

NUMENERA™



THE NIGHTMARE SWITCH BY MONTE COOK

INTRODUCTION

This adventure is for Numenera, and is exclusive to Kickstarter backers. It's the second adventure that I ever conceived for the game (the first being the Devil's Spine adventure), and in the months leading up to Numenera's release, it was my go-to adventure for running at conventions or as a demonstration of how the game worked.

Obviously, the material in this adventure is for the GM only.

This adventure works fine with beginning characters. For more experienced characters, refer to the Modifying the Adventure section, (page 3). The action starts in the land of Seshar, but it could be tailored to fit just about any village and its surrounding area anywhere in the Ninth World without too much trouble.

Credits

Writer/Designer
Monte Cook

Lead Editor
Shanna Germain

Proofreader
Tammie Webb Ryan

Graphic Designer
Kali Fitzgerald

Artists
Kieran Yanner,
Jason Engle

Cartographers
Christopher West,
Alyssa Faden

© 2013 Monte Cook Games, LLC

NUMENERA and its logo are trademarks of Monte Cook Games, LLC in the U.S.A. and other countries. All Monte Cook Games characters and character names, and the distinctive likenesses thereof, are trademarks of Monte Cook Games, LLC.



Throughout this adventure, you'll see page references to various items accompanied by this symbol. These are page references to the Numenera corebook, where you can find additional details about that item. It isn't necessary to have the corebook to run this adventure; it's an optional way to provide additional information.

Aeon Priests are members of the Order of Truth, an organization based in the Steadfast that reveres the people of the past and their knowledge on a quasireligious level of adoration and faith.



Seshar, page 203

BACKGROUND

The land of Seshar is a dry desert crisscrossed with artificial waterways created in days long past. The village of Redstone lies upon one of these waterways, flourishing due to its brisk trade in stone quarried nearby and its extremely capable cove of three Aeon Priests. And then, one night, everything changed. A young quarry worker awoke from a dream so horribly disturbing that he could no longer sleep. He soon discovered that something similar had happened to his brother, and his mother. The next morning, he learned that everyone in Redstone had had a disturbing dream. Even stranger, it seemed that it had been the same dream. That night, the exhausted villagefolk settled in to catch up on their

lost sleep, but found that it held only the same nightmarish visions as the previous night. As days and nights passed, their fears were continually confirmed—whenever someone in Redstone tried to sleep, they experienced the same awful dream.

The Aeon Priests worked to find a cure for what seemed to be some kind of mental disease, but found none. They sent away to other towns and villages for aid. Weeks passed, and the sleep-deprived villagers began to lose the ability to function. Fatigue and depression set in. Some people fled Redstone for good. A few committed suicide.

Two days ago, the Aeon Priests thought that they had discovered a possible solution. Without telling anyone (so as to avoid a panic that they, too, were fleeing Redstone) they trekked off into the open desert, leaving behind their guard, Hataniah, to keep people out of the tower while they worked.

They have not returned.

SYNOPSIS

The PCs arrive in Redstone with a delivery of medicine for the mysterious sickness. The Aeon Priests, the recipients of their goods, will not admit them into their tower. Investigating around town, the PCs learn that no one has been getting any real sleep. Everyone is having the same mysterious, disturbing dream. Eventually, the PCs very likely





attempt to break into the clave's tower, find them missing, but discover a clue as to their whereabouts. Following the priests into the desert, they discover a crystal dome containing all sorts of strange machinery. There are signs that the Aeon Priests tried to repair something here, but they were interrupted, and a major piece of the machinery is now obviously missing. There are also signs that the priests were attacked here. The PCs likely follow the tracks left by the priests' assailants, and find the band of margr who murdered them and took their numenera devices. The PCs must find a way to recover the devices and finish the repairs on the machinery in the dome in order to get the dreams to stop and save the people of Redstone from madness and eventually death.

GETTING THE CHARACTERS INVOLVED

The most straightforward way to get the PCs involved is by having them hire on as guards to watch over the river craft piloted by a man named Deymish, on his way to Redstone to deliver medicine. Deymish doesn't know any details about the illness there, just that he's to deliver his shipment to the clave there, and that it is extremely urgent.

