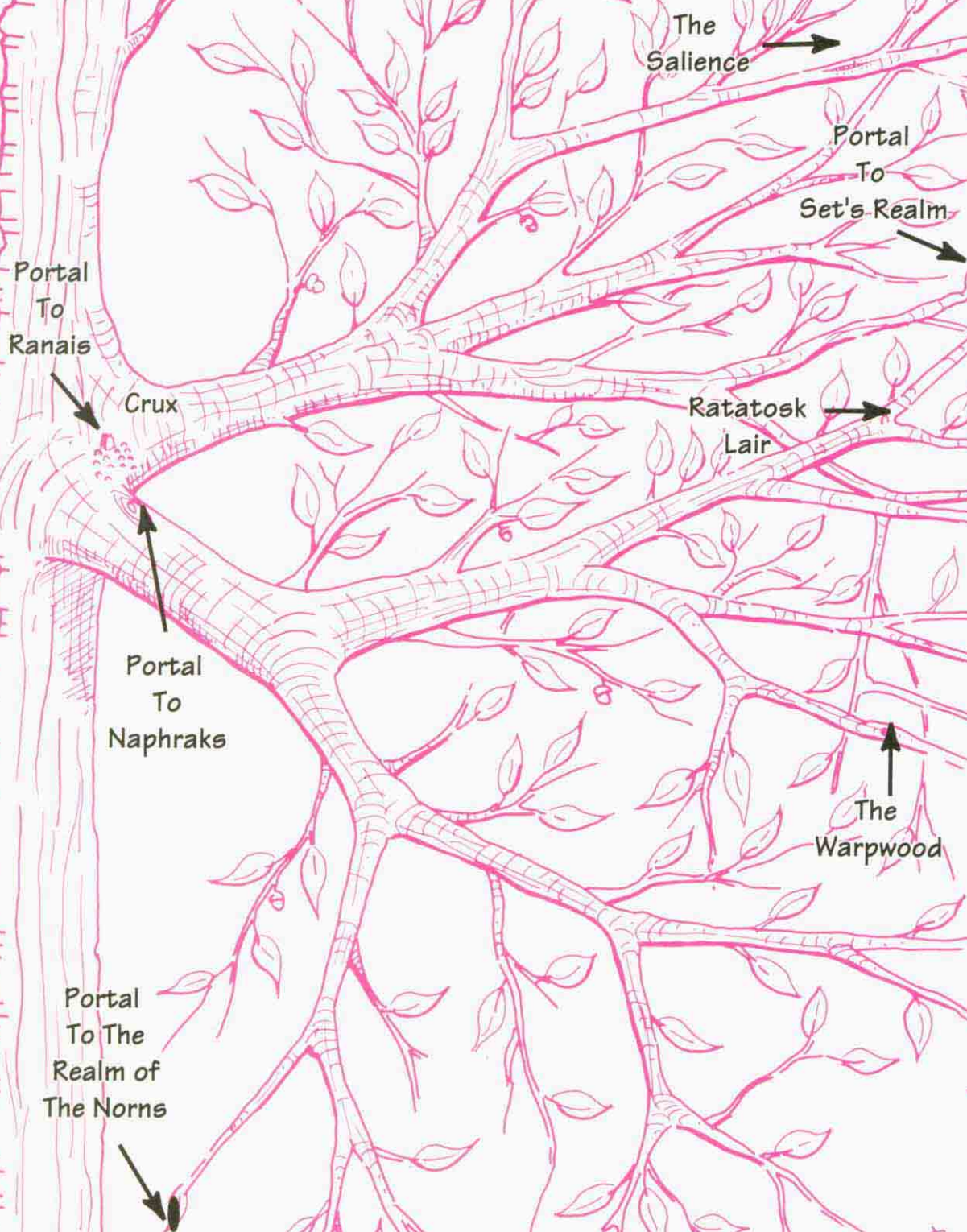


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Dungeons & Dragons®**PLANE****SCAPE®**

DELUXE ADVENTURE

DEAD GODS**by Monte Cook**

YGGDRASIL



◆ DEAD GODS ◆

Being a pairing of Adventures in which the Heroes must face the might and minions of Powers both dead and Undead, for the sake of Sigil, their own small Lives, and the very Multiverse itself.

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First things first, berk: Anyone who plans on playing in the adventures in *Dead Gods* should stop reading *now*. This book is meant for the Dungeon Master's eyes only. Page-flipping players'll only spoil their own fun.

FOREWORD

Now then: *Dead Gods* contains two separate adventures. The first one's called "Out of the Darkness," and it takes up the major portion of this book (pages 5 through 124). The adventure consists of an introduction, nine chapters, and three interludes. It's the kind of epic quest that true heroes dream of — though they'll have to step carefully to prevent that dream from turning into a nightmare.

The second adventure in *Dead Gods* is called "Into the Light." Though it's shorter than the first ride — occupying pages 125 through 156 — it's still a full-length scenario, showing just what can happen in Sigil when stubborn politics collides with arcane faith. "Into the Light" consists of an introduction and three parts.

A sharp blood'll notice that the story sections of "Out of the Darkness" are called *chapters*, and the story sections of "Into the Light" are called *parts*. That's so no addle-cove gets 'em mixed up. Having two different chunks of the book both titled "Chapter I"

would be a bit confusing. With chapters and parts, the DM always knows which section fits with which ride.

That's important, because although the two adventures stand on their own, they can also be linked together. "Out of the Darkness" and "Into the Light" feature different characters, locations, and storylines, but they both revolve around the same basic theme: the death and resurrection of gods. By weaving the two plots together, the DM gives the players a periodic change of pace and tone and allows each adventure to echo the primary theme of *Dead Gods*. Sure, it's more work, but it's also a more rewarding experience, both for the DM and the players.

The flowchart on the inside back cover of the book offers a recommended method for linking the chapters and parts of the two adventures, but that's just one possible solution. The DM's free to read through both scenarios and decide for himself how best to make the pieces form one puzzle. The Introduction to each ride gives further tips on fitting them together.

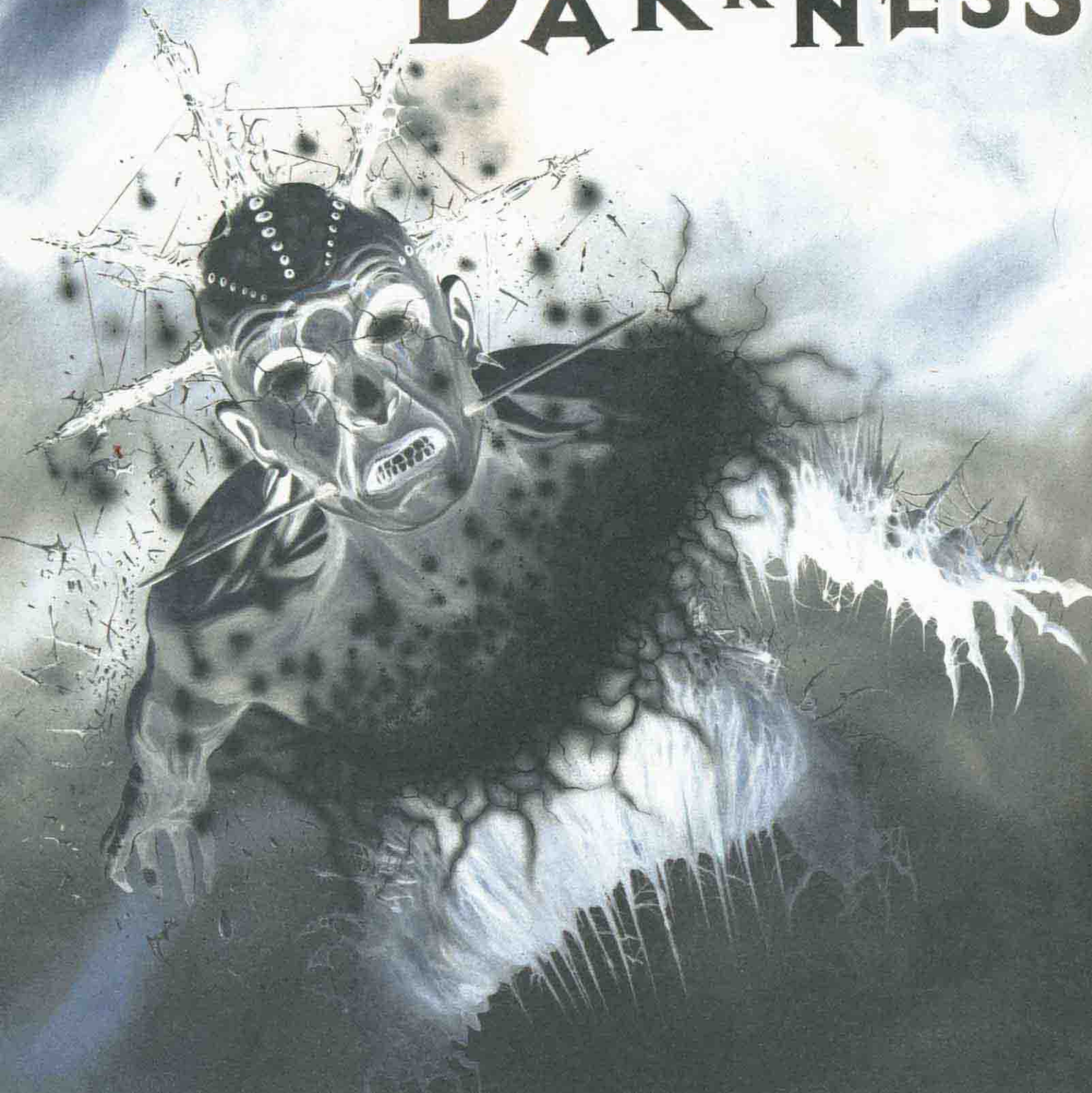
Following the two adventures is an Appendix (pages 157 through 176) that includes the write-up for a brand-new monster, the statistics for all major characters and creatures in both of the rides, and 15 full-color illustrations that depict various scenes from "Out of the Darkness" (see that scenario's Introduction for details on using the pictures). The Appendix doesn't contain statistics for every berk and barmy that shows up in the adventures, however. If a character's got only a minor role in a story, he's likely to have nothing but an abbreviated stat line right in the text, like this: Goji the Quick (Pl/♂ tiefling/F4/Bleak Cabal/N).

The PLANESCAPE® *Campaign Setting* boxed set (2600) explains how to read abbreviated stat lines. That product is all that's required to play *Dead Gods*, but the DM'll find the PLANESCAPE MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® *Appendix* (2602) and *Appendix II* (2613) helpful as well. Both "Out of the Darkness" and "Into the Light" contain further suggestions for products that provide more detail about planar locations important to the adventures.

Dead Gods is full of maps, but it also includes a poster sheet detailing important areas in the adventures. Depending on how many times the sheet is unfolded, it shows different maps. At certain points in each ride, the DM's instructed to unfold the sheet to whatever map's needed at the time.

Finally, as with all PLANESCAPE adventures, the italicized text printed in amber is meant to be read aloud to the players. All other information is meant for the Dungeon Master alone.

OUT OF THE DARKNESS



"Know that now and forevermore, he who once claimed Thanatos is no more. The past master of this place is gone and shall not return. I, Kiaransalee, Mother of Vengeance and Mistress of Unlife, rule here now and shall into infinity. My will is law in Thanatos, for it is now my realm.

INTRODUCTION

Let no soul, mortal or otherwise, speak of the former ruler again. Let no written word, anywhere in all existence, past or present, record his misbegotten appellation. Let this be the last moment any creatures ever hear the name fall upon their ears. The last voice to speak the name shall be that of his executioner, and I say it now for the final time:

"ORCUS!"

◆ BACKGROUND ◆

Sometime in the not-so-distant past, something occurred on the Astral Plane, an event that'd have repercussions throughout the multiverse: A dead god began to stir. 'Course, fallen deities return to life every now

and then, but this time was different. The power continued to rise, his appearance slowly changing, his form slowly warping. Then the god simply vanished from the Silver Void. Only the Guardian of the Dead Gods, he who once was Anubis, noticed the disappearance — and he shuddered at the implications. One of his charges was returning to life.

And his name was Orcus.

Forces — possibly inadvertent, possibly not — conspired to bring the dead god back. Somewhere in a tiny demiplane known as the City That Waits, a number of the former Abyssal lord's worshipers suddenly awoke from their eternal slumber. Somewhere on the Prime, a lich named Acererak stirred up the dark suspension of the Negative Energy Plane with a barmy scheme. Somewhere in a completely different world, a once-powerful devotee of the god of undeath sent one last impassioned prayer.

Who knows how it all came together? Who knows the true dark of such things? Somehow, a dead power was given another chance to right the wrongs committed against him. A single word escaped the lips of the tanar'ri god as he rose from the Silver Void: "Vengeance."

THE FALL OF ORCUS

It all started long ago, when a minor demipower named Kiaransalee first stood against the tanar'ri lord. See, Orcus ruled a layer of the Abyss (some say multiple layers), and his realm was filled with the undead over which he held sway. Planewalkers un-

fortunate enough to have stumbled into Thanatos — but lucky enough to have given it the laugh — described it as an endless, ghoulish reverie. At least, they did at first. Over the eons, however, the realm grew as fat and inattentive as the Abyssal lord himself. No one had ever challenged the mighty Orcus, and he began to lose the dark edge that'd helped him rise to a position of power in the first place. His actions were careless, and his realm became a place of cold, quiet, undead languor.

