the characters.

Manner	Appears cocky, scared underneath		
Race	Human (ambrian)		
Resistance	Weak		
Traits	*Contacts* (treasure hunters)		
Accurate 13 (–3), **Cunning** 5 (+5), **Discreet** 10 (0), **Persuasive** 9 (+1), **Quick** 10 (0), **Resolute** 7 (+3), **Strong** 11 (–1), **Vigilant** 15 (–5)			
Abilities	*None*		
Weapons	Spear 4 (long) or Bow 4		
Armor	Leather 2		
Defense	+2		
Toughness	11	**Pain Threshold**	6
Equipment	1D6 ortegs, 2 thaler		
Shadow	Shiny copper, like a newly made cauldron (corruption: 0)		

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

WANTED DEAD OR DEADER

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

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

In Blackmoor the information goes to Galamar, who reacts in force – the thought of what such a group would do to his mother (see page 48) fills him with both fear and flaming hatred. The cultists of Red Eye are of course mainly active in the tent camp, but he will also try to smuggle some of his wretched followers into town, in order to search out the characters and keep track of their movements.

Both these groups of cultists will trail the characters as they are moving in and outside of the town. Most often they stay at a distance and cannot be noticed unless one of the characters expressly says that he or she stops to look for anyone following them – if so, let the character roll a *Vigilant* test modified by the *Discreet* of the trailing party. However, at some points during the adventure, the pursuers willfully come closer or are forced to do so in order to keep up with the characters' tempo. When that happens, the Game Master may encourage all players to make a test against [*Vigilant←Discreet*].

Given that the characters have been described as a group of skilled witch hunters, the members of both cults act with great care. They will wait for a situation when the characters are unprepared (for example when they are sleeping) or when they are scattered. The group attacking is always as large as the total number of characters +1.

Should the characters manage to capture a cultist, it is far from impossible to force him or her to disclose information about the cult he or she is part of. All it takes are credible threats and a successful roll against [*Persuasive←Resolute*]. If such an interrogation succeeds they will also learn that they are believed to be witch hunters hired by the Mayor, which probably means that someone has tricked the cult into attacking them.

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

the captured cultist) and then join the guards in an attack on the headquarters.

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



Red Eye

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

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

Galamar was born hunch-backed, lump-footed and with red pupils – characteristics that likely have helped him establish himself as the leader of the growing cult. He would actually like to just run away and live out the remainder of his life in solitude, but as long as Ragama needs him that is out of the question. Without the aid and strength of his mother he would never have survived his youth; now he must return the favor, no matter what!

The Mentioning of The Prince

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

Manner	Violent mood swings		
Race	Human (barbarian)		
Resistance	Ordinary		
Traits	*Bushcraft*		
Accurate 9 (+1), **Cunning** 10 (0), **Discreet** 11 (–1), **Persuasive** 15 (–5), **Quick** 7 (+3), **Resolute** 10 (0), **Strong** 5 (+5), **Vigilant** 13 (–3)			
Abilities	*Leader* (adept), *Marksman* (adept), *Quick Draw* (novice)		
Weapons	Crossbow 5		
Armor	None		
Defense	+3		
Toughness	10	**Pain Threshold**	3
Equipment	1D6 shillings		
Shadow	Segmented brown and gray, like the bark on a dying pine tree (corruption: 0)		

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

Red Eye's Cultists

"Ragama! Ragama! Ragama!"

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

Manner	Staring, shaky, fanatical		
Race	Human (or goblin)		
Resistance	Weak		
Traits	*Contacts* (outcasts)		
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 7 (+3), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 10 (0), **Quick** 11 (–1), **Resolute** 15 (–5), **Strong** 9 (+1), **Vigilant** 13 (–3)			
Abilities	*None*		
Weapons	Unarmed 2		
Armor	None		
Defense	+1		
Toughness	10	**Pain Threshold**	5
Equipment	None		
Shadow	Bronze and/or brownish yellow (corruption: 0–3)		

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

Erok the Dark, cult leader

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

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

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

Manner	Gestures wildly		
Race	Human (Ambrian)		
Resistance	Challenging		
Traits	*Contacts* (explorers)		
Accurate 9 (+1), **Cunning** 11 (–1), **Discreet** 10 (0), **Persuasive** 15 (–5), **Quick** 5 (+5), **Resolute** 13 (–3), **Strong** 7 (+3), **Vigilant** 10 (0)			
Abilities	*Curse* (adept), *Larvae Boil* (novice), *Leader* (adept), *Loremaster* (adept), *Sorcery* (novice), *Recovery* (novice)		
Weapons	Wooden staff 3 (Long)		
Armor	Woven Silk 2 (flexible)		
Defense	+5		
Toughness	10	**Pain Threshold**	4
Equipment	Multicolored robes, face mask of rough bark, 2D10 thaler		
Shadow	Pulsating deep red with black veins, like a dying heart (corruption: 7)		

Tactics: Erok directs his followers at Theurgs firstly, secondly towards other kinds of mystics, then at warrior types. He does not mind sacrificing his cultists for the greater cause, but if he finds himself in a tight spot he will likely surrender. If he has no choice but to fight he will start by cursing the enemy.

Erok's Disciples

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

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

Manner	Cocky and self-assured		
Race	Human (mixed)		
Resistance	Weak		
Traits	*Contacts* (treasure hunters)		
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 7 (+3), **Discreet** 15 (–5), **Persuasive** 5 (+5), **Quick** 11 (–1), **Resolute** 10 (0), **Strong** 9 (+1), **Vigilant** 13 (–3)			
Abilities	*Mystical power* (novice, either *Bend Will*, *Curse* or *Larvae Boil*)		
Weapons	Onehanded weapon 4 and crossbow 5		
Armor	Leather 2		
Defense	+1		
Toughness	10	**Pain Threshold**	5
Equipment	1D10 shilling		
Shadow	Partially blackened silver (corruption: 1)		

Tactics: Erok's cultists stand together against an uncomprehending and misguided world. They have a mission: to show Ambria that corruption is not necessarily bad. They are prepared to defend each other and their leader to the death, or at least until Erok is slain or admits defeat.

THE NIGHT CAPE

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

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

The Night Cape will not let herself be caught alive. If such a risk is immanent she will bite down on the suicide capsule hidden under her tongue and die instantly. If the player characters use rituals in trying to extract information from the deceased assassin, they will likely end up sighing in frustration – the one who gave her the mission was *"an ordinary, fair-haired woman, dressed in a brown tunic and dark brown trousers, perhaps in her thirties"* (that is, Sibela).

The Night Cape

"You die, or I die, that's all."

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

Manner	Taciturn, watchful		
Race	Human (Ambrian)		
Resistance	Challenging		
Traits	*Contacts* (Yndaros' criminals)		
Accurate 7 (+3), **Cunning** 15 (–5), **Discreet** 11 (–1), **Persuasive** 5 (+5), **Quick** 10 (0), **Resolute** 10 (0), **Strong** 9 (+1), **Vigilant** 13 (–3)			
Abilities	*Alchemy* (adept), *Marksman* (master), *Poisoner* (novice), *Sixth Sense* (novice), *Strangler* (adept)		
Weapons	Crossbow 6		
Armor	Leather armor 2 (flexible)		
Defense	0		
Toughness	10	**Pain Threshold**	5
Equipment	Garrotes, 1D6 doses poison (moderate), 1D4 Choking Spores, Suicide ampoule (strong poison with accelerant, 2D8 in damage for 1D4 turns), master craft leather armor.		
Shadow	Flame-colored as polished copper (corruption: 0)		

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

Ordo Magica

ORDO MAGICA'S ROLE in the adventure is decided by who the characters are. If none of them is a wizard or if they have not made themselves known as capable among the members of the local chapter, an alliance with the wizards of the tower is unlikely. In that case, the role of the faction is limited to what is described in the chapter Establishments & Authorities (page 26).

However, it is expected that some of the characters live up to the criteria mentioned above – for example if they have played the adventure *Tomb of Dying Dreams* and thereby saved what was left of Magister Senia's expedition. If so, they can easily gain an audience with the Chapter Master, though not before five hours have passed after the battle at the sinkhole. Present at the reception are also Eufrynda and the guest of the tower, the wizard Kullinan Furia. Master Eufrynda takes an active part in the talk, while Kullinan sits in the shadows, ogling the characters with his piercing gaze.

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

A successful roll against *Persuasive* is needed to pull this off, modified by +5 if the characters were active in the battle by the sinkhole. Even if they pass this test, the wizards will require them to sign a contract stating that everything they find down there (be it information and/or items) belongs to the tower, and also that an adept of the order will join their expedition. Other than that, they seem happy to have someone else risk life and limb on their behalf.

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

Ganderald

"You go first ..."

Adept Ganderald is thoroughly described in the *Core Rulebook* on page 46. In this case he will act as the eyes and ears of the masters. If it comes to combat he counts on the player characters to handle the fighting, while he stands back scribbling down what is happening in the notebook he carries.

Manner	Calm and quiet
Race	Changeling
Resistance	Challenging
Traits	*Long-lived*
Accurate 7 (+3), **Cunning** 13 (–3), **Discreet** 9 (+1), **Persuasive** 5 (+5), **Quick** 11 (–1), **Resolute** 10 (0), **Strong** 10 (0), **Vigilant** 15 (–5)	
Abilities	*Loremaster* (adept), *Ritualist* (novice: *Tale of Ashes*), *Tactician* (master), *Twin Attack* (novice), *Unnoticeable* (novice), *Wizardry* (adept)
Weapons	War axe 4 and Battle Claw 4 (short)
Armor	Order Cloak 2 (flexible)
Defense	–4
Toughness	10 **Pain Threshold** 5
Equipment	Notebook, 1D6 thaler
Shadow	Deep green with thin silvery lines (corruption: 0)

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



Kullinan Furia, Order Master

"I speak, you listen. Always."

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

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

Manner	Nonchalant, avoids eye contact
Race	Human (Ambrian)
Resistance	Mighty
Traits	*Contacts* (Ordo Magica)
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 15 (–5), **Discreet** 10 (0), **Persuasive** 11 (–1), **Quick** 5 (+5), **Resolute** 18 (–8), **Strong** 7 (+3), **Vigilant** 9 (+1)	
Abilities	*Anathema* (master), *Brimstone Cascade* (master), *Exceptionally Cunning* (adept), *Exceptionally Resolute* (master), *Flame Wall* (master), *Loremaster* (master), *Recovery* (adept), *Ritualist* (master, *Break Link, Clairvoyance, Magic Circle, Seven-league Stride, Soul Stone, Tale of Ashes*), *Steadfast* (adept), *Wizardry* (master)

Weapons	None		
Armor	Order Cloak 2 (flexible) + 3 (protective amulet)		
Defense	+5		
Toughness	10	**Pain Threshold**	4
Equipment	A Soul Stone, a protective amulet (Armor +3, costs 1D6 corruption to activate, active for 1D6 turns), The Eye (a signet ring shaped like the eye of a cat, costs 1 corruption to activate, provides a photographic memory from the specific situation).		
Shadow	Shimmering silver with a few dark spots, like the skin of a trout (corruption: 2)		

Tactics: Kullinan has not reached his venerable age by needlessly placing himself in harm's way. If violence can be avoided it is for the best, but if he has to fight he often starts by shrouding himself in a flaming firewall and then blasts any oncoming enemies with brimstone cascades.

INFORMATION

No matter if the characters become close allies with Ordo Magica or not, it is of course possible to turn to the tower for information, in accordance with what is stated in the section *The Hunter's Harbor* on page 26. Note that the only one of the chapter's masters who is available for questioning is Goncai, always wine-sipping and dressed in his smoking jacket. The other two are occupied with errands related to the sinkhole.

The following list details what answers the tower can provide on some of the questions which may appear during the second act.

Who is Anadea?

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

Who is Teara-Téana?

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

What are "The Halls of Tears"?

- **Direct question:** The adept of Master Goncai, Ganderald (see page 46 in the *Core Rulebook*) is specialized in the lore of Davokar's elves. According to him there is a legend attributed to the witch Aroaleta that mentions a place called The Halls of a Thousand Tears, and which according to the barbarians is or was a place where the elves of the forest convened (see page 222 in the *Core Rulebook*).
- **The Archives:** In the archive there is no information of a place with that name – the closest one gets is a war epic entitled The Well of Tears, written by the dead court poet Eraklon about thirty years ago.

Where does the gold pearl come from?

- **Direct question:** If the characters show the ordained gold pearl found in Anadea's belt purse (see page 110) to anyone knowledgeable about elves, that person will recognize the patterns meandering style as typically elvish. If the characters have not analyzed the artifact, they can learn about its characteristics and powers, and also that it would earn about 120 thaler if sold at the Antique Plaza.
- **The Archives:** So called Mind Stones are mentioned in numerous documents, though not in a form matching the characters' find. However, there is a legend speaking about two lovers from different barbarian clans, who used smooth river rocks to communicate with each other, but one of them was corrupted since *"he did not know the secrets of the stone"* – something implying that there might be a way to limit the corruptive powers of the artifact.

Corruption in Thistle Hold?

- **Direct question:** Whoever gets the question confirms that there are both corrupted items and people in Thistle Hold. If the characters have not visited or heard about the dungeons beneath the Sun Temple they are told about these (see page 118), also about the Town Watch regularly turning to the tower of the order to gain information in connection with crimes somehow related to the *"dark powers of the world"*. Finally, they can learn about

the extent to which it is possible to conceal corruption – with rituals like *Sanctum* or *Exchange Shadow*.

- **The Archives:** A search in the tower archives lets the characters find multiple texts describing incidents during the eight year long history of town, for instance those included in the section Memorable Events (page 12) and the events taking place during the adventure *The Mark of the Beast* (the Flayer and his victims). Then again, any information relevant for this particular adventure cannot be found.

HISTORY OF THE CRYSTAL ISLE

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

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

The renowned Crystal Isle had many masters over the years, among them King Hurian Lo-Apak who can be encountered in the adventure *Tomb of Dying Dreams*. And all of them performed their darkest and most potent rituals on the island. The transformation occurred gradually; the rock darkened and finally it was turned into something else (see textbox on page 109)...

DOWN THE SINKHOLE

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

The climb itself would not have been very difficult if not for the darkness. Even if the characters get to borrow special helmets with a small oil lantern in the front, it is a challenge to see where they put their feet. They all have to make a test against [*Vigilant* +3] during the descent. A failure means that they put their weight on a lose stone and are at risk of falling. It takes a passed test against *Quick* to avoid the fall, and if that also fails the character will tumble 1D12 meters. The damage taken from the fall is modified by –3, because of the sloping sides and since they also land on a slanted surface. Adding to this, if any character is below the one who falls, he or she must pass a *Quick* test to avoid being knocked off the rock wall. Armor protects as usual.

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

A successful test against *Vigilant* with the ability *Witchsight* reveals that the air in the cave is soaked in corruption, though not strong enough that it would be risky to move around down there for short periods.

THE CAVES

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

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

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

Not much of value was left behind when the clan escaped. The eastern chamber (#6) was the place where the hunters stored their game, in the form of prey animals and loot from wanderers, barbarian camp sites and raided colonies of free settlers. By searching what is left, the characters can gather up 1d20 ortegs, 1d20+10 shillings and 2D10 thaler. Swords, axes, spears and various kinds of light armors are plentiful, though they are all in such a poor condition that they cannot be sold for more than half their usual value. If someone succeeds with a test against [*Vigilant* –3], he or she finds the only item of real value – a gemstone adorned brooch, sewn into the lining of a fur coated mantle (value: 120 thaler).

THE BURIED WOMAN

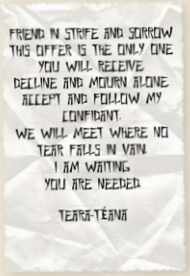
Finding Anadeas body at the top of the hill requires first a [*Cunning* –3] test to figure out approximately where in the rubble to search. A failure means that the characters start searching in the wrong place; a success lets them quickly manage to dig up the crumpled copper sign of the Fern (can be sold as copper scrap for 25 thaler, or even better as a memento of *"the Tragedy of Thistle Hold"* to someone fascinated by the catastrophe, then for 60+1d20 thaler). If is matters – for example if the characters are hunted by a hoard of wraiths (see below) – each attempt to find the remains of the tavern takes one turn.

Once they have found the sign, next up is finding the body. All characters present may make a test against *Vigilant* each turn, starting with the one who has the highest value in the attribute. A passed test leads to the discovery of the battered corpse and Anadea's belt purse.

If someone inspects the body, he or she will see that a broken necklace is tangled up in the woman's hair; a subsequent *Cunning* test leads to the conclusion that a medallion fell off when it snapped. To find the medallion, someone who expressly is looking for it must pass a [*Vigilant* –5] test.

The belt purse contains a coin bag (6 thaler, 13 shilling), a crude key with an intricate bit, a coin shaped sun symbol of blacked silver, and a patterned gold pearl, about the size of an eye bulb. With a successful roll against *Vigilant*, a letter is also found, hidden in the lining of the belt purse. It is written on very thin paper, in Ambrian but with letters looking like cuneiform symbols. It reads (see also the handout on page 175):

Friend in strife and sorrow
This offer is the only one you will receive.
Decline and mourn alone.
Accept and follow my confidant.
We will meet where no tear falls in vain.
I am waiting.
You are needed.
Teara-Téana



The note hidden in the belt purse can be found at the back of this book

The Crystal Isle

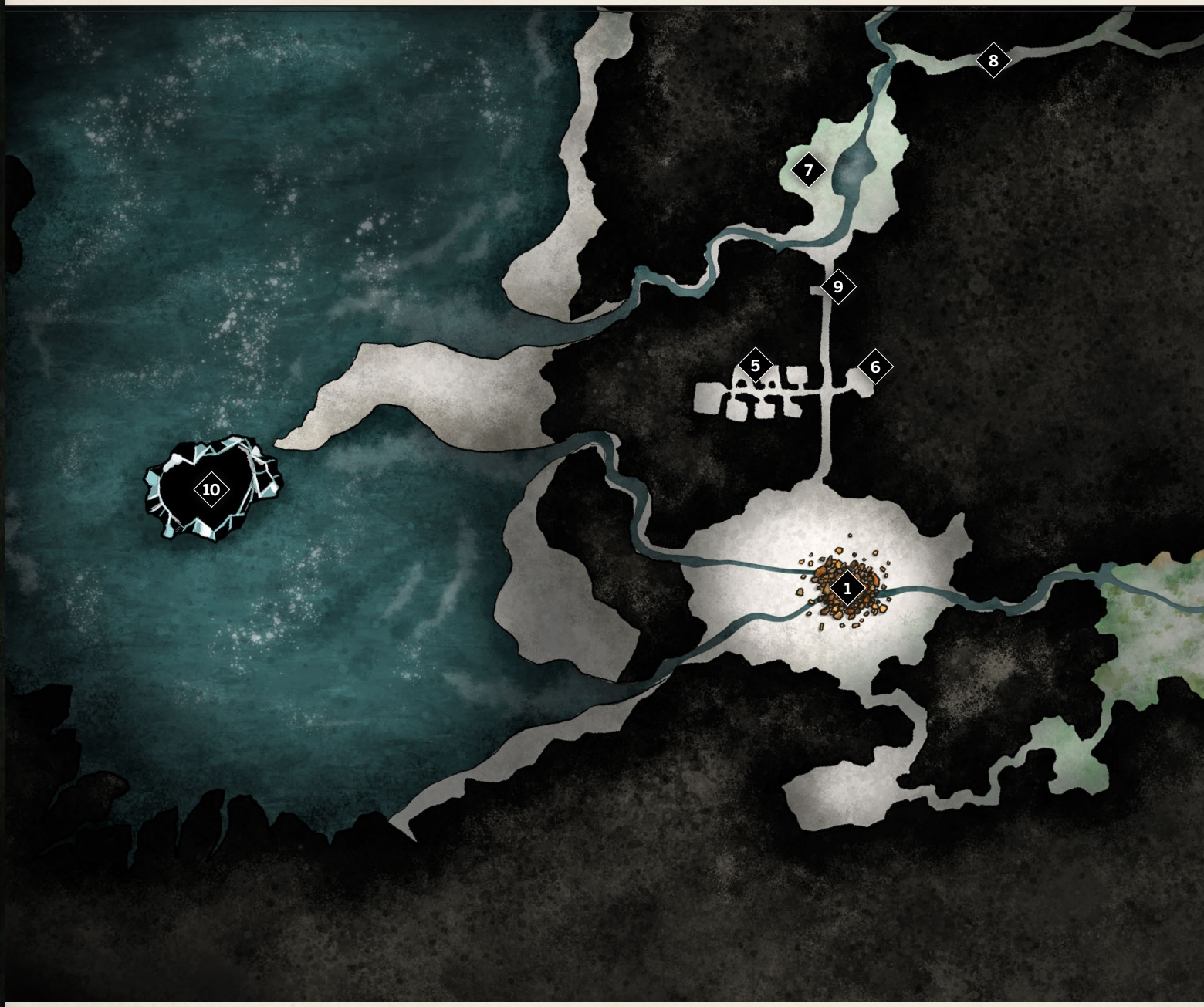
The nowadays matte black crystal was once blue-white like ice, but that was before it was discovered by the mystics of old who started using it as a site for performing mystical rituals and powers. It attracted all the corruption which otherwise would have affected the mystics, at the cost of accumulating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

Now, the Crystal Isle in part functions as an extra power source when performing all kinds of mystical powers and rituals, in part like it did before (the temporary corruption that comes with such activities is absorbed by the crystal). In order to make use of the extra powers, the mystic has to bind with the isle, which is done in exactly the same way as when one binds to a mystical artifact except that an unlimited number of individuals may be bound to the isle simultaneously. Every point in temporary corruption hence drawn from the crystal has one of the effects detailed below.

Using the isle as a source of power counts as a Free Action and only one effect may be used each turn, though at an optional level. Consequently, a mystic cannot both improve his chances to succeed and the tier of the effect die during the same turn, but he can choose one of these and decide how much the roll shall be affected.

- +1 modifier for one success roll
- +1 dice tier for one effect roll (+1 on the effect after D12)
- +1D4 in Toughness (up to maximum Toughness)
- +1 in mystical armor (lasts for 1D4 turns)

Example: *A sorcerer with 2 in permanent corruption stands on the isle intent on defending it from a group of onrushing enemies. In the first turn, the mystic opts to increase its Armor – she accepts 3 points of temporary corruption and gains a +3 bonus on her Armor for the next 1D4 turns. During the second turn she accepts 2 points in temporary corruption (7 in total) to gain a +2 bonus to succeed with the mystical power Maltransformation. She tries to trigger a chain of maltransformations but has only +2 on the first success test. After having been wounded she chooses to accept an additional 2 points in corruption the third turn, and is then healed by 2D4 Toughness. With 9 in Total Corruption she surpasses her Corruption Threshold and immediately gains 1D4 in permanent corruption and a temporary stigma. This can end badly ...*

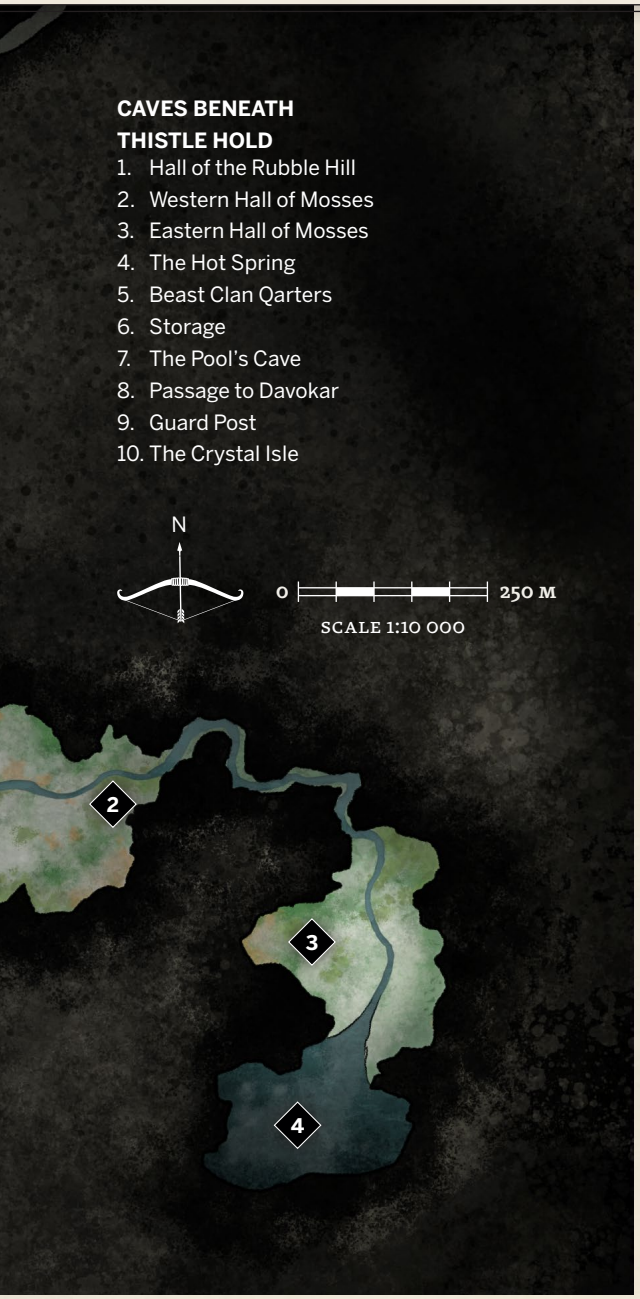


The other items in the belt purse may be described as follows:

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

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

The Gold Pearl: The strangely patterned pearl can be analyzed with a test against *Vigilant* with the ability *Witchsight*, or with a *Cunning* test (the ability *Loremaster*). If passing the test, the character understands that it is a Mind Stone: someone bound to the artifact will likely be able to communicate telepathically with the carrier or carriers of other stones linked to this one. He who makes the test also senses that this particular stone is heavily permeated by corruption, likely to affect anyone trying to use it without knowing exactly how.



THE VEARONS

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

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

The Game Master is encouraged to use the predators in two steps. At first they keep to the shadows, watching and trailing the characters from afar. A character who succeeds with a test against [*Vigilant←Discreet*] can hear something moving in the dark and maybe also notice the shine as some light source reflects off the glossy scales of a lizard. If the characters approach them, they retreat into the shadows.

Finally the lizards [as many as the PCs] attack, preferably when in an open space where they can surround the prey. Tentatively, the attack takes place in the Pool's Cave (#7), the Western Hall of Mosses (#2) or close to the hot spring (#3–4). The character who fails a [*Vigilant←Discreet*] counts as being *Surprised* (see page 158 in the *Core Rulebook*).

Vearon

Hisses hungrily, tongue flicking in and out

Vearons are cave-living lizards that can be found all over the Underworld. They have no eyes, are dressed in milky white scales and can become up to five paces long from nose to tail-tip.

