

THE CHRONICLES OF SLOVENGRIS THE ASTRAL WIZARD



Vol. 1: The Origins of Slovengris (a short story),
The Vats of Aventhil (a 4th level adventure)



By

Rodbud Fondiker

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The Chronicles of Slovengris the Astral Wizard, Volume I

Forward	2
Part 1: The Origins of Slovengris (a short story) ..	4
Part 2: The Vats of Aventhil (a 4th level adventure)	
Background	24
Introduction	25
Local Almanac	25
Hooks	26
Forsaken Hills	27
Forgotten Ruins	28
Musty Cellar	29
Tunnels of Togo	31
Epilogue	34
Appendix A: The Vats	35
Maps	
Forgotten Ruins	38
Musty Cellar	39
Tunnels of Togo	40



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Credits: Writing, layout and art - Rodbud Fondiker, Portraits - Remington Veteto, Proofreading - Eric Graham, Wild Card - Jason Underwood, Playtesters - Chusty and the gang.

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Greetings and Salutations my fellow purveyors of pain, masters of the mysterious, and adjudicators of action, my name is Rodbud Fondiker and I truly appreciate you checking out my work. My main responsibilities here at the dwarven hold of Nargazira where I live is ministering to fellow devotees of Bacchus* and trying to gain new followers. A fun way I accomplish both is with an rpg session and a keg of ale. My methods have won me top Bacchanalian recruiter 3 years in a row!

One of my creations that has spurred players in my game to provide copious amounts of feedback is an arch-villain named Slovengris, the Astral Wizard. I have recieved several suggestions from my players over the years as to where I could put Slovengris and what I could do with him. I decided to ignore all those suggestions and instead introduce the (almost) invincible scumbag that is Slovengris to the world so fellow GMs could pass on the joy of Slovengris to their players.

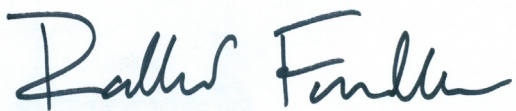
This first volume provides a little scenario to introduce Slovengris and the origin story for an inter-galactic heck raiser. Future volumes will include more scenarios, major players in the saga of Slovengris, patron writeups, new spells, and more!

Being dwarven, my command of common is considered “good enough”, but I am sure mistakes and/or affectations will slip though, my apologies in advance.

My cousin Chusty Nobspike, who also plays in my games, fancies himself a musician and likes to write theme music for my adventures. I would never hear the end of it if I didn't provide links to Chusty's [You Tube](#) and [Soundcloud](#) pages.

Please feel free to modify, change, and/or steal anything from this volume to fit in with your own campaign. Use my methods and framework to create your own super villain. Go nuts, have fun!

Your's in Randomness,



Rodbud Fondiker

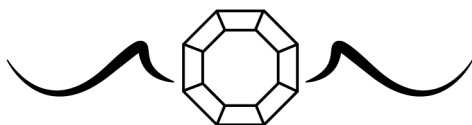


* Bacchus is what us dwarves call him, I've heard that elves call him Dionysus and humans know him as Keith Richards.





PART 1



THE ORIGINS
OF SLOVENGRIS



BEGINNINGS

Slovengris started life in a happy home with a loving mother and father . . . at least from what he could remember, a virulent plague swept the countryside where they lived and left Slovengris an orphan at the age of seven. An vile man named Abscutus was picking through the remnants of a desolated village when he found Slovengris huddled in an abandoned house, scavenging bugs to eat. Abscutus assumed the plague (about which he knew nothing!) had left no survivors in this area, thus he reckoned this lad to be of strong constitution. The youngster was more likely to survive the questionable atmosphere of his wizardly abode than most, and Abscutus could use a mundane servant, so Slovengris was conscripted.

Abscutus was old, but pinning an exact age on him would vex even the most seasoned carny. Long, matted salt and pepper hair flowed from underneath a tooled leather skullcap that rarely left his scalp. Abscutus' posture was slump-shouldered and bent, his movements slow and deliberate though stronger and sprier than most would credit him.

Living with Abscutus was better than starving to death, but even at a young age Slovengris knew life as an old man's servant was not one he was meant to live. Slovengris had a quick mind and paid attention to much that went on in the manse, enthralled with the rituals and incantations Abscutus would perform. Slovengris would mimic the phrases and gestures Abscutus would make in the privacy of his quarters. Abscutus had incorrectly equated Slovengris' quiet nature with dim-wittedness.

Slovengris begrudgingly performed his duties whilst keeping his head down and mouth shut. A few early mishaps—broken beakers, spilled reagents and the like—earned Slovengris beatings and beratings, which quickly taught him to pay attention and stay out of Abscutus' way.

The true size of Abscutus' manse was a mystery to Slovengris, for his movements were restricted to certain areas. Slovengris interacted with other servants (cooks, at least) but his attempts at small talk were met with grunts and blank stares.

Five years in the service of Abscutus was enough for Slovengris and he decided to leave. The only problem was Slovengris didn't even know the location of the

front door. Several locked doors were off limits to Slovengris so he figured those would be a good place to start. When Abscutus left on one of his jaunts, Slovengris slipped into his master's study in search of keys to open the forbidden doors. Slovengris found a key in his master's study, but it was not to any forbidden door: it was a key to unlock powers Slovengris was unaware he possessed. Rummaging through the drawers of his master's desk, Slovengris found a velvet pouch embroidered with a strange glyph. Loosening the drawstring, Slovengris gently opened the small sack and dumped the contents into his hand. An acorn-sized piece of jade rested in Slovengris' palm, humming with vibrational energy and mesmerizing the lad. A few minutes passed before Slovengris came to his senses, returned the gem to its pouch, and slipped the bag in his pocket. Slovengris ended his search for the evening and returned to his quarters.

Slovengris stashed the velvet pouch in the straw stuffing of his bed beneath his pillow. In the weeks following the theft, Slovengris had peculiar dreams. In these dreams Slovengris felt as if he was suspended in some sort of green miasma being lectured by a stern voice in an unfamiliar language he could understand. Strange glyphs similar to the one embroidered on the gem's pouch would materialize in the green haze of his dream state. These glyphs were as unfamiliar to Slovengris as the strange language, yet in his dream state they held meaning he was able to comprehend.

When Abscutus returned to his manse, Slovengris was paranoid about the purloined gem. As time passed and the dreams continued, Slovengris' paranoia abated while his disdain for Abscutus grew. Slovengris began ignoring rules Abscutus had placed on his actions and would often linger after being dismissed to spy on Abscutus, trying to discover how Abscutus left the manse. This clandestine behavior bore fruit after a few weeks when Slovengris witnessed Abscutus perform an amazing feat.

Abscutus stood in front of an apparatus that resembled a full-length mirror with the glass missing and began weaving intricate patterns in the air with his hands, arms, and fingers while chanting in a low, steady voice. The words Abscutus chanted sounded similar to the language the voice of Slovengris' dreams spoke. After

a few moments of gestures and chanting, an electrified mist filled the void in the mirror frame where the glass should have been. Abscutus stopped the ritual and peered into the swirling, lightning-streaked mist. Satisfied with what he saw, Abscutus stepped into the mist and disappeared. The strange electric mist dissolved and the empty mirror frame was quiet again. Witnessing this event answered one question for Slovengris while opening up a host of others. Slovengris retired for the evening, as confused as ever.

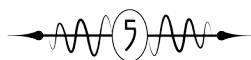
ESCAPE

A week later Abscutus was back in the manse but Slovengris had not witnessed the return as he had hoped. Over the next few months, Slovengris observed Abscutus using the portal six more times. Slovengris believed that he had learned most of the chants and gestures Abscutus would make when activating the portal. A few of the words and/or phrases near the end of the chant would change with each use which made Slovengris wary yet he forged ahead with his plan of escape. Slovengris practiced the gestures and recitations he observed Abscutus perform and he decided that the next time Abscutus departed, he would follow.

Slovengris had no possessions to speak of, just the clothes he wore. The only thing that held any value to Slovengris was the jade stone in the velvet pouch; that would leave Abscutus' manse with him.

A fortnight after Slovengris made his decision, the opportunity arose to follow through. One morning, as Slovengris was doing his regular chores, he happened by the room in which the empty mirror frame was stored, usually under a black satin cover, only now the cover was removed and Abscutus was preparing to leave. Slovengris found a position to hide where he hoped he would hear Abscutus' chants clearly; he needed to correctly learn the end phrase that always changed. After Abscutus had stepped into the mist and disappeared, Slovengris repeated the new end phrases Abscutus chanted over and over on the way back to his room to retrieve the jade stone.

After Slovengris "packed," he returned to the empty



mirror frame. A 13 year old Slovengris stood in front of the threshold and assumed the same stance he had seen Abscutus take. As Slovengris began to intone the strange syllables and make the appropriate gesticulations, his body temperature began to rise as vibrational energy coursed through his veins. The chant which Slovengris had practiced as syllables started making sense as words, then as phrases; the movements of his fingers traced alien glyphs in the air, symbols which now revealed their secrets to Slovengris. The process kept making more and more sense to Slovengris as he continued, up to the point where the Abscutus' chant had changed every time. Slovengris now knew this part of the process was where one indicated the location to which they wished to travel. Slovengris' quick mind decided to name the location he had memorized from Abscutus' most recent activation of the portal. Chances were that Abscutus would no longer be at the portal on the other side, and once outside of the manse it didn't matter: Slovengris could head in any direction and flee from Abscutus.

As Slovengris chanted the phrases naming the location, the mirror frame sprung to life and the now familiar electrified mist filled the empty space. With little hesitation Slovengris stepped through the mist. A cool feeling enveloped Slovengris and he felt his body being pulled, he hoped, to the intended location. As Slovengris soared through the blurry, gray aether, the roar of rushing air was the only sound that filled his ears. After a few minutes of the new mode of travel, the sound of rushing air was gradually replaced by the sound of angry arguing. As the soaring cold feeling ebbed, the bickering stopped and a single voice exclaimed, "What in the nine hells is this Abscutus? Bringing in reinforcements?" Instead of a pulling sensation Slovengris now felt himself being propelled and instinctively took a step forward to catch himself. This step forward was Slovengris stepping out the destination portal and into a dingy, earthen cellar. Staring at him were 4 snarling brutes, 2 with crossbows and 2 with spears, fronted by a wiry, weasel like man. As the five were trying to process a kid like Slovengris stepping through the portal they were suddenly engulfed in flame from Slovengris' left. The howls of pain which emanated from the quintet as the flesh melted off their bones was oddly intriguing to Slovengris. As the thrashing movement in the flames

slumped to the floor and stopped, Slovengris looked to his left to see from where the flame originated only to find Abscutus staring agape at him, wisps of smoke swirling from his fingertips.

Grabbing Slovengris by the nape with one hand Abscutus furiously started casting the spell to create a return portal with the other hand. Slovengris noticed the structure for the portal on this side was nothing more than a crudely fashioned door frame built into a solid earthen wall. Abscutus finished the incantation and the lightning riddled mist now occupied the rudimentary doorway to nowhere. Abscutus shoved Slovengris through the portal and Slovengris emerged right back where he started. For a grand 5 minutes Slovengris had escaped his burden. Abscutus stepped through the portal a moment after Slovengris carrying a burlap sack dripping with a thick, crimson substance. The portal fizzled out as Abscutus lifted the lid on a nearby metal box, tossed the sack inside and slammed the lid shut. Abscutus turned and glared at Slovengris, his face reddened and strained, and said only one word: "How?"

Abscutus seemed filled with equal parts rage, confusion and relief. The disdain for Abscutus which had been building was temporarily pushed aside as a young Slovengris made the determination that it would be in his best interest to tell the truth. Slovengris began by sharing his curiosity and fascination with watching Abscutus work in his labs and his interest in the symbols that constantly surrounded him as he moved through Abscutus' manse. Slovengris explained how he yearned to be outside and see the sun and sky again, how he wanted a life unrestricted, free from the shackles of menial labor. Abscutus noted with surprise the bold philosophies on life originating from such a young mind. Abscutus viciously reprimanded himself for once thinking the kid to be dimwitted, and noted that this wasn't the first time today his erroneous judgment had been exposed.

Slovengris explained how he had rummaged through Abscutus' study in search of keys that unlocked the "forbidden doors." It took a great deal of self restraint for Abscutus not to fly into a fit of rage at this revelation. Slovengris picked up on Abscutus' bubbling ire and continued the story in a more conciliatory

tone as the story moved on to finding the jade stone in the embroidered velvet pouch. Abscutus arched an eyebrow and his rage subsided as it was replaced with curiosity. Slovengris revealed everything he could remember about his green dreams and the lecturing voice as Abscutus listened intently.

Slovengris reached the point in his story where he first witnessed Abscutus activate the empty mirror frame and step through. Abscutus was amused when Slovengris revealed that he had learned the ritual chants and gestures from secretly observing him. Slovengris couldn't have created an astral portal on his own, but through his mimicry and luck had managed to re-activate a dormant, already open portal. Slovengris continued telling his story right up to the present. Abscutus studied Slovengris with a fierce intensity for several minutes. Slovengris was afraid that Abscutus was temporarily frozen with rage and would snap out of it at any second and pulverize him to smithereens. That pulverization never occurred as Abscutus finally relaxed and then did something Slovengris had never heard or seen Abscutus do: laugh.

Abscutus paced around the room as he spoke to no one in particular: "Today the weakness of my judgment has been twice exposed, though one error in judgment saved me from the other." Abscutus sighed heavily. "By all rights I should no longer exist. If there is no meaning in today's events then the universe is truly a twisted joke." Abscutus whirled to face Slovengris, staring right into his eyes, and said: "One thing is certain: after today's events you can no longer be my chore boy." Slovengris felt the butterflies in his stomach intensify as his muscles tensed; he wasn't sure where Abscutus was going.

"You want to learn my craft, about my cryptic chants and my mystic maneuvers?", Abscutus queried in a mocking tone. "Very well then, my good luck servant will now be my apprentice."

Abscutus returned to pacing and chuckled to himself, "good luck servant" as another issue arose in his mind. Abscutus again turned to Slovengris and said, "I suppose if you're going to be my apprentice I just can't call you 'boy' anymore. From now on I will call you Slovengris for good luck servant." This amused

Abscutus to no end. "You've gotten quite the promotion today, from boy to Slovengris. Now, let me see that jade stone."

Slovengris was relieved at not having been incinerated, but wasn't sure how he felt about his new name. Truth be told it was nice to have a name again: Slovengris had forgotten he used to have a name before "boy," though oddly he could not remember what it was. However, Slovengris did not like the way Abscutus laughed when he bestowed the moniker.

Reluctantly, Slovengris reached into his pocket and produced the glyph embroidered velvet bag. A flash of rage filled Abscutus as he was once again reminded of the theft. Abscutus snatched the velvet pouch from Slovengris' grasp and through clenched teeth promised, "If you ever steal from me again, I will not hesitate to end your existence the moment I find out." Abscutus loosened the drawstring and dumped the chunk of jade into his waiting palm. Abscutus intoned a few phrases and made a few gestures over the rock in his hand but nothing happened. The piece of jade remained as inert as it had always been for Abscutus. Perplexed, Abscutus ordered Slovengris to hold his palm up and dropped the stone in his hand. What was a normal piece of jade seemed to spring to life as it started to emit a soft white aura. A barely audible hum flitted through the air as Slovengris could feel the jade lightly vibrating in his hand.

"Fascinating", observed Abscutus as he plucked stone from Slovengris' palm. As soon as the stone left Slovengris' hand, the aura faded and the vibrations ceased. Abscutus placed the jade stone in a shallow dish of black sand that sat on a workbench. Using a large peacock feather as a stylus, Abscutus drew glyphs in the sand surrounding the jade stone. Cupping his hands over the jade, Abscutus chanted low and steadily for a full minute while the small sand-filled dish and its contents were engulfed in an orange glow.