THERE ARE THREE RULES
+ ENDINGS.
FIRST, GOD ALWAYS WINS.
SECOND,
EVIL ALWAYS RETURNS.
THIRD, THE FIRST RULE
ISN'T ALWAYS TRUE.
— TAR SHEVA LONGREACH,
A PLANEWALKER



That's when Kiaransalee, a drow goddess of vengeance, made her move. She'd somehow been slighted by the tanar'ri lord. To this day, no one really knows the nature of the offense, or even if it was grievous or minor. Some folks rattle their bone-boxes that Orcus's actions caused her to remain only a demipower among the drow when she'd had a chance to supplant Lolth. Others say that the crime was trivial. To Kiaransalee, the details hardly mattered. She conspired against Orcus and eventually slew him through treachery and surprise, quickly usurping his realm and position.

Thus, the first utterance by the tanar'ri lord upon his rebirth could have been either an oath or a reference to a former wrong. But even when revived from his deathlike slumber, Orcus still wasn't truly restored to life. His new existence more closely mirrored that of the undead over which he'd once ruled. He'd become an undead god.

THE RISE OF TENEBROUS

To celebrate and signify his new state of existence, Orcus chose a new name. Now a thin, small, shadowy creature, he called himself "Tenebrous," for he was shut off from the light of life forevermore. What's more, he'd lost too much strength to hold onto his former level of divinity. Lesser than even a demipower now, Tenebrous could no longer form avatars. But make no mistake — he was still a god, far beyond the strength of the mightiest mortal, and still in command of potent and terrible might. More than ever before, he hungered to exact revenge on those who'd wronged him. And in his new, twisted state — twisted both physically and mentally — that meant everyone in the multiverse.

Bathed in unholy energies, Tenebrous left the Astral by way of Yggdrasil, the World Ash, whose branches wind their way through the cosmos to reach many (some say all) planes. He knew he'd need help to regain his former power, but in trying to summon his old servants, Tenebrous discovered that they, too, had been slain by Kiaransalee. So he brought them back to unlife. These undead tanar'ri he called *visages*, and he set them upon the task of secretly gathering information to aid in his vengeance. Yggdrasil allowed them to walk the planes as needed, and the quiet town of Crux — nestled in the branches of the World Ash — served as a secret base.

No one knows exactly how much time passed at this point in the tale. Suffice it to say that some years later Tenebrous discovered the means by which to achieve his evil goal. In the ruins of Pelion on the plane of Arborea, the undead lord found the Last Word. It was the ultimate magic of unmaking, a force potent enough to slay even a god — just the thing Tenebrous'd sought.

But still he couldn't make his move. He had nearly everything he needed: the power to slay anyone in his path, a small but efficient army of infiltrators, a convenient base for his cadre of spies, and a fortress known as Tcian Sumere hidden deep within the Negative Energy Plane (a hideaway he'd created long ago for just such an emergency).

But Tenebrous lacked one important item — the talisman

that made him what he was. He needed his symbol, the tool that contained a portion of his very essence. The thing that'd make it clear to his enemies that he had returned. The thing that'd let him strike fear into the hearts of his foes, so that they'd know in their last seconds of life exactly who'd defeated them.

The being that had been Orcus needed his wand.

THE TALE OF THE WAND

In those long years past, when the goddess Kiaransalee destroyed and supplanted Orcus, she left no deed undone. She killed his servants and slew each of his proxies, all except for Rotting Jack, who convinced her to take him on as her own. (Sure, Kiaransalee knew that Jack was trying to bob her to gain power for himself, but she brought him into her fold for amusement.)

The goddess then used strong magic to wipe away every mention of her foe's name, wherever and however it'd been recorded. She lacked the power to erase the very memory of Orcus from the minds of the multiverse (which is what she really wanted to do), but her enchantment still swept through the planes, removing the name "Orcus" from all histories, etchings, and the like. Thus did she reshape Thanatos into her own image, though the undead residents remained virtually unchanged.

Lastly, Kiaransalee dealt with the Wand of Orcus, the former ruler's most cherished and mighty artifact. She gave it to Kestod and Erehe, two of her living drow followers. (While the power of the wand put them in great danger, the goddess didn't trust her new undead followers — certainly not Rotting Jack! — with so potent an artifact.) Kiaransalee transported the two drow to Agathion, the fourth layer of Pandemonium, where they buried the wand in an unknowable, unreachable vault of stone. Then she brought them back and rewarded the berks by drowning them both in the River Styx. Thus, not only were they dead (and could tell no tales), but even if they were contacted or restored to life, they'd remember nothing.

Kiaransalee felt confident that the Wand of Orcus would stay lost forever — so confident, in fact, that she actually allowed one of the dead drow to return. Erehe had been the beloved consort of one of Kiaransalee's most powerful priestesses, so the goddess allowed him to be *resurrected* and rejoin his lover on the Prime Material Plane. The other drow, Kestod, became an undead creature in his mistress's realm, as did all of her petitioners. And short-sighted Kiaransalee forgot about them both, focusing instead on running her new realm (which was quite large for a demipower) and scheming to unseat Lolth.

THE UNHOLY QUEST

In his search for knowledge — specifically, the dark of his lost wand — Tenebrous journeyed to Mechanus and confronted the lord of the modrons, Primus, the One and the Prime. Primus couldn't or wouldn't answer to the undead lord's sat-

isfaction, so Tenebrous spoke the Last Word and slew the supreme modron, just as he'd done with the others he'd visited. (His quest left much blood in its wake, some of it the blood of gods.)

Unbeknownst to anyone, the shadowy, undead lord then assumed the role of the master of all modrons, filling the void of command before Primus could be replaced from the ranks below. And though it was not yet time for the next Great Modron March, he gave the orders for the procession to begin. Thus, the modrons poured forth from Mechanus and surveyed each of the Outer Planes, gathering information on everything they saw, just as they always did – but this time, the dark of their discoveries flew back to Tenebrous.

This went on for years. (The details of this errant march are chronicled in the PLANESCAPE adventure anthology *The Great Modron March* [2628].) Then one day, while trekking through the Lower Planes, the modrons learned of Kestod and Erehe, the two drow who'd hidden the Wand of Orcus. Tenebrous left Mechanus and made preparations to travel to the Abyss clandestinely to capture the undead berk in Thanatos. Meanwhile, he sent his visages to Baator, to the desert realm of Set, where they were to bring back a magical blossom said to restore memories drained by the River Styx. The drow prisoner would be *made* to remember where he'd buried the wand.

There were other sources to question, too – it never hurt to gain knowledge. Didn't the illithid god Maanzecorian reportedly know a great many secrets? And the deity known as Camaxtli, as well? Tenebrous'd gladly kill every god in the cosmos until he found his wand, but he knew that such rampant violence would alert others too quickly. He hoped that the visages would succeed, so he wouldn't have to visit Baator personally and slay Set. That'd certainly draw a great deal of unwanted attention.

Nonetheless, Tenebrous would let nothing and no one stand in his way. He'd learn the location of his wand. He'd teach Kiaransalee the meaning of power. He'd have his revenge on the multiverse. . . .

◆ ADVENTURE SUMMARY ◆

As "Out of the Darkness" begins, the player characters have no idea what they're getting themselves into. No wise old sage meets them in a tavern and begs them to prevent the return of an evil dead god. Instead, the PCs stumble into the real plot as they take part in another.

In Chapter I, "Circean Embers," the heroes follow a band of khaasta raiders who're using a strange magical item that can steal the beauty from a person or object. The khaasta's path leads from Sigil to the Outlands, and from there to the creatures' lair – the entrance to which is found on Yggdrasil, the World Ash. But the raiders' king refuses to surrender his precious beauty.

In Chapter II, "Crux," the PCs spend time resting or healing in the tree-burg and learn that an evil force has come to Yggdrasil, a dark presence that seems to twist the minds of those most in tune with the

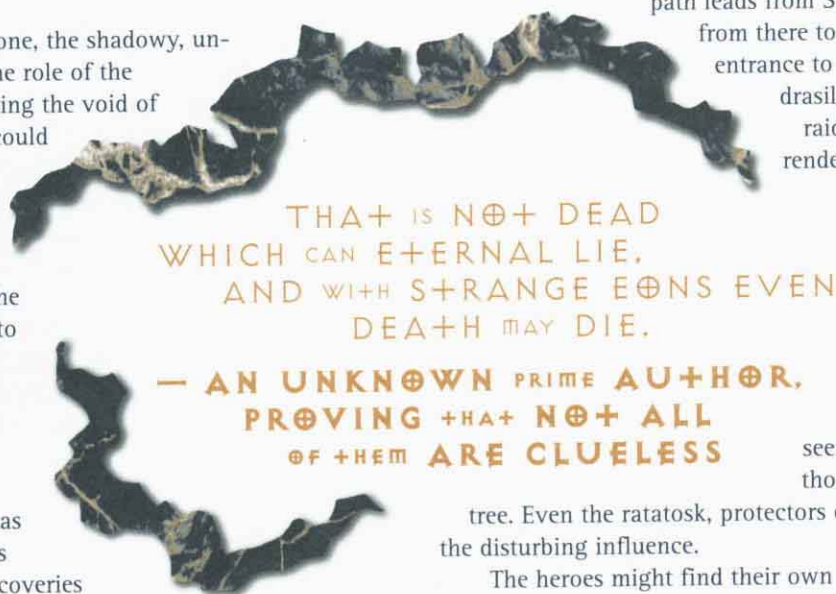
tree. Even the ratatosk, protectors of Yggdrasil, fall prey to the disturbing influence.

The heroes might find their own minds clouded in Chapter III, "Masks," in which they learn that Crux has been compromised by shadowy, fiendish creatures able to alter a berk's perceptions and steal his identity. Eventually, they follow the creatures – which are really Tenebrous's visages – to the realm of Set, where the fiends seek a magical blossom that restores memories lost to the Styx. After a dramatic battle in Crux, the PCs might believe that they've put an end to the visages' menace, even if many questions are left unanswered.

Naturally, the leatherheads're wrong. In Chapter IV, "Message From Thanatos," a summons from Crux brings the heroes back to town by way of a nearly dead prime-material world called Ranais. While crossing Ranais, the PCs learn more of the visages and perhaps even their foul master. Finally, back on Yggdrasil, the bashers take the fforge by the tusks and ambush the visages, hopefully first gaining clues as to the fiends' true base of operations: a fortress within the Negative Energy Plane.

In Chapter V, "The Bottom of the Multiverse," the PCs explore the stronghold, perhaps picking up hints to the identity of the visages' master and the source of his newfound power. But they also encounter a vampire held prisoner by the fiends – the drow Kestod, who lost his memory in the River Styx. The visages obviously want to wrest some bit of forgotten knowledge from Kestod's mind. If the PCs help him, Kestod warns them that the only other berk with the secret is found in the Vault of the Drow, on Oerth.

If the cutters follow up on this lead, Chapter VI, "The Vault of the Drow," thrusts them into a civil war that threatens to tear the Vault apart. In the midst of chaos and danger, they locate the drow Kestod mentioned and finally tumble to the truth: The evil god Orcus (now called Tenebrous) is the one leading the visages. The secret he desires is the location of his infamous wand, and he's been killing everyone in his path – even gods – to find it.





Either before or after the trip to the Vault, the heroes can chase another trail to Arborea. In Chapter VII, "The Ruins of Pelion," they live out other bashers' experiences from the distant past and learn how Tenebrous gained the power to slay gods. However, if he doesn't

recover the Wand of Orcus soon, the former Abyssal lord's newfound might will consume him from within.

Eventually, the PCs race to the Howling Plane in Chapter VIII, "Deepest Pandemonium." After getting directions from the circus-caravan known as the Cynosure, the heroes reach the fourth layer, where the wand lies hidden. They must find the artifact before Tenebrous does, and they've got to destroy it, send it far away, or otherwise keep it from the evil lord long enough for him to die — again.

Some time afterward, the bashers take part in Chapter IX, "The Dead-Book of the Gods," wherein they travel to the Astral Plane on a seemingly unrelated mission. Once there, they learn that a priest of Tenebrous they first encountered in Pandemonium is attempting to bring his god back yet again. The PCs must make their way across the floating husk of Tenebrous to confront the priest and stop his evil scheme. But is Tenebrous really dead? With all of the manipulation of their perceptions throughout the adventure, the cutters just can't be sure.

Interspersed throughout the nine chapters are Interludes that reveal the dark of Tenebrous's wicked machinations. These Interludes aren't meant to involve the PCs — they simply help the DM better understand what's going on as the story progresses.

◆ PREPARING FOR PLAY ◆

"Out of the Darkness" is a massive AD&D® PLANESCAPE® adventure, an epic with many characters to meet, locations to explore, and obstacles to overcome. It's designed for a party of four to six characters of 6th to 9th level. But even such advanced bashers will take many playing sessions to complete the scenario.

Before running "Out of the Darkness," the DM should be sure to read through the entire adventure at least once completely, reviewing the pertinent sections before each playing session. The flowchart on the inside back cover of the book is meant to help the DM keep the course of the ride straight.