Manner	Jerky movements		
Race	Beast		
Resistance	Ordinary		
Traits	*Armored* (II), *Night Perception*, *Robust* (II)		
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 10 (0), **Discreet** 15 (−5), **Persuasive** 5 (+5), **Quick** 11 (−1), **Resolute** 7 (+3), **Strong** 13 (−3), **Vigilant** 9 (+1)			
Abilities	*None*		
Weapons	Claws 5 (short)		
Armor	Lizard scales 3 +3 (Robust)		
Defense	+2		
Toughness	13	**Pain Threshold**	7
Equipment	None		
Shadow	Gray-striped, like bedrock crossed by black veins (corruption: 3)		

Tactics: The vearons sneak up on their prey, preferably in a group to be able to gain flanking advantage. If any opponent carries a light source which emits heat, he will be their primary target.

Activate the Mind Stone

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

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

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

Note that the particular Mind Stone carried by the characters is only linked to Teara-Téana's, and that activating it without knowing the correct procedure immediately inflicts 1D8 in temporary corruption.

Bayela's verses

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

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

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

THE CRYSTAL ISLE

Out on the Crystal Isle sits the blight-marked witch Bayela, singing a sad song in sorrow over having been left behind by the rest of the clan, even if by choice. As soon as the characters enter the cave of the underground lake, the song can be heard by someone passing a *Vigilant* test.

If you walk onto the peninsula reaching towards the isle the humming is heard automatically and a roll against *Cunning* with the ability *Loremaster* (or barbarian heritage) will let you discern a few phrases in the otherwise word-less melody, see to the left.

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

A character who has the ability *Witchsight* and who passes a test against [*Vigilant* +5] is convinced that the island in the lake is the source of the corruption permeating the cave system, and that it probably is hazardous just walking on it. Wading out to the isle is possible; the water is cold but never more than a meter deep. In the lake swim about thirty Beast Clan Wraiths, physically manifest in order to enjoy the lightly corrupted waters surrounding the Crystal Isle. The phantoms will stay away from waders until the witch Bayela orders them differently or until they are attacked.

Characters who venture out onto the island will immediately discover that it truly radiates or emits corruption. As soon as they set foot on the isle, they can feel goose bumps appear on their arms and neck, and if they continue forward they will have to make a *Resolute* test – a failure means that they gain 1D4 temporary corruption. And should they stay on the isle, they must pass a test against *Resolute* each hour or gain 1D4 temporary corruption. The only way to escape this effect is to bind to the crystal.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Another option is to run. The slow phantoms can move seven paces per movement action at the most, in contrast to the ten paces of the characters, so if they can make it to one of the tunnel openings

they have a good chance to escape (see the rule for Flight & Hunt, page 75).

The number of Beast Clan Wraiths standing in the characters' way when they try to flee the island is decided by the roll of 1D6. Should any characters have stayed at the tip of the peninsula, another 1D4 wraiths will be in their immediate vicinity. Note that the characters can always try to run past the enemies, but not without suffering free attacks from all they pass within range of melee weapons.



Bayela

"You leave, you're not welcome, not by living, nor by dead."

Ever since her beloved Haloban forced her to leave his side and instead accompany his daughter down into the Abyss, Bayela has had a hard time getting along with Helionor. She has kept to herself, mostly seated on the Crystal Isle, and silently watched her people being twisted by the dark power of the bedrock.

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

Manner	Peering, intense gaze
Race	Human (barbarian)
Resistance	Challenging
Traits	*Bushcraft*

Accurate 5 (+5), **Cunning** 10 (0), **Discreet** 9 (+1), **Persuasive** 13 (–3), **Quick** 7 (+3), **Resolute** 17 (–7), **Strong** 10 (0), **Vigilant** 11 (–1)

Abilities	*Curse* (master), *Dominate* (adept), *Entangling Wines* (master), *Exceptionally Resolute* (adept), *Inherit Wound* (adept), *Ritualist* (adept, *Oracle, Quick Growth, Turn Weather*), *Sixth Sense* (master), *Witchcraft* (master)		
Weapons	Dagger 2 (short		
Armor	None		
Defense	–1		
Toughness	10	**Pain Threshold**	5
Equipment	None		
Shadow	Deep Green like a blueberry bush filled with ripe berries (corruption: 9)		

Tactics: If Bayela is attacked she will try to *Dominate* the enemy. If the remaining enemies are more than one she adds Entangling Vines; if not, she uses Curse. After that she will leave it to the wraiths to finish up. She acts unhindered in complete darkness (Sixth Sense) and is prepared to die to defend her right to the isle.

Beast Clan Wraiths

Moans, groans and whimpers of hunger

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

Manner	Swaying bodies, staring eyes
Race	Spirit
Resistance	Ordinary
Traits	*Alternative Damage* (I, *Strong*), *Manifestation* (II), *Slow, Spirit Form* (II)

Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 7 (+3), **Discreet** 11 (–1), **Persuasive** 5 (+5), **Quick** 13 (–3), **Resolute** 15 (–5), **Strong** 9 (+1), **Vigilant** 10 (0)

Abilities	*None*		
Weapons	Dead Touch 3 (ignores Armor, damages *Strong*		
Armor	None (half damage as for Spirit Form II		
Defense	–3		
Toughness	10	**Pain Threshold**	5
Equipment	None		
Shadow	Glossy black, like oil (corruption: thoroughly corrupt)		

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

The Sun Temple

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

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

FATHER ELFENO

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

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

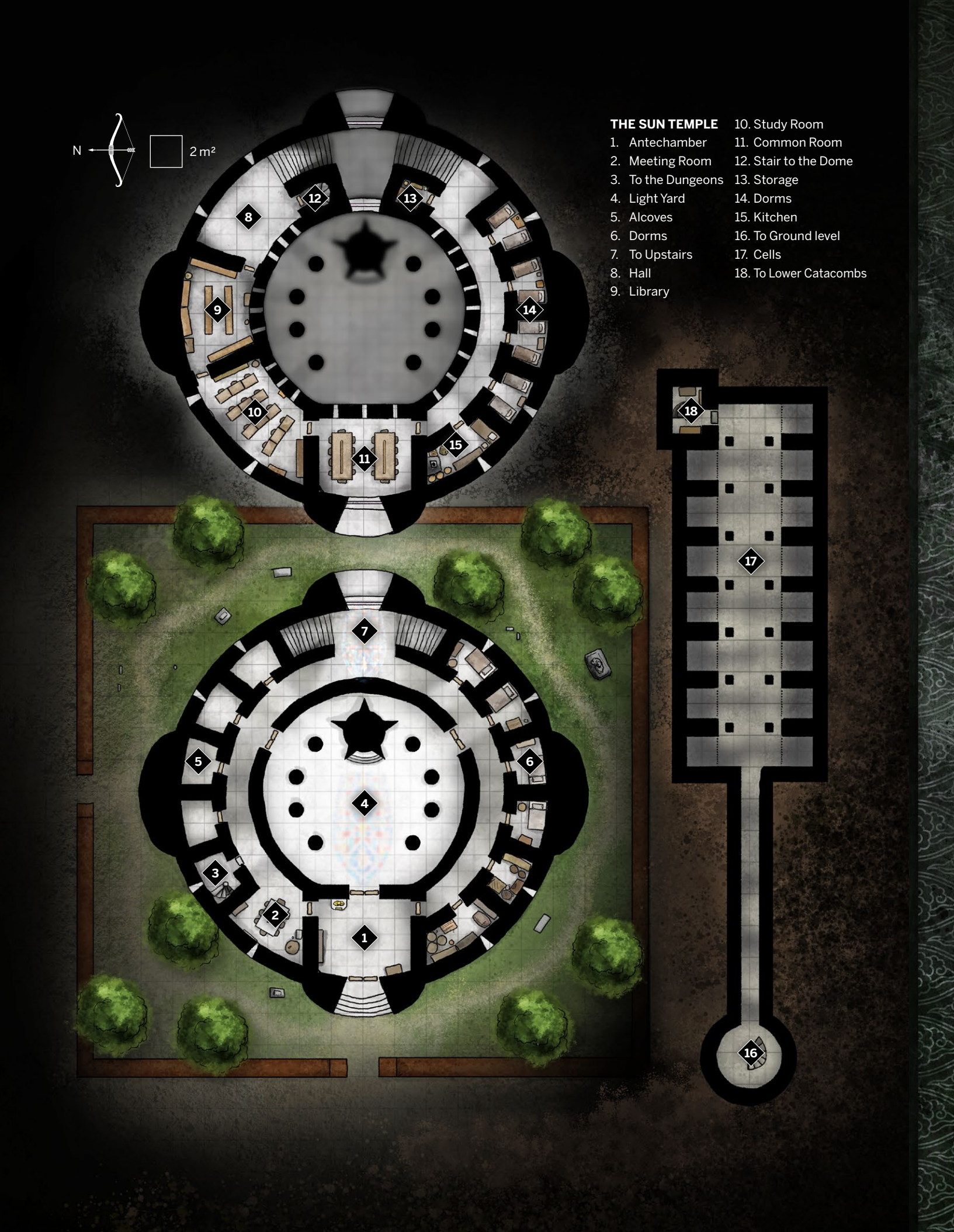
The chamber they are let into is small, window-less and without furnishings. Father Elfeno is kneeling with his back to the characters, but slowly rises and turns towards them. If this is the first time they have met he spends a long while assessing them with a haughty, concerned look on his face.

Elfeno assumes a cautious attitude and tries to get the characters to speak about themselves, their relation to Anadea and what has happened to her. If they are forthcoming and appear to be honest he can offer the following information in return:

- The woman they describe was an initiate at the Sun Temple up until a month ago. If the characters still do not know her name, Elfeno can fill in that blank.
- Neither he, nor anyone else in the Church of Prios had any contact with Anadea, on that he can swear. Hence, if the characters are looking for her superiors or mission givers they have to look elsewhere.
- He does not want to comment on why the woman left the temple other than in a few carefully select words: *"Anadea lost her conviction."*
- Should any of the characters be a member of or closely allied to the Sun Church (the trait *Contacts* with appropriate orientation) they also have a chance to learn more about the sinkhole. However, this requires that they expressly ask for the theurgs view on the hole and the abominations that ascended from the deep, and that the person who has contacts among the followers of Prios passes a [*Persuasive* +5] test. If these criteria are met, a dark-eyed Elfeno will retell that which is written in the last paragraph under the header The Truth about Haloban (page 40). He points out that it is far from concluded that the Beast Clan is the remains of clan Jezora, but that he regards it as likely.

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

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


N
2 m²
THE SUN TEMPLE
1. Antechamber
2. Meeting Room
3. To the Dungeons
4. Light Yard
5. Alcoves
6. Dorms
7. To Upstairs
8. Hall
9. Library
10. Study Room
11. Common Room
12. Stair to the Dome
13. Storage
14. Dorms
15. Kitchen
16. To Ground level
17. Cells
18. To Lower Catacombs



Father Elfeno

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

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

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

Manner	Cold, judgmental, dogmatic
Race	Human (Ambrian)
Resistance	Strong
Traits	*Contacts* (the Sun Church)
Accurate 7 (+3), **Cunning** 11 (–1), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 17 (–7), **Quick** 9 (+1), **Resolute** 15 (–5), **Strong** 10 (0), **Vigilant** 10 (0)	
Abilities	*Blessed Shield* (master), *Exceptionally Persuasive* (adept), *Exceptionally Resolute* (adept), *Leader* (master), *Loremaster* (novice), *Prios' Burning Glass* (adept), *Ritualist* (adept, *Command Confession, Exorcism, Sanctifying Rite*), *Theurgy* (master)
Weapons	None
Armor	Blessed Robe 2 (flexible) +4 (Blessed Shield)
Defense	+1
Toughness	10 **Pain Threshold** 5
Equipment	Flask with 1D4 drops Water of the Dusk, Sun symbol, the book The Lightbringer
Shadow	Fiery yellow like sun soaked gold (corruption: 0)

Tactics: Father Elfeno is first and foremost a warrior in Prios' army, even if he at the moment has opted to serve the sun god by tending to the herd of wicked fools in the Hold. But when given a chance to test his powers in dire situations he holds nothing back – he surrounds himself with a Blessed Shield and then attacks the enemy with rays of holy light.

DESEBA THE OLD

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

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

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

DESEBA'S PATRON SAINT			
Accurate 5 (+5), **Cunning** 15 (–5), **Discreet** 10 (0), **Persuasive** 7 (+3), **Quick** 9 (+1), **Resolute** 11 (–1), **Strong** 13 (–3), **Vigilant** 10 (0)			
Abilities	*Beast Lore* (adept, *Undead*), *Bodyguard* (master), *Shield Fighter* (novice), *Tactician* (master)		
Weapons	Flail of Light 4		
Armor	Aura 2 (flexible)		
Defense	–7 (shield		
Toughness	11	**Pain Threshold**	6

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

- During his whole time in Thistle Hold, Father Sarvola has been harassed by some who have a hard time accepting the appointed heretic (see page 44 in the *Core Rulebook*). He has been subjected to disturbances and disgraceful rumors, thrown objects during mass and even a couple of assassination attempts.
- According to credible sources, there are many who claim that the sinkhole is Prios' way of punishing the residents for harboring Sarvola. An attack is guaranteed to happen, probably more violent than anything up to date.
- Since the First Father has proclaimed Sarvola a heretic, the Sun Temple cannot be seen helping him. But the characters can.
- Those who harass the Mission House and its representatives seem to be ordinary residents and vagrants, but since they at times appear to be well-organized there is probably someone who guides or commands their actions.
- The characters have to find this "someone" and avert the threat against Sarvola. How to accomplish this is up to them, provided that they can prove it has been done.

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



Deseba the Old

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

Deseba has been the servant of Prios since long before the Dark Lords attacked and transformed her benevolent God into a cold, judging and ruthless giver of laws. She managed to convince herself that the transformation was necessary during the war, but is just as firm in her belief that it is high time for the Sun Church to remember its roots. Prios must be allowed to be who He is, a warm and compassionate God who cares even for the darkest of souls. Otherwise the Ambrians are at risk of awakening His wrath – bringing about an even greater catastrophe than The Great War.

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

Manner	Rubs her aching fingers
Race	Human (Ambrian)
Resistance	Challenging
Traits	*Contacts* (the Sun Church)

Accurate 5 (+5), **Cunning** 18 (–8), **Discreet** 10 (0), **Persuasive** 11 (–1), **Quick** 9 (+1), **Resolute** 15 (–5), **Strong** 7 (+3), **Vigilant** 10 (0)

Abilities	*Alchemy* (master), *Exceptionally Cunning* (master), *Exceptionally Resolute* (master), *Inherit Wound* (master), *Loremaster* (adept), *Medicus* (master), *Ritualist* (master, *Command Confession, Heretic's Trail, Holy Smoke, Patron Saint, Purging Fire, Sanctifying Rite*), *Steadfast* (master), *Tactician* (adept), *Theurgy* (novice)		
Weapons	Staff 3 (long)		
Armor	Blessed Robe 2 (flexible)		
Defense	–8		
Toughness	10	**Pain Threshold**	4
Equipment	1D6 Herbal Cures, 2 doses Elixir of Life, 2 doses antidote (strong), sun symbol.		
Shadow	Shimmering gold and gray, like a cloth weaved from gold and blackening silver threads (corruption: 2)		

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

THE DARK SIDE OF TOWN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

When the hysteria finally dies down it is fully possible to talk to Orai, but to get him to answer any questions the characters have to make him believe that they have come to help him be released – which requires a passed test against [*Persuasive* +1]. He is incoherent and he slurs, but the following pieces of information leave his lips in a sequence determined by the Game Master, colored by horrific images from fever dreams in the dungeon:

- Orai recently arrived at Thistle Hold, after having escaped the black-eyed bloodthirst of his calf-love.
- Some time ago (he alters between saying a day, ten days and a moon) he was hired as a sellsword.
- An expedition left for the depths of Davokar, led by a person he sometimes calls *"the woman"*, at other times *"the changeling"* or *"the butcher with the axe"*.
- Along on the journey came (according to Orai) between ten and a hundred people – sorcerers, killers, beast-jawed barbarians, human blight-beasts, minstrels, drummers and four small faceless girls.
- At the end of the road was a God, a forest spirit, an *"ancient being with hoofs of gold and antlers of diamond"*. The goal was to dismember the God and make it dead, dead, dead!
- (This is told in a calm voice, astutely and with clear eyes) The members of the expeditions attacked, the God did nothing to defend himself, the meat-axe struck at its neck until the head fell off. It kept on mooing. The sound cut Orai's soul to pieces.
- A sword through his back, the world went black, the steel was like ice. The steel was his payment; he never received any silver coins.
- But the Bull God did not die, and neither did Orai. Black mists covered the world and filled him with power, with the sweetest darkness ...
- What happened to the other members of the expedition he first claims not to know, but then it seems to dawn on him: *"They cut off the antlers and hoofs and followed the whispering skull to Rada Valadla – to the black heart of Davokar where Symbaroum is about to awaken"*.

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

THE MISSION HOUSE

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

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

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

When he sees the characters he stands up and comes walking towards them, holding up a twig whose leaves still have a healthy green color. *"Look what I have done!"* he says with a brilliant smile. If the characters ask what it is he replies casually: *"A twig, silly; can't you see?"* And should they instead get the idea to try and guess what his creation is meant to picture, he corrects them factually: *"No-but-no, what's wrong with your eyes? It is a twig, silly."* After the chat he skips back to his chair and resumes dangling his legs, while at the same time trying to mimic the posture and gestures of Father Sarvola. For more information about this boy, see the box Aluin on page 121.

The Mission House

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



Father Sarvola

"Always doubt, with love, in benevolence."

Sarvola of the house Bargomol is more closely described under the header The Sarvola Crisis on page 40 of this book, and in the Core Book on page 44. He claims that the only way to combat darkness is to literally be the light.

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

Manner	Concerned, laidback		
Race	Human (Ambrian)		
Resistance	Challenging		
Traits	*Privileged*		
Accurate 7 (+3), **Cunning** 10 (0), **Discreet** 10 (0), **Persuasive** 17 (–7), **Quick** 9 (+1), **Resolute** 13 (–3), **Strong** 11 (–1), **Vigilant** 5 (+5)			
Abilities	*Dominate* (master), *Exceptionally Persuasive* (adept), *Leader* (adept), *Loremaster* (adept), *Steadfast* (master)		
Weapons	Staff 3 (long)		
Armor	None		
Defense	+1		
Toughness	11	**Pain Threshold**	6
Equipment	Sun symbol		
Shadow	Radiantly dark yellow, like liquid gold (corruption: 0)		

Tactics: Sarvola never resorts to violence, not even in self-defense. If the enemies are too many for him to *Dominate* them all, he puts down his staff or flees if possible.



Aluin, the bastard son of Sarvola.

THE ATTACK

The characters will never get a chance to speak to the priest before his detractors strike. Whether they are inside the house or are observing it from somewhere outside, they have a chance to notice two persons acting strangely in the crowd. A successful test against [*Vigilant* +1] and [*Vigilant* –3] make them see a man (Efram) and a woman (Lida) who look more nervous than grieving or in need of comfort; both of them young and dressed like ordinary commoners in tunic, cape and trousers. The characters can act directly or wait, a choice affecting their chances of finding the attackers meeting place (see below).

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

Shortly thereafter, a dozen people come storming out of the alleys on the opposite side of the Promenade. They wear dirty, white robes with deep hoods and all of them carry blood-red scarfs wrapped around their heads so that only their eyes show. They have daubed the symbol of the Sun Church, the sinking sun, on their robes and they carry flaming oil lanterns with the intent of throwing them at the walls and roof of the Mission House. As they approach they shout in hatred: *"Heretics will burn!"; "Death to the Dark Lord Sarvola!"; "Prios loves you, heretic, he truly loves you!"*

Panic erupts. Most people yell out loud and do their best to vacate the yard and the building. A few energetic and brave types move out in a

counterattack but are incapable of doing much before the rioters have delivered their burning cargo. Also the characters can try to stop the attack, but depending on where they are the crowd may hinder them from achieving a positive outcome. Tentatively, the challenge is handled like this:

- Mystical powers involving *Resolute* can be used without modification, provided that the target is in sight.
- The use of ranged weapons and other mystical powers requires a clear path through the crowd and demands that the character uses a movement action to get to higher ground, for example onto a roof or the rear of a wagon. Reaching such an elevated position in the chaos takes the ability *Acrobatics* or a passed *Quick* test; if failed the character must use both his actions to get to where he is going.
- The adversaries who have thrown their lanterns will try to flee the scene, something which will happen during the next turn on an initiative corresponding to 9 in *Quick*.
- There are three ways to stop a lantern from being thrown.
  1 If a carrier suffers damage which transcends its pain threshold, he or she will drop the lantern and flee.
  2 If a character reaches a carrier and passes a [*Strong←Strong*] test, he or she snatches the lantern and the enemy tries to escape.
  3 Mystical powers like *Bend Will*, *Confusion*, *Mind-Throw* and so on have their usual effects, of course.
- Depending on the number of thrown lanterns the effect reads as follows. The characters stop ...

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

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

Sellsword of the Sun

"For Prios, the One!"

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

Manner	Taunting		
Race	Human (Ambrian)		
Resistance	Weak		
Traits	*None*		
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 5 (+5), **Discreet** 7 (+3), **Persuasive** 11 (–1), **Quick** 9 (+1), **Resolute** 15 (–5), **Strong** 13 (–3), **Vigilant** 10 (0)			
Abilities	*None*		
Weapons	Single-handed weapon 4		
Armor	None		
Defense	+1		
Toughness	13	**Pain Threshold**	7
Equipment	1D10 shilling		
Shadow	Copper with brighter and duller spots, like a buckled sheet (corruption: 0)		

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

The Patrol

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

Aluin

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

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

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

QUESTION OR PURSUE

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

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

Pursue: Pursuing them is not very difficult; the challenge is to do it without the sellswords finding out. The character (or characters) who handles the shadowing must make two tests against [*Discreet←Vigilant*] to not be reveal. If taking special precautions (for example moving along the roof tops or in parallel alleys where possible) he or she gets a +5 modification on the roll against [*Discreet←Vigilant*], but also have to make a *Quick* test not to lose sight of the sellswords. Should the character be discovered, the prey will of course try to shake him or her off, according to the rule on Flight & Hunt on page 75.

Question: The player characters will get their questions answered if they succeed with a [*Persuasive←Resolute*] test. The mere threat of rituals makes the sellswords give up and spill their guts.

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

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

- He or she is a member of a group called The Sellswords of the Sun, sworn to fight the Darkness however it may appear.
- The group consists of twelve members, led by the former Black Cloak Dolani who grew tired of his order's political considerations and wanted to set up a more actionable group of agents.
- Since six months back, the Sellswords of the Sun have had a powerful protector. He/she has no idea who this is, but the protector has given them access to a headquarters, in the basement under a building in the northeastern district of the Hold.
- The building has three entrances. The headquarters can be entered through a cellar door at the back of the house. They never visit the upper floors. They seem to be empty – rough planks cover the main gate, heavy drapes hang in all windows and the kitchen entrance is locked with an iron bar.

THE HEADQUARTERS

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

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

What the characters do with the Sellswords of the Sun is of course up to them. If they attack, the members will regard them as champions of the Eternal Night and fight to the bitter end. Dolani would rather die than to reveal the benefactor of his little order. Getting him to say anything other than phrases like *"The judgment of Prios will crush you, heretic!"* requires very brutal methods and also a successful test against [*Persuasive←Resolute*].

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

Another option is to gain entrance to the house through the kitchen door. If Dolani is killed he has the key to the padlock hanging from his belt, but it is also possible to break the door open – an iron rod and a passed *Strong* test is all it takes. However, note that if the characters do not notice Eufrynd and somehow divert his attention during the break-in, he will see what is going on and alert the closest Town Watch patrol. Sure, he hates his neighbor, but it does not detract from the joy of telling on thieves and having them caught in the act!

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

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

- A character with the *Loremaster* ability who passes a test against *Cunning* realizes that the crest on the table belongs to House Salamos, whose most famous member is the Lightbringer Leandro – the priest who supposedly convinced King Ynedar of the supremacy of Prios and later died in acid storms conjured by the enemy.
- On five of the padded backs on the armchairs are embroidered monograms. The one at the short end carries the initials K.S. (Kargoi Salamos), the others S.A. (Serex Attio), R.G. (Roia Garlaka), E.D. (Efryn Dresel) and I.B. (Isedra Berakka).
- A successful [*Vigilant* –5] test reveals a lose plate in the floor. Under it is a small glass bottle containing 1D4+3 drops of Water of the Dusk (see page 186 in the *Core Rulebook*).
- In the upper drawer of the dresser are a collection of books, containing stories from The Great War. Common for them all is that they tell about a squad of petty nobles who, without being priests themselves, worked together with the armored section of the Sun Church near the end of the war. The leader of the squad was Kargoi Salamos and after having browsed the book for a while, two other names stand out – the brothers Serex and Herakleo Attio, the latter now being the Key Master of Yndaros. The books make up a chronicle of the feats of the squad.

Complications

The characters' clashes with the Sellswords of the Sun can lead to certain complications. If the sellswords discover that they are being followed or if the characters attack the headquarters but let one or more of the enemies escape, there is a definite risk that Kargoi Salamos learns about what has happened. This, in turn, means that he and his friends are prepared when the characters arrive to break into his house: Kargoi has two guards patrolling the yard with tamed jakaars and another two posted by the entrances (stats as Queen's Ranger, page 121 in the Core Rulebook).

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

- In the bottom drawer are five army coats. Once upon a time they were white with yellow and red linings, but time and heavy use have made them discolored and patched over and over. On the front two symbols are sewn – the sinking sun of Prios in yellow and House Kohinoor's Flaming Pine in red. The characters who have memories from the war or who have the ability *Loremaster* can come to the conclusion that the coats must have been worn by an outfit fighting for the honor of both Alberetor and the Sun God.

That Kargoi Salamos lives in Thistle Holds is easily found out by asking just about anyone in town, together with his address. Should they also ask about Serex Attio, whomever they talk to will disclose that he lives next door to Kargoi in the southwestern part of town. Although, if they want to find Serex, they would probably do better scouring the taverns at the Toad's Square than looking for him at home.

Dolani

"Expect no mercy, heretic!"

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

Manner	Piercing gaze		
Race	Human (Ambrian)		
Resistance	Challenging		
Traits	*Contacts* (the Twilight Friars)		
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 10 (0), **Discreet** 15 (–5), **Persuasive** 11 (–1), **Quick** 13 (–3), **Resolute** 9 (+1), **Strong** 7 (+3), **Vigilant** 5 (+5)			
Abilities	*Acrobatics* (master), *Feint* (master), *Loremaster* (novice), *Witchsight* (adept)		
Weapons	Fencing Sword 5 (deep impact, precise		
Armor	Leather armor 2		
Defense	–4		
Toughness	10	**Pain Threshold**	4
Equipment	Master craft fencing sword (deep impact, precise), 1D4 Herbal Cures.		
Shadow	Dull silver with blackened scratches (corruption: 3)		

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

DEBRIEFING

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

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

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

AN ALTERNATE PATH

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

The agent, a changeling named Goriol, will wait until the characters are in a location with lots of people and there try to sneak the letter into the pocket of whoever he suspects to be the least *Vigilant* (the Game Master decides). The chosen character may roll against *Vigilant*, modified by *Discreet* (–5).