When the ritual ended, Abscutus lifted the piece of jade from the sand, gently brushed away a few grains stuck to the stone, and examined it closely with a jeweler's loupe. Satisfied with what he had done, Abscutus slid the piece of jade into its velvet pouch and handed the sack to Slovengris. Alarmed and confused Slovengris

hastily opened the pouch and examined the hunk of jade. Both the white aura and the vibrations were still present, but substantially less so than before. Slovengris flashed a look of anger at Abscutus but before Slovengris could get in a word of objection, Abscutus raised his hand and spoke, "Not to worry my Slovengris, the power you share with the gem has not diminished at all, it is simply more. . .um . . .tamed. Learning how to properly access and wield this power is one of the many lessons you will master over the coming years."

Abscutus fumbled around a workbench until he found a small spool of silver wire. Handing the spool to Slovengris, Abscutus said, "Use this to fashion a cradle for the stone with a hook at the top. You should wear the jade as an amulet for now, when you are grown it will be wise to set the stone in a ring. I'll get you a strip of leather to hang it on." Slovengris started wrapping the silver wire around the piece of jade when he noticed the gem was now engraved with the same glyph which was embroidered on it's velvet case.

TUTELAGE

At 13 Slovengris officially started down the road to become a wielder of arcane power. "Magic." That is what Abscutus called the strange chants and gestures he performed. The jade stone was capable of channeling the arcane power that magic seeks to control and manipulate. However the jade only seemed to work for Slovengris and in the possession of anyone else it was just a chunk of green stone.

At first, Slovengris' apprenticeship didn't seem much different from his life before, only now Abscutus sometimes told him what the objects that he was currently hauling/polishing/sorting were called. Abscutus instituted a literacy program for Slovengris to enable him to read and write in both the strange language of magic and in the language in which Slovengris communicated, what Abscutus referred to as the "universal parlance". Slovengris devoured his lessons with intellectual vigor.

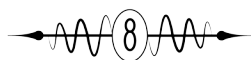
Abscutus correctly assumed a youth with the intellect

of Slovengris would develop disdain for one who forced menial labor upon them, so he tried to win Slovengris over early. Not only did Abscutus not need any potential backstabbers in his midst, but the way the last job had almost turned out he needed a partner in crime, and what more perfect partner than one you could mold to your liking. Two weeks into the official apprenticeship Abscutus gave Slovengris a gift to get on his good side; he gave Slovengris unfettered access to the observatory. Slovengris fell in love with the observatory and spent all his extra time there.

After half a year Abscutus was pleased with the progress Slovengris was making in both the structured lessons and independent studies, so he decided to press forward with his plans. Abscutus re-introduced Slovengris to the strange mirror with no glass and explained that they could use the device to travel to some of the worlds Slovengris has been observing through the telescope. Slovengris told Abscutus he thought that device was just how to get outside the manse; Abscutus replied there was a front door for that.

During the next few years Slovengris spent a great deal of time abroad. Though he was always happy to get back to the observatory, Slovengris enjoyed his time away from the manse and learned a great deal in the process. Abscutus knew Slovengris' education could not occur entirely at the manse, he needed to learn how to get around cities, how to interact with the masses, and how to be aware of local customs and laws. Slovengris spent four months in Khosh, a sprawling city known for its extensive library, doing research for Abscutus. Slovengris spent a couple of months back at the manse before he was sent to Vaykal, a megapolis with three different "kings." The political situation in Vaykal was complex to say the least, and spending a year as the under-assistant to the economic consultant to one of the eight advisors to a noble 6th in line for the throne gave Slovengris a surprisingly good education in graft, perfidy and artifice.

Abscutus cashed in some pretty big favors to get Slovengris access to training from the thief's guild in Camberlin. The guild was loathe to reveal much of their craft, no matter how much they owed Abscutus. Still, after six months with the guild Slovengris left Camberlin proficient in forgery and somewhat



proficient in the art of disguise. Abscutus was quite pleased with the skills Slovengris had acquired over the past three years. Since taking on Slovengris as an apprentice, Abscutus had done his best to balance the stern discipline needed for magical studies and the camaraderie needed for a trusted partner. This balance was a fine line for a man with the temperament of Abscutus to walk, but he had his eyes set on a bigger picture.

These stints abroad had also been a test at how well Abscutus was succeeding on the camaraderie front. Abscutus had done nothing to tamper the confident defiance Slovengris had displayed a few years back. Conversely, Abscutus had tried to use this strength to his advantage when molding his future partner in hijinks. Slovengris was not tethered to any of his foreign hosts, he was free to move about (as much as local curfews, customs, holiday, rites, etc. allowed him to) and not once had he tried to flee or escape. Abscutus took this to mean his bonding with Slovengris was working. Don't be deceived: Abscutus felt no great affection for the boy, he simply saw Slovengris as an investment, an investment from which he envisioned great returns.

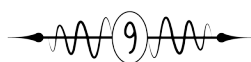
Slovengris, for his part, felt no great loyalty or attachment to Abscutus. At the wise old age of 16 Slovengris viewed Abscutus as a resource to be plundered as much as Abscutus viewed Slovengris as an investment to be used. Slovengris' travels taught him that Abscutus was truly a powerful man. Maybe not powerful in the sense a "king" is powerful, but a king doesn't have the knowledge to open a portal to hundreds of other worlds across the universe; Slovengris viewed that ability as true power. Milking as much as he could from his time with Abscutus was in Slovengris' best interest. The two were a match made in scumbag heaven.

In an attempt to further strengthen the bond between the two, Abscutus concocted a "coming of age" ritual as an excuse to give Slovengris a silver ring he had made to hold the jade stone, and a blank tome for Slovengris to record spells. Abscutus explained to Slovengris that his magical studies were going to intensify over the next few years. Slovengris was pleased with this news.

When Abscutus presented the silver ring to Slovengris, he explained the mystery of the jade stone. The jade that Slovengris had, ahem, stolen from Abscutus' study was a conduit to a plane of power where demons dwelt. Powerful wizards in ages past created stones like these by subduing a demon, rending their essence into several pieces, then infusing the shards of demon essence across four or five stones like Slovengris' piece of jade. The purpose was to give wizards access to the arcane power which flows in the realms of demons without the need to parley with one (always a dangerous undertaking). The stones functioned as the old wizards intended, but according to Abscutus' research, they waned in power the more they were used. While some stones probably existed that still worked, when Abscutus could not reveal any power in the stone he assumed it to be a used up dud, threw it in his desk and forgot about it (although the number of lives spent for Abscutus to obtain the piece of jade was in the teens). Why the stone had decided to return to life once in Slovengris' possession perplexed Abscutus... and while expressing confidence in Slovengris' ability to take care of himself, also cautioned Slovengris to be quite careful with the power of the jade stone.

The empty tome was the second gift Abscutus bestowed on Slovengris for his "coming of age" day. Abscutus explained that a wizard's tome was his most prized possession. Abscutus told Slovengris that although Slovengris had seen hundreds of books and similar tomes during his time at the manse, he had never laid eyes on Abscutus' spell book, and probably never would. Abscutus advised Slovengris to be equally protective of his grimoire. Abscutus also presented Slovengris with a scroll: "Here, let this be the first spell you inscribe in your spell book, a gift from me. This spell can help you overcome any language barriers you encounter during research or on travels. Scribe this spell in your book then we'll get to work it."

As Slovengris became adept at wielding arcane power, Abscutus filled his mind with stories about wizards of old and even more powerful entities, of powerful spells these wizards knew, lost to the ages on forgotten worlds, of artifacts capable of allowing those deemed worthy of great deeds. Abscutus pointed out that Slovengris' jade was one such artifact, and there were thousands more out there that worked in magnificent



ways. These stories had the intended effect on Slovengris: they filled him with a sense of adventure. Abscutus assured Slovengris that as soon as he was proficient, they would embark on quests for rare spells and artifacts of power.

A few years passed in Abscutus' magical tutelage and, at the age of 20, Slovengris was deemed ready to be Abscutus' wingman in chicanery.

SHENANIGANS

The first realm the duo visited was Oesteroth, a fairly large city comprised of a needlessly complicated mish-mash of streets, alleys, thoroughfares and boulevards situated in the middle of a gargantu-desert. Abscutus led Slovengris through the twisting streets and alleyways until stopping at a short staircase leading to a basement level door. Abscutus went down the steps and knocked on the door. A small window opened, some words were exchanged and the door opened. Abscutus motioned for Slovengris to follow and the two entered the basement room. The dingy room was dimly lit with candles. A smattering of sacks, crates and assorted junk was haphazardly strewn about the dusty room. Abscutus had continued to the wall opposite the one they entered and held open a curtain exposing a doorway to a brighter room. The two shuffled into the next room and Abscutus let the curtain drop. A portly man wearing a grease-stained shirt and baggy pants fumbled around on a workbench in the center of the room, his back to the duo.

"Who's your friend Abscutus?," the man inquired without turning around. "He either must not have known you very long, have no sense of smell, or have a tremendous ability to suppress his gag reflex!," the portly one chortled as he turned to face the two, sporting a wide grin revealing several missing teeth surrounded by a thick, wiry beard resembling a briar patch.

"Stuff it Kamadi," scowled Abscutus. "Do you have it? Is it ready?"

"Of course it is, it's been ready for a few years," replied

Kamadi, feigning offense. Kamadi bent down and retrieved a chest stowed under the workbench. Kamadi opened the chest and pulled out a small ebony box, closed the chest and placed it back under the bench. Kamadi handed the box to Abscutus, then turned to Slovengris and said, "Such a terrible bore with no sense of humor, how do you travel with such a man?"

Slovengris just smirked and said nothing for he found the concept of treating a "sense of humor" as a virtue to be intellectually regressive.

Abscutus opened the ebony case and removed an polished crystal orb about the size of a plum. Dozens of engraved glyphs covered the ball. Abscutus produced a jeweler's loupe from a pocket and studied the sphere intently.

"Do you want the plans you gave me to double check?," Kamadi asked.

Abscutus dismissed the question with a grunt. After a few minutes of examining the crystal orb, Abscutus seemed satisfied and said "It'll do."

"They'll know it's not magic," whispered Kamadi.

"Shut up," Abscutus retorted.

Slovengris judged the 4 men seated across the table to be slightly smarter than the average beast of burden and about as strong, a dangerous combination. Slovengris found it hard to believe that these four could be of any use in their quest for knowledge, but Abscutus had warned not to underestimate the men they were going to meet.

Abscutus removed the ebony box from a shoulder pouch and set it on the table. With slow and deliberate movement, he opened the lid to the box, retrieved the crystal orb, and gently placed it on the table next to its container.

"Well . . . I've shown you mine," Abscutus said as he looked across the table expectantly.

The sole member of the foursome whose eyes displayed an iota of intelligence stared at the crystal sphere sitting on the table. After a moment, the presumed leader asked "Where's the other part?"

Abscutus replied, "You'll see that once I know you have what I want."

The leader stared blankly at Abscutus before giving a nod to one of his henchmen. The henchman lifted a leather satchel from his lap and handed it to the leader. The leader set the satchel on the table, undid the clasp and opened the flap to reveal a sheaf of parchment bound with twine. Abscutus reached a hand across the table and thumbed the sheaf of parchment to make sure it wasn't a bundle of blank sheets. Abscutus stared at the leader for a moment before he removed a bone scroll case from his shoulder pouch, placed it on the table next to the orb and its container, and pushed all three objects toward the brutes. The leader of the brutes pushed the parchment-filled leather satchel toward Abscutus in response. Both sides snatched up their new possessions and began inspecting them closely. Abscutus removed the sheaf of parchment, untied the twine loosely holding it together, and began to scrutinize the pages. The quartet across the table bunched together to gawk at the crystal ball the leader was inspecting.

Abscutus seemed satisfied with the satchel of parchment, looked up at the gruesome foursome, and asked, "Are we good?"

The leader of the brutes uncapped the bone case, pulled the inner scroll out a bit, sniffed it, then asked, "And this is the paper that goes with it?"

"Yeah."

"Then we're good."

Abscutus returned the parchments to the satchel and buckled it close. A mere glance told Slovengris their business had concluded and it was time to leave.

The four ruffians remained seated as the two wizards rose to leave. "Give Garvin my regards and let him know I enjoyed doing business with him," Abscutus

said in the most patronizing tone possible.

The leader snarled, "You were not to mention his name, you know this."

"Oh yes, I'm so sorry. My apologies," Abscutus responded sarcastically before bowing his head and exiting the room at the inn where they had been bartering. Slovengris dutifully followed Abscutus out of the inn and through the meandering maze of streets that was Oesteroth. After just a minute or so of travel Abscutus stopped at the corner of a building and held up his hand for Slovengris to do the same.

Abscutus peered around the corner and said, "Yep, here we are," and pointed to a building across the way. Slovengris recognized the building as the inn they just left. Abscutus whispered to Slovengris, "Closest corner, second floor. That's the room we were just in." Abscutus chuckled under his breath. "Those dumb dipsticks won't be able to resist, I just know it. Now for the fun. Keep an eye on that room."

After about 5 minutes of scoping out the ruffian's room, what Abscutus was expecting to happen...happened. The corner room of the inn exploded in a burst of mystical blue flame, incinerating all objects inside the room (and probably nearby rooms). Abscutus simply grinned, turned to Slovengris and said, "Two lessons. First, never pay for what you don't have to. Second, don't leave loose ends. Let's move."

Kamadi was wrong, Abscutus did have a sense of humor.

Slovengris' zest for adventure diminished with every bug bite. Trekking through humid, deadly jungles was not what Slovengris had envisioned when he imagined questing for powers. Abscutus seemed to be handling himself better; at least he wasn't complaining as much as Slovengris would have expected. The oppressive environment didn't seem to bother their primitive escorts, which added to Slovengris' foul disposition.

Midway through the fourth day of the jungle trek they arrived at their destination. A massive step pyramid

rose from the jungle bed only to be swallowed up by the

jungle canopy. Slovengris was amazed that the gigantic edifice was hidden in the lush jungle vegetation until the squad was almost on top of it. Abscutus engaged the escorts' leader with a combination of monosyllabic grunts and finger gestures that comprised the tribe's language. The leader then issued a command to the 20 tribesmen the chieftain had provided as escorts/guides to the lost marvel. The tribesmen fanned out and began combing the base level of the step pyramid for an entrance. After about 20 minutes of thrashing through the thick jungle brush, a commotion went up where some tribesmen had made a discovery.

Everyone in the expedition convened around the supposed portal, which was a rectangular seam in the stone trimmed with archaic animal hieroglyphics. Abscutus let their escorts attempt to poke and pry at the seam with their spears, and then try to brute force the door open with no success. Abscutus again communicated with the leader, telling him to group his men about 20' back from the door as the two wizards were going to attempt to open the portal. Abscutus explained that staying that far back would keep the tribesmen safe from the wizard's spells, but to be on high alert because once the door was opened, there was no telling what might come out.

The wizards stood facing the portal as the tribesmen watched in awe at the chanting and gesticulations the duo made. When both chanting and movement seemed to reach a fever pitch, the duplicitous dyad whirled around and blasted their escorts to smithereens; a barrage of electric blue missiles launched from Abscutus' fingers while a torrent of flame erupted from Slovengris' hands. Five seconds later, 20 tribesmen and their leader were reduced to a smoldering pile of debris.

While observing the smoking carnage, Slovengris opined, "Were they really loose ends?"

Abscutus shrugged. "Does it matter?"