A few other suggestions might include:

1. The PCs simply wander into Redstone on their own, on their way somewhere else, and find the town gripped in its strange malady.
2. The PCs get word directly from the Aeon Priests in Redstone, in the form of a delivered message. The clave asks them for help.
3. The PCs hear from a resident in Redstone, someone's distant relative or a long-out-of-touch friend, asking them for help.

MODIFYING THE ADVENTURE

For experienced characters, the adventure might need to be beefed up a bit to be challenging.

For an adventure designed for tier 3 or 4 characters, in addition to the other precautions, the Aeon Priests have a pair of reprogrammed mastigophore guardians inside their tower. Additionally, double the number of margr. If you are running this for tier 5 or 6 characters, do as directed above and increase the level (and commensurate health, damage inflicted, and other factors) for all NPCs and obstacles (such as the defense system at the base of the tower) and the Armor of all NPCs by 2. The Margr leader uses a cypher—a nodule affixed to his axe—which generates a matter-disrupting field, allowing it to ignore any Armor for 1 hour.

THE DREAM

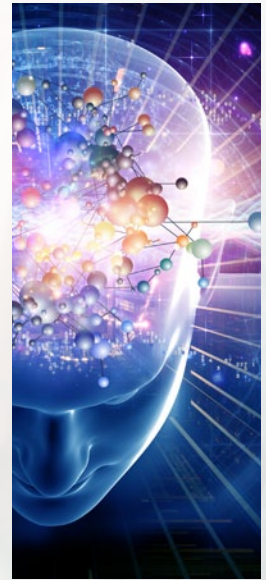
The dream that everyone experiences whenever they sleep (or are unconscious) in Redstone isn't a simple one to describe. Nothing about it is something that Ninth World humans can relate to. There are no images, words, sounds, creatures, setting details, or sensations that have any bearing on anything that exists in the Ninth World. Consider if you took someone from ancient Greece and tried to get them to play a modern-day first-person-shooter video game. Not only would they not understand the images they saw, but they couldn't wrap their mind around how they were even supposed to relate to the images, or that such a thing was even possible. The dream is similar, but likely far worse because the shapes, sounds, even the colors of what they see are utterly meaningless and alien. The dreamers are not only bombarded with images that make no sense but things which they have no context for.

If the PCs sleep in Redstone, they will have the dream too. Rather than try to describe it precisely, the GM should simply stress the indescribable nature of it. Use analogies instead of specific details or descriptions because there is nothing in it that a Ninth Worlder can understand.

After three days, sleep deprivation is going to make it so that the maximums in a character's stat Pools all decrease by 1 every other day. After a week of this loss, the rate increases to 1 each day. A good long rest restores the maximums to their normal levels (but doesn't restore the Pools beyond what is determined by the character's normal recovery rolls)

The Alternate Dream: If you wish, use GM Intrusion and choose one character. That character has a different dream. Although it is still filled with words, symbols, sounds, and certain images that make no sense, there are portions that do make sense. She sees the Faceted Dome and gets a sense for its direction and distance from her. She sees the receiver part that must be replaced, and how the operation can be completed, including the fact that it must be calibrated to the sun's current position in the sky. If she has no technical knowledge, this will still be quite alien to her, but those with some numenera knowledge will at least generally grasp what's going on.

This is, in effect, the "error message" transmission that relates how the error can be fixed.



Describe the dream to the player as if they are looking through someone else's eyes, and those eyes are not human. They are looking at creatures and objects that not only are unknown to them, but that do not seem to obey any rules they understand regarding movement or interaction with the world.

The dream is a message originally sent by non-human entities to be transmitted to other non-human entities. Was it a simple communiqué? A bit of entertainment? Technical plans? It doesn't really matter. The human sub-conscious is just on the right (or wrong) frequency to obtain some part of this message while sleeping, and it is almost too much for the human mind to bear. The transmitter of this message (sent by beings now a million years gone) is aboard a satellite high in orbit over the earth, its intended receiver being in the Faceted Dome, which is supposed to send back a transmission acknowledging the receipt. The malfunctioning receiver, without sending back the automated response, forces the satellite to transmit its message across a broader field, which encompasses Redstone. Only by repairing the receiver will this broader transmission end.