If the character passes the test he or she notices that someone touches a pocket or a knapsack – namely a young woman who looks like a market vendor. Should the character call out, the woman turns around, says *"sorry"* and hurries away through the crowd. The player character gets one chance to see through the illusion, by making a test against [*Vigilant* –5]. If that test is passed the character will, for a fleeting moment, notice that the woman adopts the appearance of a middle-aged man with elvish features.

The characters may of course try to hunt down Goriol, but this is easier said than done. As soon as he gets a chance, he will dive into an alley or into a tavern and try to change his appearance (*Resolute* 15, players roll the die). If the changeling succeeds, they must again roll [*Vigilant* –5] to find him. In the unlikely case that they manage to catch up to him, he will act as if they have captured the wrong person.

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

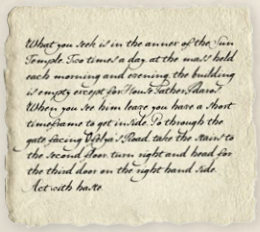
What you seek is in the annex of the Sun Temple. Two times a day, at the mass held each morning and evening, the building is empty except for House Father Idaros. When you see him leave you have a short timeframe to get inside. Go through the gate facing Ofelya's Road, take the stairs to the second floor,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

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

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

THE WAR VETERANS

Kargoi Salamos lives in a house along Summer Street, close to the palisade. His next door neighbors are his two companions: Serex Attio and Roia Garlaka. If the player characters somehow happened to reveal themselves during the hunt for the Sellswords of the Sun, there is a risk that



The letter from Elfeno can be found in the form of a handout at the back of the book

Kargois has learned about it. In that case, he as well as his neighbors are on their guard, which will have an impact on the characters chance to get to him. (see the box Complications, page 123).

In order to gain a proper hold over Kargoi, the characters have to reach the skeletons he hides in his closet, or rather down in his basement. After the war ended, Kargoi returned home from his long service and found the area around his estate ravaged by death magic. Even worse: everyone working in his service had been corrupted; they had died and risen again as undead. He cut them all down in anger, but as he entered his own bed chamber he stopped. There waited his wife and seven year old daughter – undead and thirsting for his blood. Since that day he has kept his family alive, feeding blood and lukewarm flesh to the loves of his life, held captive in one cell each.

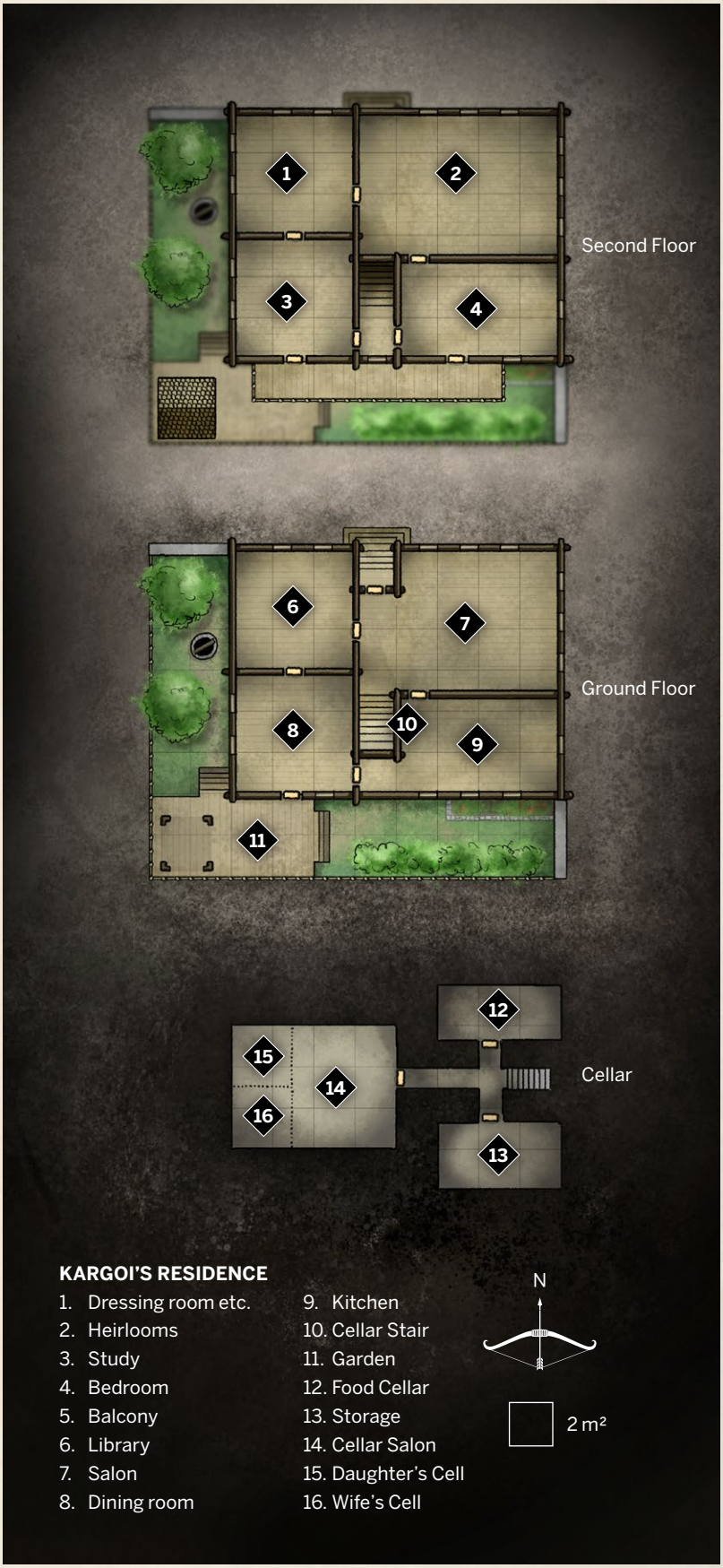
It is fully possible to get in and search the building. On a normal night, the elderly noble is alone in the house, except for the two battle trained jakaars guarding his backyard. A character with the ability *Poisoner* can with a successful test against *Cunning* prepare two pieces of meat with sedatives (for example Drone Spores, page 75) and overcome the guardians without blood being shed. Otherwise the jakaars must be fought.

Jakaar, battle trained

In the northern regions of Ambria it is not unusual for those who can afford it and who have something worth protecting to buy themselves a battle trained jakaar. The barbarians have tamed these large canines for centuries, and for members of clan Odaiova it is more or less a rule that every family keeps at least one jakaar, safeguarding them at night and keeping them company during the waking hours.

Resistance	Ordinary		
Traits	*Armored* (I), *Natural Weapon* (II)		
Accurate 11 (–1), **Cunning** 7 (+3), **Discreet** 10 (0), **Persuasive** 5 (+5), **Quick** 13 (–3), **Resolute** 9 (+1), **Strong** 15 (–5), **Vigilant** 10 (0)			
Abilities	*Bodyguard* (novice), *Iron Fist* (novice), *Natural Warrior* (adept)		
Weapons	Bite 5		
Armor	Wolf skin 2		
Defense	–3		
Toughness	15	**Pain Threshold**	8
Equipment	None		
Shadow	Lavish green (corruption: 0)		

Tactics: The jakaars are ordered to attack all strangers entering the yard.





Kargoi Salamos

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

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

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

Manner	Grim, monotone voice		
Race	Human (Ambrian)		
Resistance	Challenging		
Traits	*Contacts* (Ambrian war veterans), *Privileged*		
Accurate 7 (+3), **Cunning** 13 (–3), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 16 (–6), **Quick** 10 (0), **Resolute** 11 (–1), **Strong** 10 (0), **Vigilant** 9 (+1)			
Abilities	*Dominate* (adept), *Exceptionally Persuasive* (novice), *Leader* (master), *Shield Fighter* (adept)		
Weapons	Bastard sword 5 (onehanded)		
Armor	Full plate (flexible)		
Defense	0 (shield)		
Toughness	10	**Pain Threshold**	5
Equipment	None		
Shadow	Shiny steel, like a polished blade (corruption: 0)		

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

Both entrances to the house are locked; the same goes for the cellar door. Picking them is not difficult but requires lock-picks and a test against [*Discreet* +5], or else the sleeping Kargoi will wake up and sound the alarm (see below). Kicking in or breaking the doors is easy, but such an approach is sure to wake Kargoi up.

Anyone passing by or examining the cellar door (#10) may roll against *Vigilant*. If the test is successful, he or she will smell a faint but distinct sweet-sour scent, reminiscent of the smell from a rotting carcass.

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

If the characters happen to wake the sleeping lord, he will immediately sound his dog-whistle. The whistle makes the watchdogs of the neighbors react, but the characters cannot perceive it other than as a faint chill running down the back (requires a passed test against [*Vigilant* –5]). Kargoi will then wait for Serex and Roia to appear before making himself known – giving the characters time to discover the cellar but not enough to make their way out again; the Game Master decides depending on how long they stay down there.

It is not easy to predict how the meeting between the characters and the war veterans will pan out. Serex and Roia will want to silence the intruders for good, but Kargoi is more hesitant – he does not want his family to be the cause of unnecessary bloodshed, particularly if his friends are also at



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

risk of being hurt. Hence, the characters have the opportunity to offer him a way out: the promise to never speak of his family, provided that Kargoi and his companions promise that they and their followers shall refrain from harassing Father Sarvola in the future.

Serex Attio

"Stand still! Or face the fury!"

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

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

Manner	Twitches around the eyes
Race	Human (Ambrian)
Resistance	Strong
Traits	*Contacts* (Ambrian war veterans), *Privileged*)
Accurate 9 (+1), **Cunning** 10 (0), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 10 (0), **Quick** 13 (–3), **Resolute** 7 (+3), **Strong** 17 (–7), **Vigilant** 11 (–1)	
Abilities	*Beast Lore* (adept, *Cultural Beings*), *Exceptionally Strong* (adept), *Iron Fist* (master), *Man-at-arms* (adept), *Two-handed Force* (master)
Weapons	Bastard sword 11 (deep impact, precise) +2 on cultural beings
Armor	Full plate 5 (flexible) or Leather 3
Defense	–3
Toughness	17 **Pain Threshold** 9
Equipment	Master craft bastard sword (deep impact)
Shadow	Whirling iron gray, like a misty storm (corruption: 0)

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

Roia Garlaka

"Sure, I am kind of tired of killing, but I'm deadly good at it!"

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

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

Manner	Sways from foot to foot
Race	Human (Ambrian)
Resistance	Challenging
Traits	*Contacts* (Ambrian war veterans)
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 13 (–3), **Discreet** 15 (–5), **Persuasive** 5 (+5), **Quick** 7 (+3), **Resolute** 10 (0), **Strong** 9 (+1), **Vigilant** 11 (–1)	
Abilities	*Acrobatics* (adept), *Equestrian* (adept), *Feint* (master), *Polearm Mastery* (master), *Ritualist* (adept, *Clairvoyance, Illusion, Tale of Ashes*)
Weapons	Spear 5 (long) or Fencing sword 4 (precise
Armor	Leather armor 2 (flexible)
Defense	–5
Toughness	10 **Pain Threshold** 5
Equipment	Master craft leather armor (flexible), 1D4 Herbal Cures
Shadow	Shiny steel with star shaped rust roses (corruption: 3)

Tactics: In combat with multiple enemies Roia uses the spear and her acrobatic ability in order to perform as many attacks as possible. If facing a single opponent she always opts for the fencing sword, giving her a much greater chance to hit.

APPLYING PRESSURE

Should the characters make it in and out of Salamos' residence without being seen and having found what is hidden in the cellar, they have all they need to stop the attacks against Sarovla instigated or sanctioned by Kargoi. For a moment he considers moving his beloved somewhere else;

for another moment he contemplates ending their unnatural lives. But when it comes down to it, he wants to have them in his life, and he wants to keep them close.

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

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

THE CHAMBER OF ANADEA

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

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

- Aside from civilian clothes, a pouch containing 13 shillings and 8 ortegs and two pairs of sturdy boots, a briefcase-like box can found in the trunk. The box contains paper and coal crayons of different sizes, and one who succeeds with a *Vigilant* test or who browses the bundle of paper finds two unfinished sketches at the bottom – one depicting a stone-framed well by which a dozen cape-clad figures are sitting, bent over the rippled surface; the other a half done portrait of someone with obvious elven features.
- A character who passes a *Vigilant* test finds a notebook hidden in the space under the enameled sink of the commode. The book contains transcripts of something which must be barbarian legends, with some sentences and paragraphs underlined. He who browses the book and makes a successful roll against *Cunning* reaches the conclusion that all marked sections are about situations when crimes against taboos have resulted in corruption sickness.
- From the rod in the closet hangs a necklace in silver with a medallion in the shape of a coat of arms, more precisely a diving bird of prey. A passed test against *Cunning* with the ability *Loremaster* reveals that this is the crest of House Erebus. Another way to identify the crest is to ask in the Hall of Knights.

Incriminating Evidence

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

The challenge is to find the rolled up letter. First and foremost, it is far from likely that the characters dare enter the chamber where the owner of the house is sleeping. Secondly, the letter is hidden under a hatch in the bed frame – a hatch which in turn is covered by the thick matrass of the bed. If the characters get the opportunity to search there (for example if Kargoi is woken up and somehow incapacitated during the break-in) it still takes a passed test against [*Vigilant* –5] for anyone to find the well-hidden compartment.

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

The Legation

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



Geleto's transcribed statement can be found as a handout at the back of this book

The Queen's Legation

THE ARCHIVE AT the Queen's Legation is open to all who want to search for information about small and large events in the region. For the reasonable price of one thaler an hour, anyone can browse the files and notebooks, supervised by the notaries Karasto and Perela. If one wants the help of the employees it costs an additional thaler per notary and hour, but this may prove to be money well spent since they know the archive very well (+1 in modification for everyone searching for information).

Aside from searching for information in general, the characters may have another reason for visiting. The key that was found in Anadea's belt purse suggests that she owned some kind of property or estate, and where is the record for such ownerships kept if not at the legation? Under the header Audience with the Legate on page 132, is a description of how the characters may gain access to the record, something which requires that they manage to get an audience with Suria Argona.

BROWSING FOR INFORMATION

The archive can be used to search for information about all kinds of happenings in the eleven year history of the Hold (see page 26). Exactly when and why the characters go there is of course up to them, but provided that they have figured out Anadeas name (through the medallion or the Sun Temple) an important document can be found.

All characters who take part in the search may make one test each hour. A passed *Cunning* test with the ability *Loremaster*, alternately [*Cunning* –5], makes the character find a witness statement from a brutal quarrel at the Salons of Symbaroum eight days ago. The name of the fortune hunter who gave the statement is Geleto and his story is transcribed in the following words:

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

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

The priests never brawled, but their argument became so heated that the woman, flailing her arms, happened to hit a drinking jar that stood on their table. The jar hit a large barbarian woman in the neck, which is why she spun around and face-slapped a totally innocent youngster, whose friends were quick to accept the invitation to dance. The woman Anadea and the man Arkel sneaked out of their booth as the brawl attracted more and more to clench their fists.

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

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

VISITING GLIMMERVANN

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

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

At the Game Master's discretion, the journey to Glimmervann could be the right time for a cultist attack (see page 102). Depending on how far the characters have come in their investigation it may even be the Night Cape who is behind the ambush. Tentatively, it plays out as follows:

The characters have been asked to sit down to a simple meal. The grownups are all seated around

the table while Arkel's five siblings huddle in a corner, the youngest girl babbling in the cradle. Let all characters roll against [*Vigilant* –5]; if someone passes the test he or she hears a muffled cry. It comes from the yard outside.

A group of Redeye's cultists [PC×2 in total, maybe accompanied by the Night Cape] have beaten down the stable boy who was tasked with keeping an eye out for jakaars. They come running towards the house; two of them pushing a wheel barrel for blocking the door, the rest carrying flaming flagons of oil.

Characters who fail the test mentioned above will first hear a thud against the door, then the flagons crashing against the windowless timber walls. There are two ways to get out. They can bash the front door – a maximum of two persons may deal damage each turn and have to reach an accumulated value of 20 for the door to break. Another way is to climb the beams of the roof trusses and punch a hole in the softer roof, requiring an accumulated damage value of 10. Getting up on the beams requires a passed test against *Quick* and is normally an Active Action, but it counts as a Movement Action for someone having *Acrobatics* (=two attempts per turn).

If the characters instead pass the initial *Vigilant* test, they have time to open the front door before it is barricaded. The cultists carrying flagons will in this case throw them at walls and roof before entering melee.

Irrespective of which, the fire spreads quickly in the bone dry and draughty timber house. After two turns all who remain in the building are at risk of taking 1D4 damage from the hot vapors of smoke. To avoid this they have to hold their breath – characters who succeed with a *Strong* test each turn avoid being damage up until they fail the test, at which point they inhale the smoke.

Arkel and his parents try to rescue the younger children and will not fight. Even worse: the seven years old Merel is panicking and her mother is unable to get her to let go of the leg of the kitchen sofa, made extra difficult since she is carrying an infant! The characters who pass a *Vigilant* test realize that the mother and two of the children have not come out, or a bellowing Arkel will make them aware of this.

Saving the trio from certain death takes two turns – one turn to locate them in the smoke filled building, and one for dragging them all outside. However, this is only the case if the character succeeds with a [*Strong* +5] test to get Merel away from the sofa; if that fails, yet another turn is required to get them to safety.

Depending on how the characters handle themselves during the attack, it is more or less difficult to get Arkel to talk. Should his mother and two siblings have died in the flames, indirectly caused by the characters, he refuses to talk to them unless they pass a test against [*Persuasive←Resolute*] with an additional modification of –5. On the other hand, even if they saved all three of them Arkel is still grumpy that they put his family in danger, but he will come around if they pass a [*Persuasive←Resolute*] test.

A conversation with the farmer's son provides the following:

- Arkel has left the Sun Church, not because he has lost his love for Prios, but since he has come to the insight that he is needed on the family farm.
- Anadea was his best friend in the world, but she always had so many ideas. He often heard her defend the heretical teachings of Father Sarvola and she questioned everything spoken by the priests – not openly, but when they were alone.
- The argument at the Salons of Symbaroum was indeed about Davokar. Anadea claimed that the priests were wrong; that nature can never be evil in itself. Instead she stressed that the barbarian witches may be right in claiming that humans make nature evil and vindictive.
- He has never heard Anadea yell or whisper *"Death to the First Father."*

Measuring Time

Since centuries past, the Ambrians have had a calendar with twelve months, each with thirty days, with the addition of a holiday period of five or six days to celebrate the new year. That principle lives on but has transformed somewhat. The New Year's holiday now coincides with the Queen's birthday and has been moved from mid-winter to mid-summer. Secondly, all months have new names. Before they were named after twelve of the folk gods – for example the months of the Earthmother and the Executioner – but since Prios has been named the One, these names have lost relevance. Now they are named after twelve Lightbringers, heroes who sacrificed themselves during The Great War. However, the new convention is yet to take root among the populace. Ynedar's Month is still called the Earthmother's Month by some, by others the High Summer Month and by most simply the First Month in order to avoid confusion. In the same way, Ofelya's Month can be called the Executioner's Month, the Mid-Winter Month or the Seventh Month.



Suria Argona, the loyal Legate of the Queen and one of the most learned people in town.



Akman Kohinoor, alias Dekamedo, son of Korinthia's cousin and her most actionable agent in the Hold.

- Anadea Anadea left the temple about a month ago after a violent quarrel with Father Elfeno. Exactly what it was about, he does not know, but she ran off and swore never to set foot on *"the holy ground of the Church"* again.
- The last time they saw each other was the day he left for Glimmervann. She searched him out to tell him that she had found a new tutor to follow. Arkel called her crazy; if he had not, she would probably have told him more. As it was, the only thing she had time to say was that *"the new tutor is not in any way involved with the Sun Church or the Ambrian realm at large"*.

AUDIENCE WITH THE LEGATE

The registry containing information about the property owners in town exists in two copies, but gaining access to either of them is all but impossible for the common man. Learning who owns what in Thistle Hold is usually only possible when someone is selling an estate, or by asking directly at the door. However, the latter is hardly a passable route for those who are searching for the estate of a particular owner ...

The characters need to arrange a meeting with Suria Argona, something which can be difficult since she basically loathes humankind. At the time of this adventure it is even harder than usual. For one thing, as the Queen's confidant she has a lot on her plate because of the sinkhole and the potentially difficult diplomatic situation brought about by the arrival of the witches and their demands on getting access to the town – Korinthia expects to receive birds with regular reports updating her on the situation. But as if that were not enough, she has an earlier order to execute: the copper tablet containing Sarkomal's Prophecy is in town, and the Queen wants it!

If asked, the notaries Karasto and Perela can tell the characters about the existence of the registry, that Mayor Nightpitch has one copy and the Queen's Legate a second. Perela can also help the characters gain an audience with the Legate. For this to happen, they have to pass a *Persuasive* test, with a +1 modification if they managed to find Geleto's witness report without help from the notaries and an additional +1 if it is known that they participated in the defense at the sinkhole. If the persuasion attempt is successful, Perela asks them to return later for confirmation or to specify where they are staying and pay a shilling for someone to bring the Legate's answer to them.

Suria will in turn ask Perela about the characters, and if she learns that they appeared to be a capable group she will be glad to greet them in her study. She calls on Guard Captain Dekamedo, alias Akman Kohinoor, to sit in on the meeting. If the characters do not make a really bad impression they will get an offer: Suria promises to tell them which property is owned by Anadea, provided that the characters help Dekamedo gain possession of an object on behalf of the queen – and that they are willing to do this without asking any kinds of questions regarding the nature of the object or the task.

SARKOMAL'S PROPHECY

Queen Korinthia has decided that she will be the one to fulfil Sarkomal's Prophecy, discovered in the temple ruin now being restored by the Knights of the Dying Sun about five day's walk east of Karvosti



The Zarekian witch Yagaba is the constant shadow of the Mayor, as well as his body guard and friend.

(see the *Core Rulebook*, page 22). Whether she puts any faith in prophesies in general or in Sarkomal's in particular is not important. The main thing is that this prediction has two great benefits – first, it can be interpreted as an answer to the Queen's ambition to become the sovereign ruler of the region north of the Titans; second, it can work as a unifying symbol for the endeavor of the Ambrian people. And for both of these reasons it is important that she – not the Sun Church, Ordo Magica or some other faction of power – is in possession of, and has the right to interpret, the ancient phrases.

Korinthia's problem is that the copper tablet was found by representatives of the Sun Church and that the First Father has ordered it brought to Templewall. The same morning that the sinkhole appeared, three templar brothers came to Thistle Hold. They had the relic with them, tasked to hand it over to a delegation from the Church's High Seat. As it happened, the brothers arrived three days early and when they encountered the agents of The Eternal Night by the sinkhole, they decided to wait in town.

The conflicts within the Church mean that the brothers have no contact with the town's temple or monastery. Instead they have a room at The Winged Ladle, and one of Dekamedo's informants has reported seeing a wooden crate placed under one of the beds – one pace long, half a pace wide, and one foot deep.

The task of the characters is worded as follows: In room #3 at The Winged Ladle Inn is a wooden crate, which they will steal and hand over to Dekamedo within ten hours (the Game Master may of course adjust the time-frame up or down). He will wait for them at a booth at the Salons of Symbaroum, on the second floor. He will then be able to provide them with the address they are interested in. If they are found out or get caught the deal is off. And should they say something about the involvement of the Legation, they have not only made a deadly enemy of Dekamedo, but also of the Queen.

CONTACT WITH NIGHTPITCH

The knowledge that a second register is managed by the Town Seat and Mayor Nightpitch, may make characters who are already acquainted with Lasifor to try to avoid getting involved with the legation. The Mayor is extremely busy and it is not easy to arrange a meeting with him – not only has a whole block been swallowed by a hole that spewed out ha hoard of abominations at the town center; he also suffers from a terrible cold and has ha politically sensitive situation to handle, with the witches and their collosi outside the palisade (see page 140 for more information on the Mayor).

Nightpitch is at home and if the characters want to meet him they first have to speak to the captain of his personal guard, the war veteran Garasto. The captain has been ordered not to let anyone except leading representatives of the realm's power factions disturb the Mayor, no matter what. And to persuade him is hardly possible, since the characters have nothing more than suspicions to back their case up. If they claim that the city is threatened, he replies that Thistle Hold is always under threat. Should they tell him about Anadea, he questions her credibility and stresses that her warning may very well have been in regards to the abominations below town. At best, they can be allowed to write a message to Nightpitch (requires a passed *Persuasive* test, with a +1 modification if they were involved in the defense by the sinkhole), that he will read if and when he can.

Whatever they may write in the message, the Mayor will leave it to rest – he has more acute problems to handle! The only thing that can convince the old treasure hunter to divert his attention is if the characters say that the copper tablet with Sarkomal's Prophecy is in town. In that case he agrees to a meeting, in the dining room on the ground floor of Nighthome, while he is eating. He listens to their tale, sometimes exchanging a glance with Yagaba who is standing by the door, motionless like a statue and scrutinizing the characters with her steel-colored eyes. When he finally speaks he offers them a deal: *"Let me see and touch the tablet and I will give you what you need"*. With that, the conversation is over and Garasto escorts the characters back out.

THE BREAK-IN

Characters who decide to try to steal the copper tablet will probably start by visiting the inn to check it out. They can talk to the staff, keep an eye on the door to room #3 and map the various routes in and out of the building.

The brothers carry no symbols or other markers which reveal them to be templars. However, characters who recognize them from the battle at the sinkhole know what they are, since they made no efforts to hide their holy powers in the fight against the beasts of the Abyss. Should they also succeed with a *Cunning* test while watching the brothers, they will come to the conclusion that they most likely are nobles – for instance by their posture and way of speaking, not to mention that they can afford living at such an exclusive inn.

Talking to the patrons and staff of the inn will not help very much. A passed test against *Persuasive* will provide information on when the brothers arrived, that one of them suffers from a grave wound in the abdomen and that the two others often leave the inn for long periods at a time.

Regarding ways in and out, there is of course the spiral stair along the trunk. Another option is to get up to the lowest branches of the tree, either by using a grappling hook (requires a grappling hook and a successful [*Accurate* +3]) test or by jumping from some of the surrounding rooftops (requires a passed [*Quick* –1] test, a failure resulting in a five meter fall).

Room #3 can be entered through the door (by way of the corridor) or through the shut and sealed window facing the back of the house. Both of these are easy to pick but a test against [*Discreet←Vigilant*] is required for the inhabitants of the room not to notice the break-in and avoid being surprised.

The Game Master is encouraged to let the players be creative. During the night, the inn has two guards (stats as Ranger Captain, page 212 in the *Core Rulebook*); these can be avoided with a test against [*Discreet←Vigilant*], with a +3 modification since the guards are playing dice most of the time. Provided that they wait until Hen-Loan and Venhal have left the premises, they will encounter no opposition in the room. Sure, Leohan stands up and draws his sword, but immediately falls to his knees. He can do nothing but glare at them with hatred and call for the guards who arrive after 1D4 turns (if they have not been dealt with earlier).