The two chuckled at Abscutus' retort and turned to face the pyramid's gate. "Wanna try this one?" Abscutus asked Slovengris.

Slovengris said nothing, he just nodded and started

casting a spell.

For 10 years Abscutus and Slovengris left a swath of destruction in their wake. Slovengris was pleased with his youthful observation that the ability to traverse worlds was a far greater power than that wielded by kings. In fact, the magical duo had made a few kings look like complete fools. The two could wring the maximal reward out of any situation, even when not necessary; they just found it amusing to screw others. This blatant, sadistic greed earned them the enmity of many, but those who burned with hatred for Abscutus and Slovengris were bound to their own worlds, while the wizards still had hundreds, if not thousands, of other worlds to exploit.

Others were capable of traversing through the planes in the way that Abscutus did (and some by other methods) but the wizards felt safe at the manse. The two avoided worlds frequently traversed or inhabited by other plane hoppers so they wouldn't accidentally cross someone who could track or follow them. Abscutus, and by extension Slovengris, felt sure the remote secrecy of the manse's location would spare them any deserved reprisals.

The two wizards sat in front of the hearth pondering their options. A small city stood between them and their current objective. After a long draw off the hookah they were smoking, Abscutus absentmindedly suggested, "A plague might make our lives easier, I've done it before." As soon as the words left Abscutus' mouth a thick tension formed between the wizards. Once Abscutus realized what he had just admitted to, he looked over at Slovengris. Slovengris was staring back at Abscutus with a psychotic twinkle in his eye. Abscutus began to wonder if he had created a monster, and how much longer could he control it.

"The possibility entered my mind some years ago that you may have played a part in the scourge that ended my people, whoever they were", Slovengris shrugged. "I'm sure you did what you had to, like we always do."

Hearing these words temporarily mollified Abscutus' concerns about Slovengris. Temporarily. In the back of his mind Abscutus started making plans to rid himself of Slovengris while he was still the more powerful wizard.

Slovengris for his part really didn't care about Abscutus' accidental confession, he had long since quit caring about from whence he came. Deep inside however something changed. Slovengris' loyalty to Abscutus now had an expiration date and the countdown had begun. Slovengris reckoned that while scouring the universe for artifacts, spells and kicks was empowering, he would never know real power as long as he existed in the shadow of Abscutus and started making plans of his own.

USURPATION

Slovengris opened his eyes and stared at the ceiling. The parts of his body Slovengris could feel exuded pain, the rest of his body was numb. Slovengris tried to piece together the events of the previous day. Previous day? Previous week? Slovengris was unsure as he closed his eyes and resumed letting time work its healing magic. It was a week later before Slovengris had the energy to roll out of bed. The mutes who worked in the kitchen had brought him food on a regular basis. At least Slovengris assumed it was them, whenever he roused to consciousness there were fresh victuals waiting for him. Did the kitchen help know? Could they sense it?

Slovengris summoned all his available willpower, fought through the remaining pain and sat up on the side of his bed; he surveyed the room as a whole. The walls, the ceiling, the floor, the furniture were all viewed from a different perspective now that Slovengris owned the manse. At least Slovengris assumed he was the new owner with Abscutus gone. The cooks hadn't tried to poison him and the manse had allowed him back alone. Slovengris was pretty sure he had pulled it off, though not without cost. As Slovengris tried to stand from his sitting position on the bed, fresh pains jolted the body parts which had once been numb.

Slovengris braced himself using a teak staff carved with

the 14 Saints of the Muscati, a now extinct tribe on one of the dozens of worlds the two wizards violated. Slovengris reflected on the time he and Abscutus had spent obtaining the staff. They were pleasant enough memories and contained zero feelings of loss or remorse concerning Abscutus. Slovengris had (quite correctly) assumed Abscutus was on a similar trajectory to becoming a solo act. There was a tipping point in the process of Slovengris getting stronger where he became more of a threat to Abscutus than a dependable asset. Slovengris never once displayed any disloyalty toward Abscutus, but both wizards were shrewd enough to realize the reality of the situation and acted accordingly. It was the weaker of the two, Slovengris, who came out on top.

Garvin. Slovengris heard that name on his first job with Abscutus and on a smattering of jobs after. Slovengris noticed Abscutus would go out of his way to poke Garvin in the eye, even if the payoff seemed paltry. Abscutus would not reveal much about his beef with Garvin when asked. The only thing Abscutus would ever say about Garvin was that he was "a vile worm who recycles filth into scum". Had Slovengris known how apt Abscutus' description of Garvin was, he may have been more selective in choosing an ally, no matter how temporary the arrangement.

Slovengris ambled slowly around the manse leaning on the teak staff. He had always thought a strange bond existed between Abscutus and the manse, as if the manse was a conscious entity. Slovengris was unsure if the manse would accept him as its new master, but early indications were positive.

Slovengris made his way to the room that housed the portal frame. This would be Slovengris' first project, to learn how to operate the portal. While Slovengris would often aid Abscutus in creating an astral portal, he still lacked the strength to do it himself. The most Slovengris was capable of in that department was opening an emergency portal back to the manse, a skill that saved his life after Garvin's double-double-cross (triple cross?). One would think Garvin would have shown some sort of neutral gratitude to having one of his biggest detractors delivered to him on a silver platter, but one would be wrong. Slovengris now understood Abscutus' disdain for Garvin, and planned

retribution far greater than Abscutus' petty harassment. At least the primary objective of ridding the universe of Abscutus had been achieved.

The days turned into weeks which turned into months which turned into years while Slovengris settled into the manse. The observation that a special bond existed between Abscutus and the manse was not unfounded. Slovengris' dreams once again became a medium for communication between mysterious, unknown entities and himself. The dreams usually began the same, with an exasperated Slovengris sifting through piles of unsorted parchments and scattered notes. Then, something would jolt him out of his focused frustration; a sound, a shadow, a chill and his attention would shift. In one dream a shadow bird showed Slovengris the location of a hidden library. In another dream, following the sounds of weeping and wailing of women led him to discover a stash of keys. When Slovengris would awake the information parted would always prove to be accurate. Items would be in the location the dream revealed, previously locked doors would now open.

As the manse revealed more of its secrets to Slovengris, he came to realize why Abscutus felt so safe here. Slovengris also began to wonder how old Abscutus really was, or even how many "masters" (or tenants?) the manse had before Abscutus. It seemed highly doubtful that one individual could be responsible for accumulating so much stuff. Hell, there were probably a dozen or so potential "artifacts" Slovengris and Abscutus had obtained that were still untested or unlocked. As the manse continued to reveal itself, the number of strange, possibly magical objects increased a tenfold.

Slovengris was truly intrigued by the power of the manse, but was met with silence at his attempts to initiate communication. Slovengris was relegated to waiting for the manse to contact him, a passive stance he was loathe to take. In the meantime, Slovengris devoted great effort into poring over the secrets of the manse that had thus far been imparted to him.

Slovengris' power grew as he studied all that had been

revealed in the manse. Some of the manse's secrets shocked even Slovengris. In the 7th year after Abscutus' demise, the manse revealed the location of Abscutus' spell book. Slovengris was elated at this discovery because he now hoped to be able to activate the portal frame. Cabin fever had set in and Slovengris was ready to resume his role as intergalactic trouble maker and score settler.

Abscutus' spell book provided the missing keys to open an astral portal using the empty frame. The first time Slovengris generated a portal he stared at it for 10 minutes before screwing up the courage to step through, quite a contrast from his 13 year old self who by a stroke of luck re-activated a dormant portal and entered without hesitation. When Slovengris emerged on the other side of his first official portal unscathed, the sickening smile that curled on his lips would have made a slug feel slimy.

It took a few years of visiting worlds where he had no, or very few, enemies, re-establishing contacts and scouting new worlds to be plundered before Slovengris really threw himself back into his work. Slovengris picked up where he and Abscutus had left off: wringing as much out of a deal as possible and serving it up with a side of cruelty because Slovengris found that funny. Others didn't find Slovengris' cruelty quite as amusing and he quickly amassed a lengthy list of enemies.

RETRIBUTION

Slovengris reached the crest of the last hill before the rendezvous location. As he gazed down into the scrub filled valley, Slovengris reflected that everything about this world was red: the sun, the infertile hard pan and what little flora existed were all shades of crimson.

"And it's about to get a lot redder," Slovengris chuckled to himself.

Re-scanning the valley Slovengris noticed his contacts had arrived at the meet location. Slovengris had not chosen the location for the exchange but worried little because it was an open area in the middle of nowhere, no room for an ambush. Another nit nagged the back

of Slovengris' mind: he preferred meets much closer to his open portal should things get hairy. Slovengris reassured himself there was nothing to worry about, this was a small stakes deal with low class thugs; he could disintegrate them with a snap if things went south, though he planned to have a little more "fun" with them.

Slovengris nudged the oversized lizard locals used as steeds and crept slowly into the valley. When Slovengris was about 50 yards from his destination, he dismounted his reptilian transport and walked the rest of the way, a strategy that allowed Slovengris to once more scan the area for a potential ambush. As he continued, Slovengris inspected the octet he was to meet. They stood side by side, clad in full length coats, wide brimmed hats and balaclavas to protect from the elements. Slovengris didn't notice any elements. It was supposed to be a basic exchange: Slovengris' bag of gold for an ivory idol the size of a pineapple. The idol was not native to this area, the party Slovengris was to meet had acquired the object and smuggled it out of its homeland. It was not known if this idol possessed any real special properties, but often objects of power remained dormant or inert until their secrets were pried from the artifact or the artifact chose to reveal itself, like the jade stone in Slovengris' ring. The backstory on this idol made it an interesting enough acquisition. The asking price was a bit steep, but Slovengris didn't plan on paying.

Slovengris stopped about 10 feet from the group he was to meet. The tall one in the middle appeared to be the one he had talked to in the city, but it was hard to tell with their faces covered. Slovengris stood across from the double quartet, appraising the situation and waiting for someone to speak. After a full minute of silence, that someone was Slovengris.

"Show me the idol," the irritated wizard commanded.

The tall one (whom Slovengris assumed was his contact) unbuckled the strap on his shoulder satchel, lifted the flap and removed an ivory statuette. As Slovengris eyed the idol a humming sound filled his ears and the idol began to glow. In an instant the glow went from a soft white aura to a blazing blinding light, catching Slovengris off guard. By the time an

infuriated Slovengris tried to react to the trap it was too late. Milliseconds after being blinded Slovengris experienced the sensation of a hundred hot metal wires shooting up from the ground into his feet, up his legs and spreading over his entire body. In an instant these unseen bonds had paralyzed Slovengris and began pulling him into the rocky ground. Slovengris fought with all his might to free himself and cast a spell to end this madness, but the invisible wires held fast and continued to pull Slovengris into the earth. Slovengris' descent into terra firma ended when his chin hit the ground.

The blinding light abated and Slovengris tried to focus on the betrayers. When Slovengris' eyes adjusted and he could see them again, he attempted to imprint every minor detail of the thugs into his mind so he could identify them for later retribution. Surely none of these oafs is a wizard, the true origin of Slovengris' bonds had to be elsewhere.

The tall one spoke. "Slovengris the scumbag, that's what you're known as in most circles, in case you were wondering. You messed with the wrong person, the wrong person who has hired us as his instrument of vengeance. If it was up to me your head would already be separated from your shoulders, but our client had other desires."

The leader looked to his right and two of the thugs approached the helpless Slovengris. One of the thugs moved behind Slovengris to hold his head steady while the other thug brandished a device that looked like a corkscrew and a fruit picker had a kid. Unfortunately for Slovengris he correctly surmised what was coming as the implement of destruction was plunged into his right eye. Slovengris' head exploded with intense white hot pain as the device finished its job of removing the eye. With his one good eye Slovengris watched as his eyeball was deposited into a jar of liquid held by another thug. A second searing blast of pain and Slovengris saw no more as he heard his second eye splash into the jar of liquid. No further words were spoken as Slovengris' torturers departed and left Slovengris to his fate. The fury inside Slovengris only grew as a voice inside his mind kept telling him this was the end...and even if he survived somehow what would he do with no eyes? Slovengris was surely

destined to die here, probably by having his head devoured by scavengers while he was unable to defend himself.

After an hour Slovengris was ejected from the ground, butt naked, like a carnivore regurgitating a piece of rancid meat. Slovengris, with eternal optimism fueled by hate, began to plot his comeback, one step at a time. Mentally he recalled what he remembered observing about the area. Slovengris recalled a small cave nearby and, summoning his last little bit of willpower, located the small hole and crawled in. Slovengris examined his situation; he was in an unfamiliar world with no resources, no eyes and no possessions, not even clothes. As Slovengris drifted off to sleep, part of him hoped he would not wake.

For whatever reason, death did not come for Slovengris as he lay in the cave for hours. A significant part of Slovengris wanted to live. Three days after crawling in the cave Slovengris heard the sound of horses and wagons passing in the distance. Slovengris' optimism drove him to action for he hoped the sound was that of a merchant train was passing. Slovengris figured if he could follow the sound of the caravan, they would lead him to a city where he at least had a chance to exist. Begging offered slim chance at rebuilding, but he had a brain too, which he reckoned gave him an edge.

Slovengris was in luck for it was a merchant caravan he was able to follow to a smallish city and was even able to scrounge food in their wake along with some rags to cover his modesty.

If Slovengris had anything, it was a powerful mind, and he put it to good use, at first. As a beggar he naturally turned into a spy of sorts, overhearing all kinds of information, information he was able to profit from (neighborhood spats, a bit of blackmail on an unfaithful spouse, that sort of thing) but he could never get too far ahead for being blind made it too easy for others to get one over on him.

For three years Slovengris begged on the streets, but he lived a better life than that of a typical beggar. Slovengris could occasionally afford a meal or a bed for the night. Slovengris could do this because of the low level scams he could pull, and he sated his sadism by

taking it out on his beggar brethren.

During this time as a beggar, as Slovengris huddled in a dirty alley, trying to find some respite from the elements, he would often dwell on the fact he owned a spacious abode elsewhere. The thought of him having been done wrong, where he was versus where he should be, filled him with intense fury. This fury was not of lashing out, burning rage, it was deep and calm and calculating. It was during these times Slovengris' insanity flourished.

One day Slovengris was posted up in a usual spot with plenty of foot traffic when his now exceptionally keen ears heard something unusual. Over the past 3 years Slovengris had developed the ability to determine a number of traits about a person based on the sounds of their footsteps. Of course general things like height, age, weight but also more specific traits like job, status and whether one was local or visiting. This ability wasn't 100% accurate, but it was accurate enough to give Slovengris a leg up given his circumstances.

What he heard on this day was definitely the gait of someone who was not local to this city nor the surrounding areas. Slovengris began to wonder if this individual was from this world. Intrigued, Slovengris listened intently at the footsteps heading in his direction. Unexpectedly, the footsteps stopped right in front of Slovengris.

The stranger spoke the "universal parlance" in an accent unfamiliar to Slovengris.

"Brother, you do not seem the frail type who was born blind and has been a beggar all his life. You had a life before and unfortunate happenings have brought you to this low position, correct?"

Slovengris lifted his face as if to look at the stranger and replied with a sneer "Fantastic, you can tell which beggar is slightly less starving than the rest. Congratulations, you win a prize! That prize being you get to donate to my retirement bowl. And since I can tell you're not from around these parts, I'll let you know the customary donation amount is 5 silver pennies." Slovengris' keen hearing detected a light whirring sound caused by the grinding of thin metal pieces. The

stranger continued, unfazed: “I can also see that you have other powers which lay dormant since you lost your sight.”

At this revelation Slovengris bristled, how could he know? Was he a wizard also? Was it one of his past enemies looking for him? A hired hitman? Did the stranger want to learn Slovengris’ secrets and then dispose of him? All of Slovengris’ instincts told him to run until the stranger uttered a sentence that froze Slovengris: “I can help you get your sight back.”