Deymish: Level 3, Level 5 for all boat piloting tasks; Armor 1

DEYMISH AND HIS BOAT

Deymish is a broad-shouldered, bearded man, about 40 years of age. He has a broad nose and bright eyes. A good-natured fellow, he tells jokes and shares in any labor he asks of another. His boat is an 18-foot (5.5 m) wooden trow with a synth sail that—even fully loaded—glides along a river seemingly effortlessly. Seshar is well-known to Deymish, with its strange, winding waterways. He knows the risks, but makes his living on his boat anyway, frequently employing a few strong arms to help with would-be raiders as well as large cargoes—or in some cases both.

He pays each hired hand/guard 3 shins per day, but they get paid when he gets paid for the shipment.

When they arrive in town, Deymish asks for the PCs' help in getting the four crates of medicine up to the clave's tower. When they cannot get in (see below), Deymish is likely to want to just wait a day or two. He won't help the PCs do anything like break into the tower, but he won't stop them either.

In no event will Deymish accompany the PCs if they end up going out into the desert (again, see below).

REDSTONE

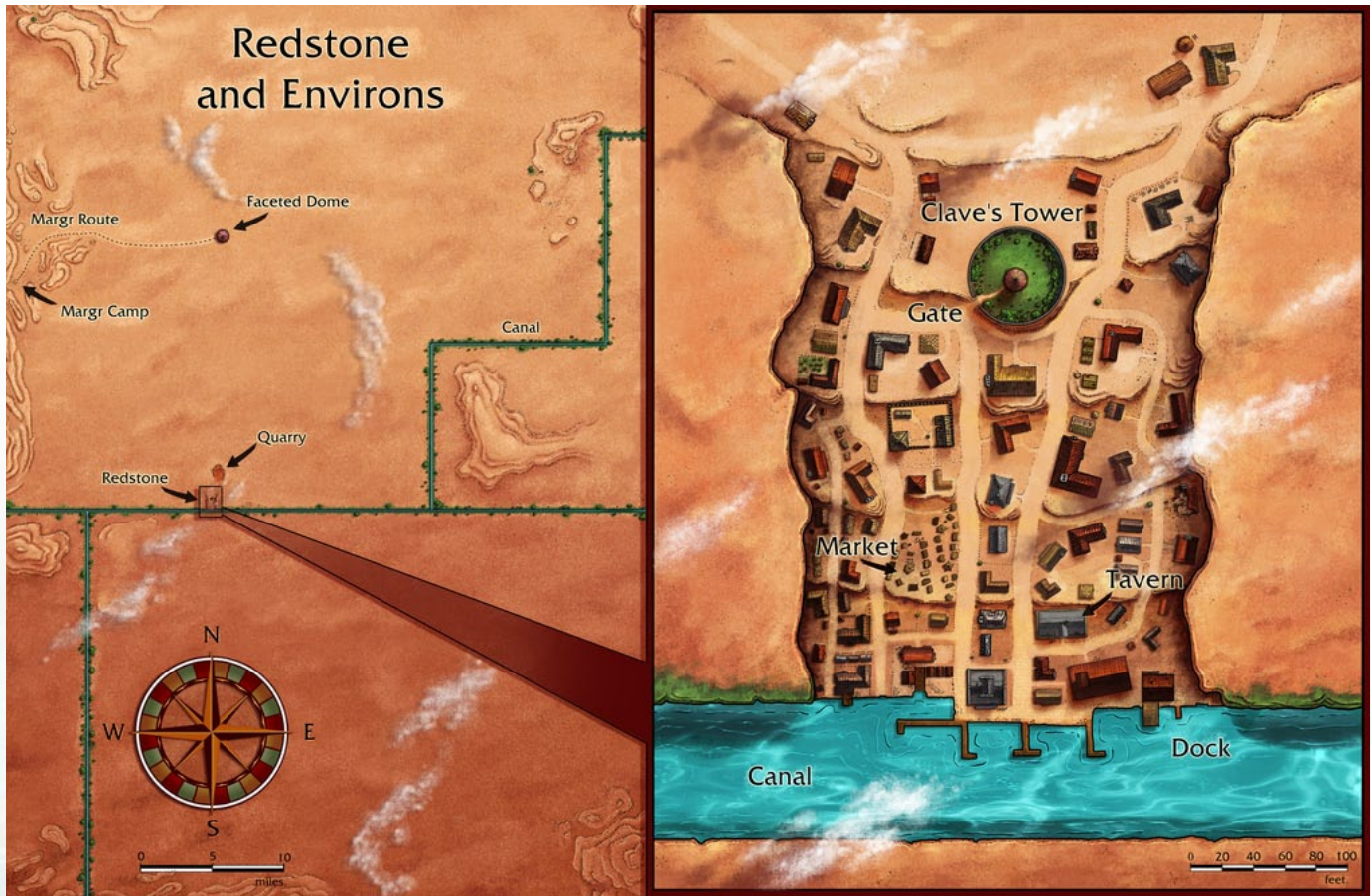
Redstone has a population of about 300 people, most of whom work in the quarry. The aldeia is built into the side of the 50-foot (15 m) escarpment at the water's edge, so the whole village is a sort of ramp from riverbank to the level of the surrounding desert. Most of the buildings, not surprisingly, are made of bricks quarried from the area. Generally speaking, the nicer, larger homes are near the top of the village, and the roughest, smallest are near the water. The tower of the Aeon Priest clave is at the very top, taller than any other building in the community. Beyond it, into the desert, lies the massive pit of the quarry.