As soon as the characters grab the wooden crate hidden under Leohan's bed they realize that something is amiss. It is empty!



The Mekele Brothers

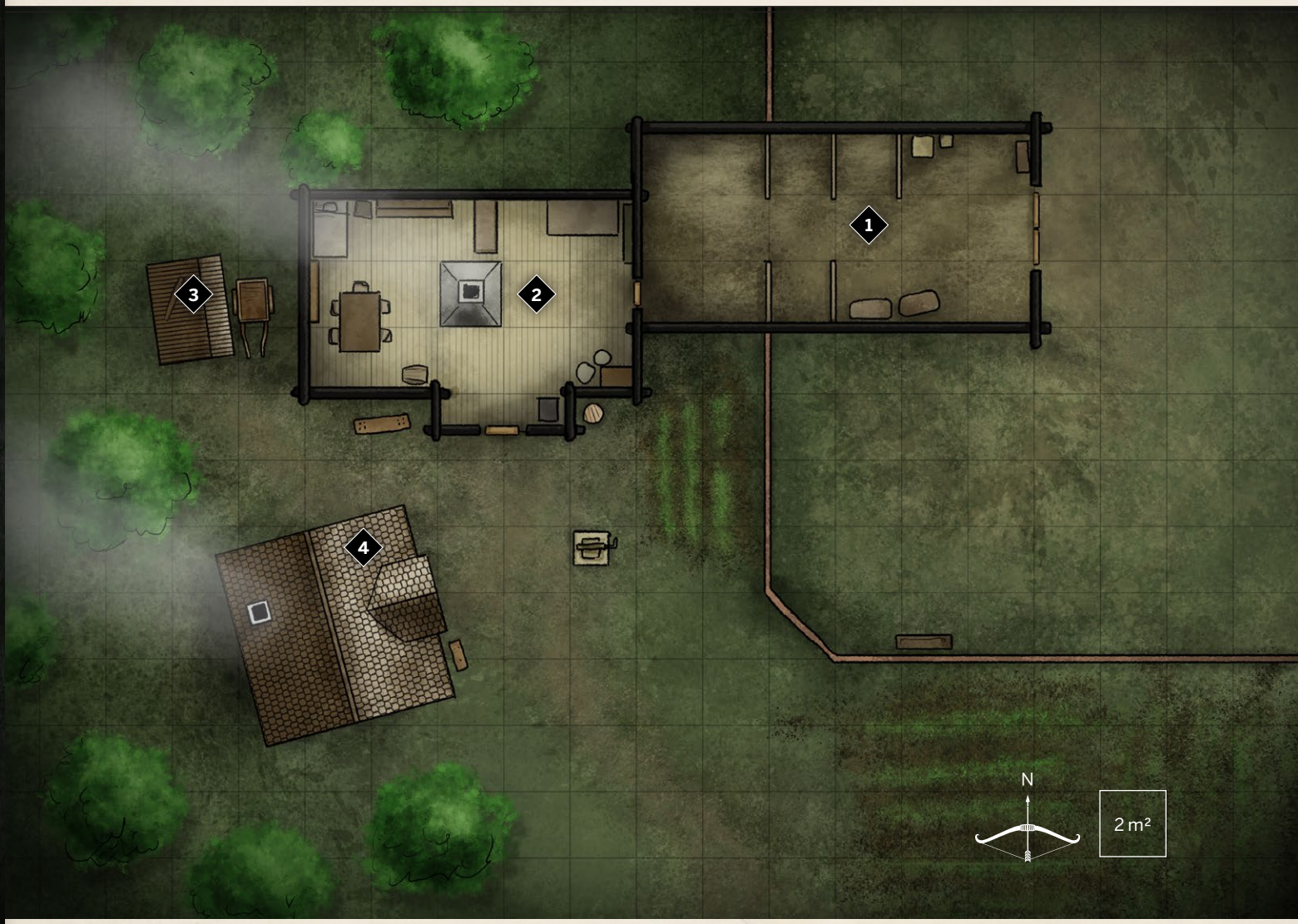
"The law of the Lawgiver is life."

Leohan, Hen-Loan and Venhal Mekele lost their mother and two sisters to an elven warband while crossing the Titans. That experience made them chose to walk the path of Prios, rather than the Queen's. They are extreme even compared to other templars but can compromise when it comes to issues not related to their faith.

Manner	Smiles aggressively, teeth bared
Race	Human (Ambrian)
Resistance	Ordinary
Traits	*Contacts* (the Sun Church)
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 9 (+1), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 10 (0), **Quick** 13 (–3), **Resolute** 11 (–1), **Strong** 15 (–5), **Vigilant** 7 (+3)	
Abilities	*Beast Lore* (novice), *Iron Fist* (novice), *Man-at-arms* (novice), *Steadfast* (novice), *Witch Hammer* (novice)
Weapons	Master craft bastard swords 6 (deep impact, precise) +2/3 (Witch Hammer)
Armor	In town Chain Mail 4 (flexible), in the field Full Plate 5 (flexible)
Defense	–2 in town, –1 in the field
Toughness	15 **Pain Threshold** 8
Equipment	2D6 thaler, templar symbol, the book The Lightbringer.
Shadow	Gold-shimmering and radient with black stains like from acid (corruption: 3)

Tactics: The Mekele brothers fight back-to-back if possible but in the end they have no concern other than destroying the dark.


8
7
9
6
4
5
1
3
2
THE WINGED LADLE
1. Kitchen
2. Dining Room
3. Leohan's Room
4. Stair to second floor
5. Larder
6. Western Annex
7. Eastern Annex
8. The Queen's Suite
9. Stair to Cellar
2 m²
N



ALAMEI'S CROFT

1. Barn
2. Main Building
3. Shed
4. Farmhand House

THE TABLET'S RESTING PLACE

After having brought the invaluable copper tablet into Thistle Hold, the brothers had a change of heart and took it to one of their previous brothers-in-arms, wrapped in a blanket. The former templar Alamei Sevio sustained gave damage to the soul during the cleansing of the ruin where the prophecy was found. Since then he has retired to a small croft on the estate of House Derego, just east of the Hold. The question is how the characters will learn this.

The most obvious way is of course to force the truth out of Leohan Mekele. Threatening him does not do much good – he will never willingly admit to knowing where the content of the crate is hidden. However, he can be reasoned with, if the characters are willing to tell him about the potential threat to the town. If the characters have figured out what they are looking for, one option is to arrange a meeting between the brothers and the Mayor. Another alternative is to use mystical powers and rituals like *Bend Will*, *Tale of Ashes* (the brothers talked about Alamei's croft by the room's heater), *Telepathic Interrogation* or *Command Confession*.

A very brutal solution to locating the priceless relic is to kill Leohan. When his brothers return to find out what has happened, they will immediately head for the croft in order to assure themselves that the tablet is safe. In that case, trailing them is a possibility. As usual, this requires that the player character with the lowest value in *Discreet* passes a test against [*Discreet*←*Vigilant*].

The only real clue to the whereabouts of the tablet is an elderly medicus named Belora. A passed test against *Vigilant* or *Cunning* with the ability *Medicus*, makes it possible to draw some conclusions based on the dressing around Leohan's abdomen – the poultice contains the herb Baseliom which has a hard time growing north of the Titans but is still used by some old-school healers who were active during The Great War. By asking the

staff at the inn they can learn that a woman named Belora usually is sent for when some guest is in need of healing.

Belora has her small and mangy reception in a nearby house along Pitch Street. She has gotten a bit senile and is easily convinced that the whole town is at risk if she will not help the characters with information on the patient in room #3 at the Winged Ladle. After a thorough account of Leohan's injury she gets lost in a lengthy monologue about old Alberetor's superiority when it comes to herbs, food, sceneries and so on. After many ifs and buts she recalls that the friends of the wounded boy talked about something very important while she tended to the cut – something about a painting being in danger, about a croft beyond the East Gate and someone called *"Almo or Alimon, no: Alamei!"*.

There is no shortage of people who know that an old hero of the Knights of the Dying Sun named Alamei Sevio has settled down close to the Hold. The character can ask just about any of their contacts, be it within the Town Guard, the Sun Church, Ordo Magica or some of the nobles.

THE CROFT AND THE KNIGHTS

Were it not for the two farmhands, Alamei would live alone at his croft. Hen-Loan and Venhal visit a couple of times a day, to talk about old memories and to assure themselves that the copper tablet is safely stowed away under the floorboards of the main building.

If the characters have broken into their room at the inn, the two uninjured brothers will make their way to Alamei's, whether Leohan is dead or alive. They will retrieve the treasure and immediately set off for Templewall in full gallop. There is, however, a window for the characters to act, before Hen-Loan and Venhal discover what has happened. Let the players roll 1D6 as the characters approach the croft. The outcome 1–2 means that the two brothers are visiting; 3–6 means that Alamei is alone with his farmhands. Should they be unlucky with the roll, they may of course wait for Hen-Loan and Venhal to leave (about two hours).

If Alamei is alone, he will never give up the tablet without a fight, and he will not stop fighting before his final breath. He is a tough nut to crack and his farmhands will do their best to help. The youngsters come running from their cabin when the fighting starts and are ready to assist their master with their bows starting on the third turn of combat. If Alamei falls they will run until they drop.

If the Mekele brothers are in the building, combat can be avoided. But that requires that the characters have talked to Mayor Nightpitch and promised he could see and touch Sarkomal's Prophecy. By explaining the threat to the town and convincing the brothers that such a meeting may be the only chance to get away from Thistle Hold alive and with the tablet (requires a passed [*Persuasive*←*Resolute*] test) they can consider an agreement. In all other instances, combat is the only way.

Alamei Sevio

"Still, my soul glows with the light of the Lawgiver!"

Deep below the temple ruins where the templars found Sarkomal's Prophecy, Alamei encountered a living darkness. It killed four of his companions before Alamei, empowered by the force of Prios, managed to scatter the dark, though at a high cost in corruption. The graying hair has fallen off and been replaced by nasty, pus-leaking wounds. And he has nightmares, terrible nightmares indicating that the darkness never vanished but only moved into his body, biding its time. At times he can almost swear that the dark is creeping up his throat...

Manner	Composed, hostile		
Race	Human (Ambrian)		
Resistance	Challenging		
Traits	*Contacts* (the Sun Church)		
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 9 (+1), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 15 (−5), **Quick** 11 (−1), **Resolute** 13 (−3), **Strong** 12 (−2), **Vigilant** 7 (+3)			
Abilities	*Beast Lore* (adept, *Abominations*), *Dominate* (novice), *Exceptionally Strong* (adept), *Iron Fist* (adept), *Man-at-arms* (adept), *Steadfast* (adept), *Witch Hammer* (master)		
Weapons	Sun axe 8 (deep impact) +2/4 (Witch Hammer)		
Armor	Chain Mail 4		
Defense	−1		
Toughness	12	**Pain Threshold**	6
Equipment	1D8 thaler, templar symbol, the book The Lightbringer, Sun Axe (double axe with deep impact, shaped to resemble the symbol of Prios, the dying sun.		
Shadow	A black void with bright, golden stars (corruption: 8)		

Tactics: Alamei fights in a holy rage, convinced that his soul is already lost and that his only chance of regaining the favor of Prios is to die in combat with the Lawgiver's enemies.

Farmhand

"Don't hurt my master!"

The youngsters would rather make a run for it but will fight as long as their master lives, more scared of losing their livelihood than their lives. However, if the provider falls they have no reason to continue fighting.

Manner	Eyes wide open in terror		
Race	Human (Ambrian)		
Resistance	Weak		
Traits	*None*		
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 9 (+1), **Discreet** 11 (–1), **Persuasive** 7 (+3), **Quick** 13 (–3), **Resolute** 5 (+5), **Strong** 15 (–5), **Vigilant** 10 (0)			
Abilities	*None*		
Weapons	Bow 4		
Armor	None		
Defense	–3		
Toughness	15	**Pain Threshold**	8
Equipment	1D6 ortegs, chewable resin		
Shadow	Pale green like dry meadow grass (corruption: 0)		

Tactics: They fires their arrows from a distance and drop their bows as soon as an opponent comes close. They only fight for as long as their master lives.

ANADEA'S STORAGE

The small storage space that Anadea owned lies at the center of the block between Ynedar's Road and Abesina's Alley. She bought it a little less than a month ago, before she stormed out of the Sun Temple, as a retreat where she could read, write and collect things that she had to keep secret from the priests. When she left the Church with nowhere to go and no one to turn to, the storage became her home.

The storage space is found in a larger warehouse which is divided into multiple sections. Most of the building is occupied by crafting material and finished but not yet sold products of various artisans, stored behind robust, iron-framed wooden doors. The locked door that the characters are after is number four and can be kicked in or broken through if the ones doing the kicking or breaking have a total value of 25 in *Strong*. However, one would presume that no such methods are needed, since the key found on Anadeas corpse fits in the lock.

Inside the door there is a windowless chamber, about two paces deep and three paces wide. The first thing the characters notice is the stench – a vigorous, prickling odor that makes their eyes water. A test against *Cunning* with the ability *Beast Lore* reveals that the source of the stench must be animal urine.

The space feels cramped though there is not much in there – a simple matrass on the floor to the right and a rickety shelf containing two books, some old clothes and used field gear, and a couple of dry rye bread loaves opposite the door. Also, along one wall is what first appears to be the owner's provisional writing desk – a crate with an oil lantern, writing utensils, some sheets of paper and something looking like the notebook of a clerk. However, as soon as the door swings open, he or she who passes a test against *Vigilant* can hear sounds from inside the crate: a scraping or scratching sound, and something resembling a child's whimper.

It is true that the crate serves as a writing desk, but thanks to three layers of thick plaids inside it is also a sound absorbing casing around an iron cage. In the cage sits a half-grown mare cat that Anadea bought from the Abomitorium a few days ago, with the purpose of using it to quickly gain entrance to the Halls of a Thousand tears if she was called for (see The Twin Keys, page 146). But the ignorant initiate had not thought it through.

The wild cat is already in very bad shape, with its fur clumpy from feces, urine and foodstuff. A test against *Cunning* with the ability *Medicus* reveals that it is severely malnourished, dehydrated and seems to have bit and scratched itself, probably as a result of stress. Anadea quickly realized her mistake, but the Abomitorium did not want to take the weak beast back and she could not make herself end its suffering. If the characters commit themselves to helping the poor creature they may soon thank Anadea for having a soft heart.

Aside from that, a number of discoveries can be made.

- A ceramic flask standing on the shelf contains a transparent fluid. A *Cunning* test with the ability *Alchemy* says that it is 1D6 doses of the sedative drug Drone Dew (see page 75), which most likely has been used to keep the young mare cat calm.
- In the outer pocket of the knapsack found amongst the field gear, there is a small box made from bark (requires a passed *Vigilant* test to find). It contains a small lump of something which feels and smells like a truffle but which is rust red in color. The pearl shaped paste is made of the mushroom Touber that only grows in the Halls of a Thousand Tears. It takes the ability *Alchemy*



Anadea's journal notes and her map of the Halls of a Thousand Tears can be found as handouts at the back of the book.

at master level and a *Cunning* test for someone (character or other) to recognize the substance and know that it is *"a fungus that is said to be used by elves but whose growing place is unknown"*.

- Anadea has drawn on one of the paper sheets (see handout on page 173). It is a sketchy map, depicting what she remembers from her only visit to the Halls of a Thousand Tears, with a few cryptic notes to describe its different sections.
- The notebook seems to be a kind of journal, if a very fragmentary one. Anadea started writing it only a couple of days before she died, in an attempt to process her conflicting emotions and confused thoughts. The first page contains a self-portrait of Anadea with sad, tear-filled eyes and smiling lips. The text on the second page reads as follows (see also the handout on page 174):

I will save the world. From Prios, from the Queen, from all. Violence begets violence till none are left to fight! That's it! Nevermore!
I am alone here, about knowing. Not everything.
The Mayor has also been there, in the Halls. And the friend of Goldengrasp. Mearoel. But they don't know me. Cannot know!
I am needed. But I'd rather be needed there. Contribute to the well with my tears and s
STOP! The choice has been made. You'll learn. She trusts you.
Remember what you serve. Anadea is nothing, her actions everything. EVERYTHING!
Now sleep. Drone dew sleep.

If the characters have made it so far as to the hideout of Anadea, they should be ready to draw the conclusions which lead to Act 3, alone or with the help of some ally. What happens then is described starting on page 145.

Under Attack!

The storage space can be a perfect place for the cultists of Erok the Dark or Redeye to strike at the characters, especially if it is nighttime and the streets outside are relatively deserted.

Other Factions

WHILE ORDO MAGICA, the Queen's Legation and the Sun Church play the main parts in the second act, other factions may play a supporting role.

All groups and agents mentioned below can be encountered in or close to town. Some are also affected by previously described challenges, but their importance is primarily decided by the actions of the player characters.

THE WITCHES

Gadramon and Eferneya arrive at the town in a spectacular way, riding one mighty colossi each. Their errand is first and foremost to report on what is happening to the Huldra and the High Chieftain on Karvosti. However, they have also offered to help the townspeople. That the *"well has spoken"* means that Yeleta's dreamsight (see below) holds larger or smaller grains of truth – a powerful source of corruption is to be found somewhere inside the palisade!

The characters can head for the edge of the forest north of town to meet the witches. They do not have to be witches or barbarians themselves for Gadramon to greet them – all who know anything about what happens in town are welcome to sit by the fire. As a suggestion, the Game Master should handle the talk between the characters and the witch as an exchange.

For every piece of information regarding the situation in town offered by the characters, Gadramon agrees to answer a question. This is what he has to tell:

- Three days prior to their arrival at Thistle Hold, the Huldra had a dreamsight. She woke up raving: *"... a dying god will bring forth the black ..."*; *"... the night drowns the plunderers' town"*; *"... not exaltation, a fall, deep down into the Abyss ..."*
- *"The plunderers' town"* is what many barbarians call the Hold, and the word "god" has a different meaning among barbarians than among Ambrians – a better translation might be "spirit" or "forest warden".
- The Bronze Well on the Antique Plaza is an ancient device, activated when powerful sources of corruption come close. That (or if, depending on when the characters meet with the witches) it sounded is evidence supporting Yeleta's dreamsight.
- This source of corruption must be found and neutralized – it is deadly in itself and can in the wrong hands be used for horrible deeds. If everything in the Huldra's dream corresponds to the factual situation, the power may be used to give birth to a very potent abomination.

The witches will try to persuade Mayor Nightpitch to let them into town, but until they succeed they are in need of help. Should the characters imply that they want to do something about the situation (in order to identify Anadea and her superiors, for instance), Gadramon emphasizes that he and Eferneya want to contribute as best

they can – if the characters continuously keep them informed of what is happening, they can assist with interpreting the information and suggest reasonable strategies.

If the characters are or become acquainted with Mayor Nightpitch, they may have a chance to persuade him to allow the witches to enter town, for example right before they go up against Erlaber Ambreagos and his cultists.

LASIFOR NIGHTPITCH

During the adventure *Wrath of the Warden*, Mayor Nightpitch has busy days. Not only have the sinkhole and the arrival of the witches made the worried residents of town along with representatives of the realms powerful factions turn their demanding and expectant glances toward him; he also suffers from an absolutely terrible cold, that causes him to speak hoarsely as he coughs, snorts and burns with fever.

The Mayor will remain at Nighthome during the main part of Act 2. A steady stream of envoys and messengers passes through the residence's gate with reports and questions, then out again carrying commands and in some cases answers. He fully trusts that others will sort out the practical handling of the challenges brought about by the situation, even if he deep down has a hard time accepting that he cannot be in total control.

Arranging a meeting with Lasifor is not easy in the current situation. Even if the player characters knew him before, they will be hard pressed to pull that off, and they will also need the support of some other influential figure. For example a letter of introduction penned by Father Elfeno, Chapter Master Cornelio or Suria Argona could help persuade Nightpitch to receive them. Even so, this will likely happen during the latter part of the adventure, when the characters have enough information to convince one of their contacts to write such a letter.



Lasifor Nightpitch, the uncrowned regent of the Hold, is one of the most influential people in the realm – a sign that the Promised Land lets commoners rise through the ranks.

Of course, the reactions of the feverish Mayor during such a meeting depend on what the characters have found out and how much they are willing to tell. The Game Master must make this decision, based on the premise that Nightpitch will do almost anything to protect his town. If they meet him early or if they withhold some essential information, they will suffer a scolding for wasting his valuable time; should the meeting be held in Act 3, after the characters have visited the Halls of a Thousand Tears, he will instead offer them all he has to give – provided that the matter is handled discreetly and without upsetting the residents more than necessary!

Lasifor Nightpitch can offer the characters the following, depending on when they seek him out:

- A permit to climb down the sinkhole. Only possible if the Mayor is a close acquaintance / friend of the characters.
- Information on the search for the Beast Clan, as described under the header The Truth About Haloban on page 40. This requires that he has good reason to trust and confide in the player characters. Note also that he is not fully convinced that Malrek is right about the Beast Clan being the remains of clan Jezora – that remains to be proven!
- The address to Anadeas storage, given the conditions presented in the section Contact with Nightpitch, page 133.

The Prince at Nighthome

For the upcoming episodes of the chronicle it may be interesting if the characters have encountered the sanitary commissioner Agramai Kalfas, alias The Prince. He might be talking to Nightpitch as the characters arrive for their audience, or he can knock at the door when the meeting is afoot, demanding to exchange a few words with the Mayor – having to report on something to do with the sinkhole and its effect on the town's fresh water wells. However, it is imperative that the sanitary commissioner does not come off as mysterious or suspicious. His presence/entrance may only appear as a way of illustrating how busy Lasifor is during the days following the Beast Clan attack!

- A letter encouraging all residents of the Hold to be as helpful as possible to its carrier. This letter must be returned at the end of the adventure.
- Permission to smuggle Gadramon and Eferneya into town, provided that it is kept secret from all commoners in town. For this to happen, the characters must have met with Teara-Téana and repeated her words to Nightpitch.
- Help to convince hesitant agents to join up with the characters in the fight against the cultists, which may be extra welcome if they are trying to form an alliance between, for instance, the Iron Pact (Lysindra Goldengrasp) and the Sun Church, or between witches and templars.
- Inform them of what it takes to get to the Halls of a Thousand Tears and offer suggestions on how to secure what is needed to find the Halls (see the header The Twin Keys on page 146 for more information).

THE TEMPLARS

If none of the player characters has a history as a templar, it is highly unlikely that the brothers Leohan, Hel-Loan and Venhal Mekele will come into play as anything but antagonists, but the opposite is possible.

That the brothers are Knights of the Dying Sun can come to light during the fight by the sinkhole, and the characters may get the idea to seek them out when it becomes apparent that they are dealing with a threat related to the dark of Davokar. There is also the possibility that the characters will reach out to the trio, instead of robbing them of the copper tablet, hoping to reach some kind of agreement. Of course, the brothers cannot be convinced to hand over the relic, but there is a chance that the characters decide to ignore the mission offered by the Legate and try to find Anadea's storage with the help of the Mayor instead.

The Mekele brothers know nothing about what happens in Thistle Hold. Regarding the situation in the realm at large, they have the following suspicions and pieces of information to share. However, this requires that the characters can convince them that they are worth talking to (the stats of the brothers are on page 134). To do this they need to make a successful test against *Persuasive*, with a +1 modification if the brothers saw them fight by the sinkhole.

- The commander of the Templars, Iakobo Vearra, expresses an increasing frustration over the Queen's and the First Father's passive attitude towards barbarians and elves. The brothers agree that all hope is lost: Prios is dead and the obvious duty of the Ambrians is to avenge Him and restore His honor!
- It was Prios who saved the people from the Dark Lords. The brothers and many of their companions believe it to be an insult to the Lawgiver that Ambria is still governed by a human monarch. Prios should rule, through a more actionable and righteous First Father than the current one.
- The famous strophe from Sarkomal's Prophecy that talks about *"a mistress"* is false (see page 22 in the *Core Rulebook*). According to both the Church and the scholars of Ordo Magica, the text never specifies a gender – the Symbarian word used translates as both master and mistress. Moreover, the text says nothing about the master being human. It could just as well be a god. A male god. It could refer to Prios!

THE HALL OF KNIGHTS

During this adventure, the Hall of Knights is all but empty. Most of the nobles have left town for their country estates, or try to stay out of the way until Mayor Nightpitch has cleaned up the mess in his town. Alkantor Argona has flown the coop, the same goes for Lesena Vearra.

In truth, there are only two interesting people left to encounter for characters who decide to stop by at the hall of the nobles: Ana Herengol, who does not have a place nearby to seek shelter, and Keroldo Erebus who is nothing but happy, now that he has the hall's store of fine spirits to himself.

Nightpitch and the Witches

The reason why Lasifor is hesitant to let the witches through the palisade is political in nature – in part because the residents in town are afraid of witches, in part because the powerful factions of Ambria want them to be. The fear of the people is important to both Korinthia and Jeseebegai, since depicting the barbarians as a potential enemy furthers their aims. The First Father even wants the witches of Davokar to appear as allied to evil, and that image would surely be severely damaged if Gadramon and Eferneya were allowed to freely fight abominations on the streets of the Hold. For that very same reason, Nightpitch's dear friend Yagaba cannot take part in any public battles against *"the Powers of the Eternal Night"*.

If the characters arrive at the Hall of Knights, they likely do so trying to find Keroldo, to ask him about the medallion found in Anadea's bedchamber closet. Another reason may be that one of the characters is of noble birth and wants to use his or her contacts during the course of the adventure. Irrespective of which, they will find Ana Herengol sitting in an armchair with a book in her hands, and a visibly drunk Keroldo rummaging through the wine storage in the kitchen. Ana does not talk to just anyone (requires a passed test against *Persuasive* by a *Privileged* character or one having the trait *Contacts* with a suitable orientation) and should the guests be badly dressed and unknown to her she will demand that they leave at once – a refusal leads to her rising to her feet and placing her right hand on the hilt of her fencing sword. If they manage to handle Ana (with or without resorting to violence), the next challenge is to make Keroldo sober enough to talk.

A large cup of steaming herb water or a couple hours of sleep are required to get the nobleman back into shape. Despite the throbbing headache he is glad to have someone to talk to – hungover or not: the not so venerable Baliff of Blackmoor is totally unconcerned about appearing smart, diplomatic or tactful.