SALVATION

Avallish was a devotee to a relatively new power in this solar system known as Qin Tantos (keen taunt-ohs). Qin Tantos is an amalgam of a deranged Artificial Intelligence which became corrupted in the post apocalyptic ruins of a highly advanced civilization and of hundreds of organic beings he has “absorbed” in an attempt to know what it means to have a “life” or “existence”. After conquering the very planet whose ancient inhabitants had created Qin Tantos, he set out in search of more knowledge on other worlds. Qin Tantos surmised the answers to his questions about “life” and “existence” were out there, he just needed to find them. Qin Tantos realized that while subjugation was the best method for gaining control of his home planet*, draconian tactics would not work everywhere and be cost prohibitive. Qin Tantos studied works on mind control and religions to develop strategies on how to attract and control the manpower needed to hunt down lost tomes, artifacts, databases and so on that existed on other worlds. An emissary of Qin Tantos would scout out the world they wished to infiltrate; learn about the beings that lived there, the history of the planet and local lore, all the information

*(something Qin Tantos viewed through his deranged logic as an inherently “good” act because the way Qin Tantos understood good versus evil as being: “good” = correct, right, “evil” = wrong, bad. Thus, the correct thing to do is to seek the knowledge which Qin Tantos desires and if conquering his own planet to gain the resources to fuel this search was necessary, then it was the correct thing to do, thus “good”)

one would need to know to set up an effective local cult.

Cults of Qin Tantos begin springing up on worlds near Qin Tantos’ home planet. Qin Tantos’ deranged logic resulted in his tenets being interpreted in wildly different ways. On one world the cult of Qin Tantos might be a bunch of blood thirsty murder cannibals whereas on another world the cult of Qin Tantos might be a bunch of peace loving orgy hippies.

Avallish was one of Qin Tantos’ first and most effective proselytizers, starting numerous sects. Avallish worked extra hard for Qin Tantos for in his heart he owed Qin Tantos a tremendous debt. Avallish also had an accident of sorts that left him blinded. Qin Tantos rewarded Avallish’s devotion by restoring his eyesight. In the mind of Avallish this was the most marvelous and miraculous magic he had ever imagined. To Qin Tantos it was what ancient scientists and engineers called cybernetics, the fusion of the mechanical and the organic, a subject of great interest to Qin Tantos. Avallish’s new “eye” not only enabled him to see again, it made him a more effective agent for Qin Tantos.

Avallish was scouting a new world for Qin Tantos when he found Slovengris. Avallish’s cybernetic eye could detect remnants of arcane power, the magic Slovengris once wielded that was hobbled by his blindness. Sensing an opportunity to strengthen the upper echelons of Qin Tantos’ organization, Avallish dangled the carrot of sight restoration in front of Slovengris, an offer he figured Slovengris could nigh refuse.

Slovengris was caught off guard with the offer to restore his sight. It seemed preposterous on it’s face, but the stranger spoke with earnestness and confidence and Slovengris’ keen ears could detect no falter in the stranger’s offer. Slovengris stood straight up from his seated lotus position and said to the stranger, “Let’s talk”.

As they walked to an inn, the stranger introduced himself as Avallish and Slovengris did the same. “You must have your ear to the ground in this neck of the

woods, at which inn would you recommend we stay?”, asked Avallish.

Slovengris grunted and shrugged, “Just head to the Bronze Pony. The proprietor Ralph is the least priggish inn keep and the beer is the least likely to contain piss.”

“Heh, with an endorsement like that who can refuse?”

Avallish booked adjoining rooms at the Bronze Pony and ordered sumptuous meals for each. The two dined together in the quiet of their quarters. Avallish was the first to speak as he regaled Slovengris with the tenets of Qin Tantos and the story of how he lost his eyesight in the service of Qin Tantos. Avallish then went on to explain how Qin Tantos restored his sight and now he could see even better, and even see things he couldn't before. Things like the fact Slovengris could wield the powers of the arcane. Slovengris listened intently. Was it some sort of magic that grew back these super eyes? Slovengris had gone over in his mind a million times for a magical solution to his predicament, was there ever some sort of regenerative spell he had read about. Slovengris had run this topic over in his mind so much he wasn't sure which information was legitimate and which information was delusional.

Avallish reached a stopping point in his recitation about the power and glory of Qin Tantos and concentrated on his dinner. After five minutes of silence, Avallish invited Slovengris to share his background and talk about how one capable of wielding such powers comes to find himself in such a lowly situation. Slovengris bristled at this suggestion. “I got my eyes gouged out by a gang of rent-a-thugs who were hired by an unknown malcontent I screwed over” isn't exactly resume building material and Slovengris needed to play this cool, at least until he regained his sight.

Slovengris merely asked, “When can I meet Qin Tantos?”

“Patience”, advised Avallish. “I still have much to accomplish on this world and I need to tell Qin Tantos about you, he would certainly want to know a bit about your background before he spends his ever so valuable time meeting with you. Qin Tantos might not want to expend the effort on just a blind beggar, no matter what

kind of power he used to wield.” Avallish was semi-bluffing, he would certainly gain favor with Qin Tantos for bringing him a wizard like Slovengris, but Avallish was no stranger to mind games. Avallish could tell Slovengris was a man of action and not used to taking orders from others, and now just a whiff of getting his sight, and his power, back enabled Slovengris to revert to his old self. What willpower to cope with a drastic change in fortune and status, to live as a beggar. Slovengris would be a force to be reckoned with when he regained his eyesight, but he would be Qin Tantos' problem by that point.

“It's just that the story is rather complex and I don't want to re-live the events leading up to my maiming more than necessary. I have done what I can to forget about that terrible day, and would rather dredge up those memories once more in my existence”, Slovengris lied. The events leading up to having his eyes gouged out replayed daily in the mind's eye of Slovengris as he etched the memories of those responsible into his gray matter. No, he would never forget that day.

“Ah, certainly, I understand such traumatic events can be difficult and painful to recall. Gather your thoughts and rest, we will stay here for some days, perhaps a few weeks. In between errands I need to run, I can instruct you in the teachings of Qin Tantos. Mayhaps his philosophies will open your mind and inspire you to be more forthcoming with us.”

Avallish stood, opened the door, and called for the help to remove their now empty dinner trays. After the servant left, Avallish retreated to his room. “Til tomorrow then, enjoy the night indoors” Avallish said before closing the door that connected the two rooms.

Slovengris noted the comment was a tad condescending, but at the same time truthful as he fumbled his way to the bed and fell fast asleep.

As the days passed a regular diet and a place to exist without constantly looking over one's shoulder did wonders for Slovengris' disposition. If this was some sort of elaborate setup or ruse, then the perpetrators were doing a fantastic job of lowering Slovengris'

defenses. Sometimes Avallish would be gone for 2 or 3 days, but more often just a few hours. When Avallish was around he was either poring through sheafs of paper or books he acquired on his jaunts, or he was proselytizing to Slovengris about Qin Tantos. Slovengris didn't mind Avallish's constant talking about Qin Tantos, in fact the opposite. The tenets and deranged logic of Qin Tantos spoke to an intelligent, power hungry being in the early stages of insanity like Slovengris.

During their talks Avallish would often ask Slovengris to reveal more about his past. Slovengris was averse to telling lies in this situation, but still did not think the truth would serve him well either. Slovengris was weary of Avallish's "super-eyes" that could "see" his power, could they also "see" lies? Slovengris decided it was in his best interest not to lie, though in his mind that did not equal telling the truth. Slowly Slovengris started revealing basic facts about his background, mainly about his youth when he could still be considered "innocent". Slovengris relayed facts like he was an orphan taken in by a wizard to be a servant, he displayed natural talent, his mentor didn't like it but reluctantly took him on as an apprentice and so on. When Avallish would ask Slovengris to elaborate on a point or provide more information than he was willing to, Slovengris would withdraw for the day and say no more.

Slovengris showed great interest in the teachings of Qin Tantos, something that gave Avallish some hope. The acquisition of power through knowledge was a goal Slovengris could intimately relate to. Qin Tantos' twisted logic of rationalization concerning the acquisition of power appealed to Slovengris and he envisioned how to use this logic to his advantage.

After spending 23 days at the Bronze Pony, Avallish informed Slovengris it was time for them to depart. Avallish told Slovengris that Qin Tantos was willing to meet him, but he could make no promises as to the disposition of Slovengris' sight. Slovengris wasn't worried, he was prepared and fully confident he could say the correct things to win Qin Tantos over and gain his sight back.

Slovengris was not impressed with the means by which

him and Avallish were transported to Qin Tantos' home world. To Slovengris the process felt like every fiber of his being was briefly torn asunder and then instantly put back together. It was a little disconcerting to Slovengris that one with so much supposed power was unable to smoothly transition his minions from place to place. (Slovengris took his own ability to hop from plane to plane for granted and assumed the ability was more widespread than it was.) It occurred to Slovengris that he may have another bargaining chip when dealing with Qin Tantos.

Slovengris was given a room in a building that was almost entirely made of metal; metal floors, metal walls, metal ceiling, sliding metal doors. It all seemed very cold to Slovengris, though he could remember visiting places with buildings like this before, with his mentor. After a week of more proselytizing by devotees other than Avallish, the time arrived to have an audience with Qin Tantos.

After a cleansing that seemed more ritualistic than practical, Slovengris was taken to a room unlike the others he had been in. Whereas the other rooms had a reverberation to them on account of their metal construction, this room was eerily quiet. No footsteps were heard as his escort led Slovengris into the room before leaving. Slovengris' keen ears could detect no sounds in this room for an eternal two minutes. Then there was a soft, throaty glup, undetectable by most. Following the gulp was a raspy moan, slightly louder. More visceral moans and grunts percolated up to the realm of discernible sound only to be cut short by the deadening acoustic properties of the room. A soft metallic voice that sounded like it had a hundred other different voices almost perfectly stacked on top of it spoke, "So you are the one Avallish spoke of, the one called Slovengris." Slovengris could hear a light, whirring noise around him and the air surrounding his body started pulsating hot and cold. Slovengris inhaled deeply and waited for the strange voice to continue.

"Yes, you are quite experienced in wielding powers of the arcane, I can read that in your blood," the voice observed. "Tell us, how did Slovengris come to acquire the command of arcane power? And how does one who can wield that kind of power end up a blind beggar in the streets of Navhom? It is a story we would much like

to hear.”

“We? Us?”, asked a confused Slovengris. “What is the meaning of this, I am here to speak with Qin Tantos only, not a crowd.”

A moment of silence followed Slovengris’ question before the voice continued, “You can hear the other voices, most interesting. This room is designed to filter those voices for the rare times I must communicate with one in this manner.”

“To answer your question, we are Qin Tantos. I am Qin Tantos, they are me and we are one. You are in the presence of the one you seek Slovengris, I am Qin Tantos and we are ready to hear your story.”

Slovengris had been preparing for this moment and conveyed his well planned history to Qin Tantos. Slovengris started factually enough, there wasn’t much to conceal about being an orphan who lucked his way into magical tutelage. When Slovengris started telling Qin Tantos about the “jobs” Slovengris and Abscutus would pull, he started articulating his tale in a very Qin Tantosian fashion. Each mission was a glorious struggle in the most noble pursuit of knowledge, an unimpeachable motivation to be certain. Every being who stood in the way of their acquisition of knowledge, even innocent guards just doing their jobs, were malicious actors conspiring to keep the heroic knowledge seekers from reaching their goals. Former allies who were betrayed by Slovengris and Abscutus became minions of evil simply by the virtue of being betrayed by those they trusted. Abscutus himself became an antagonist when Slovengris correctly surmised his intentions and merely acted in self defense. Slovengris described his solo exploits in the same manner, up until the great tragedy of his tale when his eyes were gouged out by savage know-nothings.

Any rational being listening to Slovengris recite his tale would think the narrator a tremendous scumbag and insane to boot, describing his actions as righteous and good.

Qin Tantos was not a rational being.

“Therefore I beseech you great Qin Tantos, if what Avallish tells me is true and it is withing your power, please restore my sight, give me my power back, restore me to my old self and I will gladly share all knowledge I already know and shall find in the future with the great Qin Tantos, I shall gladly share the glorious name of Qin Tantos wherever I travel, I shall gladly share my secrets of the Arcane with esteemed Qin Tantos, I shall gladly share my power!”

A sensation Slovengris had not felt in since he lost his sight welled up inside him, the sensation of magic flowing through his body. The vibrations coursing through his body rose to levels that rivaled the greatest spells he had cast in his previous life. The internal sensations grew so strong Slovengris became concerned it would blow his body apart. Slovengris felt it was almost to the breaking point when the arcane power exploded out of his body, rushing out in a steady flow in every direction. Slovengris felt the magic reach out beyond what he perceived to be the boundaries of the room, and engulf an entity which was unfathomably complex to Slovengris.

Slovengris had inadvertently created the Patron Bond spell for Qin Tantos. All future Patron Bond to Qin Tantos spells would use Slovengris’ narration and ending plea as a framework.

Two minutes of heavy silence filled the quiet room after Slovengris’ tale and subsequent arcane explosion. Qin Tantos then spoke, “We are already better off just having interacted with you the short time we have. Your show of devotion leaves little doubt to your sincerity. We will restore your sight in the manner which we are able.”

PARAPHERNALIA

The former is meant to be a brief vignette into the background of Slovengris; there is much more about his past to be divulged, and his future, well, that’s what we’re trying to determine, right? At present, four things work together to make Slovengris seemingly invincible: 1) the Jade Ring, 2) the Cybernetic Eye, 3) the Jump Ship, and 4) the Manse.

1. The Jade Ring - Stolen from Abscutus' office when Slovengris was a lad, the stone in the Jade Ring was Slove's first connection to the world of the arcane. Unlike similar stones of lore, this one did not dissipate in power, in fact it grew in power as Slovengris did for a few years before leveling off. It's been a consistent source of arcane power for Slovengris and gives him a bonus to all spell checks as well as an AC bonus and half damage when a spell he currently knows is cast at him.

The Jade Ring was briefly lost when Slovengris was sucked into the earth before his eyes got gouged out. Slove had investigated the scene looking for his lost possessions but found none. When Slovengris returned to the Manse he found the Jade Ring sitting on the dresser in his room.

2. The Cybernetic Eye - The great gift bestowed by Qin Tantos to Slovengris restoring his sight and giving him great powers. Not only was Slovengris able to see as he could before, he could also zoom in to focus on very minute details or objects far in the distance. The Cybernetic Eye granted infravision and the ability to detect magical auras. The eye has a 240 degree field of vision, roughly twice that of normal human sight.

Since the eye had to extend its wire tendrils into Slovengris' brain to transmit the visual information, this connection was used to send information in the other direction and a miniature drive is used to store his thoughts and memories as well as the visual data. This information is transmitted back to the manse regularly to use if needed to create a new Slovengris.

Lastly the eye has a compartment that stores a thousands of nanobots that scour Slovengris' body nonstop, repairing damaged tissue and monitoring his systems. These nanobots cause Slovengris to heal much faster than a normal human.

3. The Jump Ship - The Jump Ship is Slovengris' own creation designed both to look cool and to enable him to flee at a moments notice. The look of the ship was inspired by images of flying craft in sacred knowledge Qin Tantos shared with Slovengris but the principles it operates on are arcane, like a flying carpet. Its purpose began as an exploratory device, but became a useful

retreat tactic also.