Redstone is best known for the strange bricks quarried from the earth near the village. The stone is strong and resilient. Its real appeal is its appearance. Not only is it bright red, but the material (which in fact isn't actually stone at all, but an artificial substance) has a lattice of thin black lines running through it. No matter how the stone is cut, these lines always run perfectly perpendicular or parallel to each other, and all angles are right angles. The patterns are intricate and unnatural, but have no obvious meaning.

Although the clave for all intents and purposes "rules" the village, the wealthy elder of Redstone is Corl Vehm, an older, extremely overweight man

Whether or not the trip was as dangerous as Deymish feared is up to the GM, but this adventure begins when the PCs arrive in Redstone.





with a bald head and a wide smile. He manages the town's mundane affairs, and generally enjoys the respect he is afforded for it. He of course suffers from the dreams like everyone else.

The Quarry

The quarry, and the weird stone found there, is a red herring. The players will almost certainly suspect that the material has something to do with the dreams, but the quarry has been in operation for decades and no repercussions have occurred. 180 of the villagers work everyday in the quarry.

The manager of the quarry is a woman named **Gillis Vehm**, Corl's sister. She will certainly not take kindly to any suggestion that the quarry or the stone have anything to do with the disturbing dreams.

The People in Redstone

The lack of sleep is literally killing the village. The people are, without exception, all sluggish, dull-witted, and extraordinarily surly due to getting only a few minutes of sleep each night. A few hallucinate from time to time, although these are subtle and confusing rather than violent or horrific. At least two people have committed suicide, and a dozen or more are so bad off that they've collapsed into a waking catatonia.

THE CLAVE'S TOWER

The tower has three stories and a conical roof. It has a few shuttered windows on the upper two levels, with thick glass, about 30 inches (76 cm) across. Unlike the other buildings in Redstone, it is round, and surrounded by an equally circular wall. The tower has a diameter of about 20 feet (6 m). The wall, a bit over 70 feet (21 m). Climbing the sides of the tower would be a difficulty 4 task.

The Outer Wall and Courtyard

The wall is 10 feet (3 m) high, 1 foot (.3 m) thick, and made of redstone. A locked gate of iron bars blocks the entrance (level 3 lock, level 6 iron gate). The clave employs **Hataniah** or her brother, **Dalias** (Dal for short) to stand watch when they are not accepting visitors. Which is the case when the PCs arrive.

The Guard: Hataniah is a tall woman with pale brown skin and short hair. She wears brigandine armor and a helmet, and carries a long spear (she has a small sword as well). She is a no-nonsense guard who truly values the clave and is quite loyal to them. She believes that they are inside, and that it would be a terrible thing to allow them to be disturbed. She has a key to the gate, and knows where the secret switch is to turn off the defense mechanism, but she does not have a key for the tower door.