The Appendix (starting on page 157) contains the MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® Appendix-style entry for the visage, a brand new creature, as well as full statistics for major characters, foes, and monsters. What's more, the last pages of the book feature 15 different full-color illustrations of scenes from "Out of the Darkness." These illustrations are labeled by letter (A through O), and at certain points during the adven-

ture, the text instructs the DM to show the players a particular picture. The illustrations give the players a better idea of what their characters encounter ("You see this"), so the DM shouldn't show them any pictures ahead of time.

'Course, maps of important locations appear throughout the book, but the folded poster sheet contains three additional maps for use with "Out of the Darkness": a map of Crux, a map of Tcian Sumere, and a large map of the Vault of the Drow. When folded up in full, one side of the poster sheet shows Crux and the other shows Tcian Sumere. When opened once, the sheet shows the Vault of the Drow. (When unfolded in full, it provides a map for use with "Into the Light.") This folding method should make it easier for the DM to prevent players from seeing maps that they're not supposed to see.

NOTE: The Appendix does not contain stats for Tenebrous. He may have been weakened by his death and rebirth, but he's still a deity. The PCs can't wound or fight him, much less kill him.

USING "IN+⊕+THE LIGHT"

"Into the Light" is not part of "Out of the Darkness." It's a separate, stand-alone adventure that takes place in Sigil. The DM can run the scenario on its own or incorporate it into "Out of the Darkness," turning "Into the Light" into a sub-plot of the main story. The flowchart on the inside back cover of this book shows the recommended method for linking the three parts of "Into the Light" with the nine chapters of "Out of the Darkness." Suggestions throughout the text offer the DM other possibilities for integrating the two adventures.

No matter how the adventures weave in and out of each other, the PCs will have to cope with different events on different levels. They can use what they learn in one plot to deal with problems in the other, and certain characters (such as Talismin, who appears in Chapter I of "Out of the Darkness") can affect events in both storylines.

A skillful DM can even make the players believe that the two different adventures are really part of one large scenario. The two-plot method of storytelling might seem a bit complex at first, but it gives the DM and the players a great deal more flexibility and allows for excellent role-playing.

THE PLAYER CHARACTERS

"Out of the Darkness" isn't intended for low-level adventurers, but it tries to make the point that a player character doesn't have to be a vastly powerful juggernaut dripping with magical items in order to get involved in the big events of the planes. Fact is, when dealing with matters *this* big, a PC's level of power becomes unimportant. A deity like Tenebrous doesn't much care whether a hero's 1st-level or 18th-level — the berk's still a mortal, totally incapable of fighting a god.

The DM's encouraged to alter "Out of the Darkness" as necessary to fit the adventure into his existing campaign. However, it's not recommended that he drastically change the scenario to accommodate very low- or high-level PCs. First of

all, making things easier so that lower-level characters can survive will prove difficult – and will weaken the game. See, this plane-spanning adventure takes the cutters to highly dangerous trouble-spots, and if that danger isn't present, it cheapens their existence. After all, if the Abyss isn't terrible and deadly, what's the point? And if the DM lets higher-level heroes play, the sods might believe that they *can* fight Tenebrous or undertake other addle-coved actions that should rightfully end in their deaths. The PCs in "Out of the Darkness" must be capable, yet well aware of their limitations in comparison to what they're up against.

They've also got to be somewhat self-motivated. They're pulled into the main plot slowly, but when they start to discover that strange things are happening, the cutters are on their own. No external force makes them keep going, no guide leads them along from one scene to the next, and no one says, "Orcus is doing bad things. Here's a hundred gold pieces. Get him." The PCs must provide their own motivations and their own solutions. Curiosity and the benevolence to right wrongs'll probably drive the heroes onward – at least, they should. Berks interested only in treasure or other material gain aren't best suited for "Out of the Darkness," and the DM may need to provide alternate motivations for such bashers.

As mentioned earlier, the adventures of *The Great Modron March* lead directly into *Dead Gods*, making that earlier product a "prequel" of sorts. However, PCs who took part in all of the scenarios from *The Great Modron March* might be a little over-powered for the first few chapters of "Out of the Darkness." That's fine, though; the DM can balance them out by letting the visages alter the perceptions of those characters even more. With their powers of lucidity control, the visages can challenge PCs of virtually any level, especially if the sods're caught unaware.

TIPS FOR THE DM

"Out of the Darkness" is a complicated adventure, particularly if used in conjunction with "Into the Light." This section offers a few tips to help make the DM's job easier.

One of the problems with running published adventures is that the players often have some idea of what they're getting into. If the DM takes out a thick book called *Dead Gods*, the players'll know that they're about to start a long adventure involving expired deities. But the first chapter of "Out of the Darkness" pulls the heroes into the main plot by having them chase khaasta raiders. The DM should take pains to prevent the players from seeing the book too soon, perhaps by copying Chapter I and leaving the book itself out of sight until it's needed. (By permission of TSR, Inc., pages 12 through 25 of *Dead Gods* may be reproduced for personal use only. © 1997 TSR, Inc. All rights reserved.)

Chapter VII, "The Ruins of Pelion," may present challenges that many DMs won't have faced before. See, at that point in the game, the players will create a new group of temporary characters who adventured in Pelion's distant past. To ease the transition between the original PCs and the new

bunch, it might be a good idea to start the new heroes at the beginning of a playing session and not return to the original bashers until the beginning of yet another. (In other words, don't make the players switch characters in the middle of a session.) What's more, the DM can run the temporary PCs' adventure in a different room or an entirely new location in order to make the experience seem even more unusual. Another option is to have a "fill-in" DM from outside the playing group run the sessions that involve the temporary characters. 'Course, the regular DM still needs to be aware of everything that happens during that time.

Here's an even stranger idea. In Chapter IX, "The Dead-Book of the Gods," the PCs travel to the Astral, where the Guardian of the Dead Gods warns them that the threat of Tenebrous is not yet over. Instead of running that chapter last, the DM can use it to begin "Out of the Darkness." Then,

when the Guardian delivers his message to the heroes, it unleashes a flood of repressed memories of events. At that point, the PCs return to Chapter I and play out the adventure until they catch up to Chapter IX again – apparently, they'd already done all of those things but somehow lost their memories of them. (Perhaps Tenebrous wiped their brain-boxes clean so the sods wouldn't remember that he was trying to restore himself to full power.)

For this to work, the DM must arrange in advance for the characters to lose a considerable amount of time – most likely several months – that they can't account for. But that could be great fun, too. Imagine the heroes' confusion and fear as they slowly realize that it's six months later than they thought it was. The DM must also deal with the fact that the PCs already know they'll survive the adventure, since they're alive at the "end" when they talk to the Guardian.

Finally, it's essential that the DM familiarize himself with the many locations visited in "Out of the Darkness." It's enough to read through the descriptions in *A DM™ Guide to the Planes* (found in the *PLANESCAPE Campaign Setting* boxed set), but other products provide more details about specific settings. The *Planes of Chaos* boxed set (2603) has the dark of Yggdrasil, the Abyss, Pandemonium, and Pelion. The *Planes of Law* boxed set (2607) covers Set's realm on Baator. *A Guide to the Astral Plane* (2625) lays bare the Silver Void. *A Player's Primer to the Outlands* (2610) could prove handy as the heroes track the khaasta in Chapter I. And numerous products featuring Sigil – including *In the Cage* (2609) and *Uncaged* (2624) – provide information on the Cage's wards and residents.

A few non-PLANESCAPE products might also prove helpful. The classic 1st-edition adventure *Vault of the Drow* (Dungeon Module D3) contains a great deal of chant on the Vault, though most of it's been presented and updated in Chapter VI of "Out of the Darkness." If the DM wants to expand on the heroes' stay in the Vault, the accessory *The Drow of the Underdark* (9326) reveals much about the dark elves.



CHAPTER I: CIRCEAN EMBERS

"Slavering gods, but you're slow!" The toilmaster's whip cracked in the air above the heads of the workers. "Put some back into it!" A long, meandering smile crossed his reptilian mouth. "If belief is power, as the chant says, then I believe you'll all be dead as Dustmen if you don't get that cart moving." The khaasta urged his lizard mount onward into the muddy terrain.

The sky was a drab color usually found in the streets of Sigil or the glooms of the Gray Waste. If the clouds held any rain, it would likely prove to be greasy and dirty. And everyone in the caravan was already befouled with mud and oil. The portal from Sigil had taken them through the strip mines of Chariamur, and it would be a while before they reached Ironridge.

Thirty human slaves pulled a huge wagon full of supplies and stolen cargo. The khaasta guards on lizardback watched over them, but the toilmaster gave the orders. As he looked on, the wagon went up and over a large rut of dried mud. A clink-clink-clink of glass was followed by a sudden, sharp crash.

The wagon stopped. The toilmaster looked toward the back of the cart, where a handful of slaves had been pushing. One of the men had changed. His countenance now hinted at something respectable — something attractive. Despite the fact that the slave was human, the toilmaster now found something pleasant about the berk. He'd have to make sure the worker remained in his personal force . . .

"Damn!" said the toilmaster, trying to shake himself back to his senses. "Watch out, you sodding leatherheads!" He brought his whip down upon the back of the nearest slave. "You've broken a bottle and wasted some beauty."

◆ THE THIEF OF CHARMS ◆

A few hundred years ago, a planar wizard named Chyv Imrin discovered a portal that led from his kip in Sigil to a prime-material world called Neirston. He knew the portal'd prove quite useful — the chant said Neirston was magic-rich — but the problem, he soon found, was the key to the portal: beauty. See, anything could pass through the portal, but its beauty was drained away to activate the door. And that left the person or object something *without* beauty, unappealing to all eyes. Gems lost their luster and shine. Works of art became bleak and plain. People became uncomely. They didn't change physically in any way; they simply lost some intangible quality and became unattractive.

Chyv, of course, didn't want to suffer that fate. So he constructed what he thought was a minor magical item, an object that has since proved to be quite powerful: the *thief of charms*. The *thief* is a rod of iron with a glass bottle attached to one end. When touched to an object or creature, the rod steals all beauty from the target and stores it in the bottle, which can be removed and corked. (The target is not allowed a saving throw.) Other bottles can easily be fitted onto the end, and any bottle or similar container will do, for the magic is in the rod. If no container is attached to the end of the rod, the *thief* cannot drain beauty.

Whenever Chyv wanted to journey to Neirston, he used the *thief of charms* to fill a bottle with stolen beauty and then carried it through the portal. The doorway always consumed the bottled beauty rather than drain it from the

THAT'S THE PROBLEM
WITH HUMANS.
THEY'RE +⊕⊕ SODDIN' STUPID
+⊕ MAKE GOOD SLAVES.
— THE +⊕ILMASTER

wizard or from an item he carried or wore.

But Chyv couldn't fill his study with hundreds of flasks; he had to capture beauty more or less as he needed it. See, he learned the hard way that stolen beauty is fleeting and dangerous. When stored in a bottle or other container, the beauty fades away completely in about a month. When the beauty is applied to an object or a living being, the effects last for only a week. What's worse, if something is given beauty beyond its own — in other words, if beauty is drained from one thing and added to another that already *has* it — the recipient becomes so attractive that those who look upon it feel compelled to possess it. For these reasons, Chyv called the stolen beauty *circean embers*.

Eventually, the wizard, like all mortals, died. The portal, and indeed the world of Neirston, was forgotten in the Cage. The *thief of charms* passed into obscurity — that is, until the item was looted by cross-traders and eventually sold to a khaasta bandit-king named Haac(!)nss (pronounced like a phlegmy cough, a click, and a hiss put together). Haac(!)nss didn't look upon the rod as a bit of esoteric magic. He saw it as a tool to get rich. He figured that what the item could steal, he could then sell, and he sent his troops out with the *thief of charms* to collect all the circean embers they could get. But the reptilian raiders failed to see the true nature of the rod or of beauty itself. They didn't realize that all natural things possessed inherent beauty. Instead, they assumed they had to drain the beauty from intelligent, living targets. And so the khaasta made their way to Sigil, to steal from the Cagers that which the sods experienced so seldom.

USING +THE CIRCEAN EMBERS

Throughout the adventure, various bashers might use or fall victim to the *thief of charms*. The DM should keep in mind the following general rules to govern how it works:

- ♦ Anyone who loses beauty to the rod can regain it by exposing himself to *any* circean embers. It's not necessary to find the exact bottle containing the beauty stolen from that individual.
- ♦ A victim who's lost beauty suffers a -2 modifier to reaction rolls made by others — unless the lucky sod runs into a very rare individual who doesn't make judgments based on physical appearance. Stolen beauty affects a victim's basic nature; in other words, an ogre who loses beauty and an elf who loses beauty both suffer the same penalty.
- ♦ Any person or object whose appearance is enhanced with the circean embers is perceived by others to be extremely attractive. Onlookers who fail a saving throw versus spell are affected as by the *sympathy* effect of the 8th-level wizard spell *antipathy-sympathy*. The berks feel compelled to possess the beautiful person or object as they might desire a glittering treasure or magnificent work of art. (Members of the Bleak Cabal, and any other creatures the DM so chooses, gain a +2 bonus to their saving throws versus the *sympathy* effect. Sensates and other beings designated by the DM suffer a penalty of -2, as they focus so much on their senses.)
- ♦ Anyone currently made beautiful by an application of circean embers is immune to the *sympathy* effect caused by seeing another "infected" person or object.
- ♦ Circean embers wear off in about a week, restoring the beautiful subject to normal and canceling the *sympathy* effect in others. But the *thief of charms* can restore a victim to normal immediately, and the circean embers can be dispelled as can any other magical effect. (Note that someone who *loses* beauty won't return to normal in a week and can't be "cured" with *dispel magic*; the victim's stuck unless exposed to circean embers.)
- ♦ A single use of the *thief of charms* will drain all of a victim's beauty or bestow upon him as much beauty as he could ever have. In other words, using the rod several times on the same target won't have any added effect.