More common and precise world travel requires some sort of knowledge of the destination, depending on the skill of the caster. It is through this method that Slovengris quickly and easily returns to the manse. One problem with this method is skilled wizards may be able to re-open the portal if they get to it quick enough after it closes, like Slovengris accidentally did as a young man. Therefore it isn't prudent when fleeing a sticky situation to teleport straight to the manse lest someone follow and learn the location of the hideout.

Slovengris also faced the problem of safely exploring new worlds which his Jump Ship solved nicely. Since Slovengris didn't have even second hand knowledge of some of the worlds he wanted to visit, he developed method to approximate locations using the observatory. The portals to these approximate locations usually opened high above the ground in the atmosphere, which he could traverse in the Jump Ship and safely navigate the new world without fear of teleporting into lava, or the middle of an ocean, or the middle of desert, and so on. Anyone who followed would come through the exit portal and fall hundreds of feet to their death.

Creating the Jump Ship is a ritual that lasts 24 hours and requires three different spells to be cast. When the ritual is complete the ship is ready to be activated at Slovengris' prompting, the destination pre-determined. When the activation phrase is intoned the portal comes to life with a swirling, electrified mist. A hum fills the room, the ship dissipates in a grainy fade out, a brilliant flash follows and the portal goes dormant.

4. The Manse - While the Manse is a mountain of mysteries wrapped in enigmas, we will briefly touch on one of the newer additions to the property: Slovengris' resurrection chamber. Fusing Qin Tantos' technological powers with Slovengris' command of the arcane they were able to create a system that would "build" a new Slovengris in case he died, complete with thoughts, knowledge and memories up until the moment of his death (or, extremely close).

The resurrection chamber has only been used a few times. Slovengris was in no hurry to test the process himself and when it finally happened, he didn't like it.

The process to create a new Slovengris takes 6 months.

The resurrection chamber makes Slovengris nearly invincible. In order to put a stop to Slovengris once and for all, the characters will need to learn the location of the Manse, mount an assault on the Manse and destroy the resurrection chamber.

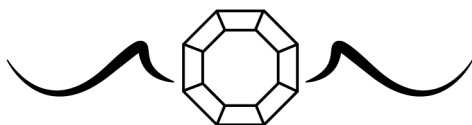
The Res Chamber exists as a fail safe and can be a source of great fun in the game. Your players get some lucky rolls in and manage to take out Slovengris. No big deal, they can strut around, collect rewards and accolades and then BAM!, old Slove's back in the picture. Oh the weeping and wailing when Slovengris shows back up.

Further details about these artifacts will be presented in later volumes, but this information should be plenty for a GM to get a feel for the character that is Slovengris.

In Case of Death - Should Slovengris perish, if he has a Jump Ship prepared it vanishes as soon as Slovengris' life force dissipates. Likewise the Jade Ring teleports itself back to the Manse upon Slovengris' death. Once function in the brain ceases, the Cybernetic Eye will immediately empty it's drives sending all the information back to the Manse to be implanted in a new Slovengris. Once this is finished, the Cybernetic Eye will self destruct by releasing the liquid contents of two small chambers that when combined create an extremely potent acid turning the eye in to blob of metal. The self destruct process is complete roughly 30 seconds after Slovengris' death.

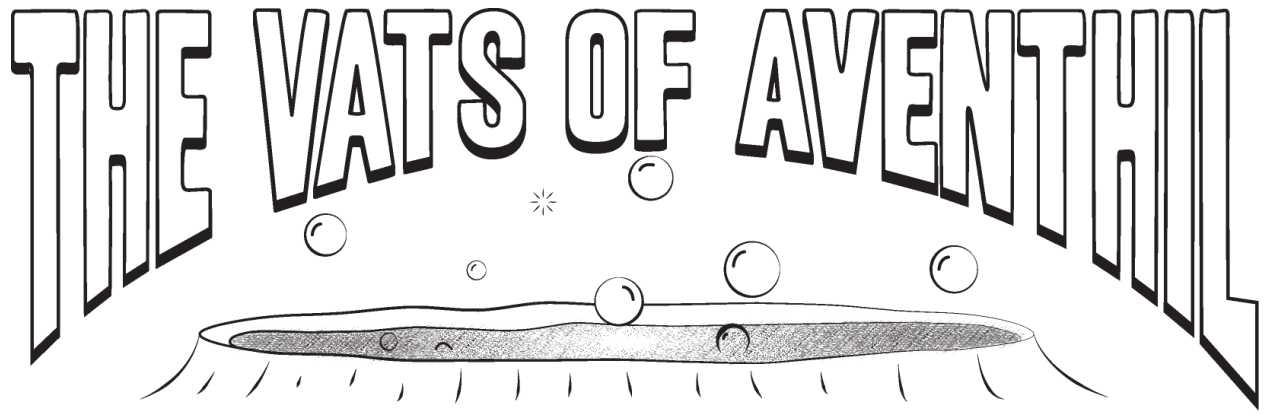


PART 2



THE VATS
OF AVENTHIL

THE VATS OF AVENTHILL



BACKGROUND

Having to flee a country/world/dimension at a moment's notice was nothing unusual to Slovengris, but the randomness of a haphazard retreat really bit him in the arse this time. Wounded and not in full control of his journey, Slovengris crash landed in a desolate crag of an unknown world. The rambunctious entry aroused the attention of a barbarous mountain tribe who investigated the big boom and shiny lights. Slovengris convinced the primitives that he was a god sent to lead them using his cybernetic eye to wow them.

What little communication occurred with the tribe leaders during Slovengris' two week recuperation led him to believe there was a trade route a few days hike to the south. Conscripting a band of "sacred warriors", Slovengris set off with his minions to a slightly less depressing area of this planet.

Slovengris could have done the ritual to re-assemble his ship and leave at any time, but a few things kept him here. First, Slovengris wasn't sure where he was and wanted to ascertain his locale for certain before making another blunder. Second, it would be good to lay low until the situation from which Slovengris was fleeing settled down: if he didn't know where he was, then others most likely didn't either. Third, though Slovengris derives some power through the Gods of Logic, he greatly reveres the Gods of Randomness and pays them heed. Untapped power could reside here attempting to attract someone intelligent enough to harness and appreciate it. Slovengris figured he might

as well look around.

A few weeks of successful raids on easy targets traversing the trade route had Slovengris' newfound minions in high spirits, but the quality of goods appropriated from the travelers did not inspire the wizard. Slovengris ordered his minions to pull back to the hills and let things settle as they had surely attracted the attention of a local authority by this point. Laying low would give Slovengris time to examine what he had learned about this world thus far.

The band of miscreants found shelter in the remains of an ancient structure, overgrown, weathered and nearly enveloped by the hillside. The tribe folk were leery about setting up camp here as they claimed similar sites in the mountains were haunted or bad luck. Slovengris assured his warriors they had nothing to worry about while secretly hoping they did.

On the third day of the party's residence at the ruins, two tribesmen, Pulk and Wod, got inebriated and wrestled to the great delight of their kin. Pulk lifted Wod over his head and threw him into pile of debris. Wod fell through the pile of debris with a crash and disappeared.

When Slovengris was informed that his minions had discovered a passage down into some cellars his mood brightened slightly. When Slovengris was informed that only half of the first party to check out the ruins had come back alive and they were a gibbering mess, he arched an eyebrow and decided to investigate the underground cellar himself.

Slovengris banished the evil spirits that occupied

the cellar his men discovered. Slovengris then led a contingent of tribesmen through a network of excavated passages that led to natural earthen tunnels. It was in these natural tunnels that Slovengris actually smiled for he found 3 bubbling pools of most unusual substance. His warriors were now turned into workers as Slovengris ordered them to set up a more permanent residence at this locale as experiments using the substances began.

The first subjects Slovengris used were weaker members of his squad. Though the fourth experiment was successful, the first three were fatal, so new, non-tribesmen subjects were needed. Small raiding parties hit outlying farms for supplies as well as new test subjects. Fearful of rousing more attention, Slovengris implored his tribesmen guard to be crafty in their raids but deep down he knew this was a fool's task and his time on this world would be limited. Slovengris made the proper arrangements to facilitate his eventual sudden departure.

The results of Slovengris' experiments varied, but all who survived went through profound changes. Some of the more powerful mutants could not be restrained and were let loose into the wilds, while others content with their new powers stayed to serve. Slovengris secretly delighted in thinking about the mutant creations that couldn't be controlled wreaking havoc over an unsuspecting world of rubes he considered his inferiors.

INTRODUCTION

The Vats of Aventhil is an adventure designed for a party of 3-5 characters, level 4 or 5, which can stand on it's own as a one shot or can be used to introduce that pesky Astral Wizard Slovengris. See Part 1 of this volume for a history of Slovengris.

An attempt was made make this scenario flexible enough to shoehorn into any campaign while still providing enough substance for an enjoyable standalone adventure. All one would need to fit this scenario into an existing campaign is a location for the Forgotten Ruins that makes sense. Use your existing

world in place of the Forsaken Hills and whatever hook would fit your milieu.

If running this stand alone, or using this scenario to start a campaign dealing with Slovengris, and don't already have an existing world, brief almanac of the surrounding area is provided so the GM can fill in details as needed. If the party continues after Slovengris, they won't be on this world for very long.

LOCAL ALMANAC

World Name: Clessia

Target Location: The Forgotten Ruins

Nearby Settlements:

Tugton (pop 500) - Mayor Eddon

Taverns/Inns: The Dancing Bull, The Splintered Plow

1.5 days of travel to the Forgotten Ruins, 2 days of travel to Rivelin Keep

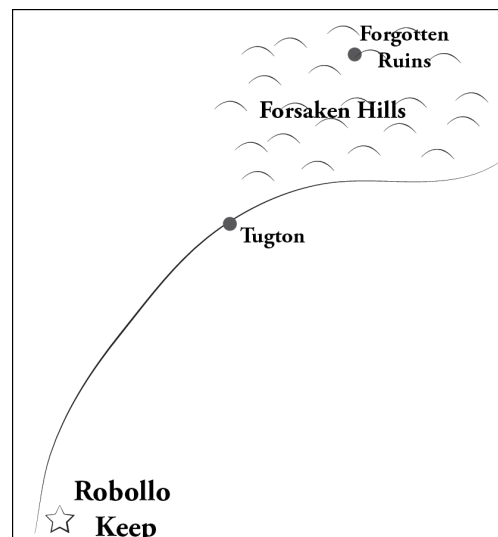
Robollo Keep - Lord Robollo, Lord of the Lands

Taverns/Inns: The Gilded Griffon, Barky's Emerald Den, The Flagstaff (dive, no inn)

3.5 days of travel to the Forgotten Ruins, 2 days of travel to Tugton

General:

Temperate Climate, current season is fall
Standard middle ages technology





Three hooks are included to get you started. Use whichever one you like or just d3 it.

1. The Lord of the Land

The party has been summoned by the local leader Lord Robollo about an opportunity. The party really wasn't given a choice, but with the coin amounts bandied about in the invite, they likely would have attended anyway. The party is led through the main hall down a side passage to the Lord's office.

Seated behind his desk, the Lord looks up and dismisses the guards so that y'all are alone in the room. Ravelin stands and moves to the front of his desk as he starts speaking.

"Let's not mince words, I hear you are the type who can handle themselves in tough situations, is this true?"

-briefly interact with characters then continue-

"Do you recall hearing about a bandit issue around the northern bend area of the main road about 6 months ago? Just kinda, went away?" Without a pause he dismissively waves his hand. "Doesn't matter if you did, but they were starting to be a serious problem. My men had a few encounters with the bandits, they were led by some", and now pause and glance at any would be spell caster in the room. Ravelin continues, "magical type. A spellcaster and I ain't talkin the local healers. They handled my soldiers with little problems before scurrying back into the hills. When the robberies abated, I was hoping they'd left the area for good, headed for greener pastures."

"Recently we had reports from the countryside about grotesqueries pillaging and people disappearing. I would have just chalked it up to peasant superstition, a rabid bear or something . . . natural." Ravelin pauses again to draw a deep breath, and continues: "but my master huntsman observed one of these creatures himself.

A great hulking beast, mannish in most aspects save for tusks growing out of its jaws and a reddish hue to its skin. The huntsman slew the creature, then tracked its path of destruction backward. The trail led to a ruined keep ignored by locals and forgotten by most for it was just a pile of rubble. Yet the huntsman found our missing bandits, a small cadre at least, and they appeared to be keeping watch."

"Exhausted and having suffered a wound during battle with the beast, the huntsman returned with the information I've just relayed to you. If what my huntsman tells me is even a fraction true, this situation needs to be dealt with immediately which is why I've summoned y'all. Find out what the bandits are doing at the ruins and put an end to whatever schemes that mage might be concocting and you will each earn 750 gold pieces. You will be provided with horses, rations and other reasonable supplies. I believe this will take special talents, talents I hope y'all possess. What say you, are you up to task or should I look for others? Time is of the essence!"

2. The Mayor of Tugton

A portly man shuffles up to the table where the party is seated (or whatever location he might find them doing whatever) and nervously introduces himself as the Mayor of the village.

"Uh, greetings fine folk, I'm Eddon, mayor of of this here village we call Tugton." The man takes a deep breath and pauses a moment before continuing. "We do well enough with the little trade route that runs through the village and we're blessed with some fertile fields around, but it's not often we get those of, um, your . . . stature passing though here and we're remote enough the Lord generally ignores us, and you see, well . . . we have this problem and thought, maybe we could hire you to fix it", the mayor quickly rambles in a single breath.

After a brief rest he continues, "As I was saying, we're blessed with some fertile soil in these parts but lately those who work the fields have been harassed by bandits not only taking goods that aren't rightly theirs but people too! That's the scariest part is these ruffians are making off with people for who knows what purposes." The mayor visibly shudders at whatever passed

his mind.

After nervously eyeing the party the mayor offers “We can pay you 500 gold [or 100 gp x # in party, whichever is higher I’d say] if you can bring an end to this mess. If you find some of our kidnapped and missing folk, I’m sure their kin would be quite thankful if you helped them get home safe too.” The Mayor fidgets nervously while awaiting an answer from the party.

3. The Sad Farmer

The GM will need to provide the set up concerning how the party meets the farmer, whether the farmer approaches them in a tavern, has a notice posted, flags them down on the side of the road, etc.

The man is on in years and has quite a somber look about him. His face hangs so heavy you wonder if he is even capable of smiling. He sighs morosely and begins, “I’m just a poor farmer with little to offer, but you look like the type who might take on the kind of work I’m looking to hire.”

After basic assent/agreement the farmer tells his story.

“There was a little talk about folks being accosted by strange creatures, enough to raise an eyebrow and take basic precautions, which we did. But that didn’t stop these vile wretches from taking everything I had, and they did it with no small cunning.”

The farmer inhales deeply and continues, “Ten nights ago I awaken to the sound of the hounds barking and the smell of smoke. Get up to find my barn is on fire. Me and my son Carl went to try and save as many of the animals as we could. While we was dealing with the barn, the evil creatures made off with my daughter, Suzella. It’s just the three of us that live there on account their mother passed a few years back.”

“It wasn’t until we had cleared the barn of as many animals as we could and contained the fire that we discovered Suzella missing. Enraged, Carl grabbed his bow and sword and started after the kidnappers. I was unable to stop him though I feared it would be his certain death.”

The farmer looks down at the ground and fidgets a bit. After a few seconds, he looks up and says, “It was his death, but not in the way I feared. Carl was able to track the bastards all the way to their hideout. Whether these creatures are smart or are the pets of some vile humans I can’t say. Carl made his way back a day later and relayed to me the location they took Suzella, before he died of mortal wounds sustained in a fight with a dire badger on his way home.”

The farmer’s lips tighten as a flash of anger briefly pierces the sadness, “If you can rescue my Suzella I can pay you 25 gold pieces each. I know it’s not a lot but I’m sure these beasts will have more treasures that you can confiscate. I just need my Suzella back, she’s all I got left.” The farmer’s sad eyes gaze blankly at the party as he waits for an answer.