Corl Vehm: Level 2, Level 4 for all interactions (including deceptions or seeing through deception)

Gillis Vehm: Level 3

Hataniah: Level 3, Level 6 to trick or tempt away from her duty; Armor 2

Dal: Level 3; Armor 2

Characters can attempt to rouse unconscious comrades. If a PC spends an action doing so, the unconscious character will rouse in 1d6 rounds.

The tower serves as a great introduction to the Numenera task resolution system, as it involves things to climb, disable, dodge, avoid, identify, and more.

If the PCs say that they have a delivery, she just tells them to come by tomorrow. She will say the same thing the next day, continuing to put them off indefinitely. She maintains her post all day.

At night, her brother guards the gate. Dal is less loyal and less clever. He can be bribed or tricked, although he does not know where the secret switch is to deactivate the defense mechanism (although he knows about it), and, like his sister, does not have a key to the tower door.

The Garden: The courtyard is a ring of beautiful exotic plants from all across the world surrounding a circular lawn. In the middle of the lawn stands the tower. The plants in the garden also form a defense for the clave. Anyone passing through the garden will rub against one of the level 3 poisonous plants there. Such a character must make a Might defense roll or be wracked with pain all over their flesh for 10 minutes. During this time, the afflicted character treats all tasks as being 3 steps higher than normal.

The Lawn and the Base of the Tower: Lastly, a third numenera defense has been worked into the base of the tower. While it is activated, anyone that comes within 15 feet (4.6 m) of the tower—basically, anywhere on the flat lawn around it—triggers this level 4 mechanism, which pulses with a burst of greenish light that extends out 15 feet (4.6 m) from the tower, and up to about 10 feet (3 m) from the ground. Creatures within this area must make an Intellect defense roll or fall unconscious for 1 minute (during which time the disturbing dream will likely start, of course). This device can be triggered multiple times, so multiple characters crossing the lawn produce multiple pulses.

There is a secret switch by the gate to deactivate the defense mechanism, but it is a difficulty 6 task to find it.

Tower Levels

Level 1

The door to the tower is locked with a level 5 lock. Inside, the entire level of the tower is a single room. It is unfurnished, and currently holds a number of wooden crates, filled with various supplies. It is lit by glowing panels on the ceiling 15 feet (4.6 m) above. An iron staircase runs up to Level 2.

On the wall is a metal panel with glass screens and various controls. It is a difficulty 4 task to figure out and use the following functions:

1. Turn the lights in the tower on or off.
2. Deactivate or activate the defense mechanism outside the tower.
3. Communicate via audio with the other two levels of the tower.

It is a difficulty 6 task to figure out and use the panel to open a secret door in the floor in this chamber, which holds a cache of 100 shins.

The panel could also be dismantled to obtain 1d6 random cyphers.

Level 2

This is the laboratory for the clave. In it, there are a number of different experiments in the works involving chemicals, mechanical devices and batteries, and stranger things. It is a difficulty 3 task to determine that no one has worked here for at least 2 days.

A notebook kept by one of the priests is open on a table here amid a number of chemicals and tools for working with chemicals detailing a number of different attempts at creating a cure for the malady plaguing the town.

Scavengers can find three cyphers on that same table. One is a small amount of level 4 powder that, if consumed or inhaled, restores 1d6+2 Speed. Another is an injector with a level 3 serum that grants a creature the ability to resist a poison or disease as if the task were 2 levels lower for 28 hours. The last is a bit of level 5 liquid in a tube that will put the imbiber to sleep for 1 hour.

Level 3

This is the living quarters for the individuals in the clave. There are three beds here, along with other comfortable furnishings. It is obvious to anyone that no one has been here for a few days. Old food sits on plates on a table next to half-full mugs of cold, stale coffee.

Amid the personal belongings of one of the priests, a character can find a journal started months ago by a man named Xarmun. Most of it is rather meaningless, but it notes the date when the plague began, and the various attempts of the clave in combating it. The last entry mentions that someone named Brogun (another Aeon Priest) has convinced Xarmun that the dreams are a transmission from somewhere, and that they should go to the Faceted Dome northwest of the village to check if anything is amiss there. It mentions that it will be a full day's journey, and that Xarmun is leery about it. Lastly, it says that they are not going to tell anyone about their trip for fear that people in the town will think they have abandoned Redstone.