- If shown Anadea's necklace Keroldo will first look surprised, but if he is told where it was found he will soon remember and retell a story that he seems to be immensely proud of. He met a farmer's daughter when he was fourteen years old. With flattery, gifts and sweet promises he finally got her into bed, convinced that he was to hoist her out of the dung and make her his spouse. Now he cannot even remember her name, but he seems to recall giving her that exact piece of jewelry. That she has saved it all these years is something he finds laughable, considering how thoroughly he crushed her dreams.
- If he is asked about other nobles in town (for example about their current whereabouts) it will be hard to shut him up. He starts by mocking the Queen for her *"headless idea"* to fulfil Sarkomal's Prophecy and restore the Symbarian Empire – that will only lead to ruin, according to him.
- He is also happy to gossip about what is going on in the Hall of Knights and makes it sound like all nobles hate each other. Superficially, they appear courteous and polite, but underneath an intense power game is afoot, primarily between houses Argona and Vearra who are fighting an idiotic contest in the hope of winning a throne that will never be theirs.
- Should the characters ask Keroldo about corruption and evil he continues to play the jester. He claims that there are a fair number of genuinely rotten individuals among the nobles, but that most of them are too lazy or cowardly to meddle with the forces of darkness. He will never believe the whispers about cultists and occult nightmare rituals among the nobles of Ambria. On the other hand, he adds seriously, a majority of the members of Ambrian nobility seem convinced that their noble blood cannot be corrupted, and with such a belief they need not be afraid to *"cuddle with the Dark"* ...

THE IRON PACT

The aggressive branch of the Iron Pact which is led by the former treasure hunter Lysindra Goldengrasp has no idea about what has happened to Eox or that the skull is hidden inside the palisade. However, the autumn elf Mearoel knows the truth about the "well", so right from the start the group will be on the hunt for the source of corruption that the device warned of – though without any success, since the skull is concealed with mystical veils.

The Game Master can introduce the group in different ways, though most likely through Lysindra since she is a person of note. As a suggestion, the characters can notice her presence in the following ways:

- When the characters return to the surface after having been down the sinkhole, characters who pass a test against *Vigilant* can see a woman watching them from a distance. She leans against a razed wall close to the hole, her facial expression indicating intense disapproval and deep concern. A roll against [*Cunning* +5] is needed to identify the woman.
- When/if the characters approach the camp of Gadramon and Eferneya, they may make a roll against [*Vigilant*←*Discreet*]. The one who passes gets a glimpse of Lysindra, glancing at them over her shoulder before hurrying into the woods. A roll against [*Cunning* +5] is needed to identify the woman. The witches refuse to comment and advise them not to follow.
- One of the group's most important tasks is to eliminate cultists in town. Hence, they will of course react when the henchmen of Redeye and Erok the Dark start terrorizing the player characters. If the characters at some point discover that they are being trailed and get

the idea to hunt down the persecutor they are in for a shocking surprise – they arrive at a backyard where their prey lays executed on the ground, throat cut wide open.

Aside from Lysindra and Mearoel, the group consists of a dozen hopeful initiates still to be accepted among the so called Iron Sworn, the fully fledged members of the Iron Pact. All of them are very eager to demonstrate their worth.

Should the characters find their way to Anadea's storage, they can discover a direct lead to Lysindra and her group. No matter if they seek her out for that reason or only because they have seen her at the sinkhole and with the witches, she welcomes them into her home near the East Gate. She will not answer any questions they may pose, admitting to nothing more than being a normal concerned resident who just happens to be braver than most.

However, she is happy to listen to the characters speak about themselves and the situation they are in. The lead in Anadea's storage indicates that Lysindra is friends with someone who knows the way to the Halls of a Thousand Tears. To get her help, the characters must be totally open with what they know, and they also have to let Lysindra accompany them on the journey. If the Huldra is correct in assuming that a powerful abomination is about to be born in the Hold, all forces of good must stand together in the fight!



Lysindra Gyllengripe

"I was an idiot, now I am ... enlightened."

Lysindra is one of the most successful explorers ever to map and salvage the treasures waiting in Davokar. Her fortune comes from her own finds, and also from fees paid by the nobles who wanted to come along on her well-guarded and well-planned expeditions. What finally made her acknowledge humankind's harmful effect on the world was that she on numerous occasions revisited areas that she had explored before.

When she for the seventh time could observe how the lovely, lush and rich nature of such an area had turned into a blight-stricken wasteland, it was impossible to ignore the truth – humanity, not nature, is the mother of evil. Now she is prepared to atone for her many atrocities, whatever the cost may be!

Manner	Loud voice, intense gestures
Race	Human (Ambrian)
Resistance	Challenging
Traits	*Contacts* (Explorers)
Accurate 7 (+3), **Cunning** 17 (–7), **Discreet** 10 (0), **Persuasive** 10 (0), **Quick** 9 (+1), **Resolute** 11 (–1), **Strong** 5 (+5), **Vigilant** 14 (–4)	
Abilities	*Alchemy* (master), *Exceptionally Cunning* (adept), *Exceptionally Vigilant* (novice), *Loremaster* (master), *Marksman* (novice), *Sixth Sense* (adept)
Weapons	Long Bow 5 (precise)
Armor	Woven Silk 2 (flexible)
Defense	–4
Toughness	10 **Pain Threshold** 3
Equipment	1D4 doses Wraith Dust, 1D4 Ghost Candles, 1D6 Herbal Cures, 2 doses Elixir of Life, 2D8 thaler.
Shadow	Red and green, like a gleaming copper roof covered in wines (corruption: 0)

Tactics: Lysindra is no warrior but she can handle a bow. She keeps her distance if at all possible, assisting her companions with well-aimed arrows.

Mearoel

"You are the sickness of this world."

Mearoel is one of the many Iron Pact members who has given up hope on the Ambrians. The barbarians managed to uphold some kind of balance, but the hunger of the newcomers threatens to drag all of them into perdition. All that Mearoel and his allies can hope for is to hamper the wrongdoers and postpone the inevitable as far into the future as possible. Not in the hope of triumphing or to enact revenge, but out of the aspiration to honor the power that breeds life.

Manner	Calm but hateful stare
Race	Elf (Autumn Elf)
Resistance	Strong
Traits	*Long-lived*
Accurate 15 (–5), **Cunning** 10 (0), **Discreet** 10 (0), **Persuasive** 5 (+5), **Quick** 15 (–5), **Resolute** 11 (–1), **Strong** 7 (+3), **Vigilant** 9 (+1)	
Abilities	*Beast Lore* (master, Cultural Beings), *Exceptionally Accurate* (adept), *Loremaster* (master), *Man-at-arms* (adept), *Natural Warrior* (adept), *Recovery* (master), *Steal Throw* (master)
Weapons	Elven throwing axe 5 (deep impact, precise, 3 attacks/turn) or Unarmed 3 (two attacks at the same target, in both cases +3 on Cultural Beings)
Armor	Silk Cuirass 4 (flexible)
Defense	–5
Toughness	10 **Pain Threshold** 4
Equipment	6 master craft throwing axes (deep impact, precise)
Shadow	Red, yellow and green like an autumn forest (corruption: 0)
Tactics: Mearoel first and foremost uses his throwing axes but when they are spent he is by no means afraid to leap unarmed into the melee.	

Prospective Iron Sworn

"You heard them say it: NEVERMORE!"

All of the humans, goblins and ogres who have abandoned their previous lives in hope of becoming permanent members of Lysindra's aggressive Iron Pact cell, have previously participated in one or more expeditions led by the former treasure hunter. They are blindly loyal and fully convinced that humankind's intrusions into Davokar must be stopped and penalized.

Approaching the Iron Pact

The Queen as well as the Sun Church regard the Iron Pact as a hostile organization, and for its agents there is no other future than the gallows. With that in mind, one can understand that the members of the pact are safe rather than sorry – should the characters be clumsy or behave aggressively when they approach Lysindra the have most likely made themselves an enemy for life...

All of them aspire to become accepted as fully-fledged members in the Iron Pact, so called Iron Sworn. To succeed in this they have to impress both Lysindra and the autumn elf Mearoel, and finally Prince Eneáno's second in command, the feared warrior Adreanea.

The following stats apply to the human and goblin agents of Lysindra's cell:

Manner	Quiet, waiting for orders
Race	Goblins and humans
Resistance	Ordinary
Traits	Goblins have *Pariah* and *Short-lived*, humans *Contacts* (treasure hunters)
Accurate 11 (–1), **Cunning** 10 (0), **Discreet** 15 (–5), **Persuasive** 7 (+3), **Quick** 10 (0), **Resolute** 5 (+5), **Strong** 9 (+1), **Vigilant** 13 (–3)	
Abilities	*Feint* (adept), *Loremaster* (novice), *Twin Attack* (adept)
Weapons	2 fencing swords 4
Armor	Leather armor 2
Defense	–4
Toughness	10 **Pain Threshold** 5
Equipment	1D10 shilling
Shadow	Brownish red, like a copper treasure hidden in the dirt (corruption: 0)
Tactics: The agents obey Lysindra's orders, eager to atone for their sins and convinced that their self-worth depends on their willingness to serve.	

The following stats apply to the ogre agents of Lysindra's cell:

Race	Ogre
Resistance	Ordinary
Traits	*Long-lived, Pariah, Robust* (I)
Accurate 5 (+5), **Cunning** 10 (0), **Discreet** 9 (+1), **Persuasive** 10 (0), **Quick** 13 (–3), **Resolute** 11 (–1), **Strong** 15 (–5), **Vigilant** 7 (+3)	
Abilities	*Iron Fist* (novice), *Two-handed Force* (adept)
Weapons	Two-handed hammer 8
Armor	Ogre skin (robust) and leather 4
Defense	+1
Toughness	15 **Pain Threshold** 8
Equipment	1D10 shilling
Shadow	Crimson red (corruption: 0)
Tactics: See goblins/humans above.	

ACT THREE:

Midnight in Thistle Hold

FOR THE THIRD act of the adventure to start the players and their characters must reach the right conclusions from the leads in the second act. They must realize that Anadea was a member of the Iron Pact, and that her *"superior"* is in the Halls of a Thousand Tears.

AS ALWAYS, IT is best if the players can put the pieces together and reach the right conclusions on their own, which is made possible by the elven Halls being mentioned two times in the section *The Hunter's Harbor* (page 20 and 25) and in the *Core Rulebook* on page 222. If this is not enough, there are many who are willing to help.

The witches, Ordo Magica's masters, Father Elfeno, Lysindra Goldengrasp and others are all capable of reaching the conclusions mentioned below, and also to link the leads to the legends about the Halls of a Thousand Tears. If the Game Master wishes to make it more exciting, the players may roll the tests mentioned below for the one they are talking to, but that is not a requirement. However, it should be noted that only three persons in Thistle Hold know how to get to the Halls: the autumn elf Mearoel, and Lasifor Nightpitch and his witch. More on that in the upcoming section, after a closer look at the leads.

THE LEADS

The letter in Anadea's belt purse: Aside from the text being written with symbols resembling cuneiform writings and speaking of sorrow and tears, it is signed by Teara-Teána. Anyone with the ability *Loremaster* immediately recognizes the name as elvish. If also passing a *Cunning* test he or she will recall that elves seldom communicate in writing, but that they often use script that looks like Symbarian symbols when they do.

Arkel's testimony: In combination with the report of Geleto, the story of Arkel implies that Anadea was a heretic, both in the sense that she defended Father Sarvola and in that she had an idea of *"Davokar's nature"* which deviated from that of the Church. It is also clear that she had a *"new tutor"*, one who was not part of the Sun Church or the Ambrian realm in general. If needed, the Game Master can let the players roll a *Cunning* test for the characters to realize that this only leaves the barbarians or the elves as likely alternatives.

Anadea's storage: In the storage there are several items pointing to the elves – the ball of Touber, the sketchy map and the entry in the journal. For one thing, the journal entry contains the exclamation *"Nevermore!"*, which can be identified as the motto of the Iron Pact by someone with the *Loremaster* ability. The note also mentions *"the halls"* and a *"well"*, which corresponds to the scribblings on the map.

The box in the alcove: The portrait of a person with elven features speaks for itself. When seeing the sketch of the stone-paved pond, someone who has the ability *Loremaster* at the adept level and who succeeds with a *Cunning* test (character or other) remembers a barbarian legend about *"the Well of Tears"*. It is supposedly a pond or well into which the elves shed tears of bottomless grief, but exactly what they are grieving for is disputed – the unwavering brutality of humankind, the evil of corruption, their dying prince or maybe that the elven race is about to become extinct.

The Road to the Elves

WHEN THE CHARACTERS realize that the person who can help them reach their goals – whether that goal is to reap the extravagant rewards promised by Anadea or to learn more about the alleged source of corruption – probably is in the Halls of a Thousand Tears they have to find a way to get there. If they have been to the storage and found the journal, they already know that Lasifor Nightpitch and someone called Mearoel should be able to help them; if not, they have to ask around, but with some caution.

HELP ON THE WAY

Ambrian factions like the Sun Church and House Kohinoor would be delighted to receive confirmation of the existence of the Halls of a Thousand Tears, but hardly in order to get themselves invited to a cup of elven herbal water. On the contrary, they would regard the Halls as a strategic, military target and do ALL in their power to a) help the player characters get there, and b) afterwards force them to disclose where this elven settlement can be found. If the players do not realize this, the Game Master should explain the situation, provided that some of the characters have the ability *Loremaster* or the trait *Contacts* including the Sun Church, the Ambrian Army or Ambrian Nobles. If the group does not include such a character, it is recommended that they all get to roll against *Cunning* to reach the same insight. What they then do with this insight is up to the players and their characters ...

Whomever they characters confide in will initially adopt a skeptical stance and express doubts that the Halls are real. If they keep trying, everyone they might talk to will finally refer them to the same person: *"If anyone knows anything about these Halls or has an idea on who else to contact, it is Mayor Nightpitch."* The exceptions to this are the witches who say that also the Huldra may know and Lysindra who never mentions Nightpitch, but instead brings them along to meet with Mearoel.

THE TWIN KEYS

Getting to the Halls of a Thousand Tears is not very difficult, provided that the characters know what needs to be done and can acquire two vital components: a piece of Touber mushroom and a mare cat or jakaar, alive and kicking. Both Nightpitch and Mearoel can tell the characters this – the former if the characters can convince him that it is necessary to prevent his town from being attacked, the latter if Lysindra Goldengrasp asks it of him.

There is a chance that the characters already have both components (found in Anadea's storage). If not, the Mayor or the autumn elf can provide them with the mushroom, in exchange for the promise that the characters will try to gain some more when they visit the Halls. However, the wild beast is something they must acquire themselves. At the stables of the Abomitorium there are both mare cats and jakaars but their keeper, Miesma, claims that all are needed for the upcoming Fight Day. The two remaining alternatives are to stage a break-in or to overpower the night guard and take one of the beasts by force.

A more diplomatic solution is to ask for the name of the trapper who provides the beasts for the Abomitorium. That way they will get to meet the game hunter Malmedo who lives in a small apartment inside Haloban's Ring and who welcomes them to join his next hunt. Malmedo has located a pack of mare cats – a male, three females and a litter of six half-year-old kittens – but has not dared go after them on his own. Should the characters help him, he will let them keep one kitten and half of the meat from the ones that are killed. The details of such a hunt are left to the Game Master to decide.

Young Mare Cat

Hisses angrily

The young mare cats are yet to develop their poison glands but can nonetheless be a challenge for an outnumbered opponent. Like their elders they are death defiantly fearless.

Manner	Bares its fangs		
Race	Beast		
Resistance	Weak		
Traits	*Natural Weapon* (I)		
Accurate 11 (–1), **Cunning** 9 (+1), **Discreet** 15 (–5), **Persuasive** 5 (+5), **Quick** 13 (–3), **Resolute** 10 (0), **Strong** 7 (+3), **Vigilant** 10 (0)			
Abilities	*Acrobatics* (novice)		
Weapons	Bite 3		
Armor	None		
Defense	–3		
Toughness	10	**Pain Threshold**	4
Equipment	None		
Shadow	Green as grass after a heavy rain (corruption: 0)		

Tactics: The mare cats sneak up on their victims to achieve Surprise, then moves around to the flanks to keep the advantage throughout the fight.

Journey Through the Woods

ONCE THE CHARACTERS have acquired a piece of Touber and a live forest beast, the instructions say to take them out into the forest. When they have made their way past the tree-line, the beast must be leashed and fed the mushroom, wrapped in some minced meat. According to the information the characters have, they are then to follow the animal, since it will head straight for the gate to the Halls. However, a few things should be noted.

GUIDE THE BEAST

First, the Touber mushroom does not affect the temper of the beast, so if it is anything else than a kitten or a weakened specimen (for example the one in Anadea's storage) the characters have to mind their own safety. Someone who is used to dealing with animals and/or has the ability *Beast Lore* can suggest that instead of a leash they use two tools called Shaft Snares – sticks that are two paces long and equipped with a noose at one end, making it possible for two moderately strong people to keep the beast at bay. Each time the animal becomes aggressive they may add their *Strong* values together and make a test modified by the beast's *Strong* (+3 for an adult mare cat, ±0 for a jakaar). Remember that if one of them lets go of the shaft snares (for instance if they are attacked) the animal gets trickier to manage – in that case the test is [*Strong*←*Strong*]. And should both handlers lose their grip, the beast will take off into the forest, provided that they have not made other arrangements.

THE LONG ROAD

Secondly, their instructor says that there are several gates to the Halls of a Thousand Tears, but that these either appear at different places in the woods or are not active all at once. Irrespective of which, it is impossible to be sure where the beast will go or how long the journey will be. Consequently, they should be prepared for more than a short trip.

As a suggestion, the Game Master can have one of the players roll 1D4, without saying why. The outcome is then used to decide how many challenges they will encounter on the road, and also how many days it will take for them to reach the halls – two days per challenge. Regarding the challenges, you can either have the players use 1D10 and the table to the right to decide these, or the Game Master can chose depending on what encounters suit the group best. A third option is (as always) that the Game Master develops his or her own challenges.

1. The Brigands: A group of greedy brigands has heard the characters come stomping through the forest and arranged an ambush amongst thorny shrubbery. The would-be thieves are human if they are encountered close to the forest edge, goblins if met further in, but whatever the case they are as many as the PCs +1 and have stats as Robber/Robber Chief on page 211 in the *Core Rulebook*. The character who passes a roll against [*Vigilant*←*Discreet*] avoids being *Surprised* when the brigands make their move.

2. Fairy Dance: A group of persistent fairies has discovered the characters, curious to know why they have a beast on a leash. They decide that the animal must be set loose, and may very well succeed at this since the oldest among them has learned the power *Unnoticeable* at adept level from an Arch Troll. Their first attempt is made when all but the night watch is asleep. For the fairy to make it, the night watch must first fail a roll against [*Resolute*←*Resolute*] (see *Unnoticeable*, *Core Rulebook*, page 139), and after that fail a test against [*Vigilant*←*Discreet*] when the spring elf starts fiddling with the knot, lock or other arrangement hindering the beast from running away. If the fairy is discovered it sets off into the night while his four friends fire arrows from up in the trees.

If the first attempt fails they will try again during the following night, with a new strategy. The four companions storm the campsite and fire one arrow at one character each, after which they retreat back into the dark, hoping that the characters will hunt after them. Again, the oldest one uses *Unnoticeable*, to try to get close to the beast and set it free. The test against [*Resolute*←*Resolute*] is made as usual, but this time the characters who remain by the fire (if any) actively have to state that they are watching for anything other than the evasive fairies if they are to be allowed to roll the [*Vigilant*←*Discreet*] test.

So, what happens if the fairies succeed? Well, the suggestion is that the characters get a chance to catch the beast before it escapes – tentatively with a roll against *Quick*, followed by a period of intense wrestling [*Strong*←*Strong*] (both tests with the modification +5 if the beast is young or injured). Should that fail they may be able to track the runaway; the characters must roll three successful tests against *Vigilant* before finding the animal asleep from exhaustion. The hunt is made easier if the beast has a rope or a chain dangling behind (+3). Should the tracking fail, the player characters have no option but to return to Thistle Hold and hope they can acquire more of the mushroom ...

Challenges (D10)

1: The Brigands
2: Fairy Dance
3: The Pupae
4: Free Settlers
5: The Ranger Patrol
6: Sea of Light
7: At the Brink
8: Aluin
9: Mother Marsh
10: Beast Clan Raiders

3. The Pupae: The characters' guide leads them straight through a dense and vast area of thorns, about fifty paces wide. In its midst they encounter something peculiar – a shapeless, black lump, large as a curled up ogre; like a vile, stinking giant boil. And something is moving under the oily, leathery surface!

If the characters let events take their course, a fully grown, humanoid creature soon claws itself out of the boil. And it indeed proves to be an ogre – a very confused, starving, scared and hence rather aggressive ogre. It is totally void of memories and has no language, but if the characters refrain from attacking, it will only growl and wave its arms at them to try to scare them away. It has the statistics of a Famished Rage Troll, but with the trait *Natural Weapon* swapped for *Pariah*.

4. Free Settlers: The characters encounter a small community of free settlers in their path. It consists of two families, numbering sixteen individuals in total – six children, eight adults in two generations and two elderly men who once where priests in service of the Executioner and who refused to accept the supremacy of Prios. The characters are welcomed with smiles and are offered to spend the night in one of the three huts the settlers live in.

What the characters are unaware of, is that the inhabitants live in a symbiosis with a vicious lindworm called Gulgafal, nesting at the top of the giant village tree. Gulgafal is fed and cared for by the settlers, who in turn can count on the serpent to protect them. Naturally, the village Elder Hugor intends for the characters to become Gulgafal's next meal.

The adult villagers (half male, half female) have stats as Cult Follower (page 211 in the *Core Rulebook*) and will try to sneak up on the characters in the middle of the night. If any character is keeping watch, a test against [*Vigilant←Discreet*] is all it takes to discover the threat before they attack. Should the characters quickly gain the upper hand, the settlers decide to make a run for it and Hugor sounds his horn.

A moment later, an abysmal roar is heard from above. Gulgafal comes slithering down the trunk, determined to shelter his herd and fill his belly. For the lindworm's stats, see page 223 in the *Core Rulebook*.

If the characters manage to best the serpent, they can climb up to its nest and make some interesting finds. The Game Master is free to decide the details or to use the tables featured in the eBook Adventure Pack 1 which can be downloaded from various online stores. If going with the latter option, it is suggested that the characters roll four times on the table Curiosities, and once each on Mystical Treasures and Artifacts.

5. The Ranger Patrol: A patrol from the Queen's Rangers attracts the attention of the characters from a distance. The group includes Captain Serela and her five rangers (page 212 in the *Core Rulebook*) and they are in the area to investigate the rumors of a raging arch troll. They are, of course, also obliged to check that all Ambrians they encounter in the woods are carrying a License for travels in and explorations of the Forest of Davokar.

Serela may very well be one of Queen Korinthia's most tenacious subjects. If the characters do not have their license in order, she demands that they immediately turn on their heels and also spares one of her rangers to escort them back to the tree-line. If they do have the license they need, she may still raise bothersome questions. Are they really allowed to keep wild beasts in chains or on a leash when the explorer's license says nothing about it? Do they really have the skills warranted to be wandering about or should they be forced to pay a small fee for their incompetence?

How the encounter ends depends on how well equipped the characters are in terms of a valid license and how convincing they are: even if the papers are in order, a passed *Persuasive* test is required to satisfy the zealous captain. It may actually come to combat, since the irreproachable Serela takes her orders very seriously!

The Trolls of Davokar

The trolls live, like the elves, in phases. But where the life-phases of the elves are separated by a longer or shorter dormancy, the trolls evolve through a kind of pupation. The reason why this is not known among Ambrians and barbarians is that the trolls always go underground when the time comes. Existing witness statements, from the Underworld and from the rare cases when a troll has pupated on the surface, are all perceived as erroneous or as tall tales – especially since they often include the conclusion that female trolls lay eggs.

Of course, the trolls' equivalent to spring elves/fairies is goblins. When they sense that it is time to die, they leave the community to seek their death, meaning that not even the goblins know that about a tenth of those who disappear subsequently return, either as rage trolls or (in a few cases) as more even-tempered and, in the eyes of real trolls, disfigured ogres. The latter live out their lives deprived of the chance to undergo further stages of pupation, while a small portion of the rage trolls evolve into liege trolls. According to this logic it is probably evident that the arch trolls are the troll race's equivalent to winter elves ...



Beneath the treetops of Davokar you often feel like you are being watched. Most of those times you really are...

Tomb of Dying Dreams

Those who have played the adventure Tomb of Dying Dreams can take the opportunity to re-visit the region surrounding the crypt of Hurian-Lo Apak while travelling towards the Halls of a Thousand Tears. It may even come to pass that their guide insists on traveling through that area; an area which may be more or less lethal to enter, depending on the outcome of the adventure ...

6. Sea of Light: As the time comes to seek shelter for the night, the characters arrive at a vast field of ruins whose ancient remains barely can be seen through the undergrowth. In a couple of places, walls still stand tall enough to protect from the wind – great places for the characters to roll out their blankets.

He or she who passes a *Vigilant* test discover that what was first assumed to be a twig poking up from the ground actually is the bone from some long dead creature. A *Cunning* test with the ability *Medicus* further reveals that it is a human femur and that the death must have occurred less than two years ago. If they dig on the spot, they will find more bones beneath the moss, also items in the form of weapons and Ambrian coins (1D10 thaler). It is impossible to tell how these people died, at least from studying and analyzing the remains.

The answer to that question comes as night falls over the field. It is then that they rise from the Underworld: hundreds of Frost Lights that have ruled the area for centuries. Initially they are scattered and the sight of them is more beautiful than frightening. But if the characters are to make it out alive they better get a move on.

If they depart immediately, they will only attract the interest of 1D4 Frost Lights (see page 230 in the *Core Rulebook*); if they linger for one turn, 2D4 spirits will come at them; and so on, up to 5D4 warmth-seeking souls. It takes five turns of full movement to reach the edge of the field.

Should they stay by the wall segment, the Frost Lights will eventually take notice of them and close in on the campsite together. If so, the characters' only chance is to form up back to back and keep the spirits at bay during the five turns it takes to reach safety. Once they have left the field they will not be followed since the Frost Lights are bound to its ruins.

7. At the Brink: A barbarian woman comes staggering through the woods. When she sees the characters she stops to stare at them with terror in her eyes. Her clothes are shredded, she has bite and claw marks on her arms and face, and she screams at them in the barbarian tongue: *"Stay away! Don't come any closer! Fly, you fools, fly!"* A test against [*Vigilant* +3] with the ability *Witchsight* can reveal that the woman positively oozes corruption!

If the characters do not obey she bursts into a full-blown frenzy. And when she activates her mystical artifact, the war axe Hunger (see page 74), her total corruption value surpasses her value in *Resolute*. The woman's skin immediately adopts a blood red nuance, her eyes turn black and she drops the axe as long claws sprout from her swollen, gnarled hands.

Combat is unavoidable and will hopefully teach the characters to be careful with people they encounter in Davokar, even if they appear to be in distress. For the stats of the ex-woman, see page 226 in the *Core Rulebook*.

8. Aluin: A character who passes a *Vigilant* test can suddenly notice a strange sound intermingled with the rustling of the leaves. It sounds like someone is humming a cheerful melody; a child or maybe a woman, or a man with a high pitched voice. Shortly thereafter all Ambrians among them recognize the song as an old Ambrian lullaby.

Aliun comes strolling through the forest – the very strange, six year old boy who has appointed Sarvola to be his father. He greets the characters with a smile: *"Hey, hellohey, you're also on a stroll in the woods? You walking the dog/cat?"* He sits down on a stump and asks if the characters wish to join him for a while. If asked what he is doing all alone in the depth of Davokar he just shrugs his shoulders and points out that he likes playing in the forest since it is *"full of fine plats and things you can toy with"*.