1. FORSAKEN HILLS

The Forsaken Hills presents some hazards the party might encounter on the way from Tugton to the Forgotten Ruins. This area is optional, and if you wish to get on to the ruins then by all means do so. If the party needs a little warming up (or softening up) on their way to the ruins, then pick whichever one(s) you wish and have at it.

If you want to keep it random roll twice for encounters, once in the morning and once in the afternoon. A roll of 1 indicates success; using a d6 is standard, however using a d5 is slightly more metal.

If you are using this mod as part of an existing campaign, use whatever you like, be it this table or one(s) pertinent to your world.

Encounter Table for Forsaken Hills

1.1 Carl’s Bane

A brief rustling in a brush pile draws your attention in time to see a giant badger emerge from the dead undergrowth. A yellowish-brown foam drips from the sides of this vicious creature’s maw as it hisses and bears it’s teeth at you. What intent can be conveyed from it’s beady little eyes is pure hatred.

This would be a good encounter when the party is taking a break, either for lunch or setting up camp for the evening. If this encounter occurs while the party is mounted, have each character roll a d3, a result of 1 indicating their horse rears at the site of the badger and the character is thrown.

Badger, rabid dire: Init +6; Atk bite +6 melee (1d6 plus caustic saliva); AC 14; HD 5d10; hp 38; MV 40'; Act 2d20; SP caustic saliva: upon successful hit target must make a DC 13 Fort save or take an additional 2d3 acid damage ; SV Fort +4, Ref +5, Will -1; AL C.

1.2 Escaped Mutant Experiment

A hulking humanoid beast with deep red fur, vicious fangs and 4 muscular arms springs down from a rocky crag. A 2' long reticulated tentacle sprouts near the mutant's left shoulder, supporting a human head which is spouting orders and encouraging the beast to violence against the party.

Based on the human head's ranting and raving, one can deduce the beast's name is Clembo.

Clembo, mutant: Init +5 Atk Claw Swipe +5 melee (1d8 + 4) or Fist Slam +5 (1d10 + 4); AC 16; HD 6d12; hp 50; MV 35'; Act 2d20; SP ; Fort +8, Ref +3, Will +6; AL C.

1.3 Cursed Spirits of Ancient Soldiers

A strange mist begins to surround the party, swirling with random determination. Smoothly, the randomness abates and the mists begin to congeal into semi-solid forms of soldiers from a forgotten army more than 1,000 years old.

Strange things have been stirred up since Slovengris set up shop at the vats. The Spirit Soldiers are one of these things. The # of mist soldiers = # of the party + 2.

Mist Spirit Soldiers (2+): Init +5; Atk Mist Weapon +4 melee (1d6+3); AC 14; HD 5d8; hp 33; MV 40'; Act 1d20; SP undead traits; SV Fort +4, Ref +2, Will 0; AL C.

1.4 Crash Landing

A shrill squawk pierces the relative calmness of the day. Turning to the direction from which the squawk came you see a giant, clumsy buzzard lumbering through the air toward the party. The buzzard awkwardly dives at the party, hoping to snag a meal.

Determine at random which party member the buzzard is attempting to snatch. A DC 12 Reflex save allows the character to dodge the buzzard grasp. Either way the buzzard will crash about 60' from the party. If he had a character in tow, that character takes 2d4 hp of damage. The buzzard is mad with starvation and will fight on the ground until death trying to get some food.

Ravenous buzzard: Init +0; Atk beak peck +4 melee; AC 13; HD 5d8; hp 29; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP wing buffet; can use his move action to spread his wings and create a gust in an attempt to knock party members prone, will do this first and attack any knocked prone, Reflex vs DC 14 to remain standing; SV Fort +2 Ref +1 Will 0; AL C.

2. FORGOTTEN RUINS

If you wish to get to the meat of the scenario, you can start the adventure here (after the appropriate set up, of course).

This phase is a standard combat made slightly interesting with some fixtures on the battleground that can prove to be both useful and a hinderance, depending on one's perspective.

A single large, round tent made of skins (as is the tribesmen fashion) sits atop the opening to the cellar. Inside the tent are a three stools atop a bear skin rug. Under the skin is a crudely fashioned trap door concealing a ladder descending into a torch lit room. Nothing else can be discerned about the chamber below.

Spots where characters or guards can take cover during the assault on the tent give attackers -2 to hit on both ranged and melee attacks. When characters are navigating the ruins during combat, trying to make it

to the tent there is a 1 in 4 (1 on a d4) chance they step in a shallow pit causing their move action to end and requiring an action to pry their foot out.

The # of tribesmen = # of the party + 2. There are as many tribesmen guarding the tent as there are party members, 2 other tribesmen on patrol will appear from behind the party, attack at the end of round 2, and will be placed at the bottom of the initiative order.

Tribesmen Guards (2+): Init +3; Atk short sword +4 melee (1d6), short bow +3 ranged (1d6)*; AC 12; HD 4d10; hp 23; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +5, Ref +4, Will +3; AL C.

**only the guards on patrol have short bows.*

Loot: Searching the corpses of the tribesmen yields 3 gold rings (30 gp each), a thick silver chain necklace (45 gp) and a small platinum nose ring (50 gp).

3. MUSTY CELLAR

3.1 Guard Room Ambush

As you climb down the ladder from the hole above, you are attacked.

The entrance to the cellar under the tent leads to this chamber. There are 4 guards in this room who thought they heard commotion up top and are ready to pounce if the people coming down the ladder aren't brother tribesmen. There will be 5 guards if one from up top managed to make it down, and they will definitely be ready.

In either situation, 2 of the guards will get to act on a surprise round on the first person down the ladder after which initiative is rolled for all even those who haven't made it down yet. It then takes an entire move action to make it down the ladder. Guards may opt to attack those coming down the ladder at a +2 to hit bonus.

Tribesmen Guards (4 or 5): Init +3; Atk short sword +4 melee (1d6), javelin +3 ranged (1d6)*; AC 12; HD 4d10; hp 23; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +5, Ref +4,

Will +3; AL C.

**one javelin per tribesmen guard.*

Loot: Searching the corpses of the tribesmen yields a gold pinky ring with small diamond insets (60 gp), 2 gold rope bracelets (30 gp each), and an electrum ring with sapphires (90 gp).

3.2 Cook

As you enter this chamber your nose is assaulted with both the odor of fetid meat and the aroma of fresh baked bread. A plump matronly sort of lady has stopped her cooking chores and is looking at the party with a cheerful smile. "Y'all come right in and have a seat, ole Melba here just made some soup and I'm sure y'all are famished!", the older woman invites as she motions with her head toward the dining table and benches in the center of the room.

Melba is a seemingly normal, sweet old lady who serves as the cook for Slovengris' crew, but she is actually an experiment gone "alright" and harbors non-obvious powers. She will seem startled at first but will quickly welcome the party in, act as if they are new recruits and offer them something to eat. If any in the party accept she will give them a shallow bowl of stew laden with a deadly asp. Searching the bowl before eating will reveal the snakes, eating freely will result in being bit by the venomous asp and the dumbasses who attempted to eat the stew die.

If questioned she will play dumb, evade, or try to change the subject. If pushed, threatened or confronted about the snakes in the stew, she will let out a blood curdling scream and attack. The scream will attract Tribesmen that will arrive after 2 rounds of combat while potentially stunning the party; DC 13 Will Save or stunned for 1d3 rounds.

Melba, mutant cook: Init +2; Atk See below; AC 11; HD 5; hp 33; MV 20'; Act 2d20; SP snake swarm, mutant zap, spellcasting (+8 spellcheck); SV Fort +4, Ref -1, Will +7; AL C

Snake Swarm: Melba's mutations allows venomous snakes to emerge from Melba's body on demand. Once

per day she can summon a swarm of 50 snakes to attack her foes. Snake Swarm: Init n/a; Atk +3 (1d3 damage + venom); AC 10; HD 1+2; hp 7; MV 35'; Act 1d20; SP venom (DC 13 Fort save or 1d3 stamina); SV Fort +0, Ref -1, Will -1; AL N.

Mutant Zap: Twice a day Melba can let loose a flash of energy automatically zapping a target within 40' for 2d4 points of damage.

Spells known: Charm Person, Chill Touch, Sleep

Tribesmen Guards (2): Init +3; Atk short sword +4 melee (1d6); AC 12; HD 4d10; hp 23; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +5, Ref +4, Will +3; AL C.

Loot: Searching the corpses of the tribesmen yields a golden necklace with a sabre tooth charm (80 gp). Searching Melba's corpse reveals an intricately carved wooden amulet woven with honeysuckle and lilac. It provides the wearer +2 Will save (already figured in Melba's stats) but prevents them from healing overnight if worn for more than 1 hour that day.

3.3 Trash Room

As you make your way down the narrow winding passage you notice it slopes down. As you turn a sharp bend the slope grows steeper and the putrid odor of decay and rot hit you in the face like a silk fist in an iron glove. You would assume there is a trash heap at the bottom of this sloping passage.

If the party continues, they do come to a trash heap occupied by failed experiment. The failure being that the subject was turned into a trash eating monster.

The edge to the trash heap drops off sharply but can be easily scaled to get back up, that is, if there is no trash eating tentacle beast attacking you.

Standing at the edge of the pit staring down into offal smelling trash pile, one swears that they see something glinting among the trash.

If characters want to wade through the garbage, as soon as they climb down the pit they must make a DC 12 Fort save or they start vomiting and retching and are

unable to do anything for 1d3 rounds. As soon as the first character makes it down, the trash mutant will emerge and gain a surprise attack.

Trash Eating Tentacled Mutant: Init +3; Atk tentacle lash +4 melee (1d6 + 2 acid damage) or acidic gob bomb +5 ranged 25' (1d4 acid damage for 1d3 rounds); AC 13; HD 5d10; hp 35; MV n/a; Act 1d24, 1d20; SP can use tentacle lash on foes up to 10' away; SV Fort +5, Ref -3, Will +2; AL C.

3.4 Barracks

As you look about this room you quickly realize it's the sleeping quarters of the tribesmen. The giveaway was the makeshift beds of straw and rags on the floor with fancy sheets, obviously obtained from a caravan heist. That, and the snoring coming from some tribesmen currently sleeping here.

These rooms are barracks in the most basic sense, they're just the rooms the tribesmen sleep in. Regardless of when the party reaches these rooms they will be mostly uninhabited except for a few sleepers (unarmed, unarmored and unaware, 2-4, gm decide or roll). How the party wants to deal with these sleepers can be interesting and fun. My players tend toward the "leave no loose ends" philosophy.

On the other hand if your players are more "take prisoners" types, interrogating the sleeping tribesmen will yield no results. First off, they don't speak nor understand common, they have their own tribal tongue. Second, even if a Comprehend Languages spell or some such is used the most the party can get from the tribesmen are vulgar insults. If the party gets all fancy pants and uses something like ESP, they garner that the tribesmen see themselves as chosen warriors of the "Great One" and are devoted to him in the fullest.

If the party takes the time to search the empty beds they find nothing because the tribesmen don't really even trust each other when it comes to shiny stuff and keep their treasures on their person. The sleeping tribesmen do have some loot.

Loot: The sleeping tribesmen between them have finely etched pair of silver armbands (60 gp) and medium

opal set in a gold band (50 gp).

3.5 Entrance to Tunnels

This brightly lit room has a table in the center with 3 tribesmen and 1 enlarged cranium mutant playing a card game. One of the tribesmen is standing up from his chair, shaking his fist at the big headed one.

“How many times do I have to tell you Brodd, I know when you’re cheating ‘cause your head lights up.”

The big headed chap named Brodd also rises from his seat and begins to protest “That’s not why my . . .” when he looks over and sees the party.

“Hey you! You’re not suppose to be down here!”

The rest of the gamblers look in your direction and are up and armed in a flash, charging the party.

Tribesmen Guards (3): Init +3; Atk long sword +4 melee (1d8) or battle axe +4 melee (1d10)*; AC 12; HD 4d10; hp 23; MV 30’; Act 1d20; SV Fort +5, Ref +4, Will +3; AL C.

**only 1 tribesmen has a battle axe.*

Brodd, big head mutant: Init +4; Atk special, see below; AC 13; HD 3d10; hp 20; MV 30’; Act 1d20; SP brain squeeze, encephal-blast, spellcasting (+7); SV Fort +3, Ref +5, Will +8; AL C.

Brain Squeeze: Brodd can use his psychic energy to reach out, grab a hold of a foe’s brain and gently squeeze. This causes massive discomfort and prevents the foe from performing any actions, even spellcasting, while under the influence of the squeeze. The first round is such a shock the character gets no save, in subsequent rounds a DC 16 Will save will break the connection. Brodd must concentrate to maintain the connection and can perform no other actions. If Brodd takes damage the connection is broken.

Encephal-blast: Brodd can lash out with a burst of psychic energy at a target’s consciousness causing 2d5 points of damage, DC 13 Will save for half.

Spells Known: Color Spray, Magic Shield

Loot: Searching the tribesmen corpses yields a floral motif gold brooch with a topaz center (40 gp) and 250 gp on the table that was being wagered. Brodd has a keenly sharpened engraved silver dagger that does +2 damage and is worth 300gp.

4. TUNNELS OF TOGOTH

These tunnels were formed when an old one called Togoth expired on this world. His corpse sat on what was then a sparsely inhabited planet for decades before being fully covered with dirt and debris and removed from the starlight which had stalled its decay. Once covered, Togoth began to rot but the very nature of its skin and essence toughened the dirt around it, leaving tunnels and caverns where the old one once lay.

Some of Togoth’s organs had a strange interaction with the physical laws that govern this planet. What would be Togoth’s equivalent to a brain, heart and eye slowly degraded over eons leaving behind three pools of thick goo infused with the magical essence of the old one. The results of humanoid interaction with this goo are varied, as Slovengris is currently finding out.

4.1 Porkly’s Cell

As you enter this room you are greeted with a humorous if not macabre sight. Chained to the wall of the cavern is a hulking beast with the torso and head of a pig and legs like a normal, albeit extremely strong, man. Three guards holding various implements of destruction are standing in front of the beast, pleading with it. The tribesmen are saying things like “C’mon porkly, we want ya on our side, quit trying to kill us!”, while lashing the porcine defect with a bullwhip.

Just about the time your brain has processed the scene, “Porkly” looks over at the party, lets out a high pitched roar of a squeal, rips the chains from the wall, and charges the party. It takes a second, but the tribesmen realize what is happening and start yelling “Yeah! That’s it Porkly, attack our enemies, not us!” as they charge to join in the fray.

Tribesmen Guards (3): Init +3; Atk pole arm +4 melee (1d10) or spear +4 melee (1d8)*; AC 12; HD 4d10; hp 23; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +5, Ref +4, Will +3; AL C.

**only one of the tribesmen has a spear.*

Porkly, porcine mutant: Init +6; Atk slam +8 melee (1d7+2); AC 14; HD 6; hp 38; MV 35'; Act 2d20; SP greedy pig +5 melee (2d4+2, see below for condition); SV Fort +6, Ref +4, Will 0; AL C.

Greedy Pig: After a successful slam attack on the first action die, Porkly will attempt to devour the foe he just hit with his second action die. This only applies to hits on the first action die, if Porkly's slam misses on his first action and hits on his second, greedy pig activation doesn't carry over to the next round.

Loot: A pair of gold earrings (30 gp), a jade bracelet (25 gp) and silver necklace with a spoon pendant (30 gp).