THE DESERT

The desert beyond the village is extremely flat and dry. Large beetle-like insects crawl across cracked earth, scuttling for shade beneath sagebrush and the occasional large rock.

Characters skilled in tracking or nature (or who are just observant) occasionally find signs of others who have made a similar journey. These of course are the tracks of the Aeon Priests.



THE FACETED DOME

It's about eight hours march across the dry desert to reach the dome, but it's really not that hard to find. It glitters and glistens in the sun during the day so that it can be seen for many miles.

The dome is 20 feet (6 m) high and 130 feet (39.6 m) across, made of triangular faces of white crystal that are cool to the touch. There is no door, but if anyone touches a facet and mentally focuses on entering, that facet becomes permeable and allows them entrance. The dome itself is virtually indestructible.

Signs of Struggle: Near the dome, there are obvious signs of a fight—churned dirt, bits of dried blood, a broken spear, some torn robes, and so on. The robes are easily identified as those of an Aeon Priest. It's also possible to see from this spot that a large group (some on foot, some mounted) came to this spot from the east and moved westward.

Characters may also notice that there are strange symbols around the fight scene crudely etched into the dry dust.

The idea is that the margr band saw the priests outside the dome, charged in and attacked. Then, after the battle was won, continued west, but only after the superstitious abhumans put down the strange symbols as magical wards against the hungry gods that built the dome, for fear that their actions might have angered them.

Inside the Dome: The air is cool and moist, and somehow there are thriving green potted plants giving the whole place fresh air. Most of the interior, however, is filled by a maze of machinery. Spinning turbines, rotating dishes, and banks of control panels and interface stations. The floor is made of multicolored ceramic tiles.

There is also a panel in the side of one of the large machines that has been removed, exposing a cylindrical space where something obviously gets "plugged in" and affixed to some wires, cables, and conduits. Next to the removed panel, which lies on the floor, is a cylinder that obviously fits into that space, along with various wires and prongs that would allow it to be connected to the larger mechanism, but just as obvious is the fact that the cylinder has burned out from the inside. It is blackened and partially melted.

If a PC had the "Alternate Dream" this is, in part, exactly what she saw—a sort of how-to demonstration of the removal of the panel, removal of the faulty cylinder, and its replacement with a new one.

A new cylinder is clearly needed, but where is it? The Aeon Priests had it with them when they were attacked by the margr outside. The margr now have it (although they do not realize what they have).

The Aeon Priests arrived at the dome, got in, and found the proper area that needed repair. They got halfway through the repair (removing the faulty cylinder) but then took it outside to calibrate a mechanism that is a part of it, which uses the exact position of the sun and the satellites overhead to get it so that it will function properly. Unfortunately, while they were outside, they were waylaid by margr. Basically, rather than show the abhumans how to get in the dome, they tried to drive them off—and failed.

Loot Inside the Dome (Without Destroying Anything): If the PCs search the place carefully, but are interested in making sure that the still-functioning machinery remains still-functioning, they find a variety of interesting tools, and the following items:

- A level 7 cypher that looks like a pair of metal goggles (it needs a new strap). The wearer learns the level of whatever she looks at once they are activated. Activation lasts 1 hour.
- A level 6 cypher that looks a little like a glass wand with a copper tip. When activated, any one metal object level 6 or lower touched by the copper tip instantly disintegrates. The object can be up to the size of a human, but if it is larger, it does not work.
- A level 2 cypher that sprays out a thick viscous liquid. Within the liquid are incredibly fast-acting microscopic repair units that mend a break or tear in an object (or fuse two disparate objects held together).
- An oddity that resembles a toy doll made of synth, but the doll is of a creature that looks like nothing anyone's seen before, with a large number of asymmetrical limbs, all different sizes, a long neck, and a four-eyed head.

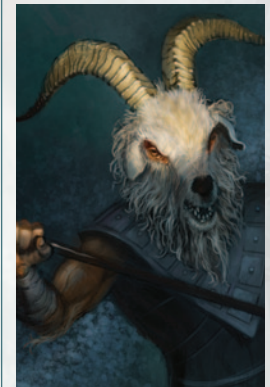
Loot Inside the Dome (Without Care): Of course, if the PCs don't care about leaving anything intact, they can gather 1d100+50 shins scavenged from machinery, and 1d6+1 additional random cyphers.