See the textbox Aluin on page 121 for more inspiration on how the conversation may run. If the characters allow it, he is glad to walk with them for a while, until he leaves them as abruptly as he appeared, with the excuse that he must return before *"dad gets worried"*.

9. Mother Marsh: The characters are forced to come to a halt when their path takes them to the rim of a bog. The beast that leads them wants to continue straight ahead, but it looks as though it should be possible to walk around it without losing much time. Whether the characters put up a fight with the willful, hissing and stubborn beast or decide to try to navigate the swamp, they are soon joined by a peculiar creature.

It is a short female figure – bony and bent, with moss-green skin which looks hard and wrinkled like the bark on a pine. She seems ancient but has a posture suggesting that she is alert and hearty like a youngster. The wide smile is toothless and she watches the characters with big eyes, just as dark blue as ripe blueberries.

The creature welcomes them to the wetland of Mother Marsh, and continues to speak of herself in the third person. She offers to guide them through the swamp; all she asks in return is that one of the characters will owe her a favor which she can collect when she has the need for it. Should the characters agree, they will have no problem trailing her to the other side of the marshland,

where she waves them off with a sly smile. If they instead turn down her offer, she will mutter a curse over the character who has been most talkative. At first, all he or she feels is a tiny sting at the base of the nose. But about one week later a small wart appears on the right nostril. The wart will grow by one millimeter in diameter per month, and no one but Mother Marsh is able to break the spell, at the cost of a favor of course ...

The character who agrees to the initial offer will most likely come to regret the decision. For one thing, his or her shadow or aura will become tainted – anyone looking at the shadow of that character will notice a dark, uneven stain at the center of his or her forehead. Additionally, the character will wake up one morning with an inexplicable understanding of what needs to be done in order for the contract to be fulfilled: Mother Marsh wishes for: *"The depraved heart of a greedy human"*. Should the character refuse or take too much time it leads to a wart curse like the one described above.

10. Beast Clan Raiders: The Beast Clan has been forced to abandon their previous home and is looking to start over somewhere else. To gather resources, two groups have been sent out to strike at free settlements and barbarian camps; each group consisting of 1 Beast Clan Guardian, 3 Beast Clan Warriors and 5 Clan Beasts (see page 93–96 for stats). One of these groups has gotten wind of the characters.

Should the characters take precautions before setting up camp – for example if they end the day's walk by tracking some hundred paces back, in parallel to their own trail – he or she who has the watch can quite easily discover the threat. If so, a test against [*Vigilant* +5] is enough to discover the pursuers, allowing time to wake the others and either run or prepare for combat. Without such precautions the test for discovering the barbarians is [*Vigilant*←*Discreet*] as usual. And should the test fail, the characters are taken by *Surprise*.

The nine Beast Clan members are probably a really tough challenge for most groups, but when venturing into Davokar one should not expect anything less. A kind Game Master lets the characters discover the threat at a distance even if no precautions have been taken, so they can find somewhere to hide or somewhere to make their stand. Should they opt for combat under those circumstances they will only have themselves to blame!

The Halls of a Thousand Tears

THE CHARACTERS VISIT to the Halls of a Thousand Tears will be short and they will not have the time or opportunity to see very much of the elven realm. *Wrath of the Warden* is the opening episode of the chronicle, so for now the players will have to make do with a glimpse of the grandeur, as a prelude of things to come.

The main reason for the visit is to gain a clear lead in the hunt for the powerful source of corruption located somewhere in Thistle Hold, based on Anadea's last conversation with her contact in the Iron Pact. Adding to that, the talk to Teara-Téana will provide the characters with important insight into how the Iron Pact works and also about the dynamic which is fundamental to the main conflict in the game world: the one between the principles called Wyrhta, Wielda and Wratha by the barbarians.

ARRIVAL

The first sign that they are closing in on the Halls is that their guide starts tugging at the restraints, eagerly yelping or whining. The beast stops in a grove with the ground covered by fallen, fiery yellow or deeply red leaves. It sniffs the air and scratches the ground, with its ears twitching back and forth.

After a while it sits down, closes its eyes and lets out a continuous howling/meowing. A strong gust of air hits the grove and quickly transforms into a whirlwind that lifts leaves, dirt and debris from the ground – debris that, before the characters' eyes, merges into something that more and more looks like an archway. At the moment when the wind dies, the portal is activated and they can see that it leads to a short corridor with floors of vulcanized glass, with the walls clad in shimmering algae and with the far opening covered by a drape made from vines of green and brown.

A character who has the ability *Witchsight* and who passes a test against *Vigilant* realizes that the portal immediately starts to lose power and that it will soon collapse; a passed test against [*Vigilant* –5] provides the same insight but more in the form of a feeling than a sense of knowing. In any case, they only have about a minute to act before the archway collapses into a pile of leaves, twigs and dirt.

THE ENTRANCE

The corridor is not more than ten paces deep and ends at a curtain of bushy vines. The draping is under the influence of a mystical rune that reacts to corruption; its stalks are normally a brownish green but if blight stricken creatures approach they shift



For centuries Ka'eroan has watched the gates to the Halls of a Thousand Tears. So far, no one has entered without his blessing.

into ever-darkening shades, based on the level of corruption. At 1–2 in total corruption the drape gets a red nuance, at 3–5 it shifts towards purple that then grows darker and becomes pitch black if a thoroughly corrupt being comes close – as a warning to the elves posted as guards in the Entrance Chamber.

The hall behind the curtain is about twenty paces wide, fifteen paces deep and the height of three men, rising to a natural cave ceiling. The latter is overgrown with moss that emits a soft, pale-blue shine, and long threads of shimmering algae hang all the way down to the cave floor, each a few paces apart. Along the side where the characters enter, there are five other openings, covered in similar vine draperies. On the opposite wall are two arched doorways whose massive gates are closed. The walls at the short ends of the hall display something looking like large mosaics – actually plant and flower arrangements whose color and life force have been preserved by mystical means.

Three beings are in the hall, on a moss-clad podium between the doorways on the far side. One sits cross-legged at the front edge and two stand behind him holding shallow, wooden bowls up to their chests. In the gloomy light, it first appears as if the ones standing are children. But as the characters come closer they find that they are mistaken: the closest person is huge, tall as a fully grown man when seated. Anyone having the ability *Loremaster* who succeeds with a test against *Cunning* recalls that elves are said to continue growing as long as they are alive, probably meaning that the individual sitting on the podium is very old. The wrinkled face, misty eyes and hunched posture that are revealed as they approach, all seem to indicate that the initial guess was correct.

The man and the woman behind him give the characters a welcoming nod, after which the female speaks up in the harsh elven language: *"Tell me what you seek"*. A character with the *Loremaster* ability at adept level can both understand what is said and deliver a crude answer (for more elaborate conversations a *Cunning* test is needed). Should the characters fail to understand, the eternity elf Ka'eroan echoes the question telepathically.

It is not very likely that the characters get it into their heads to behave threateningly, but if that is the case the three and a half meter tall Ka'eroan will rise to his feet and start by trying to ensnare them with his *Entangling Vines*. If this does not change their minds, he will start swinging away with his seemingly ordinary wooden staff (actually a powerful artifact). And if it comes to combat, if will not take more than two turns before a group consisting of twenty five elven warriors (see Late Summer Elf, page 205 in the *Core Rulebook*) join in. In short: if the characters are stupid enough to pick a fight with the elves of Davokar, in their halls, they will soon come to regret it!

Most likely, the meeting with Ka'eroan is without incident. If the characters answer that they seek Teara-Téana, *"Anadea's master"* or something similar, the male weeper soon nods and walks off to fetch the sought-after person. He leaves the twin gates of the doorway aja ...

Ka'eroan

An extended, hateful rustling

Ka'eroan is one of very few elves to survive his fourth slumber, and he made it through for one purpose alone: to keep guarding the gates to the Halls of a Thousand Tears. The stats below are only relevant if the player characters give the eternity elf any reason to grow angry. Defeating him and the late summer elves arriving to his aid is most likely out of the question.

Manner	Adamant		
Race	Elf (Eternity Elf)		
Resistance	Mighty		
Traits	*Manifestation* (III), *Regeneration* (III), *Robust* (III), *Spirit Form* (III)		
Accurate 19 (–9), **Cunning** 7 (+3), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 9 (+1), **Quick** 10 (0), **Resolute** 17 (–7), **Strong** 11 (–1), **Vigilant** 10 (0)			
Abilities	*Acrobatics* (master), *Berserker* (master), *Entangling Wines* (master), *Exceptionally Accurate* (grandmaster), *Exceptionally Resolute* (grandmaster), *Polearm Mastery* (master), *Steadfast* (master), *Witchsight* (master)		
Weapons	The Keepers Staff 11, and [*Resolute←Strong*] to paralyze the victim for 1D4 turns after damaging hit		
Armor	6 (Robust+Berserker), can only be damaged by mystical powers and magical weapons, with damage cut in half		
Defense	+4		
Toughness	11	**Pain Threshold**	6
Equipment	Soul Stone		
Shadow	Brown and rogh, like the bark on an ancient tree (corruption: 0)		

Tactics: Ka'eroan starts off with a chain of biting vines after which he bashes away at the intruders with his staff.

Blight-Marked Characters

If the curtain at the entry indicates that a blight-marked creature approaches the entry hall, the elves take no risks. Just when the characters emerge from the corridor, twenty five late summer elves pour through the gateways in the far wall, all of them with arrows ready to fire. However, provided that the player characters behave calmly the meeting with the eternity elf can play out much as it is detailed above.

THE WAIT

The wait for Teara-Téana to join them in the entry hall is long. Meanwhile, the player characters can get a glimpse of what is beyond the half-open gateway, study the vegetal mosaics at the short ends of the hall and even exchange a few words with the female weeper.

If the characters approach the twin-doors they will receive a firm but gentle reprimand from Ka'eroan – a telepathic *"No!"* echoing between their ears. But no one will stop them from glancing through the opening. The hall beyond is lit by algae like the entry hall, and it looks huge. Here and there crudely cut, or possibly natural, pillars rise from the floor, covered by algae that in places is concentrated into tiny clusters, like bright stars on a pale summer night sky. A couple of groups of slowly wandering people, probably elves, walk past at a distance and a wild boar piglet comes right up to the door, sniffing the air and giving the player characters a short, black-eyed look.

The mosaic on the wall to the right of the podium depicts a scene in which about twenty people wearing iron-gray clothing walk across a landscape that is burnt to ashes in front of them, and more and more lush the further the perspective extends behind. The mosaic to the left portrays a grove in a dense forest. A massive stone table stands at the center of the grove and around it thirteen people are assembled. The details are not fine enough to make out individual features, but it is clear that three of them are much taller than the rest and that these are wearing different clothes – tunics and mantles of ankle-length, instead of half- or quarter-length jackets.

Lysindra in Tow

When Teara-Téana hears the name Lysindra Goldengrasp she involuntarily flinches and her face darkens. Her gaze wanders between the characters for a while, after which she states that the conversation is over and that they have to leave the halls forthwith, willingly or with an escort. The characters have one chance to explain that they are not in league with Lysindra but that she forced them to take her along. For her part, Lysindra demands that she must be allowed to stay since she is a full member of the Iron Pact, but that is not reason enough for Teara-Téana. It ends with a very grumpy Goldengrasp being shoved through one of the corridors by ten spear-carrying summer elves. Of course, the reason for this is that Teara-Téana distrust Mearoel and other aggressive members of the pact, worried that their actions will provoke the humans into intensifying the effort to cultivate/exploit the Forest of Davokar.

A character with the ability *Loremaster* who passes a test against *Cunning* can initiate a dialogue with the female elf standing behind Ka'eroan on the podium. Her answers are short and in regards to anything besides the topics listed below she asks them to be patient and await the arrival of Teara-Téana:

- Her name is Áleia, her male friend Dareol. The shallow bowl is used to collect their tears and it is emptied three times a day, into the Well of Tears which can be found deep within the Halls.
- Mannen The elf before her is named Ka'eroan and he guards the gate. He is very old and it is he who controls where on the surface the six portals will materialize.
- According to Áleia, the mosaic to the right symbolizes *"the battle and victory over Symbar"*, which was won without weapons in hand.
- The left mosaic portrays the council where the elf prince Eneáno and ten human chieftains agreed on and signed the Iron Pact. (The character with the ability *Loremaster* who passes a *Cunning* test recalls that one of the humans in that picture is said to be the forefather of Queen Korinthia, Argalo.)
- If the characters are hungry, Áleia can fetch a pitcher of water and a trey filled with berries, nuts and marinated mushrooms. They must promise not to disturb Ka'eroan while she is away.

The characters have waited for several hours when Dareol returns. He exchanges a few, concerned words with Áleia and the character who passes a test against *Vigilant* can clearly hear Dareol mentioning Eneáno. If any if the characters understand elvish he and/or she hears:

Áleia: *"Problems?"*
Dareol: *"We met Prince Eneáno. He wanted to talk."*
Áleia: *"Oh. How is he?"*
Dareol: *"It is a bad day ..."*

Shortly thereafter, they can hear the powerful roar of a man from somewhere outside the gate. It goes silent for a while until the same voice begins to laugh, first in a restrained way, then wilder and wilder and finally it turns into violent crying and angry whimpers. A woman raises her voice (*"Find your calm, Prince!"*), and the male voice goes silent.

Should the characters ask the elves on the podium about the incident they will be told to direct the question to Teara-Téana. And before long, she comes through the door, closing it behind her.

TEARA-TÉANA

The awe-inspiring shape that enters the entry hall is tall, dressed in a dark brown coat with the hood folded down, and carrying two slender swords hanging from a wide belt with floral embroideries. The feline features with marked cheekbones, big eyes and a small nose are accentuated, so that her face almost resembles that of a beast more than a human.

Teara-Téana nods towards Ka'eroan before turning her full attention to the player characters. She watches them suspiciously, if not threateningly, and asks them in broken Ambrian to take a seat on the floor. She remains standing, her arms crossed and with a look in her eyes that demands an answer: *"Who are you and who has taught you my name?"*

If the characters give her any reason to doubt their answers, she excuses herself, walks up to the podium and kneels before Ka'eroan. He removes a necklace from his neck and offers it to her, after which she returns to show its pendant to the characters – a pearl large as a clenched fist that seems to be filled by gray-white smoke. She places the necklace between herself and them, while explaining that the spirit inside the pearl will darken if someone nearby utters a *"conscious untruth"*. That being done, she gestures for them to continue telling their tale.

If a character wants to challenge the pearl with a lie, he or she must pass a test against *Discreet* or *Persuasive* with a –3 modification. A failed test means that the pearl darkens and the characters are warned: *"Lie again and you will be escorted out of the halls!"*, a threat which will be carried out without pardon. Hopefully the player characters will realize that the situation they are in provides no room for anything besides humble obedience – after all, they are all alone in an underground realm full of mighty elves without even knowing how, or if, it is possible for them to escape.

In the end, once Teara-Téana has received the answers she is looking for she proves to be very reasonable. She joins them on the floor, wanting to know how she may help them. The following lines may be used directly or work as inspiration if the characters ask other kinds of questions:

With whom did you argue outside the gate? Why?
She will not respond to this question, other than with a disapproving glance.

The Gold Pearl?
The Mind Stone was a gift from Teara-Téana to Anadea, for them to be able to keep in touch. She would very much like to have it back and if a character is bound to the artifact she can break that link. Should one of the characters later on be considered for membership in the Iron Pact, she will return the Mind Stone to him or her, and reveal how to use it with a reduced risk of attracting corruption – 1D4 per usage instead of 1D8.



Teara-Téana has fought for the world and the Iron Pact for centuries.

The aim of the Iron Pact?
The basic force of the world is creation. Every time someone violates this force by taming, manipulating or cultivating it, the force will react in its defense, giving rise to the phenomenon known as corruption amongst humans. And the reaction grows stronger with the force of the violation – sometimes so strong that it destroys itself in the process. This has happened before, many times before, and the goal of the Iron Pact is to prevent this from happening again – hence the pact's watchword: *"Nevermore!"*.

How is the Iron Pact organized?
The Iron Pact consists of about ten cells, which in different ways try to ease the effects of civilization's quest to subjugate the pure power of creation. There are no rulers or chieftains giving orders to the individual members – some of which have lost all hope, claiming that the world can only be saved by the destruction of humankind; others (like her) still harbor some hope that humans can be convinced of the truth.

What happened to Symbaroum?
That is not important. All that humans need to know is that if they continue to violate the world, what

happened in Symbaroum will happen again, sooner or later. Moreover, it is totally true that a number of dark creatures are slumbering in Davokar, and that careless behavior may awaken them. Should such beings be unleashed, they will cause massive damage and expedite an already disastrous development towards darker days.

What threatens Thistle Hold?
A group of humans embracing the powers of corruption has managed to find a powerful god of the forest, cut its head off and take the skull to the town. The spirit, called Eox, still lives and may possibly be rescued if the head is reunited with the body, but it cannot wait much longer.

The collaboration with Anadea?
After her previous contact in Thistle Hold, the tutor Vernam, was killed, she sent one of her agents into town to identify a worthy replacement. It was a time-consuming and difficult task, not least since the agent needed to keep to the shadows and only act during the night. But finally he managed to enlist Anadea, who then was invited to the Halls of a Thousand Tears where she swore the oath of the Iron Pact and inherited Vernam's position as Teara-Téana's eyes and ears in the Hold.

When Teara-Téana learned about what had happened to Eox, she contacted Anadea through the Mind Stone and asked her to recruit a group of trustworthy companions, and to first identify the wrongdoers, then reclaim the skull of the god. She was supposed to report back about her accomplishments each day at dawn, but she only had time to do that once before she disappeared – probably because she happened to reveal herself. Her short report stated: *"Believe I have found the cultists. The leader is named Erlaber, an antique dealer. They keep to the old tannery. I'll strike later today."*

When Anadea did not get back to her the next morning and Teara-Téana heard the rumor that the old alarm contraption had tolled, she gave up – it would take too long to recruit a new agent and it would be too dangerous to send any of her agents into town because of the heightened security. To ask the only remaining Iron Pact cell in the Hold for help was unthinkable – Mearoel champions a more aggressive interpretation of the pact's duty and if he were to learn of Eox's fate he would most likely make matters even worse.

She finishes by asking the characters if they are willing to resume where Anadea left off.

What about the reward?
Depending on what the characters initially asked for, Teara-Téana's answer will vary. The Game Master is left to decide, but basically she is willing to make good on Anadea's promises, if not to any and all extremes. Sure, the Iron Pact has great riches, deep-reaching knowledge and is in possession of numerous artifacts of both elven and Symbarian origin. However, in the end it is important that the reward a) helps the characters one or two steps along the road to their respective goals, and b) is not so grand that the goals immediately can be fulfilled. As a suggestion, Teara-Téana has each character choose from among:

- An artifact corresponding to the abilities and goals of the character
- Training in an ability or mystical power, that with the help of the elves costs 50% of the original cost to acquire or rise in level (5 experience for novice, 10 for adept and 15 for master).
- Taking part in a cleansing ritual that lowers the value in permanent corruption by 1D4, at the cost of as many points in *Experience*.
- Gemstones or precious metals to a value of 400+1D100 thaler.

Where to take the skull?
Teara-Téana's agent has told her about the witches outside Thistle Hold. Hence her answer is that once they have reclaimed the skull from the *"corruption eaters"*, the characters should contact the witch Gadramon and ask him to guide them to Eox's territory.

Can I/we become members of the Pact?
That is not impossible. The elves are very restricted when it comes to moving about in human settlements, which is why the Iron Pact is always in need of agents from other races and breeds. She will not make any promises, but provided that they succeed in reclaiming and returning the skull they can talk more on the matter at a later stage.

Questions about Elves

It is not unlikely that the players and their characters take the opportunity to raise other kinds of questions during their talk to Teara-Téana. Maybe they what to know about the purpose of the changelings or about elves in the Davokar region – how many they are, how they live, from whence they come and so on. In response to such questions they will get nothing but silence. The autumn elf has neither the right nor the need to enlighten the characters on elven mysteries.

Confirmation

THE JOURNEY BACK to Thistle Hold is not affected by the manner in which they leave. Teara-Téana asks Ka'eroan to open a portal close to Thistle Hold and the characters are instructed to walk to the south from the place where they emerge.

Now all that remains is the showdown with Erlaber Ambreagos and his followers. The Game Master should try to keep the pace and the tension high, not least by reminding the players that time is short. If they are not quick enough, the forest warden will die and, maybe even worse, a mighty abomination will be born in Thistle Hold, ready to tear the town apart.

WHAT HAS TRANSPIRED

Much has occurred since the appearance of the sinkhole, not only for the player characters but for Erlaber Ambreagos as well. First, the cult leader has studied and learned the ritual that, according to The Prince, will imbue him with the strength of the Eternal Night. He has also been busy relocating his ritual chamber, from the closed down tannery to a location which in itself will lend the event of his rebirth even more power – namely down into the Underworld and to the smooth surface of the Crystal Isle, also this on the Prince's initiative.

No matter if the characters or someone else inspected the sinkhole on behalf of Ordo Magica, the information from the descent has spread to the leading figures in town, largely due to the fact that Master Goncai has a hard time keeping his mouth shut. Since the Hold's Sanitary Commissioner Agramai Kalfas knows as much as anyone else, especially about the cracks close to the surface which are at risk of affecting cellars and wells in town. He also knows that Nightpitch has decided that no one is to climb down into the Abyss before the arrival of the delegation he is waiting for – a group of fifteen Black Cloaks led by the much feared theurg Losadra, belonging to The Whip of Prios, the section within the Sun Church specializing in problems linked to corruption and blight sickness. Hence, the puppet of Agramai should have all the time he needs to perform the ritual down there.

Getting down was not much of a problem, thanks to the guidance of The Prince. One of Erlaber's followers is the witch Manaloum and he used *Maltransformation* to transform another cultist, also an adept of Ordo Magica, into a snake. The latter, Desidera, made her way from a cellar (pointed out by The Prince), through a crack, up to and then down into the caves. She established a Mystic Circle in the Eastern Hall of Mosses, then made it to the surface through the tunnels previously used as the Beast Blan's escape route.

Back in Thistle Hold Desidera, Manaloum, Erlaber and the leader's two bodyguards could move down into the Abyss by way of the ritual *Seven-league Stride*. Of course, they took the skull of Eox along – something the characters will not discover until they have fought a tough battle inside the old tannery building.

INFORMATION

Meticulous characters do nothing drastic until they know who or what they are up against. The information presented below can be found in different ways, depending on who the characters are and what alliances they have fostered. Knowledge about Erlaber may for instance be gained through the Town Watch or the merchants in town (see the points below).

As for the closed down tannery, a search in the archive at the Queen's Legation or a talk to the Building Commissioner's assistants at the Town Seat reveals that it was closed about a year ago. The tannery was relocated to the village of Glimmer, a short way west of the Hold, since the vile stench surrounding it caused problems in the densely populated town.

The building is in the northwestern part of town and is still without an owner, in large part due to the lingering tannery smell inside. There are plans to tear it down and raise a new structure in its stead, but the decision is yet to be finalized. Instead the house is rented to a merchant from Yndaros, named Beniam Golak according to the contract – in reality a decoy for Erlaber Ambreagos with a made up name.

A floorplan of the building can be acquired, either by persuading the staff at the Town Seat (requires a passed *Persuasive* test) or by talking to a former tannery worker who can be found at one of the dives inside Haloban's Ring – a sickly woman named Irona, afflicted by severe shakes and twitches due to the chemicals she was exposed to in the tannery.

- If asking about Erlaber among merchants and auction houses by the Antique Plaza, they get the perplexing answer that he usually introduces himself as an antique dealer but that no one can remember having seen him actually peddle any kind of antiquities in the Hold. Most guess that he is a buyer, hired by some wealthy but secretive individual from Yndaros, or that he himself is a well-off collector of Davokar's curiosities.

- Many antique dealers can testify that Erlaber seems attracted to the macabre and grotesque. For instance, the barbarian merchant Elda sold him a Symbarian figurine not more than a month ago – a figurine depicting a man with his abdomen split open and torn apart, and with his head replaced by a gaping snake skull.
- If the characters break into Erlaber's home they will be disappointed. Sure, the three rooms are luxuriously furnished and smell of pungent incense, but aside from a chandelier made from linked, blackened skulls and a bowl of dried berries they find nothing of interest – he obviously stores any artifacts he owns someplace else. The berries can be identified by someone having the ability *Alchemy* that passes a *Cunning* test (see the textbox on Krusean Berries for a description).
- At the headquarters of the Town Watch they can meet Herado Duskwatcher. If they succeed with a *Persuasive* test (with a +1 modification if they fought at the sinkhole), they can convince him to share some information. Apparently, Erlaber has a tendency to figure in lots of criminal investigations, never as the prime suspect but often enough for him to be included in the informal record that Captain Dekamedo has established to keep track of suspicious people in town.
- To gain access to Dekamedo's record on Erlaber the characters must be acquainted with the Captain since earlier, or manage to convince Herado to let them see it. This time a test against [*Persuasive* –3] is required, but with a +1 modification if they fought in the defense by the sinkhole. The record has the following to say:

Erlaber
Antique Dealer
Lowborn Noble?
Settled year 17 (from Yndaros)
Probable cultist
Possible killer
Possible cult leader

Year 18. Alone to survive when the rest of his family (wife and four children, age 0 to 9) were strangled to death, exsanguinated, and left to hang by the feet from a beam in the ceiling. Claimed to have been at a business meeting with wizard (Desidera) who backs the statement and implies a love affair. Door broken and valuables missing.

Year 18. Highly corrupt statuette stolen from warehouse in the northwestern district, two guards brutally murdered. Using mystical means, the owner traced the item to Erlaber's home. Claims to have bought the statuette in good faith from fortune hunter Gendla. Investigation terminated when Gendla is found dead wearing necklace from the warehouse.

Year 19. Beastly cult exposed in the village Glimmer. The cult leaders last, wheezing words were "Ambreagos, Erlaber, Ambreag...". According to OM, Ambreagos was a tyrannical Symbarian noble house – possibly worshipped by the cult. Erlaber is questioned, (acts?) bemused, has never been to Glimmer.

Year 20. Was seen with the changelings Klagander and Sibela, wanted in relation to a series of robberies and murders with dark overtones in Yndaros. Claims they contacted him, offered to sell him artifacts which proved to be trash.

Year 20. The antique dealer Jorlio found poisoned, with intestines spilled out and self-inflicted wounds all over the body. Three witnesses speak of a black-dressed visitor three days earlier, one identifies Erlaber. Unconfirmed, especially since the key witness suffers from dementia.

Krusean Berries

The berries from the Krusean bush can be eaten both fresh and dried, and give rise to a long-lasting buzz which may be compared to that of alcohol consumption. The one eating the berries also suffers 1D4 in temporary corruption, which tends to linger in the body (if relevant, the corruption fades with one point every two hours). For this reason, the berries have become popular among people who are charmed by Davokar's darkness and the powers of the Eternal Night. According to rumor, they are also used during torture – the buzz combined with the amassing blackness can get just about anyone to talk ...