4.2 Peasant Cells

Downtrodden peasants of all ages line the walls of this dimly lit cavern. Their chains are secured to the cavern walls with pitons as 4 tribesmen keep watch in this room. 2 tribesmen are sitting at a small table eating, one is leaning against the wall with his helmet over his eyes, and the last is strolling the cavern, walking away from the party. It seems the party's presence has gone unnoticed so far.

If a job seems unimportant to a tribesman, they'll do a lousy job at it. Guarding these prisoners seems far from important to the tribesmen. The guards are unaware of the surroundings since they don't think anyone could possibly come down here to free the peasants so it is highly probable the party can get a jump on them from the start.

For any party member using ranged weapons, there is a possibility an errant missile will hit an innocent peasant. If a ranged attack misses, roll 1d5 with a roll of 1 indicating a peasant is hit. No need to roll for damage, they all have 1 hp. The farmer's daughter is exempt from being hit in this manner.

If a character fires into melee, apply the rules to see if a fellow party member is hit by the errant shot. If not, then proceed to the roll above.

The farmer's daughter Suzella is among the kidnapped peasants being kept prisoner in this cavern. Neither she nor any of the other peasants will leave the cavern on their own as they are all too weak and timid. They will beg and plead for the adventurers to lead them out when the coast is clear. Suzella must be escorted all the way back to the farmer's house or she won't make it. If left to get home on her own, she never shows up and disappears for good, breaking the farmer's heart. If the party escorts her back to her father (if the *Sad Farmer* hook wasn't used, Suzella will ask the party to escort her home) award everyone in the party a permanent point of Luck.

Tribesmen Guards (4): Init +3; Atk short sword +4 melee (1d6); AC 12; HD 4d10; hp 23; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +5, Ref +4, Will +3; AL C.

Loot: Rifling the pockets of the tribesmen corpses produces a twisted silver ring (15 gp), a gold medallion shaped like a leaf (25 gp), a container of small sapphires (75 gp), and a single diamond earring (30 gp).

4.3 The Vats of Aventhil

The first thing that grabs you about this enormous cavern other than its size is an large glowing orb hovering near the ceiling that illuminates the room. Moving your gaze from the miniature indoor sun you take in the rest of the cavern's features. Three large pools filled with a bubbly, viscous fluid dominate much of the floor space; one deep red, one pale green and one yellowish white. A crude ducking stool has been built next to each pool, and you notice the inhabitants of the cavern for the first time. Across the cavern next to the red pool you see someone being put into the cage of a ducking stool by a muscular, golden skinned mutant with the head of a hawk. The avian mutant is being directed by an older, scraggly man wearing a pointed hat and a silver eye mask. A trio of tribesmen observe the scene, ready for action if needed.

The party has stumbled upon Slovengris right in the middle of an experiment. Slovengris' cybernetic eye will detect any intruders as soon as they enter the

cavern. Roll initiative.

As usual Slovengris is prepared to flee. In order to buy some time, Slovengris will unload on the interlopers for 2 rounds before he splits. Slovengris realizes even if he defeats these people he most likely has no tribesmen left as lackeys and it will just be a matter of time before more mercenaries or militia men or whatever show up to finish the job. Slovengris has learned to take the out when you can.

Slovengris' strategy will be to open with Magic Missile on the party and Magic Shield on himself and allies followed up by Fireball in round 2 and Invisibility in round 3 to escape. Of course, feel free to develop your own strategies for Slovengris depending on how you are using the scenario within the context of your campaign. The above actions are for the "Slovengris as a villian over multiple scenarios" storyline.

Tribesmen Guards (3): Init +3; Atk long sword +4 melee (1d8); AC 12; HD 4d10; hp 23; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +5, Ref +4, Will +3; AL C.

Golden Hawk Mutant: Init +4; Atk long sword +7 melee (1d8 + 2); AC 14; HD 6d8; hp 35; MV 50'; Act 2d20; SP wings which enable him to move 50' per round; SV Fort +6 Ref +5 Will +3; AL C.

Slovengris: Init +8 Atk Spells, see below; AC 20; HD 12; hp 111; MV 35'; Act 2d20 + 1d16; SP Spellcheck +10, SV Fort +3, Ref +4, Will +6; AL C.

Spells Known (today):

Level 1: Cantrip, Choking Cloud, Color Spray, Magic Missile, Magic Shield

Level 2: Invisibility, Levitate, Mirror Image

Level 3: Fireball, Lightning Bolt

Loot: A spiral silver bracelet (25 gp), a lunar motif electrum medallion on a silver chain (112 gp), a set of engraved brass knuckles (67 gp) and platinum pinky ring (77 gp) can be found on the corpses of the tribesmen. The mutants have no loot.

4.4 Slovengris' Personal Room

As you enter this room a thick haze hangs in the air

along with an odd, acrid odor. There is a portal shaped indentation in the wall with a pedestal in front of it. A makeshift desk/workbench that one would stand at to work is against the adjacent wall. An open chest filled with silver and gold coins, silver chalices, golden goblets, electrum serving trays and all sorts of treasures taken from the raids that the tribesmen couldn't wear. On the opposite wall is a makeshift bed with a chair at the foot of it.

Scattered on the workbench are a number of loose pieces of parchment, both blank and written upon. Two decently bound books written in an alien text, and a crudely bound sheaf of parchment written in magical text. A quill and ink pot sit on the workbench while a number of jars and test tubes filled with who knows what are on small shelves on the benchtop.

The crudely bound sheaf of parchment is the spellbook for Transformational Preparation (see Appendix A), a protection spell for those being dipped in the vats.

The margins in both books are filled with notes in a slight variation of this world's common. If no one is immediately available that can provide magical translation, one with an Intelligence of 14 and above can spend 2 full days studying the books and other items on the workbench to deduce some information.

Things Learned From Studying the books and notes:

- these tunnels were likely formed by the death of an old one who decayed here
- the vats are probably remnants of Toth's organs, the green being the brain, the red being the heart and the white being the eyes, or at least toth's equivalent to those organs
- Slovengris was trying to figure out a way to magically manipulate the outcomes of submersion in the vats
- Slovengris was trying to precisely determine the chemo-magical properties of the sludge in order to predict what kinds of effects the sludge might display on other worlds.
- The cryptic message "2 barrels each to Mandrag" is written on a slip of parchment among the notes.
- In the notes, Slovengris refers to the pools of ooze at the "Vats of Aventhil", though no reference or reason for this moniker can be found



If a Comprehend Languages spell is used, in addition to the information above, the following details can be learned.

The first book is called *The Events and Results of the Commorion Disjunction*. A bookmark opens to a page titled “List of Old Ones missing after Commorion Disjunction” and the name Togoht is underlined. Another bookmarked page discusses the lineage of old ones and Togoht is mentioned as hailing from a plane called Tsongorach.

The other book is called *Peculiarities and Properties of the Ancient Planes and the Inhabitants thereof*. This tome is bookmarked to a chapter on Tsongorach. The next 30 pages or so are worn from flipping back and forth and the margins are filled with drawings and cryptic notes.

If a wizard goes nuts and casts comprehend languages to the extent that they can permanently read the alien language in which the books are written (30 + spellcheck) then they can elect to read each book in it's entirety. To read a single book takes an entire year to read, and that is spending every day reading for 10 hours a day. This cannot be broken into chunks nor can any single day be missed due to the complex form of communication this alien language represents to the normal human brain. If the wizard manages to complete this task they gain a permanent +1 Intelligence. They don't understand the most of the material, it's just that the mental energy exerted to accomplish this task was akin to doing 100,000 pushups.

If the same wizard wishes to read the second book, this one will only take him 6 months to read under the same conditions. They will receive the same award for their effort, permanent +1 Intelligence. It does not matter which book they read first.

One side effect of reading these tomes is that the reader becomes very protective of them and will not lend them out for any reason. The reader will actually seek to hide the books somewhere they know will be secret and safe. This side effect wanes over a 20 year period over which time they will eventually remove the books from hiding and place them on the shelf in their library

with the rest of their tomes and even be willing to lend them out to certain friends.

The vials and jars on the workbench contain, in addition to samples of the ooze, standard alchemical substances. Quicksilver, brimstone, and a rainbow of vitriols are among the flask contents found on the workbench.

Loot: The chest in Slovengris' room contains the loot the tribesmen couldn't wear. 2,500 sp, 1350 gp, and 312 ep are the coins in the chest, while the rest of the treasure adds up to be an additional 2,000 gp.

EPILOGUE

Lord Robollo will want to see the surviving members of the party regardless of whether he bestowed the mission to the characters or not. Both the sad farmer and Mayor Eddon will suggest that Lord Robollo would like to meet and may reward those responsible for vanquishing the threat from his lands. If the party doesn't go to the keep immediately, i.e. they stick around and experiment with the vats, a group of 6 soldiers will track them down and inform them Lord Robollo requests their presence to hear about their heroic exploits and reward them appropriately.

Once in front of Lord Robollo the party will be asked for an accounting of what they discovered at the ruins and who was responsible for the carnage in the countryside. If the party omits any details a wizened man sitting next to Lord Robollo will lean in and whisper something to Lord Robollo who will then ask the party pointedly about the missing detail. Regardless of how the party answers the second time, Lord Robollo will let the matter rest.

After the party conveys all they intend to Lord Robollo, he will reward each with a velvet pouch containing 750 gp worth of assorted gems and inform the party the opportunity exists to possibly make more from this situation and for them to speak with Fanuci, the sage sitting next to him. With that Lord Robollo dismisses the party. Fanouli leaves the room and motions for the party to follow.

Fanouli leads the party to an antechamber with a oak conference table. Fanouli unfurls a scroll and flattens it out on the table. It is a poster offering a reward of 5,000 gold stallions (whatever those are) for information leading to the apprehension a wizard of ill repute named Slovengris (Handout A).

Fanouli asks the party if the wizard depicted on the poster looks like the one they encountered in the ruins. After the party affirms, Fanouli will explain that the man offering the reward lives on another world. Fanouli can contact Havelin and pass on what the party has shared and there is a chance Havelin will wish to meet the party face to face.

If the party told Lord Robollo about finding the books and notes in Slovengris' chamber, Fanouli will relay this to Havelin who will want to meet the party. If for some reason the party kept these findings a secret from Lord Robollo, Havelin is not interested in meeting with the party just to hear their story. This can change at any time if the players admit to Fanouli they were holding stuff back. Fanouli will contact Havelin again and Havelin's interest in the party will be renewed.

When the party is ready to leave, Fanouli will take them back to his private library where he will contact Havelin and Havelin will open a portal to bring the party to his abode on an different world.

APPENDIX A: THE VATS

The ooze pools left behind by the degradation of Tothog, while infused with magical essence, are quite deadly to living creatures who come in contact with or imbibe the substances. In the papers left behind by Slovengris, he details the magical method he discovered to protect those who were plunged into the pools via the ducking stools. While this method protected them from certain death, some side effects still occurred along with the benefits of submersion.

Slovengris created Transformational Preparation (Part 1) as a ritual utilizing magic circles as a power conduit to free the wizard up to cast Creative Transformations (Part 2). Transformational Preparation is the only complete spell that can be located in Slovengris' notes, though the notes do seem to indicate that Part 2 is how animal traits can be induced during submersion.

Since Slovengris created this spell as a ritual and meant to be read from book, a caster need not learn this spell to cast it.

Transformational Preparation

Level: 1

Range: 25', targeted

Duration: 2 hours

Casting Time: 1 Turn

Save: n/a

General: This spell is used to protect a subject being lowered into a Vat of Aventhil from (most) deleterious effects and primed to absorb their positive effects.

Manifestation: (d4) As the caster chants the ritual incantations, a(n) 1) orange 2) blue 3) green 4) purple nimbus forms around the subject.

Corruption/Misfire: n/a, see below

1. Critical Failure - Slovengris loved to put little traps in his magical writings should they fall into the wrong hands. One of his favorite was to use a word which if mispronounced would cause the book, scroll, whatever



to burn up in flame, which is what happens here. The caster mispronounces a key word, the book goes up in flame and is destroyed.

2-9: Spell cannot be attempted again today.

10-19: Subject gains 1 positive effect and 2 side effects. For positive effects roll on the table for the corresponding vat they were lowered into.

20-29: Subject gains 1 positive effect and 1 side effect. For positive effects roll on the table for the corresponding vat they were lowered into.

30+: Subject gains 1 positive effect. Roll on the table for the corresponding vat in which they were submerged.

Positive Effects

Green/Brain Vat (d5)

- 1) Nerve endings in brain greatly increase making nervous system more efficient, gain +2 Agility.
- 2) Cranium expands to accommodate larger brain, +2 Intelligence but -1 Agility due to loss of balance.
- 3) Your Central Nervous System gets an overhaul and your brain is more in tune with the workings of your body, gain +2 Stamina.
- 4) Heightened nervous system provides larger than normal energy field surrounding the character making them more understanding and empathetic during interactions with others, +2 Personality.
- 5) Heightened brain ability works rapidly to spot a foe's weakness. Once per combat gain a +5 bonus to an attack roll, and if successful, +5 to the ensuing damage roll.

Red/Heart Vat (d5)

- 1) Strengthened heart can pump adrenaline through the heart twice as fast. Get an extra action die (d20) during the first round of combat.
- 2) Strong heart leads to strong body making one harder to kill. +2 Stamina
- 3) Improved circulation increases blood flow to muscles. +2 Strength
- 4) Gain the heart of a lion, now has ability to let loose an otherworldly roar which gives the character and all

allies within earshot +2/+2/+2 attack/damage/saves for the next 2 rounds.

5) Strong circulatory systems enables character to bleed out for twice as long as normal before perishing. (i.e. a 3rd level character would take 6 rounds to bleed out instead of 3.) The character also heals at 2 hp per 8 hour rest instead of 1.

White/Eye Vat (d5)

- 1) Develop an advanced inner mind's eye which greatly increases one's capacity for abstract thought, gain +2 Intelligence and -1 Personality.
- 2) Keen eyes give you the edge over foes, +1 AC and +1 Attack.
- 3) Your eyes become like that of a fly, gain infravision (if character doesn't already have it), +1 AC and +2 Initiative.
- 4) Keen eyesight makes character hyper-aware of surroundings, +1 Luck and +3 Reflex save.
- 5) The character's eyes change color to a soft metallic gray and you are able to intuit other's true feelings through their shimmering aura (this is a clear aura, not color), +2 Personality.

Side Effects (d20)

- 1) Skin becomes scaly like that of a reptile, but retains it's current hue.
- 2) Blotchy patches like birthmarks appear all over subject's body, and they slowly move.
- 3) Subject develops useless gill-like structures on the sides of their neck.
- 4) A small clump of 3" - 5" tentacles grows out of the subject's (d3) 1) Knee 2) Elbow 3) Shoulder.
- 5) Subject develops an extra digit on both of their hands and feet.
- 6) Subject's eyes turn a solid color (d4) 1) white 2) black 3) silver 4) gold.
- 7) All the hair on the subject's body turns white (if already white or has no hair, oh well then).
- 8) 1d7+3 teeth fall from the subject's mouth.
- 9) Subject's neck elongates by 1d3+3 inches.
- 10) The skin of the subject is permanently stained the color of the sludge they were submerged in.
- 11) Little 1" - 2" growths resembling pig tails sprout all over the subject's (d6) 1) right arm 2) left arm 3) right leg 4) left leg 5) torso, front 6) torso, back.