◆ A CRY IN THE NIGHT ◆

This chapter, the first portion of "Out of the Darkness," has little to do with the overall plot of Tenebrous's return. Instead, it's meant to subtly draw the player characters into the story without letting them learn too quickly just how big a problem they face. The text below assumes that the PCs begin the adventure in Sigil, although the DM can place the opening in any burg desired.

One evening, after dinner, the PCs hear a shriek from outside their tavern (or home, or wherever they've just finished their meal). 'Course, the Cage has more than its share of screams, but true heroes will, at the very least, investigate to see what's happening. When they do, read:

A thin slip of a boy stumbles through the street. As he gets closer, you can see the elvish heritage in his pale face. His clothes bear the marks of a recent scuffle, but he doesn't look grievously harmed.

"Look!" he cries, plaintively. "Look at what they've done to me!"

You see no great wounds or scars, although you must admit that you've never seen a less comely half-elf. There's just something odd about him, but you can't quite put your finger on it.

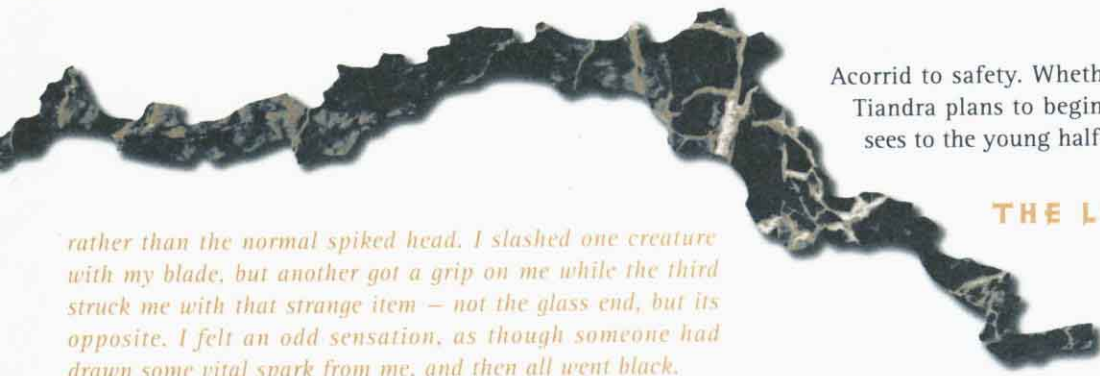
Suddenly, a cloaked figure hurries forward, toward the boy. The stranger seems to have arranged the hood of his brown robe so it hides his face. Looking down at the half-elf, who has collapsed crying to his knees, the figure simply states: "This must end."

The cloaked figure (who is female, though the loose robe hides her shape) seems very concerned about the boy. If approached by the PCs, she introduces herself as Tiandra (PI/♀ human/F4/Sign of One/NG). As she helps the boy up, her cloak opens to reveal a tall, black-skinned woman of regal bearing who, like the lad, is quite unattractive – though none of the PCs can quite place what it is about her that makes her so.

The half-elf seems confused, perhaps in shock. Only if the PCs seem sincerely concerned about him will Tiandra be forthcoming about what happened. She explains that the boy was assaulted by reptilian creatures, and that she herself was attacked about a week ago.

"Fate found me in the Lower Ward, near the Great Foundry, when I was assailed by three creatures of scale and claw. Their intent seemed more to detain than to harm, yet I'd have none of it. The largest produced a queer device, resembling nothing so much as a mace with a glass bottle at one end





rather than the normal spiked head. I slashed one creature with my blade, but another got a grip on me while the third struck me with that strange item — not the glass end, but its opposite. I felt an odd sensation, as though someone had drawn some vital spark from me, and then all went black.

"I awoke not long after, I believe, but my attackers had vanished into Sigil's unholy night. Though I felt strange, it wasn't until I saw my reflection in a window that I knew what they'd done. They'd made me into the unlovely creature you see before you. Their sorcery has cursed me to be foul in all eyes. Even my voice gives no comfort to those who hear it.

"Those serpentine monsters seemed to have no motive in their attack other than to afflict me so. And it wasn't just me — others, like this lad, have been so struck. I'll end these assaults if it's the death of me! And I'll reward you well for any aid rendered, should you be so inclined."

By this point, the boy has recovered enough of his wits to join the conversation. He gives his name as Acorrid Degasias (Pl/♂ half-elf/0-level/Free League/N) and confirms Tiandra's tale. The same thing happened to him, save that there were far more of the monsters, and rather than fighting he tried to give them some garnish. But the lizard-creatures took the jink *and* his appearance. Acorrid remarks that he feels more as though something was taken from him than given to him — in other words, he blames his new appearance on a theft, not a curse.

If the PCs ask about involving the Harmonium (Sigil's normal law-enforcers), Tiandra complains that the Hardheads won't help. None of the victims has been wealthy, and Tiandra thinks the Harmonium helps only the rich (which is not necessarily the truth). In any event, no one's been successful in stopping the reptilian attackers. Neither Tiandra nor Acorrid even realize that the creatures are khaasta.

If the PCs show interest in stopping the assaults, they gain Tiandra's thanks. She also promises them 100 gp each for their trouble if they're successful in ending the reign of terror.

NOTE: This encounter, or a slightly altered version of it, can be used at any time in any civilized location. It can take place as the PCs enter or leave a town, or as they simply stroll through an otherwise innocuous street. Fact is, this entire chapter can be placed in any community, so it should be easy to incorporate the adventure into an existing campaign.

◆ TAKING THE RIDE ◆

Assuming the PCs agree to help, Tiandra explains that all of the attacks have occurred in the Lower Ward, and they always happen at night, just before antipeak. She asks the PCs to prowl the Lower Ward tonight for the assailants while she gets

Acorrid to safety. Whether or not the characters help, Tiandra plans to begin her own hunt as soon as she sees to the young half-elf.

THE LOWER WARD

Even at the best of times, the Lower Ward is a hazardous place to be at night. The Dungeon Master can and should put together a few

short encounters to emphasize the danger. The ward boasts general ruffians, mysterious shadow-skulkers, and even fiends; wise PCs should try to steer clear of all of them. It'll take the group a very long time to search the whole ward. Not everyone they meet should be "an encounter," but the DM should make sure that enough occurs to give the PCs the feeling that the search is taking a long time — not to mention the idea that the streets of Sigil are never completely safe or uneventful. A few ideas include:

- ◆ A cross-trader (Pl/♂ githzerai/T5/Believers of the Source/NE), trying to peel gullies, begs passersby to enter a nearby abandoned building to rescue a hurt child. 'Course, there's no child; instead, the rogue's prepared a trap: a 10-foot-deep pit covered by a large rug. If any victims fall in, the knight of the post offers to help them out — in exchange for all their jink. But even if they give him their money, he just gives them the laugh.
- ◆ Two Anarchist agents (Pl/♀ human/F3/Revolutionary League/CN) who've just set a fire in a nearby Cipher factotum's house try to skulk away in the darkness.
- ◆ Twelve Cipher namers (var/var/F1/Transcendent Order/var) rush through the streets, on their way to put out the above-mentioned fire. As they're also looking for the arsonists, they're quick to jump to conclusions if they see anyone sneaking about.
- ◆ Five Hardhead soldiers (Pl/♂ human/F4/Harmonium/LG) and their commander (Pr/♀ human/Pal6/Harmonium/LG) search the ward for the khaasta. If they encounter the PCs, they try to send the heroes home — the berks aren't authorized to look for criminals.
- ◆ An illusionist (Pl/♂ tiefling/III7/CE) working for the tanar'ri tries to sneak a rutterkin into town unnoticed for some nefarious scheme. The wizard uses illusions to fool or ward off passersby.
- ◆ A group of five bubbers (Pl/♂ human/0-level/Fated/N) looks for any way possible to obtain some jink for a drink. They might attack the PCs or offer to perform a minor task for a fee.

THE KHAASTA

At last, toward antipeak, the PCs come upon another victim of the khaasta thieves. A bariaur male, completely devoid of beauty, lies unconscious in an alleyway. Just as the PCs discover the poor sod, they hear distant sounds of movement, the clank of metal, and low hissing.

Waking the bariaur is fairly easy, but if the PCs take the time to do so, they hear the above-mentioned noises fade almost out of perception. The victim's name is Thardandis (Pl/♂ bariaur/F2/Society of Sensation/CG). He's confused, groggy, and angry,

but with prompting, he tells the PCs that he was attacked by a large group of lizard-men he calls khaasta.

If the PCs follow the sounds, they head back out into the street and soon turn into another alley where the khaasta are preparing to make their escape with their stolen spoils. The heroes find 11 khaasta: 10 raiders and their leader, the toilmaster.

Though the khaasta almost certainly outnumber the PCs, at this point the creatures are primarily interested in escape. They've had their fill of Sigil and taken what they needed. If the heroes confront or attack them, the toilmaster sends enough khaasta (one per PC) to fight while he and the rest escape through a portal further down the alley. This should provide enough time for them to get away; the portal stays open long enough to allow six khaasta to escape, and two or three of them can slip through in a round. However, should the toilmaster be presented with the opportunity – such as if a PC gets past the remaining khaasta by skill or spell – he won't hesitate to use the *thief of charms* on the heroes. It serves as an effective delaying tactic and adds to the plunder.

The portal the khaasta hope to use is a narrow crawlspace that leads under one of the side buildings. The key is the silver feather of an Arcadian dovehawk, which is not consumed when used and functions when traveling either way through the two-way portal. The crawlspace leads to an isolated mining area on the Outlands near the Caverns of Thought. Waiting there for the raiders are five more khaasta, eight human slaves, 10 giant lizard mounts, and a wagon filled with bottles of beauty and supplies for the trip overland to their lair – accessible only through a portal on the great tree Yggdrasil.

NOTE: It's crucial to the story that some of the cross-trading khaasta escape with the *thief of charms* and some of the stolen beauty. If necessary, the DM can increase the number of khaasta in the encounter, or rule that some of the creatures have already escaped through the portal by the time the PCs arrive in the alley (and make it clear to the heroes that this has happened). The latter option foils the use of a *gate ward* or *surelock* spell to stop the khaasta. 'Course, the PCs should want to follow the villains, but if the khaasta's wrongdoing isn't enough motivation, having one of the heroes fall under the effects of the *thief of charms* might be more compelling.

AFTER THE BATTLE

The confrontation with the khaasta will more than likely end with the villains giving the PCs the laugh through the portal. The heroes are unable to follow, unless by some amazingly odd chance they have a silver Arcadian dovehawk feather. (The toilmaster makes no big show of the key, so the characters won't even catch a glimpse of it.) However, if a PC managed to slip through the portal along with the khaasta, the creatures probably tear the poor sod to ribbons when he emerges on the other side; without the key, he won't be able to retreat back to his comrades in Sigil.

Captured khaasta know a bit of chant. Intimidating one of these reptilian beasts is difficult, but a convincing threat of force or torture (or the use of magical charms) reveals the following:

- ♦ The khaasta have a magical weapon that steals beauty; they hope to sell the beauty to others.
- ♦ Anyone who's had his beauty stolen can regain it by exposing himself to that which is stored in the toilmaster's bottles.
- ♦ The alley portal leads to a location on the Outlands from which the khaasta have only a few days' march to their forest home. This lair holds many khaasta. (If possible, the captives lie and tell the PCs that the lair contains hundreds of their people.)

None of the raiders know how to open the portal; only the toilmaster knows the dark of the feather. To tumble to this information, the PCs can try to cast *warp sense* or find the chant from a well-lanned graybeard. Luckily, a plethora of sources in the City of Doors specialize in the dark of portals and keys – for the right jink. Some cutters might visit the Guvners at the City Courts. In-the-know bloods might track down Lissandra the Gate-seeker (Pr/♀ human/M9/Revolutionary League/NG), a tough wizard who carries a log book in which she records the nature of every portal she finds. And there's always Alluvius Ruskin (Pl/♀ tiefling/Wil14/Incantifier/NE), the old proprietor of Tivvum's Antiquities, a shop in the Market Ward that sells every kind of gate key imaginable.

No matter where the PCs obtain a silver Arcadian dovehawk feather, it costs them at least 50 gp and takes them the better part of a day to find. If the heroes then chase after the khaasta, they'll be well behind their quarry. It's important to the adventure that they don't actually catch up with the khaasta until the creatures have reached their secret lair. This shouldn't be a problem, however – following the villains'll be hard enough.

◆ CHARIAMUR ◆

When the PCs pass through the alley portal, they emerge near an abandoned mine on the Outlands. Refer to the map on this page.