The Margr Marauders

If the PCs follow the obvious trail left by the margr, they eventually close the distance (perhaps after another day of walking) enough to make out a dozen or so of the creatures, some mounted on aneen. There are, in fact, 11 margr and their very large leader. The group has four aneen, but they use them as pack animals, not mounts.

The abhumans make their way with no particular hurry, so even though they have a considerable lead, the PCs can catch up with them. While on the move, the goods stolen from the Aeon Priests are wrapped up and kept on one of the aneen.

Note that if one of the PCs had the "alternate dream" the Faceted Dome will be particularly easy to find.



Margr: Level 2, Resists trickery and lies as level 3. Makes Might defense rolls as level 3. Runs, jumps, and climbs as level 3; 1 Armor; 3 points of damage

Margr Leader: Level 3, Makes Might defense rolls as level 4; 16 Health, 2 Armor; 5 points of damage

*Margr,
page 244
Aneen,
page 232*





The margr minds do not receive the strange dreams plaguing the nearby humans.

GM Intrusion: The perimeter guard surprises the PCs while they observe the camp. The PCs must silence this margr quickly before he alerts the others.

Experience Point Awards:
Repairing the receiver in the dome and ending the malady in Redstone earns each PC involved 3 XP in addition to any earned through the course of play or by finding any artifacts, such as the metal rods in the possession of the margr.

The Margr Camp: It's likely that when the PCs catch up with the margr, the abhumans have stopped and made camp. This is very much the best opportunity that the PCs have to get what they want.

When they stop and make camp, the margr set up a perimeter patrol of one individual who circles around the camp, and another who stays awake on watch in the camp near the resting aneen. The remaining margr sleep. The loot taken from the Aeon Priests is laid out on a rough blanket near the sleeping leader in the middle of the camp.

The Margr Loot: The Aeon Priests were killed and eaten, but some of their items were saved. The Margr don't understand them, but know that they are valuable and can perhaps use them as trade items at some later date. The items include:

- A level 5 artifact that is, in effect, a pair of metal rods. When they are brought together, they produce a powerful jolt of electricity that launches a lightning bolt-like burst at a target within immediate range. The bolt inflicts 10 points of damage, but using it is difficult, and any attack roll's difficulty is increased by 2 steps. Depletion: 1 in 1d10.
- A level 3 detonation cypher that explodes in a burst of caustic shrapnel in immediate range. Those in that area suffer 3 points of damage from the shrapnel, and then 3 points the following round from the fact that the shrapnel melts into a caustic, burning sludge.
- A level 4 cypher that comes in the form of a headband. It allows the wearer to tap into the datasphere to get a general idea of the topography of the area within 50 miles (80 km) in all directions, including all pertinent features.

- An oddity that is a bent metal rod with a small synth handle. It changes color based on how far it is from sea level.
- The cylinder from the Faceted Dome, a level 5 device.

Repairing the Receiver

All the PCs need to do, if they get the cylinder back, is return to the dome and replace the cylinder. This is a difficulty 5 task, but if one of the PCs had the alternate dream, it is automatic. This resets the receiver, which sends a message to the source of the dreamstate transmissions, effectively ending the nightmares of all the people in Redstone. The return to the village is uneventful.

THE AFTERMATH

The people of the town are overjoyed at the PCs' triumph, assuming they become aware of it. They are likely to throw a feast in their honor (after they all get some sleep), and it is certainly true that they PCs will never need to buy a drink or even a meal in Redstone for a very long time.

The people are horrified at the death of the clave, and ask the PCs, if they are leaving, to please spread the word that the village needs new Aeon Priests. Under no circumstances will the PCs be allowed to take possession of the clave's tower or any belongings currently within it (loot taken during the course of the adventure is fair game), although any breaking and entering they committed will certainly be overlooked.

After another day or two, Deymish is going to want to leave, and he is the easiest way for them to get out of Redstone. Out of gratitude, Corl Vehm pays him for his (now unnecessary) cargo, so he can pay the PCs their salaries.