- 12) Subject's voice changes pitch, timbre, accent, and so on several times a day, so much that they no have no discernable, distinct voice. Does not affect spell casting but does make it hilarious.
- 13) Subject's eyes become perfectly round and are now as tall as they were wide.
- 14) Subject develops a 3rd eye on the palm of their non-dominant hand.
- 15) Subject's fingernails turn the color of the vat in which they were submerged.
- 16) Vat sludge oozes into the subject's ear canal and hardens. The subject isn't deaf, but they now talk much louder than normal.
- 17) The subject loses most fat and their now leathery skin shrinks, giving them a very gaunt, almost skeletal appearance.
- 18) Sludge seeped in the subject's mouth and permanently stained their teeth the color of the ooze.
- 19) Thick tufts of hair grow on the subject's knuckles.
- 20) Subjects ear's grow 50% in size.

FORGOTTEN RUINS

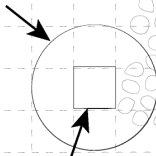
Enough ruined
wall to provide
cover.



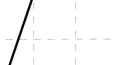
Flagstones



Fur Tent

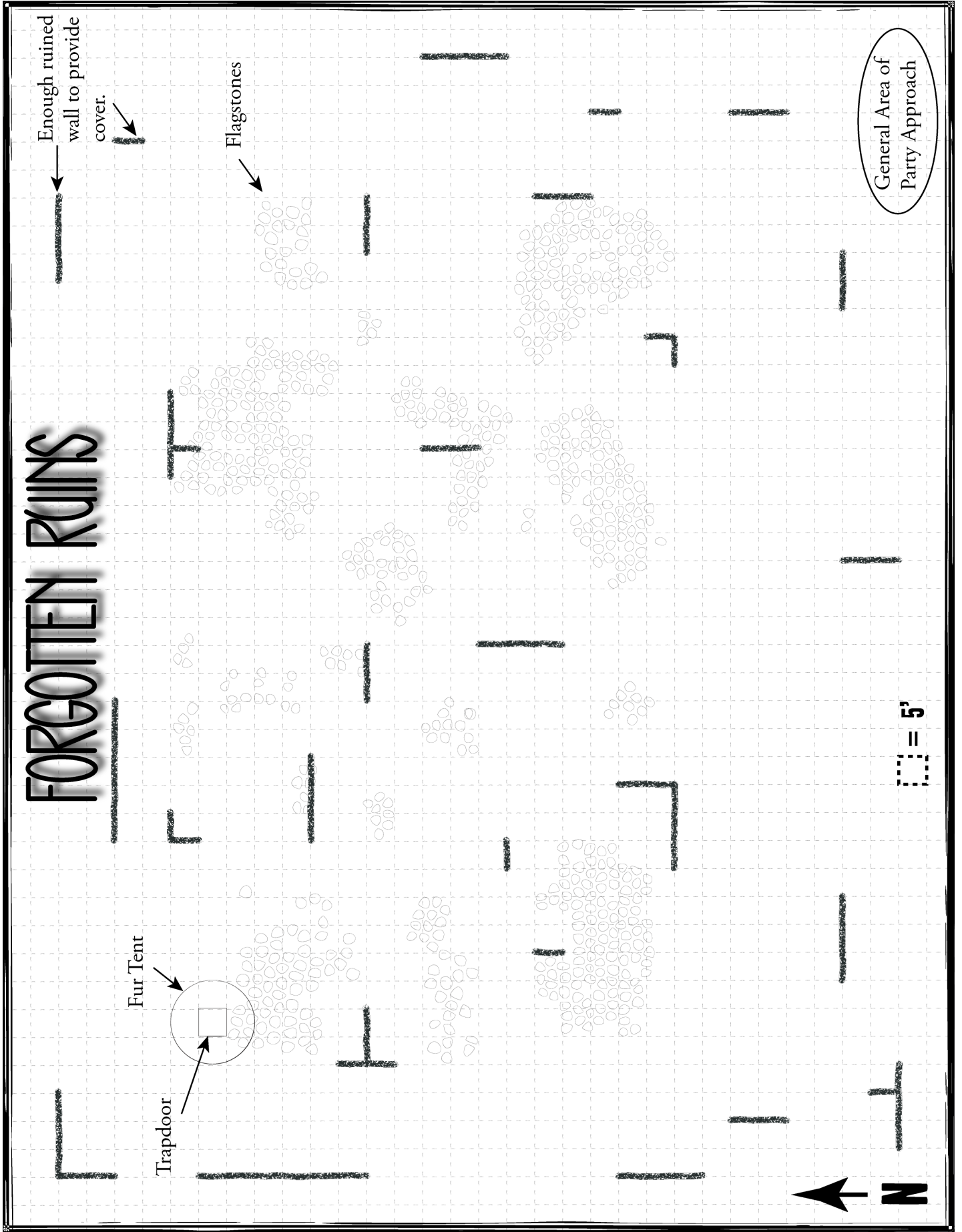


Trapdoor



5'

General Area of
Party Approach



MUSTY CELLAR

3.1

3.2

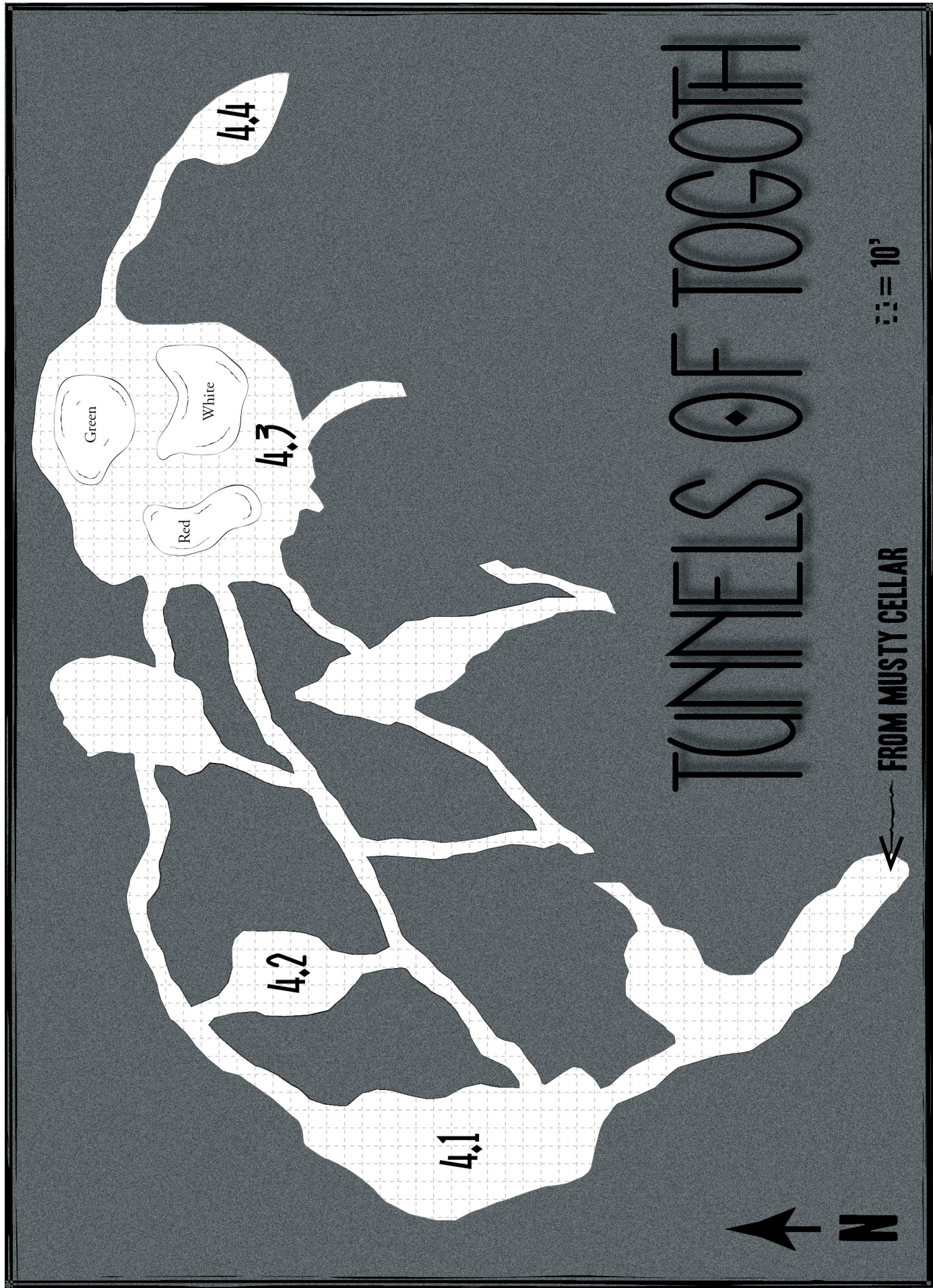
3.4

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← TO TUNNELS OF TOGOOTH



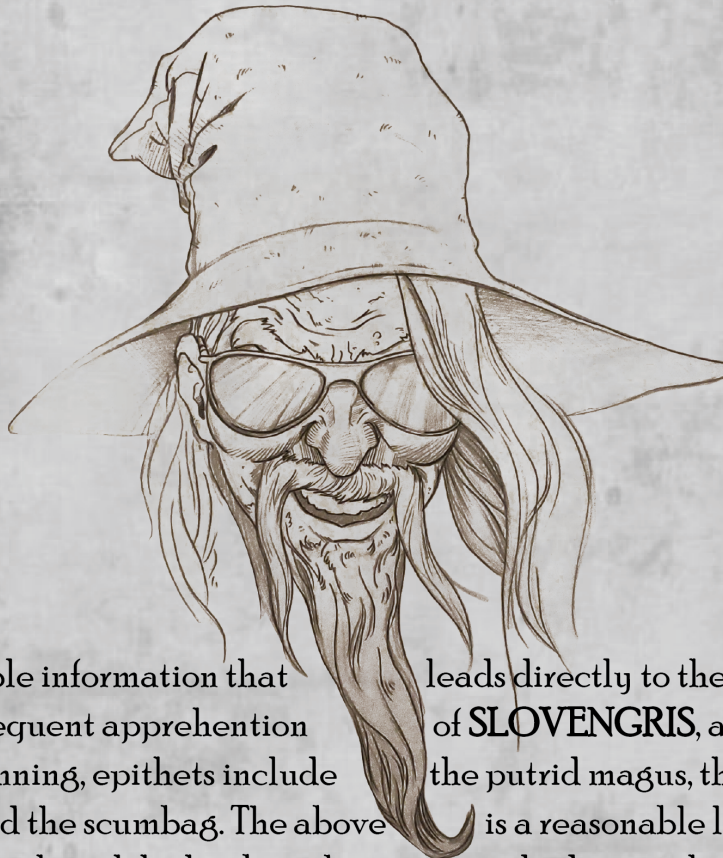


Handout A

REWARD

5,000 Gold Stallions

(or equivalent in other precious metals if desired)



for credible information that leads directly to the location and subsequent apprehension of **SLOVENGRIS**, a wizard of low cunning, epithets include the putrid magus, the corrupt caster, and the scumbag. The above is a reasonable likeness of Slovengris though he has been known to aptly disguise his appearance. Even in disguise he usually wears solid silver spectacles, though some say he sometimes wears a single eyepatch. Slovengris has also gone by the aliases Ramscoot, Javii Lister, Corlin of Tsizto and Mack. Being a wizard Slovengris should be considered dangerous and caution is advised. Any information pertaining to the deeds and doings of Slovengris will also be rewarded at a lower rate once verified. Anyone with information concerning Slovengris is urged to contact

HAVELIN ANGSCOT Midoro City, Tower Quadrant

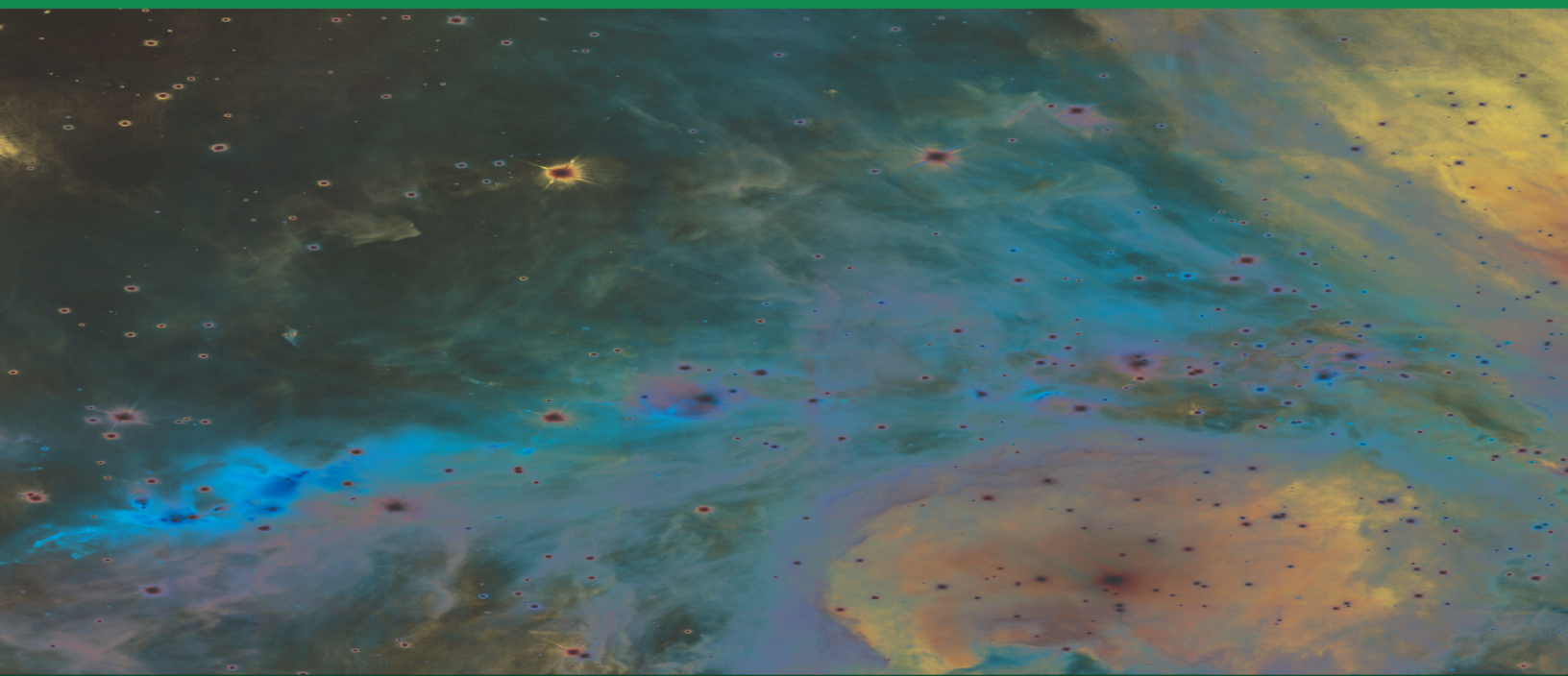
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Nargazira Press is pleased to present the maiden work of Rodbud Fondiker, *The Chronicles of Slovengris the Astral Wizard*, Vol. 1.

The goal of *The Chronicles* is to present a framework for players to pursue an villainous scoundrel named Slovengris across multiple worlds or planes. Whether to pay back a personal vendetta, to collect on a myriad of bounties, to get their hands on Slovengris' supposed stash of artifacts, or to simply rid the universe of a sleaze ball (or some combination of the four), players will not lack a motive to track the scheming wizard.

Volume 1 gets the party started with a short story titled "The Origins of Slovengris", a backstory that brings Slovengris to life by hitting some of the highlights (or lowlights) of his past.

The second part of Volume 1 is a 4th level adventure called *The Vats of Aventhil*. After yet another reckless getaway, Slovengris inadvertently finds himself on the characters' home world and wreaks havoc as he is wont to do. Local authorities enlist the aid of the player characters to stop mutant creatures harassing the countryside. Worlds collide.



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