ALLIANCES

Aside from searching for information, the characters would do well to gain allies for the fight against the cultists. Below is a list of potential allies specifying what it takes to come to an agreement, including notes regarding who or what the different groups refuse to work with.

No matter who they talk to, the leader of the faction will stress the importance of everything being handled with discretion – if the people in town learn that an *"evil cult"* has been allowed to exist at the heart of the Hold, it will have long-term consequences for their faith in Ambrian authorities in general and Mayor Nightpitch in particular. The only exception to this is Lysindra Goldengrasp, who

on the contrary emphasizes that the residents have a right to know.

The Town Watch/Town Seat: Captain Dekamedo, alias Akman Kohinoor, can enlist a handful of watchmen from other posts (primarily from the barricade surrounding the sinkhole) and join up with the player characters.

The Sun Temple: Provided that the characters did not help to stop the harassments against Sarvola, Father Elfeno and two of his sun priests can participate in the strike against the cultists. Otherwise they have to talk to Deseba the Old. She cannot partake in any attacks but asks three sun priests to be at the characters disposal. Irrespective of which, it takes a skilled negotiator (e.g. Nightpitch) to get them to fight alongside the witches.

The Sun Knights: The Mekele brothers might consider fighting on the characters' side, provided that they have met at some earlier point. Even if they have previously fought against each other, it may be possible to convince Leohan to put old grudges aside, for a good and noble cause. The templars will under no circumstances cooperate with the Iron Pact and it will take a skilled and authoritative negotiator (e.g. Nightpitch) for them to consider working alongside witches.

The Iron Pact: If asked, Lysindra and Mearoel do not hesitate to join up. They will even consider dressing up and lying about their identities in order to make an alliance with the Town Watch and/or the Sun Temple possible. If they learn that there are templars in the mix they will force the characters to choose – the blood is all too bad between them ...

The witches: Gadramon and Eferneya never hesitate to join the fight against the cultists, provided that the characters (with or without the help of Nightpitch) can get them into town.

Ordo Magica: The chapter in Thistle Hold is accustomed to hiring sellswords to take care of the fighting and feels that such chores are best handled by others. However, if the Game Master wishes, Kullinan Furia may be present when the characters are denied help from Chapter Master Cornelio and offer to give them a hand.

THE CULT'S HIDEOUT

Once the characters return from their meeting with the elves, Erlaber and his closest companions have left the tannery and taken the skull with them. But since they know that the characters are on their trail, they have filled the building with Redeye's and Erok the Dark's cultists hoping to stop them permanently or at least slow them down (see pages 103–104 for stats). A majority of the force is hiding in the windowless storerooms (room #1 and #2); some are down on the floor and four cultists with crossbows are patrolling the balustrade inside the building.

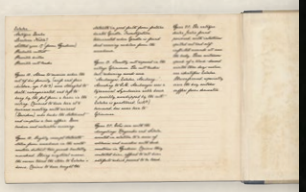
Stormy Night

As a suggestion, a thundering storm is raging over Thistle Hold as the characters return from the Halls of a Thousand Tears. The rain is hammering against roofs and pavements, and thunder is rolling across the lead gray skies. Provided that the attack takes place during the wee hours, people in the area will not easily notice what is going on in the abandoned tannery building – actually the sounds of battle will be drowned out by the storm so that the characters and their allies will be able to vacate the premises before a crowd gathers. If the Town Watch has not been informed beforehand, the first patrol will arrive ten turns into the fighting, but they will not dare to enter before reinforcements come running, another ten turns later.

If watching from outside the characters can see two people at each entrance, dressed like hired guardsmen. Also, should they climb some nearby rooftop and pass a test against *Vigilant* they can see through the dirty and cracked windows and notice movement inside the building. However, since most of the cultists are in hiding they will not be able to count more than a handful of people. If one of the characters expressly states that they will watch the hideout for at least two hours, then passes a [*Vigilant* –5] test, they will notice that large quantities of food are delivered to a sliding door inside – a door which is opened by someone who passes the crates on to a room further in ...

To get a clear idea of what awaits them, the characters must resort to more drastic methods. Maybe they can employ distractions or fake attacks to be able to kidnap one of the guards at the backdoor, and then interrogate him or her, preferably aided by mystical powers or rituals? Maybe they can use traits like *Shapeshifter* or powers like *Shapeshift*, *Unnoticeable*, *Possess* or *Borrow Beast* to gain a better understanding of the situation? Or the task may be achieved by performing the rituals *Clairvoyance* and/or *Oracle*. Note that if *Clairvoyance* is used, the character will see the stairs to the basement, but the basement itself is impossible to make out, as if it is protected by the ritual *Sanctum*. Also, do not forget that if none of the characters have the powers or abilities mentioned above, they can always ask for help from their allies and friends.

Warned about the hidden cultists or not, the battle in the building will be tough. How many



Captain Dekamedo's record on Erlaber can be found as a handout at the back of the book.

THE TANNERY

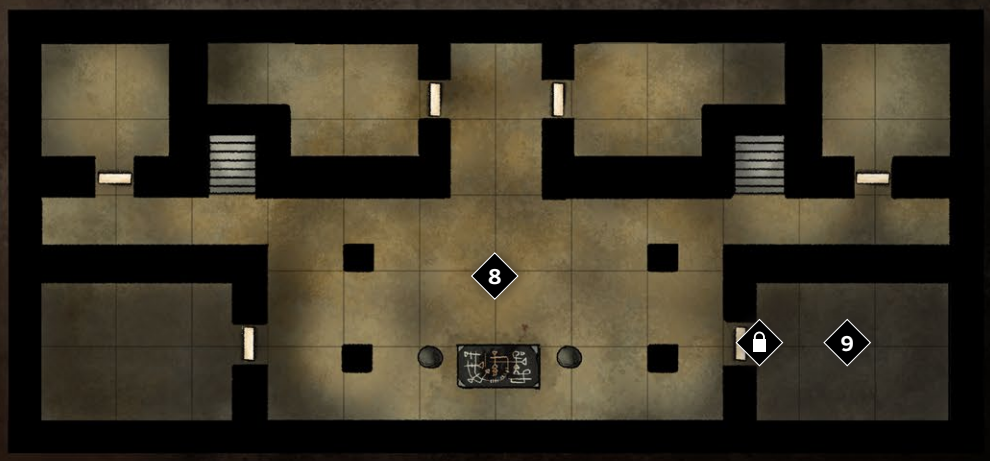
1. Former Office
2. Former Storageroom
3. Great Cauldron
4. Acid Baths
5. Water Baths
6. Balustrade/Drying Racks
7. Stair to Cellar
8. Ritual Chamber
9. Erlaber's Curiosa Storage (locked)



Ground level



Cellar



cultists the characters must fight can be determined based on the number of allies they have in tow. In the margin to the right is a list with suggestions regarding this, but the Game Master should adjust the numbers to suit the characters in his/her group.

The first row (bold) in each segment refers to the number of groups/factions, not to individuals. The second row states the total number of cultists that will attack the characters specifically in melee during the whole combat scene. Row three details the number of opponents that will fire at them from the balustrade each turn (crossbow, damage 4, free line of sight for both shooters and characters shooting back). Finally, the last row specifies what die to use when determining how many close combat opponents make contact with the characters each turn. It should also be mentioned that if the characters have not eliminated one of the cults, the opponents come from both Redeye and Erok.

Exempel: *After having talked to Lasifor Nightpitch, the characters have managed to smuggle Gadramon and Eferneya into town and had the Mayor's help convincing the Mekele brothers to fight along with the witches. Hence, they attack the tannery with two allied factions, meaning that the characters themselves will be up against [PCx2] cultists during the course of the battle. Each turn 1d4+2 new enemies will engage them in melee until the total number is reached; moreover, two crossbow bolts will be aimed at them each turn. The rest of the [PCx5] cultists in the building move in on the witches and the templars – encounters that can be handled in summary by the Game Master, on the basis that the characters part of the battle will determine the outcome of it all.*

AFTER THE BATTLE

When the cultists have been taken out, the characters and their allies soon discover that neither the cult leader nor the sought-after skull is in the building. Luckily there are several ways to figure out where they are.

The plan was that the ritual would be performed in the cellar beneath the tannery. The massive stone podium where the skull of Eox lay up until a few hours ago can be found down there, covered by a black blanket, embroidered with archaic symbols and soaked in rose scented secretions. The place is protected by a *Sanctum* and cannot be discovered by mystical means, but if the characters use the hatch or the stairs to get down the site is waiting to be explored. What has happened and where the skull has been moved can be determined in the following ways:

- A character (or NPC) with the ability *Witchsight* that enters the cellar receives a vision of a giant ox head with staring fisheyes, lying on the podium mooing softly. If also passing a *Cunning* test, other images flash by, as if the creature is trying to show the character something: first a sinkhole somewhere in Davokar; then a dark lake, also inside the woods; finally a huge cave with moss-covered walls. These images should help the characters recall the underground lake beneath Thistle Hold, given that they have seen it before.
- At the sides of the podium are two braziers. By using the ritual *Tale of Ashes*, the character can see and hear what happened as the wizard Desidera returned from her trip down the hole. A shape dressed in black robes asks if everything went according to plan, and she responds: *"The circle is made, at a safe distance from the underground lake"*. Then the mystic gets to witness the two talkers and three others (two changelings and the ogre witch Manaloum) gather around the podium, placing their hands on the ox skull before disappearing.
- A successful test against [*Vigilant* –5] reveals barely noticeable scratches in the floor by the podium, hidden under the black cloth. The podium can quite easily be pushed sideways to expose a crudely cut space, intended to be used for hiding the skull of Eox if something happened. Down there the characters will find one of Erlaber's cultists, the hissing and hateful youngling Gardai. He knows full well where his master has gone, but will not say anything unless the player characters pressure him hard and succeed with a test against [*Persuasive* –1].

The Opponents

No allies
PC × 5 opponents
4 projectiles
1D6+2 new per turn

One ally
PC × 3 opponents
3 projectiles
1D6+1 new per turn

Two allies
PC × 2 opponents
2 projectiles
1D4+2 new per turn

Three or more allies
PC+1 opponents
1 projectiles
1D4 new per turn

Combat in the Tannery

The more intense and eventful the battle at the tannery is, the better. Let the players make use of the structure of the building and reward their ingenuity. If they try to push a cultist down into one of the tubs that has been filled with leftover tanning acids, let them roll a die against [*Strong*←*Strong*]; should they be pushed and fail the defensive roll, they may be able to save themselves with a test against [*Quick* –5] – if not, they suffer falling damage according to the rule on page 177 in the Core Rulebook. In the same way, it is possible to push someone down into the giant cauldron ([*Quick* –3] or Acrobatics to get out), or from the balustrade (resulting in a three meter fall).

Final Encounter

IT IS IMPERATIVE that the Game Master thinks things through before the concluding battle against Erlaber Ambreagos. The encounter with the sorcerer and his followers should prove a real challenge and the players should feel that the outcome depends on how their characters preform in the fight.

We suggest that the characters will have to climb down into the sinkhole alone, even if they have had several allies during the clash in the tannery building. That they suddenly are without companions can be explained by injuries suffered in the fight with the cultists and that the few who are unharmed are reluctant to leave the wounded without someone to care for them. Another explanation may be that some of the allies (Kullinan, Eferneya or Elfeno) have pushed themselves to the brink of becoming blight born. Also, it is urgent – Erlaber has already initiated the ritual!

Phase I:
When the characters wrap up the examination of the podium where the skull used to lay, people who have the ability *Witchsight* or have 5 or more in total corruption can sense rhythmic tremors in the air, like blast waves caused by the beating of a powerful heart. Should one of the characters' allies fit the required criteria, he or she will rise up and shout at the top of his or her lungs: *"Do you feel it? It has begun! Run, hurry, this ritual must be stopped!"*

Phase II:
If neither the characters nor the allies perceive the waves, or if the characters for some reason decide to wait, phase two commences. The blast waves grow in strength until they can actually be heard. A passed test against *Vigilant* means that the character perceives a sound reminiscent of the slow but accelerating beating of a heart. It is not possible to determine from where the sound comes – it feels like it permeates the whole world. Incapacitated allies who take note of this will try to order the player characters to get a move on, with fear and panic in their eyes.

Phase III:
The third and final warning is impossible to miss. The sound of the heartbeats grows even louder and is made physically manifest: the sound waves emit a faint, etheric, bright blue light, like waves from a stone thrown in water, but in spheres instead of rings. Moreover, everyone feels how the surges bring with them an instant nausea that inspires dark thoughts and murderous impulses.

Phase IV:
If the characters persist in waiting they will never be able to stop the ritual in time. Instead they will notice how the frantic heartbeat suddenly dies out, about fifteen minutes into phase III. A grave-like silence descends over Thistle Hold. If they immediately start to run, they will make it to the sinkhole in time to witness how the creature that once was Erlaber Ambreagos rises from the deep, on its new, enormous bat wings (see the header Combat on the Surface below). Should they instead hunker down and stay hidden, they will be forced to hear the abomination wreak havoc among people and houses, causing death and destruction before leaving the town, headed for Davokar's deeper and darker parts (see The Victorious Night, page 170).

THE WAY DOWN

For the characters to have any chance to stop Erlaber's ritual they have to get a move on before the chain of events reaches Phase IV. No matter if they get going in Phase I, II or III, their way down to the Beast Clan caves will look the same. Remember to describe the signs of the progressing ritual as the characters are running through Thistle Hold – even if they started moving as early as in Phase I the distance they have to cover is long enough for them to both hear the sound of the heartbeat and see the faint, bluish surges shoot through the air.

There is no time to form new alliances and should they hope for the Town Watch to back them up they will be disappointed. If Dekamedo is not already allied to the characters they will find him in charge of the guard around the sinkhole. He says that the guards on duty are exhausted after having been active since the morning before. Adding to that, they are needed where they are since the number of incidents is increasing: attacks are coming from desperate fortune hunters who aim to be the first ones down into the caves, looking to examine the wilder and wilder rumors about the treasures down there, but also from more or less corrupted figures who feel drawn to the dark power of the deep.

In order for the characters to pass and gain access to the ropes that are in place, they have to be able to show Dekamedo a letter from Nightpitch or convincingly argue that they have been down into the sinkhole before. An alternative is to persuade the Captain of the gravity of the situation, which is done with a successful roll against *Persuasive*, with a +5 modification if a leader from some other faction (injured or not) accompanies them to the rim of the hole.

THE HALL OF THE RUBBLE HILL

The first thing the characters notice when they reach the top of the rubble hill is that someone has placed burning torches over the cave floor, lighting up the area between the hill and the openings to the north and west. A passed *Vigilant* test also makes it possible to glimpse (what remains of) the Midnight Cult, standing in the gloom between the openings leading to the lake and the Crystal Isle.

How many individuals they glimpse depends on if the characters have been in the cave before and what happened then. If they did not kill the blight marked witch Bayela, she has unknowingly helped them by killing the body guard Klagander and the adept wizard Desidera.

If they instead killed the witch, they are forced to encounter all four: the ones mentioned above along with Sibela and the ogre witch Manaloum. Irrespective of how many cultists are waiting, their orders are clear as uncorrupted crystal: to slow the characters down until the master has completed the ritual.



Manaloum

"Corruption breeds power, not vice versa ..."

Manaloum grew up as the adoptive son of a childless witch of Clan Enoai, far to the north. He did his best to live up to the high demands and expectations of his mother, but never got anything but reprimands and deep sighs in return.

His frustration grew into desperation and finally he started breaking the clan's taboos in order to grow stronger. And sure, the roots of the herb Runefala have helped him. They helped him to overcome and slay his stepmother when she discovered what he was up to, and they have helped him realize that the price of success must be paid for in corruption ...

Manner	Laughs death in the face		
Race	Ogre		
Resistance	Challenging		
Traits	*Robust* (II)		
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 15 (–5), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 9 (+1), **Quick** 7 (+3), **Resolute** 13 (–3), **Strong** 11 (–1), **Vigilant** 10 (0)			
Abilities	*Inherit Wound* (master), *Natural Warrior* (novice), *Maltransformation* (novice), *Quick Draw* (master), *Storm Arrow* (master), *Tactician* (adept), *Witchcraft* (adept)		
Weapons	Unarmed 6		
Armor	3 (Robust)		
Defense	–2		
Toughness	11	**Pain Threshold**	6
Equipment	16 thaler, 10 storm arrows, 2D6 Runefala roots (works as Concentrated Magic but deals 1 corruption on consumption.		
Shadow	Brownish red with black spots, like opals hidden in ferrous earth (corruption: 4)		

Tactics: Manaloum first fires his storm arrows. When they are all spent he will try to "maltransform" especially dangerous opponents. He only enters into close combat if it is impossible to avoid it.

Desidera

"The dark is the rule, light the exception."

Four years have passed since the then novice wizard Desidera met Erlaber and fell in love. The stranger gave words to her thoughts and to the view of the world which she until then had only suspected during her struggles to understand the relationship between light and dark, goodness and evil, order and wilderness.

Darkness is not the absence of light as her former masters taught, she knows that now. Instead, the dark is the natural state of existence, perverted and weakened by light. Desidera is prepared to follow her love to the end of the world, if it is there that their shared studies into the powers of darkness will take them!

Manner	Happily smiling
Race	Human (Ambrian)
Resistance	Challenging
Traits	*Contacts* (Ordo Magica)
Accurate 9 (+1), **Cunning** 13 (–3), **Discreet** 11 (–1), **Persuasive** 10 (0), **Quick** 7 (+3), **Resolute** 15 (–5), **Strong** 5 (+5), **Vigilant** 10 (0)	

Abilities	*Confusion* (master), *Illusory Correction* (master), *Loremaster* (adept), *Ritualist* (adept, *Magic Circle, Sanctum, Seven-league Stride*), *Steadfast* (adept), *Unholy Aura* (adept), *Wizardry* (adept)
Weapons	Wooden staff 3 (long)
Armor	Order Cloak 2 (flexible)
Defense	+3
Toughness	10 **Pain Threshold** 3
Equipment	Ritual Codex (Exchange Shadow, Desecrating Rite, Possess), 1D10 thaler.
Shadow	Silver with dark streaks, like the moon's reflection over the rippling surface of a forest pond (corruption: 3)

Tactics: When combat starts, Desidera invokes her unholy aura. Then she tries to confuse her enemies or help her allies with illusory corrections.



Klagander and Sibela

"We are the Dark."

The friends Klagander and Sibela were two of the first changelings to be discovered among the Ambrians, both of them in Yndaros, with Sibela amongst the refugees and Klagander in a merchant's home.

They found each other in Old Kadizar, rejected by their families and forced to steal and sometimes kill to survive. They hate Ambrians and really do not value anything at all besides the dark friendship they share with each other. Erlaber helps them to grow stronger, which is the only reason why the changelings have joined his Midnight Cult.

Manner	Silent, arrogant expressions
Race	Changelings
Resistance	Challenging
Traits	*Shapeshifter*
Accurate 7 (+3), **Cunning** 10 (0), **Discreet** 16 (−6), **Persuasive** 5 (+5), **Quick** 14 (−4), **Resolute** 10 (0), **Strong** 9 (+1), **Vigilant** 11 (−1)	
Abilities	*Backstab* (adept), *Exceptionally Discreet* (novice), *Exceptionally Quick* (novice), *Feint* (adept), *Twin Attack* (novice)
Weapons	Fencing sword 4 (precise) and Parrying Dagger 3 (balanced)
Armor	Woven Silk 2 (flexible)
Defense	−8
Toughness	10 **Pain Threshold** 5
Equipment	1D6 thaler
Shadow	Dark green like leathery leaves with single blackened veins (corruption: 2)

Tactics: The two changelings always strive to fight two against one, that way gaining the advantage needed in order to use their backstab techniques. If that is not possible, they stay together to avoid being flanked themselves.

THE SHOWDOWN

Out on the Crystal Isle, Erlaber Ambreagos has set the stage for his rebirth. His cultists have built him a podium of stacked boulders from the rubble hill, in which six torches have been wedged, pointing in different directions. As the characters arrive, the ritual is nearing its climax and the low-tuned chanting of the sorcerer is accompanied by drawn-out mooings from the skull on the podium.

Precisely what the characters face in the final showdown depends on two things: how quickly they reacted after the fight at the tannery and how long it takes them to pass the cultists standing on guard. The column Reaction Time in table 4: Erlaber's Rebirth mirrors Phase I to III on page 162, while the column Delay answers to the number of turns the characters need to get past the cultists.

Table 4: Erlaber's Rebirth

NPC	REACTION TIME	DELAY
Erlaber Ambreagos	Phase I	1 turn
Prince of the Abyss	Phase II–III	1–5 turns
Midnight	Phase II–III	5+ turns

Hence, there is a chance for the characters to stop the ritual before the rebirth process commences. But that requires that they start moving at Phase I and also that they manage to get past the cultists in a single turn. The latter may be achieved either by incapacitating all opposition directly or by the characters using both their actions for movement, making it possible to run past them. If they go for trying to evade them, do not forget that the cultists will get one free attack each and that they will hunt after the characters and join the final showdown.

Erlaber Ambreagos

Manner	Big gestures, burning gaze
Race	Human (Ambrian)
Resistance	Challenging
Traits	*Privileged*
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 14 (–4), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 17 (–7), **Quick** 10 (0), **Resolute** 11 (–1), **Strong** 7 (+3), **Vigilant** 9 (+1)	
Abilities	*Bend Will* (adept), *Exceptionally Cunning* (novice), *Exceptionally Persuasive* (adept), *Larvae Boil* (adept), *Leader* (master), *Loremaster* (master), *Ritualist* (adept, *Desecrating Rite, Possess, The Exaltation Ritual*), *Sorcery* (adept)
Weapons	Black Edge 3 (Short)
Armor	Witch Gown 2 (Flexible)
Defense	0
Toughness	10 **Pain Threshold** 4
Equipment	Ritual Codex for The Exaltation Ritual (value: 500 thaler), the dagger Black Edge (page 73)
Shadow	Black flakes on smoldering white, like liquid iron starting to cool (corruption: 5)

Tactics: Erlaber's sadistic tendencies make him prefer to use the mystical power Larvae Boil in combat and interrogations. He stays away from melee as long as it is possible, preferably with a group of loyal minions in front, but surrendering is never an option – he would rather end his own life before that happens.

Prince of the Abyss

"No, not yet, you ...
... Aaaaaaooo, diiiiiiie!"

If the characters arrive before the ritual is complete, Erlaber's transformation is stopped at the stage called Prince of the Abyss. The ritual has made his body grow both taller and more massive, and covered it with a thick, leathery skin in shades of deep blue. His head has been deformed, becoming elongated, pointy and crowned with three short horns (at the temples and the neck). The process has erased most of his knowledge and powers of the mind, but strengthened his spirit with the force of rage.

Manner	Upright, calmly furious
Race	Abomination
Resistance	Strong
Traits	*Armored* (II), *Regeneration* (II), *Robust* (II)
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 14 (–4), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 17 (–7), **Quick** 10 (0), **Resolute** 14 (–4), **Strong** 7 (+3), **Vigilant** 9 (+1)	
Abilities	*Berserker* (novice), *Exceptionally Cunning* (novice), *Exceptionally Persuasive* (adept), *Exceptionally Resolute* (master), *Leader* (master), *Steadfast* (master)
Weapons	Black Edge 9
Armor	Witch Gown 2 (flexible) + 6 (Armored and Robust)
Defense	+8
Toughness	10 **Pain Threshold** 4
Equipment	Ritual Codex for The Exaltation Ritual (value: 500 thaler), the dagger Black Edge (page 73)
Shadow	Black like the surface of cooling iron ore (corruption: thoroughly corrupt)

Tactics: The Prince of the Abyss attacks hungrily with Black Edge. Since corruption does not bother the abomination he activates the paralyzing effect of the dagger at each hit.

Midnight

"Nooow! Yeees! What!? No, what is happeeeaaaRAAAaaa ..."

Should the characters be delayed on their way towards the Crystal Isle, Erlaber has time to complete the ritual. If so, his body is filled with the combined force of the isle and the dying god, resulting in the complete and utter destruction of his spirit.

In front of the characters, the creature grows an additional meter in height, towering and wiry and covered in a coat of gray, hairy scales. The head and face resembles that of a bat, but with the mandible jaws of a spider and curved goat's horn reaching down to the shoulders. The last thing that happens before the creature acts is that it unfolds a set of huge, leathery wings.

The Ritual Aborted

If the characters are fast enough to get to meet Erlaber Ambreagos in human form during the final encounter, it should be noted that the sorcerer is standing on the Crystal Isle. Since he is bound to the crystal, he may make use of its dark powers during combat, according to the rules and restrictions described in the textbox on page 109.

Manner	Pure rage		
Race	Abomination		
Resistance	Mighty		
Traits	*Armored* (III), *Corrupting Attack* (II), *Natural Weapon* (II), *Regeneration* (II), *Robust* (III), *Wings* (III)		
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 9 (+1), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 7 (+3), **Quick** 11 (−1), **Resolute** 13 (−3), **Strong** 18 (−8), **Vigilant** 10 (0)			
Abilities	*Berserker* (master), *Exceptionally Strong* (master), *Natural Warrior* (adept), *Steadfast* (master)		
Weapons	Claws, two attacks at the same target 14/10, +3 in temporary corruption		
Armor	Leathery hide 10		
Defense	+3		
Toughness	18	**Pain Threshold**	9
Equipment	None		
Shadow	The deepest black, a light-consuming stain on the night sky.(corruption: thoroughly corrupt)		

Tactics: Midnight's hatred drives it forward without concerns; all that matters are death and destruction.

SHOWDOWN ON THE SURFACE

If the characters are so indecisive (or frightened) that they do not take their wounded allies' call to action seriously, they have placed both themselves and the whole of Thistle Hold in a very dire situation.

The blight born Erlaber Ambreagos rises from the Abyss in the form referred to as Midnight (even if the creature itself neither has nor calls itself by any name). Its body and soul are dominated by a voracious appetite, for both warm flesh and general destruction. The player characters have one turn to stop it, before the creature realizes that the area around the sinkhole contains an unnecessary amount of armed humans, and that it only has to fly to the neighboring district to be able to quench its thirst without disturbance.

As Midnight touches ground, on the side of the sinkhole where the characters will also arrive, the majority of the town guards on post will turn and run while the rest remain standing, as if paralyzed by fear. Moreover, the defense is spread thin along the rim of the hole, which is why the characters only can count on the help of 1D4+1 guard (they throw their spears and avoid close combat).

The abomination fights for one turn. Should the characters fail to incapacitate it, Midnight lunches backwards into the hole, takes flight and may only be hit with ranged attacks during the second turn.

After that, the characters must chase it through the streets. It moves north towards the Toad's Square and strikes at the locations mentioned below, before it feels satisfied enough to begin the journey to the alluring depths of Davokar. To decide if, and in that case when, the characters reach the locations before the creature moves on, you can use the *Quick* test formula at the start of the paragraphs. The test is made by the character who has the lowest *Quick* value, and note that it gets easier and easier to succeed since the creature remains longer at each site:



Ruled by an all-consuming passion, Erlaber Ambreagos welcomes his death and rebirth.