You're greeted by the stench of oily metal shavings and air that's heavy with leadlike dust. The ground at your feet is muddy, even greasy, with trickles of befouled water running through the kneaded, soggy soil. A rough landscape of oily tillings and syrupy pools stretches in every direction. Dark, sooty clouds hang overhead, threatening a rain that you somehow know will only further pollute the environs, rather than cleanse the foul area.

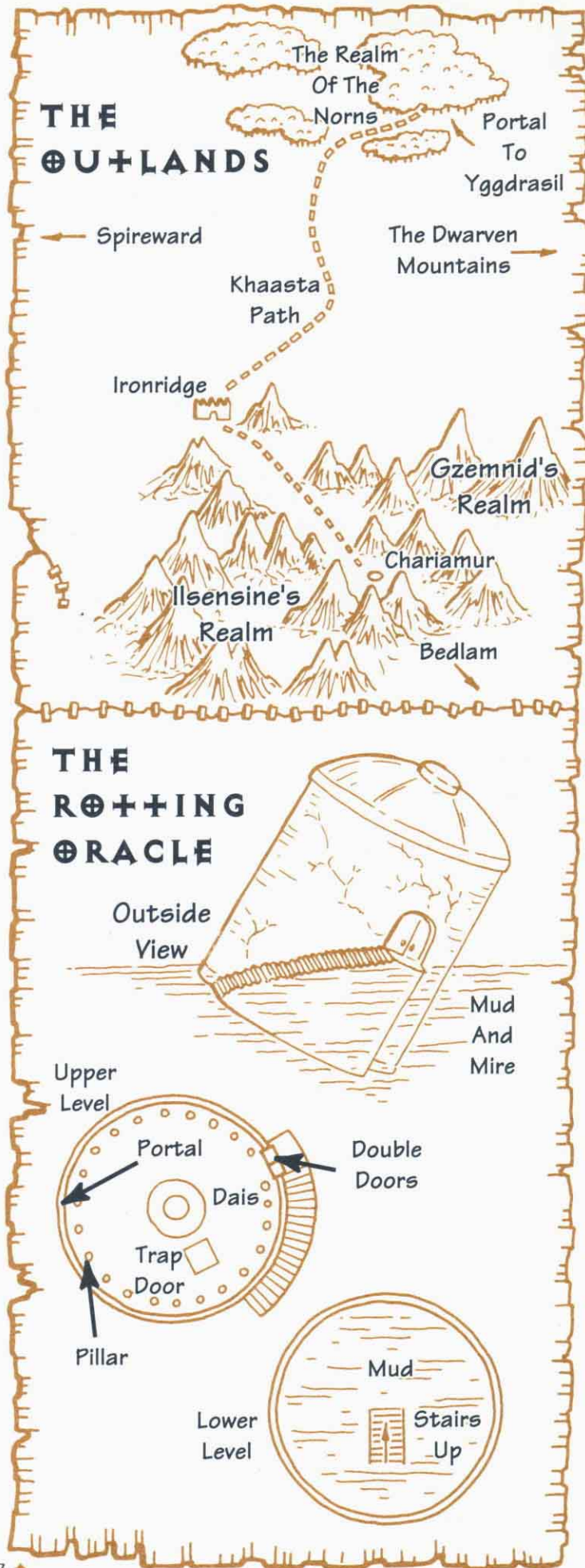
Long ago, Chariamur was an open-pit mine located between the realms of Ilsensine and Gzemnid on the Outlands. It was usually found in the 7th or 8th ring of the plane, though it currently rests in the 7th. The mine was created by a veritable nation of grimy, vile gnomes known as spriggans. These loathsome miners and their umber hulk slaves tore apart the land to such a degree that it's said to be a festering wound from which the Outlands will never heal. Ancient foundries and smelting works once surrounded the mine, but they've disappeared into the fetid cesspool or were eaten away by the uncaring caress of time and corrosive rains. Fortunately, in the vast scheme of things, Chariamur is a tiny place.

The odious gnomes are long gone, wiped out by pestilence and flood (or so the chant goes), but Chariamur's always been occupied by something or another. Until recently, the area was used by spies and proxies of the illithid god Maanzecorian to spy upon his rival, Ilsensine, in the nearby Caverns of Thought. These spies based themselves in the Rotting Oracle, a building half-submerged in the oily mire.

THE ROTTING ORACLE

After the spriggans had left, but still many, many years ago, a huge rotunda was built in Chariamur by a set of quintuplet tieflings who believed they could channel information from the moldering god known as Juiblex. Not long after its creation, the building sank halfway into the mud and mire of soot and metal tillings. The tieflings disappeared, but their structure survives – albeit half-submerged and askew.

Plodding across this fetid expanse, your boots grow heavy with a muddy build-up, which is blue with metallic dust. The sky seems ready to burst at any moment, though you spot what might be shelter off to your left. A blackened, scarred cliff-face rises up out of the mire, and built alongside it is a round, domed building that sits askew in the mud.



As you watch, a figure emerges from the door of the structure. The skin surrounding its huge, white, pupil-less eyes is sallow brown with a hint of violet. Four small tentacles flail wildly from below where you'd expect to see its nose and mouth. The finery it wears grows filthy from the ooze it runs through as it stumbles closer, but it pays you no heed. Three-fingered hands clutch at its soft skull, and suddenly, wordlessly, the creature's face and head are drawn inward by an irresistible force — an implosion that resembles nothing so much as a giant, invisible hand crushing the skull of the creature like a grape.

It falls dead into the mud.

- ◆ Show the players Illo A (on page 169).

The PCs will likely enter the Rotting Oracle to try to figure out what might have happened to the creature — a mind flayer known as Hananolith. Though the lower level of the building is submerged, the heroes still can enter easily enough; the doorway was originally raised and reached via a set of stairs (which are now completely hidden from view). The interior of the main level is a single room with pillars strung around the perimeter and a raised dias in the center. On the dias is an old ceramic pool, once used for divinations but now cracked and filthy.

The space between two near pillars is actually a one-way portal from Gehenna. Through this portal came the agents of Maanzecorian long ago, and through this portal also came the illithid the PCs saw die — a former proxy of the deity. *Former* because Maanzecorian is now dead. Slain by Tenebrous and his wicked puissance, the illithid power of knowledge and secrets was among the first to die in the Abyssal lord's quest to regain his wand.

If the PCs enter the Rotting Oracle, they also encounter a second mind flayer — Dleniacorus, another proxy (Px/illithid/HD 8+4/LE).

Kneeling on the dias, another sickly mauve, tentacle-visaged creature shudders with what seems great pain. One of its large, white eyes has gone black with blood, and more dark fluid seeps amid the tentacles — perhaps from a mouth obscured by the writhing appendages. As you watch, dark hemorrhages appear, like cracks quite literally forming on the sides of the thing's head.

"Dead," a voice pounds into your head. "God is dead! The secrets are lost. It has slain our great Maanzecorian. . . ." As the creature's spirit flees its dying form, so too does the voice leave your brain.

When Tenebrous attacked Maanzecorian on Gehenna, Dleniacorus and Hananolith fled through the portal to Chariamur, abandoning their deity to the dead-book. 'Course, they still hit the blinds, for their ties to their patron were too strong. When Maanzecorian fell, they followed soon after in horrible, unimaginably painful deaths.

NOTE: Because the PCs are mere mortals, they can do

nothing to save either proxy, should they for some reason want to.

THE DEATH OF MAANZECORIAN

When a power dies, the side effects and repercussions are many. Maanzecorian was a god of knowledge, and wisps of his essence scatter from his dying form. On Gehenna, where Tenebrous stands over the murdered corpse, the Abyssal lord is bathed in eons of collected secrets and bits of chant. Even on the other side of the portal (perhaps because of the presence of two of Maanzecorian's proxies), the PCs are deluged by random bits of knowledge flowing to the Outlands and into their brains.

'Course, the chant's decidedly useless to the heroes. With the vast storehouse of knowledge that comprised so much of the deity's spirit, the chances of gleaned a valuable piece of information from the meager stream of thoughts that reaches the Outlands is nil. It is, however, a strange experience for the PCs. Unless they've been through a psychic storm on the Astral Plane (a somewhat similar phenomenon), it's quite disorienting to have knowledge come unbidden into their minds. The chant they gain includes the following:

- ◆ Javor favors his younger son over the eldest.
- ◆ The source of the Tungakim River is at a place called Hinter-rock.
- ◆ Karrum Nionimo keeps a magical dagger hidden in the bag under his bed.
- ◆ Porcupinefish feed on shellfish and coral.
- ◆ Madarn is against killing the big cat.
- ◆ Shiny gray in color, chalcocite is formed at fairly low temperatures.
- ◆ The Drachenfels trace their ancestry back to ancient Blackmoor.

UNWELCOME EYES

If the PCs linger near Chariamur or the Rotting Oracle for more than an hour, they're assaulted by a violent and dangerous intruder: Blvastin, a beholder from the nearby underground realm of Gzemnid. It seems the beholder god recently felt a profound disturbance — the death of Maanzecorian — and instructed his proxies to send an eye tyrant to investigate.

Rather than disintegrate the PCs immediately, the beholder uses its abilities to *slow* and then *charm* them in order to gain information. The creature struggles to subdue the heroes (in an aggressive manner) unless they fend off the attack by rattling their bone-boxes in an obsequious, subservient way. Either way, the beholder suffers their existence only long

enough to get the chant it wants. After the PCs tell the eye tyrant what they know (or *claim* to know) about the “disturbance,” the monster does its best to send them to the dead-book. The heroes should use the time spent wigwagging with the beholder to come up with an escape or battle plan. Naturally, the best plan may be simply to try to give it the laugh and run away (as the PCs surely can move much faster than it can).

CHAN+ IS +HE MIND FLAYERS
 ⊕NCE PRAC+ICALLY RULED +HE ENTIRE
 PRIME AND EVEN +HREA+ENED
 +HE ⊕+HER PLANES.
 D⊕ES EVERY RACE HAVE +S DAY
 IN +HE SUN. ⊕R IS +HERE
 S⊕ME+HING SPECIAL AB⊕U+ ILLI+HIDS?

— HARRIS ⊕F +HE FATED



around 3,000 folks, and the town's ruled by a council of elders who have a small garrison at their command to protect the burg.

The khaasta's trail leads right to this fortified community, where the toilmaster traded some of his loot (bottles of stolen beauty) for bub for his raiders. The

brewer and his wife used the circean embers on themselves, which created quite a ruckus. They're now perceived by others to be incredibly attractive, perhaps even among the most appealing beings in the multiverse, and sods who spy them must save versus spell or suffer from the *sympathy* effect (as described on page 13).

When the PCs enter Ironridge, read:

Iron towers and high walls give this place the appearance of a fortress more than a city, but that's not surprising in a burg so close to the realms of mind flayers and beholders. The guards at the gate give you peery glances but let you pass, and inside you see that many humans call kip here, though there seems to be a fair number of dwarves as well.

Near the entrance, however, you see and hear a bit of a scuffle. A crowd has gathered around some berks fighting over something or someone.

If the PCs investigate the fight, they can work their way past some of the crowd to get a look at what's really going on. They see 12 bashers (PI/var human/F1/var/var) fighting with bare hands or small knives (which cause 1d3 points of damage). Five more brawlers lay on the ground, injured or dead. As the PCs watch, however, a few people from the crowd rush in and join the confusing melee. The situation appears to be escalating, with new folks joining in faster than existing combatants fall.

This is a free-for-all brawl over the brewer and his wife, who're trapped in the middle of the fight, not immediately visible to the PCs. The fighters don't lust after the beautiful couple; they just want to *own* them. Unfortunately, the city guardsmen (PI/♂ human/F1/Free League/NG) that have shown up failed to break up the fight — in fact, when they tried, some of them fell under the spell of the circean embers and became part of the problem.

Unless the PCs have powerful calming or mind-influencing magic, they'll just hit the blinds if they try to break up the fight. (The DM should remember that Ironridge currently resides in the sixth ring of the Outlands, where all psionic abilities and all spells and spell-like abilities of 7th level or higher fail.) 'Course, any heroes that spot the brewer (PI/♂ human/0-level/Fated/N) or his wife (PI/♀ human/0-level/Free

◆ TRACKING +HE KHAAS+A ◆

This part of the Outlands really holds nothing else of interest. The most important thing that happens here is the death of Maanzecorian and his proxies, which is designed to foreshadow later events. The forces released by the deity's demise even destroy the pillar-portal in the Rotting Oracle. Once the PCs are ready to move on, it's easy to find and follow the khaasta's trail in the mud — after all, it was made by a large group and a loaded wagon. Even the drizzling acrid rain won't wash away the trail for quite some time.

After following the tracks for a full day, the PCs find that the terrain becomes less fouled. The clouds clear away, and a warm breeze begins to drive the metallic haze from the air. On the next day, the heroes cross over into the sixth ring of the Outlands, and on the third day the PCs must make a successful tracking proficiency check to continue following the trail across the dry prairie. The only signs of life are small herds of bison grazing amidst the tall grass.

Even if the PCs fail the proficiency check and lose the trail on the third day, continuing in a relatively straight path brings them to the anthill known as Ironridge.