Quick –5: The creature is drawn to a pottery store by the cry of the owner. It rips the owner and her two novices apart and then starts to wreak havoc in the vicinity, leaving death and total destruction in its wake.

Quick –3: The creature is attracted by a small girl starring at it from a window on the second floor of a three story building. Midnight falls over the apartment and its residents – mother, father, grandfather and five children. If the characters are too late to save the townspeople, the creature leaves a bloodbath behind.

Quick: Midnight is hit by a sudden impulse to smash the lighted statue on the Toad's Square. It lands nearby, slaughters two foolhardy town guards and attacks the monument wielding the severed legs of its victims.

Quick +3: The final stop is at the Salons of Symbaroum. The Abomination demolishes the entrance and moves with haste through the restaurant, up to the beer hall and on to the gambling booths on level three where it throws itself out a window and flies for the forest. It kills or maims everyone standing in its path.

If the characters pass any of the *Quick* tests a violent showdown will commence. If not, see the section called Triumph of the Night on page 170, which also describes what happens if the characters are defeated by the creature in combat.

Aftermath

ONE CAN ONLY HOPE that the characters stand victorious as the dust settles after the final encounter. If not, there is always the hope that the players still had an exciting adventure, also that they have learned a lot about the power factions of Ambria and gained some valuable insight regarding the workings of the world of Symbaroum. Regardless of which, this chapter contains instructions and suggestions on what may happen in the wake of the adventure, both regarding the characters and the people of Thistle Hold.

IT SHOULD BE mentioned that *The Chronicle of the Throne of Thorns* does not require the players to have the same characters in all episodes. Of course, it can prove to be extra interesting if at least some of the characters are along for the whole ride, but it is not a must! Should all characters die in battle against the cultists of the Hold, the second section of this chapter may provide an indication of what newly generated characters know about what people will call The Tragedy of Thistle Hold.

Healing a God

IF ANY PLAYER characters survive the adventure it must be decided what should be done about the skull of Eox. Even if the ritual was completed, it appears as if the beast god is still alive.

To carry the skull in full view through the streets of Thistle Hold is hardly an option. The smartest route is probably to take it through the natural tunnels and cracks that lead north from The Pool's Cave, and which finally will take the player characters to the surface about three hours walk into Davokar.

From there, they can send a runner back to contact Gadramon and Eferneya, who already have received a dreamsight from Teara-Téana expressing the wish that the witches will guide the characters to the territory of Eox.

MEETING EOX

Nothing happens during the day and night the journey takes, partly because of the deterring effect of the colossi, partly since the creatures of Bright Davokar can sense the presence of Eox and stay away out of respect for the dying god. At one point they can glimpse a pack of jakaars watching them from a distance, later they are followed by a group of curious rabbits who finally are scared away when the severed skull gives off a sudden bellowing.

When arriving at Eox's body they meet Teara-Téana and four other elves, two of which seem to weave mystical rituals to keep the creature alive, and two weepers with their wooden bowls brimming with tears. After a wordless greeting the mystics go silent, receive the head of the ox and place it so that

the sectional planes touch. The flesh and skin start to simmer along the wound and the bellowing of Eox grows deeper and stronger so that the bodies of everyone present ultimately tremble in response.

The process does not take more than a few heartbeats, and then Eox rises, almost twice as massive as a normal ox and with his neck proudly and defiantly stretched. The creature gives the characters a furtive glance, then begins to graze in the dry vegetation of the autumn soil.

GRATITUDE

Once Eox has been healed, Teara-Téana offers the characters a seat on some moss-covered stones and tree stumps nearby. She says that the god is grateful and then asks the characters, one by one, how they feel about what they have done – do they feel that they have acted righteously, that all the death and eventual devastation they have caused is justified, given what they have achieved? If someone brings up the promised reward, she lets them know that she has it with her (at least the parts of the reward that are of a material nature and which are possible to take along into the woods), but she also returns the question: *"Would you say that you have earned this reward?"*

Both these questions are part of a test to determine if all or some of the characters may be possible recruits for the Iron Pact. For that to be the case, they first have to express some kind of doubt regarding the righteousness of their actions, since Teara-Téana is no rabid hater of humans but respects all forms of life. Secondly, they must decline the reward they previously asked for, with the argument that the survival of Eox and the lives saved are reward enough.

The characters who answer in such a respect will still be offered the agreed compensation, but will also hear a telepathic whisper as they depart from the grove: *"So long, my friend in strife and sorrow. Soon we'll meet again, if you truly want and dare. Till then, take care of yourself and keep these words of mine as your secret gift."*

Developments

MOST OF WHAT happens in the wake of the adventure depends on how Act 2 played out in your gaming group, and on how the characters conducted themselves in dealings with the other agents in town. The Game Master should take some time to contemplate the aftermath of the adventure. If the heroic actions of the player characters have become known among the population in Thistle Hold they will most likely become the subjects of newly composed songs and poems. Should their actions only be known to one or more faction leaders a private audience may take place, at which the characters are thanked and/or rewarded.

The paragraphs of this section offer suggestions on more general events and developments that the Game Master may use to his or her liking. Most are based on the premise that the characters won the day and that the town tries to put the tragedy behind it. The exception is the final header, which describes what will happen if the characters decide to make a run for it or if they lose the battle against the cultists and their leader.

THE SINKHOLE

As soon as possible, Building Commissioner Kalio Galeia will initiate the work of filling in and covering up the sinkhole. Queen Korinthia and Mayor Nightpitch provide him with all the resources he needs and for the following months none of the regions daylaboring goblins or humans will need to go hungry. The rumor of the project spreads all the way to Yndaros' refugee camp and has its residents moving north by the thousands. In spite of several incidents (strikes, riots in Blackmoor and food rationings during the winter) the whole district is rebuilt during the late fall of year 22.

Something unknown to almost everyone is that Lasifor, pressured by the Queen and Grand Master Seldonio, has allowed Ordo Magica to create a smaller passage down to the Crystal Isle, through cracks in the bedrock. The purpose of this is of course

Erlaber's Treasure Chamber

As previously said, Erlaber has acquired a large number of items, curiosities and artifacts over the years. Most of these are stored in a chamber beneath the tannery (#9) but it is highly unlikely that the characters will be able to seize them for themselves. First, they will hardly have time to search for treasures after the battle in the tannery; second, they are probably accompanied by one or more allies who will lay claim to the items for their own sake or for the sake of the town – not least since they all are of such a nature that they should be destroyed or shipped off to some secure location (the monastery of the Twilight Friars, the headquarters of Ordo Magica or the Halls of a Thousand Tears).

However, if the Game Master feels that the characters have earned some additional prize, aside from what they will get from Teara-Téana, one of the faction leaders may have put one or more suitable objects aside on their behalf, to be handed over at a private audience.

Slaying a God

It is not unthinkable that the characters decide to slay Eox for good. The creature obviously represents a power that is opposed to Ambrian intrusion into the forest of Davokar, which may be in sharp contrast with the characters' goals and alliances. Eox takes damage from mystical powers, as for instance Brimstone Cascade and Larvae Boil, and it is not able to defend itself.

If the characters choose to slay the ox its carcass will remain in the forest, leaking and radiating corruption. A local wasteland spreads around it, where all vegetation dies and which all animals, beasts and even insects steer clear of. However, it will attract both abominations and blight born humans. Within a couple of months, rumors of the site will reach Thistle Hold – speaking of an area in the forest which reeks of corruption, where unspeakable rituals are staged during moonless nights ...

to study the corrupted power node, and one must hope that no one is ensnared by its dark charm or tries to use its power for more hazardous rituals ...

THE BEAST CLAN

Helionor leads her subjects deeper into Davokar, pillaging and ravaging barbarian camp sites and free settlements along the way. Ultimately they will establish a new base in the mountains near the Black Pitch Mire and keep sending their warriors south for loot and slaves. Of course, they will appear in future episodes of *The Throne of Thorns*, alone or as allies to the raging representatives of Wratha.

THISTLE HOLD

The Tragedy of Thistle Hold will be kept alive in the memory of all Ambrians, but the anxiety that initially plagues the residents will soon give way to romanticized heroic poems and celebrations in honor of *"the victory over the dark"*.

Up to the point when the sinkhole is covered up, the security at the gates is heightened and the Legation is very restrictive when it comes to granting Explorer's Licenses – except to heroes who participated in the defense of the town, of course. But when the sun and warmth return, most reverts back to how it was before the tragedy. Human memory is short, more so when concerning bad things ...

TRIUMPH OF THE NIGHT

Should the characters choose to run away or if all of them are slain in the showdown with Erlaber Ambreagos, the sorcerer will automatically succeed with the ritual and turn into the NPC called Midnight. The abomination will still head for the depths of Davokar, but in this case it will have time to cause even greater death and destruction before leaving town – buildings are razed and set on fire, hundreds of people are slaughtered and the icy terror that fills the midnight air makes as many die from heart attacks or suicides.

The fear lingers, not just in Thistle Hold but in the whole realm as the news of what has happened starts to spread. And with the fear comes anger and hate, aimed at the authorities of Ambria as much as at the abomination. Riots and protests occur in all towns south of Davokar, accusing the mayors, commanders, nobles and the Queen who failed to protect their subjects. Despite the Sun Church trying to mediate, the uprisings must be quenched by force of arms on a couple of occasions, both in Thistle Hold and in the capital city of Yndaros. It takes several months before the anger cools and a weary kind of calm settles over Ambria.

Should it somehow become known that the characters were involved in trying to handle the situation but that they opted to run from the danger, they would do best to assume both new names and new clothing styles. Initially, they will be as hated as the authorities and later they will become the subjects of ridiculing songs, tales and paintings, and known as *"the cowardly scaredy-cats who ran off crying for their measly lives"*. Their previous contacts will reject them or a least refuse to see them in any public situations. In other words, the group must fight to restore their honor – something that the Game Master can turn into a whole series of interesting and thrilling adventures!

What Comes Next?

OF COURSE, THE Game Master and his or her players know best what surviving and/or newly made characters should do until it is time for the next episode in the Throne of Thrones.

There are probably lots of things left to do in Thistle Hold, and the fact that it suffers from the aftermath of the Tragedy does not make it less interesting – in the wake of the appearance of the sinkhole and, possibly, the rampage of the abomination there are both wounds to lick and a town to rebuild. In short, the events linked to the adventure have opened up new possibilities and job opportunities for the characters.

After a few short words on the allocation of *Experience* this section lists a series of plot hooks and circumstances which the Game Master is welcome to develop and refine according to his or her preferences.

EXPERIENCE

As is known, the characters should be awarded 1 *Experience* for each scene which contains at least one challenge. Exactly how to define "one scene" is up to the Game Master, but in general we would suggest that each header in the adventure text counts as a scene. The exception is the headers describing reoccurring threats, as for instance Wanted Dead or Deader on page 102. Naturally, in that case each confrontation with the cultists of Redeye and Erok should be regarded as one scene.

Based on the above, the adventure *Wrath of the Warden* should provide the characters with between 40 and 50 *Experience*, depending on choices made, primarily during the second act. However, the Game Master should feel free to make this decision, based on how quickly or slowly he or she wants the characters to advance.

RECONSTRUCTION

A whole district has been devoured by a hole that needs to be covered up. Each character can take part in the reconstruction of the Hold, as a laborer or in the capacity of some kind of leader – a foreman, a keeper of the pay packets or as someone tending to sick/wounded daythalers. Challenges may potentially appear when the workers protest against their meager paychecks and poor working conditions, when some mysterious disease hits the work camps or while an ancient ruin is found when digging up dirt and gravel for filling the sinkhole.

Another option is that the characters decide to establish an outpost in Davokar to provide the construction site with lumber and/or planks. In that case, the Game Master can take a closer look at the chapter on Goal Oriented Roleplaying, page 52.

HUNTING CULTISTS

The Tragedy of Thistle Hold has made people in Ambria more paranoid than usual. A group of characters with witch hunting ambitions should have lots to do.

For one thing, the cults of Redeye and Erok the Dark need to be dealt with. Then there are lots of rumors about suspected *"seeds of corruption"* in Thistle Hold and in surrounding villages. Usually the suspicions are unfounded or intentionally fabricated, but not always. Characters who have had dealings with the robber baron Mal-Rogan or the cultist Odako (see the adventures *The Promised Land* and *Tomb of Dying Dreams*) may very well be faced with a not so happy reunion ...

MEMBERS OF THE IRON PACT

The characters (if any) who pass Teara-Téana's test after having revived Eox will be contacted by her when the Game Master finds it suitable. The elves experience time differently from more short-lived creatures and it may very well be that Teara-Téana waits one, two or even ten years before reconnecting with a potential ally. On the other hand, she has lost her agent in Thistle Hold, so if the Game Master does not mind, there is a great chance that the characters will receive an offer.

As agents of Teara-Téana, the characters are expected to find out as much as possible about the happenings in town which may be of interest to the elves, but they are also pledged not to act in a way which fuels the Ambrian peoples' hatred for the Elder Folks. This may lead to espionage missions inside the palisade, or stealthy break-ins with the purpose of gaining access to sensitive information and secret documents.

Also, it is not unlikely that the agents are asked to put an end to forest expeditions, to reclaim dangerous artifacts from individuals or auction houses, and to hunt down blight marked humans or beasts which have left the woods and are hiding somewhere in the Ambrian realm.

SLAVES OF THE BEAST CLAN

When the Beast Clan attacked Thistle Hold, many Ambrians were dragged down into the hole to embark on an anything but joyous life-journey as the slaves of the Jezites. If the Game Master wishes, the characters may be contacted by relatives of these poor souls, willing to pay handsomely for someone to track down their family members. The quest givers can be commoners of limited means or some wealthy highborn (leaders of the town's factions or some nobleman of the region).

Whoever hires them, it is recommended that the characters never succeed in finding the main camp of the Beast Clan, since the Jezites are meant to figure in future adventures. But it is fully possible that Helionor has ordered one or more groups to establish smaller camps near the forest edge, to make raids against border settlements easier to perform. Of course, slaves are needed in those outposts, and maybe the characters are so lucky that the ones they are searching for are in one of them.

FORESHADOWING

The content of the next episode of the chronicle is touched upon in the eBook *Symbaroum – The Throne of Thorns*, but if the Game Master wants to foreshadow the future on a more general level we would suggest that the characters are given reason to visit Karvosti (though without digging too deep into its intrigues and conflicts). Another tip is to provide hints that there are internal, so far relatively peaceful, power struggles plaguing the Sun Church.

Last but not least, Korinthias ambition to fulfil Sakomal's Prophecy will be of central importance in the next episode. Maybe the characters will come across rumors of a ruin said to contain leads on where to find the throne of Symbaroum? If so, the Queen, the Sun Church, Ordo Magica and other power factions will undoubtedly send agents there. The player characters may become involved as allies of one of these or set out to find it on their own. Of course, any viable leads will not be found (those will be saved for future adventures in the series). But maybe it is in this ruin that the Ambrians (and players) learn that the throne of Symbaroums last emperor was called ... the Throne of Thorns.

Dear soon to be friend,
Meet me with haste at the Fern Tavern in the district northwest of the intersection Vhedar's Road/The Promenade. My errand is urgent and of a nature best discussed eye to eye. Of you and your friends I ask only that you take a leap of faith and that you listen to my proposal. In return, I promise to not disappoint. I and the people I represent have vast resources and are prepared to offer a royal compensation for your services.

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

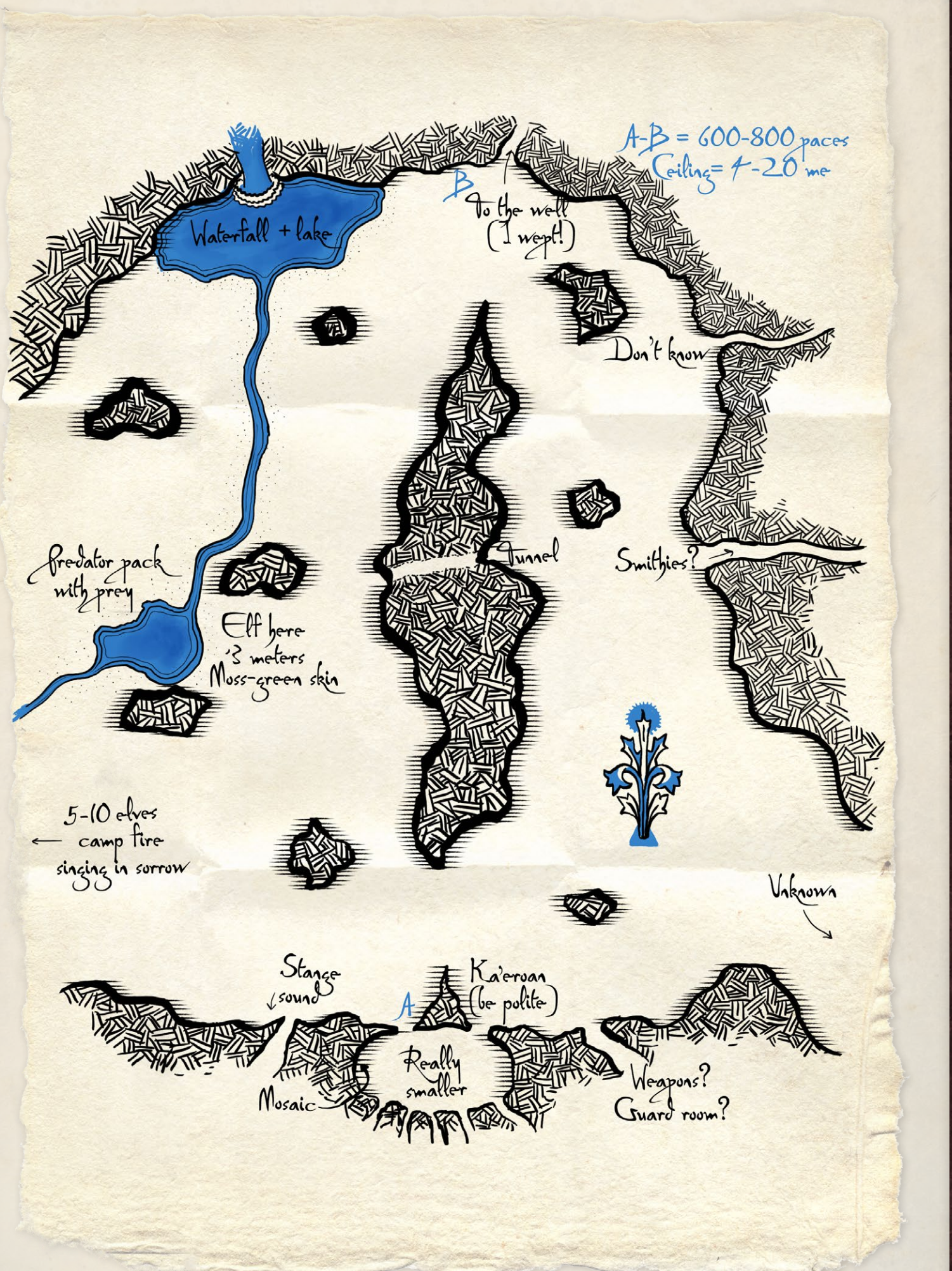
What you seek is in the inner of the Sun Temple. Two times a day, at the mass held each morning and evening, the building is empty except for House Father Idaros. When you see him leave you have a short timeframe to get inside. Go through the gate facing Ofelya's Road, take the stairs to the second floor,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

The upper left:
Anadea's message, page 88

The upper right:
Erlaber's message, page 101

To the left:
Father Elfeno's letter, page 124

To the right:
Anadea's map of The Halls of a Thousand Tears, page 138


A-B = 600-800 paces
Ceiling = 4-20 me
B
To the well
(I wept!)
Waterfall + lake
Don't know
Predator pack
with prey
Elf here
3 meters
Moss-green skin
Tunnel
Smithies?
5-10 elves
← camp fire
singing in sorrow
Unknown
Stange
sound
A
Ka'eroan
(be polite)
Really
smaller
Mosaic
Weapons?
Guard room?

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

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

The priests never brawled, but their argument became so heated that the woman, flailing her arms, happened to hit a drinking jar that stood on their table. The jar hit a large barbarian woman in the neck, which is why she spun around and face-flapped a totally innocent youngster, whose friends were quick to accept the invitation to dance. The woman Anadea and the man Arkel sneaked out of their booth as the brawl attracted more and more to clench their fists.

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

I will save the world. From Prios, from the Queen, from all. Violence begets violence till none are left to fight!
That's it! Nevermore!

I am alone here, about knowing. Not everything. The Mayor has also been there, in the Halls. And the friend of Goldengrasp. Mearuel.

But they don't know me. Cannot know!
I am needed. But I'd rather be needed there.

Contribute to the well with my tears and s.SWEAT!
The choice has been made. You'll learn. She trusts you. Remember what you serve. Anadea is nothing, her actions everything. EVERYTHING!

Now sleep.

Drone dew sleep

Above:
Geleto's testimony, page 130

To the left:
Anadea's journal entry, page 138

The upper right:
Dekamedo's notes on Erlaber, page 159

The lower right:
Teara-Téana's letter to Anadea, page 109

Erlaber
Antique Dealer
Lowborn Noble?
Settled year 17 (from Gyndaros)
Probable cultist
Possible killer
Possible cult leader

Gyear 18. Alone to survive when the rest of his family (wife and four children, age 0 to 9) were strangled to death, exsanguinated, and left to hang by the feet from a beam in the ceiling. Claimed to have been at a business meeting with wizard (Desidera) who backs the statement and implies a love affair. Door broken and valuables missing.

Gyear 18. Highly corrupt statuette stolen from warehouse in the north-western district, two guards brutally murdered. Using mystical means, the owner traced the item to Erlaber's home. Claims to have bought the statuette in good faith from fortune hunter Gendla. Investigation terminated when Gendla is found dead wearing necklace from the warehouse.

Gyear 19. Beastly cult exposed in the village Glimmer. The cult leaders last, wheezing words were "Ambreagos, Erlaber, Ambreag...". According to OM, Ambreagos was a tyrannical Symbarian noble house – possibly worshipped by the cult. Erlaber is questioned, (acts?) bemused, has never been to Glimmer.

Gyear 20. Was seen with the changelings Klagander and Sibela, wanted in relation to a series of robberies and murders with dark overtones in Gyndaros. Claims they contacted him, offered to sell him artifacts which proved to be trash.

Gyear 20. The antique dealer Jorlia found poisoned, with intestines spilled out and self-inflicted wounds all over the body. Three witnesses speak of a black-dressed visitor three days earlier, one identifies Erlaber. Unconfirmed, especially since the key witness suffers from dementia.

FRIEND IN STRIFE AND SORROW
THIS OFFER IS THE ONLY ONE
YOU WILL RECEIVE.
DECLINE AND MOURN ALONE.
ACCEPT AND FOLLOW MY
CONFIDANT.
WE WILL MEET WHERE NO
TEAR FALLS IN VAIN.
I AM WAITING.
YOU ARE NEEDED.

TEARA-TÉANA

Heartfelt Thanks to the Wardens

Claus Bo Christensen, Andrzej Miszkurka, Cato Vandrare, Mattiaz Fredriksson, Scott Kehl, Eric Wellens, Christer Malmberg, Ragnar Lodbrok, Evan

Stewards

Rod Meek, Richard Hunt, Jeffrey Scott Hessell, Craig Denham, Hardi Kõvamees, zivp, David Callahan, Josiah Barton, Parker Johnson, Jacob Rotschield, Eran Boudjnah, Ian Stewart, Ichiro Ota, Nik Mennega, Terry L Pike, Cole Bambrick, Adam Whitcomb, Riccardo Zampieri, Colin Matthews, Christian Boughton, Bo Hasle Buur, Jenny, Tom Norris, Chris Hefferin, Adrienne C, Michael Russell, Martin Nichol, Eleyana, Benjamin Chee, Donnie Strickland, Undead_Ichi, Garth Westphal, Jason Rapai, Mark Greenberg, Palmi8, Colm & Eva Doyle, Jason Jordaan, Paul "LostLegolas" Leone, Carey Newhouse, Mad Jay, Zach Aandahl, Jason Chen, Russell, Steve Park-Smith, Luca Lettieri, Steve Benton, Josef Zetterquist, James 'The Great Old One' Burke, Paki, Pete Tracy, Brad D. Kane, Robert Jeanmenne, D. Cardillo, Seth Spurlock, Barthelemy 'Skender' Alezandaru, L Scot Gowers, Bartosz "Stoperssonn" Stopczyk, Matthew Sutherland, Paul "FatPob" Goldstone, Metodi Aleksandrov Nikolaev, Victor Lopes, Brian Kearns, Ben Meiklejohn, Dan White, Nichol Murray, Piccadilly Pineapple, Mark Threlfall, Rafa Cerrato, Lowell Parker, Jack Conroy-Murphy, Thomas-Joseph Carrieri, Serge, Andrew Sean Jones, Steve Turner, Joshua Brian Smith, Devon E.Sanders, Chris Heath, Adam Buti, Christopher Trapp, Michael Parker, Dr. Donald A. Turner, James P Sauers III, Damien Laing, Justin Jantzen, Nathan Litton, Kyorou, Brandon Bowling, Daniel Cavani, Mordwain, Jaime T. Matthew, Gonzalo Dafonte Garcia - Aikanar, Andrew J Princep, Tim Hartmann, Shawn P, Trevor Lynn, Jerold H Farver Jr., Håkan Fredriksson, Jarrod Varty, Isaac Salume, C. Kettering, Richard W. Sorden, Oakarms, Jeremy W Baker, J.Koskinen, Martin Legg, Alec Beller, Aaron J. Schrader, JDTX88, Kaleb M., Carl LeCompte, H. Moeller, Ghostcrawler, Pangur Bán, Magamo, Phillip Stepp, Ricardo E. Urdinaran, Ette, Victor Kunkel, John A, Jonathan Sinn, Stormraider, Andrea "Pagonel" Capoluongo, Wayne Naylor, Jason Stoker, Randy Smith, Giuliano Matteo Carrara, Alex Gray, Conqueror, Christer Johansson, Jacob Torgerson, Brian M. Wickman, Tuomas Lempiäinen, Terry Adams, Dirk Vanleeuw, William Dovan, Tott Komahey, Filthy Monkey, Kandy Dolan, Nathaniel, Isaac Carr, Nightstar, Shane Walden, Thaddeus Mercer, Brian 'Gedion' Taulbee, Grant, Amadan, Joos, Francis Winter Paulsson, Cory Aughenbaugh, Jeffrey S. James, Christopher Brant, David Lyons-Nash, David S Robinson, James Marcucc, Conrad Murkitt, Taet Zahhat, Simon Clancy, Letschi, Joel Dickason, Simon 'Zed' Roe, Wesley Mann, Karl Brodd, Mike Shema, Zé Borges, Joshua Walker, Maya Mary Kennon, Bill Treadwell, Bob Lukic, Dan Svensson

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