NOTE: During the three-day journey from Chariamur to Ironridge, the DM's free to plague the party with encounters. Before the PCs get too far from the old mine, they can be attacked by green slime or gray ooze found in a fetid pool, illithid spies from Ilsensine, more beholders from Gzemnid's realm, or even a slime-covered umber hulk (a relic from the bygone days of Chariamur).

IRONRIDGE

Ironridge is a human burg nestled in the mountains of the Outlands, currently settled in the sixth ring. The town's a touchstone for those wishing to deal with the dwarves of the Dwarven Mountain, or even beings in Gzemnid's or Ilsensine's realms. Its population varies from year to year, hovering

League/NG) must save versus spell or feel the desire to possess them as well. Obviously, wanting to own folks is wrong, and these feelings should seriously trouble a good-aligned cutter. Still, if any affected PCs somehow manage to grab the couple and get away, they'll have to figure out what to *do* with the poor sods (at least until the circean embers wear off in a week).

If the PCs ask around Ironridge about the khaasta, they soon learn the chant: The reptilians did indeed visit the burg. Fact is, the brawl near the gate is related to something the khaasta traded to a couple of townsfolk (though the PCs can probably guess that on their own). But the creatures left, reportedly for the realm of the Norns – a journey of about four days.

If the PCs choose to stay in Ironridge for a time, they quickly learn that the Redmarch Inn is a fine establishment to get a meal, a place to sleep, and a bit more of the local chant. It seems the burg's got its share of problems, what with the occasional wandering beholder or illithid spy, not to mention the tanar'ri that sometimes raid the town, take victims from their homes, and drag them kicking and screaming back to the Abyss. Folks figure there must be a portal to the Abyss somewhere nearby, but no one's ever found it.

A SHADØW

If the PCs rattle their bone-boxes a bit too much about the khaasta, they pique the curiosity of Talismin Redboar, a vicious and evil half-elf who calls kip in Ironridge. Tall and lissome with skin the color of weak tea, she keeps her night-black hair in multiple braids, and when she's being secretive she wears a drab cloak over her ostentatious street clothes. Her eyes are large and brown with impossibly long lashes. She's got a good ear for the chant, so she's sure to tumble to what the PCs are looking for and the profit involved in obtaining some of the circean embers herself. When the PCs leave Ironridge to pursue the khaasta, Talismin decides to follow them surreptitiously.

If the Dungeon Master would like to involve more fiends in "Out of the Darkness," Talismin is the key. She consorts with fiends more often than not; it's even said she's got a cambion son hidden away somewhere. More than likely, she knows the location of the aforementioned portal to the Abyss, but she keeps that dark to herself. (It doesn't play a part in this adventure, anyway.) Fact is, Talismin usually deals with the tanar'ri, but she currently works for the yugoloths, serving as their eyes and ears in Ironridge.

Using the half-elf presents the DM with a number of options. She can serve as a recurring foil for the PCs throughout the entire scenario, following the heroes everywhere they go and tumbling to the truth of what's going on as fast as they do (or perhaps even faster). What's more, she'll try to manipulate events to benefit her own ends. This might mean just gathering chant for the yugoloths, but it could also mean trying to grab power for herself. Talismin is first and foremost self-serving.

For example, she might try to steal the circean embers for herself at some point. Or she might wait until the PCs reach the tree-town of Crux (in Chapters II and III), learn of the evil that's troubling the burg, and *then* make her move. If, by shadowing the heroes, Talismin discovers that something's killing gods, she quickly tumbles to the implications and might even try to get a hold of that kind of power for herself – which means trailing the PCs all the way to Pelion (in Chapter VII). If the DM incorporates "Into the Light" into the larger adventure, Talismin might even get involved in that as well.

Course, the crafty and sly half-elf will take great pains to make sure the PCs don't realize she's following them. She'll use spells both to conceal herself and to watch the movements of the heroes. To make the PCs a little peery, though, the DM can let them catch a quick glimpse of Talismin in Ironridge and then spot her again toward the end of this chapter. Still, when she finally makes a move – wherever it may be – her sudden involvement should be a surprise.

Until that time, Talismin will never attack the PCs outright, fighting only in self-defense. She might attempt to take out a single basher if he's separated from the rest of the group, but she'd need a very good reason to do so – it might jeopardize her position.

THE WALKING CASTLE ØF TIAC RAMI NØ

If the PCs leave Ironridge and continue to follow the khaasta, the trip to the realm of the Norns takes four days. On the second day of the trek, they have another strange encounter.

You spy a dark speck on the horizon that just keeps getting bigger and bigger. As you make your way across fields of yellow and blue wildflowers, you see that it's something on four legs – something huge.

Before too long, the thing comes closer, and you can see that it's not a creature at all, but a gigantic stone structure on living, birdlike legs. As it gets nearer still, each step is accompanied by a low rumble and vibrations in the ground. The tower seems to be coming right for you.

While walking castles are generally the homes of eccentric and standoffish wizards who want to keep their distance from others, the PCs probably can't *avoid* meeting up with this one. See, the wizard Tiac Rami No (Pr/♂ human/M14/N), a diminutive, dark-skinned sorcerer from a remote prime-material world, *wants* to contact the group. He's used magic to become aware of their presence, and he'd like to ask them a few questions. When the thundering castle gets close to the party, it stops walking, and a shuttered and hinged window high in the tower wall swings open to reveal the smiling wizard.

"Ah, hello? Yes? Please to pardon intrusion. Seen you gentles a group of . . . creatures with many bottles, yes? Am looking for these. Am looking to purchase more wonderful bottles, yes? Hmm?"

While en route to their lair on Yggdrasil, the khaasta ran into Rami No, who forced them to surrender some of their cargo: bottles of stolen beauty. The wizard promptly applied the circean embers to his most prized possessions – six gems of varying type that have been in his family for generations. Unfortunately, he fell under the spell of the beauty, and now he's addicted to the jewels' finery. He wants – he *needs* – more circean embers.

If the PCs let on that they know where the khaasta are (or at least where the creatures are headed), the slightly barmy wizard won't rest until he gets all the chant he can from them. But rather than try to coerce the information from the heroes, Rami No invites them into his castle, which consists of a spiral staircase and a number of nicely appointed rooms separated by walls of rice paper.

The wizard treats the PCs to a lavish meal of curried meats and rice wine provided by *invisible servants* and *charmed* spider monkeys. During the repast, the wizard excuses himself from time to time and slips into an adjoining room, where his gems are stored in a trapped chest. Through the thin walls, the PCs hear Rami No talking secretly to the gems, which he refers to as "my beauties." But the wizard won't let the characters see his "beauties" under any circumstances.

If the PCs mention that the khaasta are apparently headed for the realm of the Norns, Rami No commands his castle into motion and sets it on a thundering course to that locale (at its top movement rate of 24). 'Course, while the Norns might overlook a few insignificant mortals sticking their noses into the realm, there's no way they're going to let a walking castle crash in and step all over their groves.

Canny PCs should realize this fact and abandon the castle before it reaches its destination. But if any bashers are still inside when the castle tromps into the realm of the three Fates (as they're sometimes known), they see Rami No suddenly fade away. Before they can determine what happened to him, other things in the castle start to vanish as well. Within 2d6 rounds, the entire structure disappears as if it never existed at all, and anyone left inside plummets to the hard ground, suffering 1d6 points of damage for each 10 feet fallen. (Figure that the PCs are 2d4×10 feet off the ground.) The only remnants of Tiac Rami No's existence are a few well-behaved spider monkeys that fled the castle just in time and will now call the Norns' realm home.

But good-aligned cutters shouldn't be helping the wizard obtain stolen property in the first place. If the PCs avoid telling Rami No about the khaasta, or if they manage to give

him the laugh, they can continue their journey across the Outlands on their own. It's easy enough for the heroes to slip into small places where the huge castle can't follow, but Rami No's still a top-shelf wizard, difficult to hide from and unwise to anger.



CAN'T SEE THE TREE ♦ FOR THE FOREST ♦

As the PCs get closer to the realm of the Norns, the land around them becomes more fertile and lush. Tiny brooks wind their way through gentle hills to nourish copes of trees that grow more and more common until the heroes find themselves before a thick forest.

Peery PCs who always look around carefully find a subtle sign that they're on the right trail. A broken bottle lies on the ground, just inches away from an indentation of exposed soil about five inches across. A few feet away is a pool of dark, dried blood.



Here's what happened: A bottle of circean embers fell off the khaasta's wagon, breaking upon a stone and turning the rock into an appealing treasure.

One of the khaasta picked up the stone, enchanted by its beauty. But the toilmaster, too, fell victim to the stone's sudden charm and slashed the sod to get at the prize.

This is, more than anything, another warning of the danger of the circean embers.

THE NØRNS' REALM

Eventually, the PCs reach the realm of the Norns, a large but unnatural grove within a huge forest.

All around you are dark, elegant trees, compact shrubs, and thick underbrush. Thickets of tough vegetation seem likely to impede your progress. No flowers bloom and no birds sing, yet the area has a stark beauty – the magnificence of severity and intensity.

Leatherheads who plunge into the underbrush and try to hack their way through find themselves caught up in briars and thorns in 1d6 rounds, suffering 1d4 points of damage and becoming trapped and lost. If they continue to cut their way through, they suffer another 1d4 points of damage per round. This happens regardless of a body's alignment or personality.

If the PCs look carefully, however, and if they mean no harm to the Norns or the realm, they find a path through the vegetation. By moving slowly and cautiously, they can make their way through the area without trouble. The undergrowth imperceptibly parts to let any nonviolent, nonintrusive bashers pass. Other than the plants, the PCs see no living things anywhere in the realm, though a successful tracking proficiency check lets them spot the trail of the khaasta group. (Though the creatures are violent by nature, they were allowed to pass because they respected the realm.)

At this point, if the PCs are still successfully tracking the khaasta, or if they've somehow guessed that they're looking

for Yggdrasil, it takes them about an hour to find a root of the World Ash. (*Find the path* or similar magic helps locate the tree but doesn't reduce the amount of time needed.) On the other hand, if the PCs simply wander through the realm, it takes them 2d4 hours before they stumble upon a sign of the khaasta's passing or upon Yggdrasil itself.

NOTE: The thick undergrowth won't let the PCs reach the actual home of the Norns or any other significant portion of the realm.

THE WORLD ASH

When the PCs discover Yggdrasil, read:

After you've trudged through the briar-filled forest for quite some time, you notice that the trees have grown significantly larger. Branches reach up over a hundred feet into the sky, and trunks swell to over 10 feet across. In fact, the path you're following leads right up to a fallen tree of enormous size half buried in the earth. The trail seems to climb right up the slope of the trunk.

The huge fallen tree leads to a branch of Yggdrasil, the plane-spanning World Ash. If the PCs climb up onto the trunk and continue to follow the khaasta's trail, they soon find that the tree disappears into a wide, round, colored portal. If the heroes move off the trunk and peer around the portal, they see nothing – the tree doesn't continue on the other side. To follow the khaasta, the PCs must pass through the round gate. They need no key.

When they emerge on the other side of the portal, the characters are no longer on the same trunk. Instead, they're standing on a giant branch of an unimaginably huge tree – Yggdrasil. Behind them is the colored portal that leads back to the Outlands. If the PCs travel forward on the new branch, they find it grows larger as they walk, becoming well over 500 yards in width even as it leads them down many twists and turns.

While the heroes move along, the thick foliage prevents them from seeing anything but branches and leaves, no matter which direction they look. Daylight and darkness fall in "normal" cycles, and if a character manages to catch a glimpse through the leaves, he sees a blue sky (if it's daytime) or a dark, starry sky (if it's night), though never a sun or moon. Gentle breezes occasionally blow through the foliage, and, like most trees, Yggdrasil experiences seasons. During this chapter, it's late summer for the tree. In a month or two, the leaves will start to fall (giving travelers more glimpses of the sky), and after that the branches will be covered in light snow. Fact is, winter's a great time to walk the World Ash; that's when the ratatosk hibernate.

For more details about traveling on Yggdrasil, refer to "The World Ash," at the beginning of Chapter II.

NOTE: The squirrel-folk known as ratatosk appear in later chapters of "Out of the Darkness." However, the DM's free to let the PCs encounter ratatosk, giant beetles, and other tree-dwelling creatures at any time.

◆ NAPHRAKS ◆

The khaasta don't actually live on Yggdrasil. A portal hidden in a huge knot of the tree leads to a demiplane called Naphraks, and that's where the creatures make their lair. The knot — which is more like a crater — lies about six hours' walk from the spot where the colored portal connects the Outlands with Yggdrasil. Once the heroes reach the knot, they see that a small town lies just a bit further along the branch, located at the point where two separate limbs of the great tree branch outward. This burg is known as Crux.

If the PCs pass by the knot and head straight for Crux, skip ahead to Chapter II. Most of the residents of the town know about the knot, the portal to Naphraks, and the khaasta settlement there, so the party can easily learn where to go. Oddly, the khaasta never bother the people of Crux, so folks there don't have much feeling one way or another about the bandits. Some of the inhabitants even benefit from the khaasta's presence; the creatures often sell their stolen goods cheaply in town.

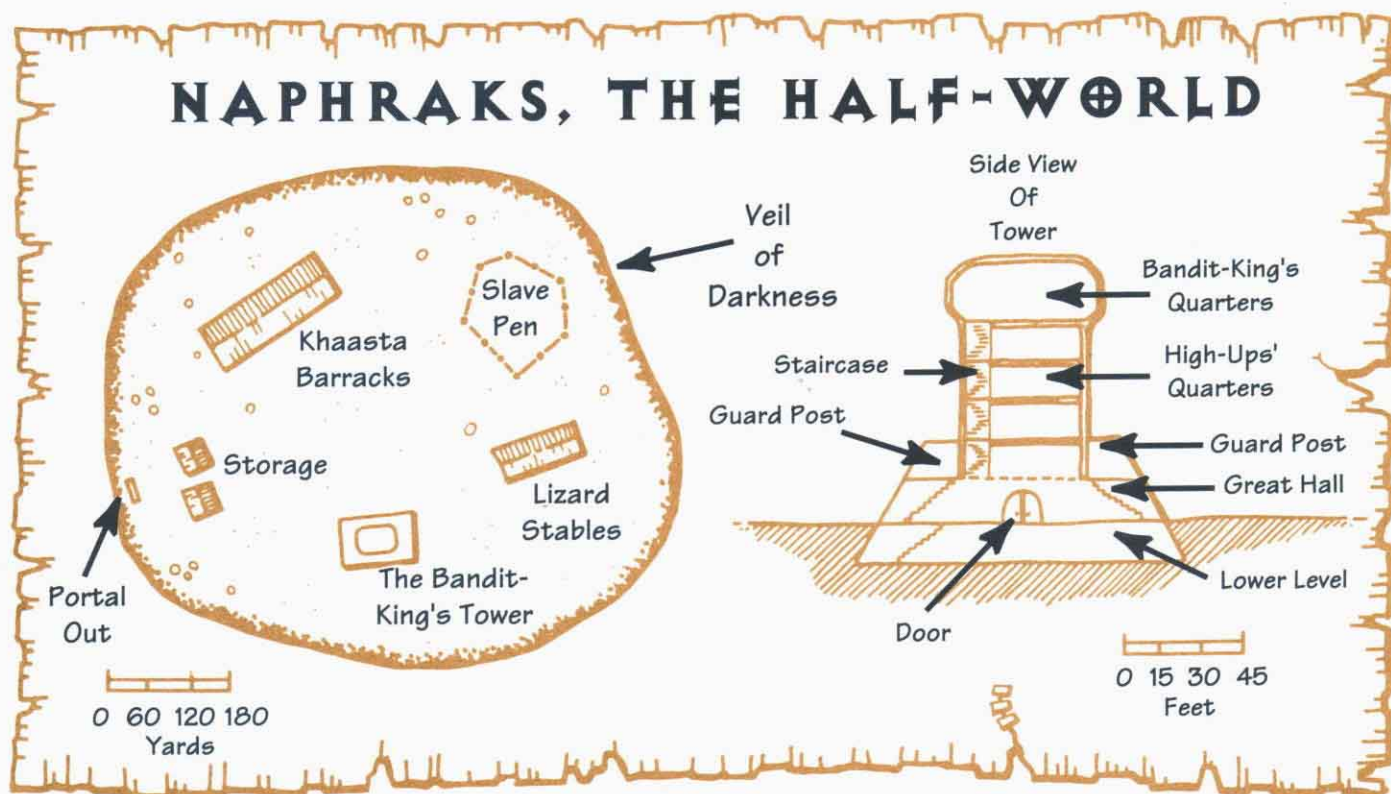
When the PCs decide to climb down into the giant knot, they find that it's similar to descending a small, dark canyon. Mountaineering proficiencies are helpful, but bloods who bother to search the area come across a path (though it takes half an hour to find). At the bottom of the knot, the PCs find an open portal to Naphraks — no key is needed. But the portal's opaque, and the heroes can't learn the dark of what lies on the other side unless they go

through. Standard methods like *warp sense* fail.

Naphraks is one of the small domains known by a select few cutters as *half-worlds* — special demiplanes accessible only by traveling the World Ash. Many half-worlds are unoccupied, while others are used as secret refuges, lairs, or even prisons. Some graybeards think that Yggdrasil itself (or herself, as the ratatosk say) creates the half-worlds. 'Course, a lot of these same bashers claim that the tree spawned *all* of the planes like fruit. In any case, Naphraks is only about 800 yards across, surrounded by a veil of impenetrable darkness. (Refer to the map below.)

Stepping through the portal in the knot ain't like using a normal portal in Sigil. First of all, it's one-way: The second the PCs go through, they suddenly find themselves perched on a large, flat boulder, with no feeling of transition whatsoever. It's as though they'd always been on the stone, which is as large as it needs to be to accommodate the whole group. The boulder and its riders hurtle at an indeterminate (but undeniably fast) speed through a seemingly endless expanse for several minutes. Suddenly, with no deceleration, no jerk or loss of momentum, the boulder simply stops somewhere in Naphraks (though never within one of the structures). The stone appears to have always been there.

Similar boulders are scattered throughout the half-world, though the ground in Naphraks is generally bare, moist soil. The demiplane also features a handful of crude structures and one impressive-looking tower, but no trees or other vegetation (except inside the bandit-king's tower).



KHAASTA BARRACKS

This long, low building is constructed of roughly fitted stone. It has a tiny cellar with a cistern that not only supplies the khaasta with water but keeps the whole place damp and cool – which is how the creatures like it. (Where does the water come from? Who knows, berk?)

A total of 68 khaasta live sparsely in the barracks. Individuals don't get much space, but that doesn't seem to bother them – they don't spend much time here. The khaasta don't worry about making their cases aesthetic or even pleasant. They focus more on fighting, proving their might, and taking what they can from the weak.

SLAVE PEN

Though they're primarily bandits, all khaasta in Naphraks take and keep slaves. They might sell the berks if they get a good offer or if the mood strikes them, but most slaves are put to work around the camp. Currently, 52 slaves of varying humanoid races live in this less-than-pleasant pen. The khaasta care little about their own dwellings and even less about those of their slaves. The creatures barely give the workers what they need to survive, and nothing more.

Freeing the slaves and encouraging them to rise up in revolt isn't a great idea. The workers're too weak and malnourished to do anything but be slaughtered. But the PCs can do a good deed – and create a fine diversion – by freeing the slaves and sending them through the portal back to Yggdrasil (see "Leaving Naphraks," at the end of this chapter). Such an act gains the attention of virtually all khaasta in the barracks, drawing the monsters away as the PCs make their way toward the truly important location: the tower.

STORAGE

These two wooden shacks serve as storehouses of stolen plunder and any basic tools and goods needed by the camp. One shack also contains another wagon similar to the cart the PCs followed here.

LIZARD STABLES

Here the khaasta keep the giant lizards they use as mounts. These huge beasts require a large area and a lot of food. In addition to the 10 just brought in by the raiders, the stables contain 31 lizards. Slaves usually care for and feed the mounts; those too weak to work are fed to the beasts. The omnivorous lizards usually eat a slop of water mixed with roots, vegetables, leaves, and meat all mashed together.

THE BANDIT-KING'S TOWER

Canny PCs should figure that the stolen beauty would be brought to this tower, the most impressive structure in Naphraks. (Course, the fact that the raiders' wagon and riding

lizards still sit in front of the building is a dead giveaway.) The tower was constructed ages ago by a unknown sorcerer, long since vanished, who obviously used the half-world as his personal abode. But the tower's much larger than the practical khaasta need. Except for the Great Hall and the lower level, the creatures don't really use the structure all that efficiently.

GREAT HALL. Here the PCs find the stolen circean embers, the bandit-king of the khaasta, and the *thief of charms* (currently in the king's possession).

But the heroes won't find the huge chamber comfortable. Water boiled continuously in the lower level makes the Great Hall hot and humid, just as the king likes it. Steam visibly rises through small holes drilled in the floor, and potted plants give the room the look of a jungle. Naphraks has no sun, but the plants seem to thrive without it; fact is, they're quite well cared for, clearly one of Haac(!)nss's excesses. His other indulgence: two giant iguana pets, kept here in the Hall, that receive better treatment than any khaasta in the camp.

Through the hazy, warm air and the thick foliage of this chamber, you see a huge reptilian creature seated in a large wooden chair. The armor upon his breast is a shining bronze plate, and a strange sort of crown rests upon his long, narrow head, which is marked with a long, gangrenous scar. A grand wooden table and more chairs have all been pushed to one side, obviously to make room for the hundred or so glass bottles that surround this scarred "king." He pores covetously over the bottles, reverently clutching a short metallic rod.

◆ Show the players Illo B (on page 169).

The PCs can try to recover the circean embers in one of three ways: sneak in and steal the bottles, negotiate with the king, or fight the khaasta.

The first option – sneaking into the tower and scragging the bottles – is an extremely difficult task. Haac(!)nss is obsessed with them and sits gazing at the plundered beauty. He occasionally gives "doses" to his plants or iguana pets. (Remember that anyone viewing an affected object must save versus spell or suffer from the *sympathy* effect.) What's more, the iguanas will defend their master (and the bottles), and the king can also summon 10 khaasta guards from their nearby posts in one or two rounds. Lastly, the Great Hall contains 113 bottles of beauty (stolen from victims in Sigil and elsewhere), far too many to sneak away with.

The second method – formally approaching Haac(!)nss – is an interesting but frustrating option, though it's easy enough to gain an audience. If the PCs march into Naphraks with confidence, the khaasta take them to see their high-up; if the heroes sneak into the camp, they can approach the king on their own. Either way, Haac(!)nss reacts well only if the PCs offer to buy the circean embers. Any other tactic – threats, begging, trickery, and the like – just pike him off, prompting him to have the PCs scragged and turned into his newest slaves.

Still, even if convinced to sell the circean embers, the king

sets a price of 500 gp per bottle and agrees to part with only 10 bottles at this time — no more. If the PCs truly want to bring all the beauty back to its rightful owners, they're out of luck.

The final option — battle — is dangerous for several reasons. Attacking the king brings the aforementioned guards. In two to four rounds, all other khaasta in the upper levels of the tower appear; in 4d4 rounds, the rest of the khaasta in the camp converge on the tower to slay the invaders. What's more, the chances are great that bottles of circean embers will be broken during the fight (especially by the iguanas), which will send raw beauty out into the air to "infect" nearby random targets — both creatures and objects.

NOTE: Behind the wooden throne, Haac(!)nss has piled all manner of stolen "treasure" — wood carvings, plaques, glass sculptures, and the like. The booty may contain a few handfuls of loose coins, but the PCs won't find magical items or valuable gems here. The whole pile of stuff's worth about 5,000 gp, assuming that the heroes cart it all back to an interested market. But the DM should make it clear that it'll require a lot of time and effort to do so.

LOWER LEVEL. On this level, a cistern like the one under the barracks provides water both for drinking and for boiling in huge kettles of black iron. The heated water rises up through tiny holes in the ceiling to make the Great Hall above extremely humid.

The lower level also contains a kitchen, a pantry of food-stuffs, a storehouse of general supplies, and quarters for the six slaves (PI/♂, ♀ human/O-level/var) who keep the water boiling and cook the king's food (which is actually an easy job, as Haac(!)nss isn't picky). The slaves also perform other tasks in the tower and are treated marginally better than the workers in the pens.

GUARD POSTS. Five khaasta guards wait here at all times, responding to trouble when needed. In addition to their standard battle-axes, the guards carry javelins to hurl at intruders they spot from the balconies. (Each room contains about 50 of the weapons, so there's little chance of running out.) The floors also contain peep holes so the guards can see what's happening below. Otherwise, the rooms are quite stark.

HIGH-UPS' QUARTERS. These levels hold the bare, undecorated cases of khaasta who rank above the common folk. The toilmaster is here (if he's still alive), as is the Wise One, a blind tribal shaman. The Wise One won't put up much of a physical fight, but his magic still makes him a potential threat.

BANDIT-KING'S QUARTERS. This large domed chamber was once the conjuring and meditative chamber of the wizard who built the tower. The floor and walls are covered with magical in-

scriptions and drawings that are partially worn away but still somewhat visible. To read the runes, the PCs must make a successful ancient languages proficiency check, or use spells such as *read magic* or *comprehend languages*.

Most of the inscriptions provide no useful information. Above a small alcove, however, are runes that spell out the word "fade." Uttering the word aloud activates a one-way portal in the alcove that leads to the back of a tannery in the town of Crux. Haac(!)nss is the only one in all of Naphraks who knows of the portal, but if the PCs tumble to the doorway, it may be their only chance of quick escape — especially if the khaasta are after their heads.

But this chamber has a secret that even the bandit-king knows nothing about. Toward the bottom of one of the walls, a loose stone can be pulled out to reveal a hidden storage compartment. (PCs have the

same chance of finding this stone as they do of locating a secret door.) This space holds the wizard's last-ditch cache, tucked away in case of emergency: a *dagger +1*; a *potion of healing*; a scroll with *Mordenkainen's lucubration*; a scroll with *invisibility*, *nondetection*, and *forget*; and a small pouch containing 45 gp and a gem worth 100 gp. The wizard'd planned to use this stash to make good an escape if he were ever in danger. But as he's now gone and the goods are still here, things evidently didn't work out as he'd hoped.

LEAVING NAPHRAKS

All khaasta in Naphraks know of the portal that sits in a rock archway near the surrounding veil of darkness (refer to the map). If the PCs don't find the secret portal in Haac(!)nss's tower, they'll have to leave through the archway. The one-way portal is always open, so the heroes need no key, but it's opaque, so they can't see through it. As before, *warp sense* and other methods of detecting what lies on the other side fail.

Anyone who steps through the portal comes out at the bottom of the huge knot on Yggdrasil's branch. (Only the trip to Naphraks involves the strange boulder ride.)

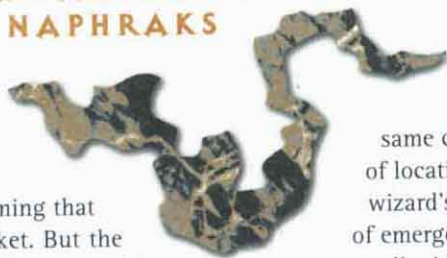
◆ WRAPPING UP ◆

There's no easy way to bring this part of "Out of the Darkness" to a close. Even if the PCs managed to smuggle the bottles of stolen beauty out of Naphraks, how will they return the circean embers to their true owners? Most likely, the best the heroes can do is take or destroy the *thief of charms* so the khaasta raids will stop. And, of course, if any PCs lost their own beauty during this chapter, they should be able to regain it.

In any case, once the PCs emerge from the portal in the knot, the folks of Crux offer rest and refuge — and that's where the meat of the adventure begins to be revealed.

DAMN +HE SØDDING SLAVES.
I JUST WANT MY BEAUTY.

— +THE BANDIT-KING
OF NAPHRAKS



CHAPTER II: CRUX

Nothing moved. All was still on the tree, and the sounds and stirrings of the town had faded completely. It seemed to Targat Bal that he could no longer even tell where he was. Oh, he knew he stood outside of Crux — after all, he'd been hauling barrels of water from Dymvaxis Ren's third storehouse. But right at this moment, he faced away from the buildings and heard no sounds. He felt that he could've been anywhere. Normally, a quiet moment was a welcome relief in his work day, but this time something was different.

There'd been strange whispers bandied about of late by the folks in Crux. They'd said that something was wrong with the tree, that something evil had come. And now Targat felt it in the absence of movement and sound. Something was here.

He turned and started to head back to Crux as fast as he could. The wood of the branch was good and solid beneath his steps, and his boots were shod with spikes. Nonetheless, as he ran and ran, the buildings of the town got no closer. Then he felt a presence behind him, and he turned to look. And he

saw it. Targat saw what had come to Crux. He knew then that nothing would ever be the same. And he also knew that he'd never live long enough to warn anyone.

◆ THE RIDE ◆

At this point, the cutters have followed the khaasta raiders to Yggdrasil. If they've already explored Naphraks, the heroes likely take refuge in Crux after returning to the tree — especially if they killed any khaasta or stole the bandit-king's circean embers. 'Course, the PCs might head for Crux *before* they journey to Naphraks. Either way, this chapter deals with the party's first visit to Crux.

The heroes find plenty of places to stay. The khaasta don't cause trouble in the town because of a deal that the town's high-up — a cutter named Veridis Mov — made with Haac(!)nss, the bandit-king. But Crux is by no means dull.

Fact is, the encounters in this chapter lead the PCs directly into the main plot of "Out of the Darkness." Once the group enters Crux, events should take their own course — assuming the PCs have enough heart to help bashers who're obviously in trouble and enough curiosity to investigate strange goings-on.

NOTE: The heroes are almost certain to visit Crux either before or after they deal with the khaasta, if only to rest, heal wounds, relearn spells, and buy more supplies. But if the berks don't seem likely to hang around town and get involved with the ratatosk problem, the DM could just run the chapter's important encounters right away (starting with "Ratatosk"), or arrange some other scene to encourage the party to take part in the town's troubles.

THE WORLD ASH

In the first few chapters of "Out of the Darkness," the PCs spend a lot of time traveling on Yggdrasil or exploring the tree itself. This section summarizes the more important chant on the World Ash. For full details, refer to *The Travelogue* in the *Planes of Chaos* boxed set (2603), though both the *Planewalker's Handbook* (2620) and the *PLANESCAPE® Campaign Setting* (2600) give the basic information.

YGGDRASIL, NOW . . .
IS +HA+ +HE BIG +TREE
⊕R ⊕NE ⊕F +HE RIVERS?
— A CLUELESS SOD

Yggdrasil is an impossibly huge ash tree spawned in the first layer of Ysgard, though its innumerable roots and branches contain two-way portals that reach onto many other planes. These portals aren't like the kind found in Sigil, but more like the color pools of the Astral Plane: round, shimmering gates of color that are always open and require no key. The portals aren't bounded spaces, either; branches and roots simply disappear into them.

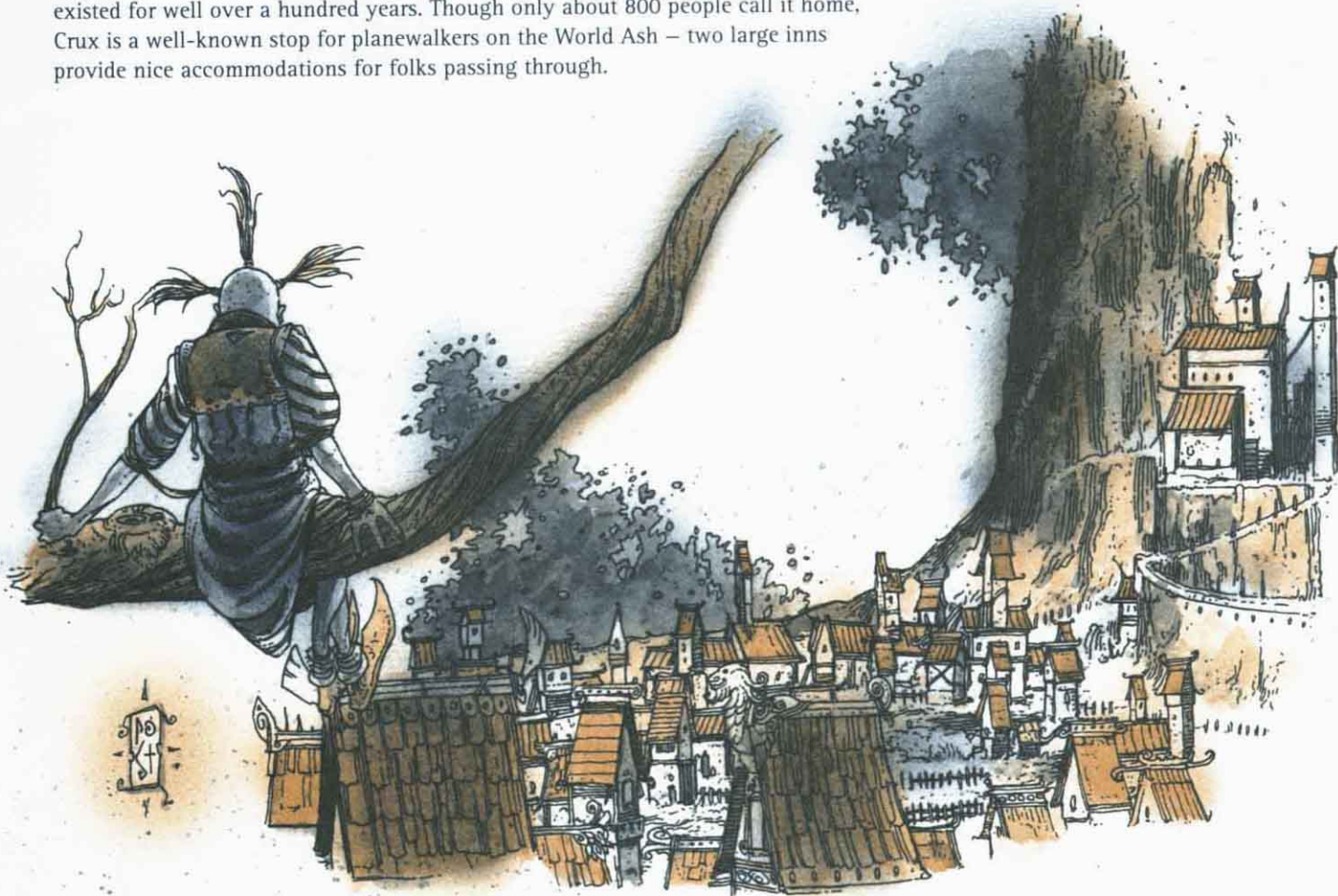
The main trunk of Yggdrasil is actually part of the Astral Plane — a fact the DM should remember when considering magical item plusses and spell level losses for the PCs while in Crux or elsewhere on the trunk. However, travelers through the Silver Void never see the tree. Similarly, those walking along a branch can't spy conduits or githyanki through the thick leaves, but if they move more than 50 feet away from the tree (say, by flying or levitating), they "fall off" and find themselves on the Astral.

Yggdrasil generally has reliable gravity, and travelers can walk all the way around a branch if they like. But while crossing a spot where two branches meet, there's a moment of disorientation where a berk feels the pull of gravity from both branches at once, or the absence of gravity entirely. It's a good idea, then, not to travel upside-down.

The inside front cover of *Dead Gods* contains a map showing the portion of Yggdrasil used by the PCs during "Out of the Darkness."

◆ THE TREE-BURG ◆

Nestled between two major branches of Yggdrasil, the small community of Crux has existed for well over a hundred years. Though only about 800 people call it home, Crux is a well-known stop for planewalkers on the World Ash — two large inns provide nice accommodations for folks passing through.



Fact is, the whole economy of the burg is based on travel, transport, and trade along the tree. Even traffic with Sigil is not uncommon; Cager merchants pay well to have wood crafts and products brought from Crux to the City of Doors.

'Course, *getting* the stuff from Crux to Sigil can be tricky – no known portals connect the two locations. But the tree-town contains a two-way portal to a prime-material world known as Ranais. Once highly populated, Ranais was devastated by an ancient calamity. Many of its people fled to the planes to escape the death of their world; most human residents of Crux are descendants of those primes. But the portal's still active. So planewalkers looking for a quick route to Crux often use a portal in Sigil that leads to Ranais, make a short trek across its ruined landscape, and then take the portal to Crux.

Despite regular contact with travelers from the City of Doors, the folks of Crux have few ties to any organized factions, religions, or other groups. Residents like to keep themselves separate from the ways of Cagers. They consider themselves special and make important distinctions between locals and out-of-towners. People in Crux appreciate a visitor's jink, to be sure, but they almost always keep newcomers at arm's length.

Refer to the map of Crux on the poster sheet.

VERIDIS MOV

Veridis Mov is the wealthiest and most powerful cutter in Crux. Though the town has no formal ruler, folks there defer to him in matters of decisions and planning. The blood is by no means a saint, however. Fact is, Veridis takes a percentage from virtually every business transaction that occurs in Crux. But no one minds because through his genius, the whole town continues to prosper, and thus, so does he.

Veridis specializes in gathering knowledge, in taking bits of chant and weaving them together in intelligent ways. He brings together those eager to sell and those with jink to spend. He discovers short cuts and lanns the right Clueless with the right information. In short, the blood's a deal-maker extraordinaire, though not in an obvious fashion.

To the casual eye, Veridis is a rich cutter who never seems to do anything but chat pleasantly with folks. Unlike others in similar positions (particularly in the Cage), he doesn't have a retinue of minders watching his back and catering to his every whim. Truth is, Veridis employs no one. And that's what so many bashers just can't tumble to: He runs the show without seeming to do anything or give anyone orders.

'Course, some peery folks mark Veridis Mov as a criminal and the town of Crux as his shady organization. In reality, though, that's just screed. Veridis doesn't break laws; he makes them. His plans rarely, if ever, involve violence (at least not intentionally), and he seldom engages in combat himself

– despite his top-shelf physical condition and training. The blood doesn't steal, either. In fact, Crux has a reputation for being very safe from cross-traders or danger of any kind. (Veridis even cut a secret deal with the bandit-king of the nearby khaasta settlement. He feeds Haac(!)nss the dark of portals, paths, and other helpful subjects, and Haac(!)nss keeps his raiders away from Crux – and might even come to the town's defense if needed. No one else in Crux knows of this arrangement.)

Still, Veridis has developed a reputation outside of Crux as a criminal lord with a lot of dangerous power. He doesn't do much to discourage this notoriety – it helps to keep troublemakers away. Some folks say he wields great magic; others claim he has legions of nasty bashers who'd slit a body's throat in an instant. Those in the know believe that the high-up's dealings have simply earned him a lot of powerful allies (which is actually probably true).

Except for a cat named Zin, Veridis lives alone in a beautiful wooden home. The house is surrounded by a tall fence, and within the enclosed yard is a physical training and practice area. (On top of being a genius, Veridis is a swordsman of incredible skill.)

The first time the PCs encounter Veridis Mov is when they spot him strolling confidently but leisurely about town. He moves as if he owns the place, and folks who greet Veridis treat him as if it were true. They know he has a weakness for white roses and red wine and like to give him such things as gifts. But no one's got a bad word to say about him; people in Crux aren't afraid of Veridis, but grateful to him.

- ◆ When the PCs encounter Veridis Mov, show the players Illo C (on page 170).

Though not physically imposing, the blood looks everyone he meets in the eyes, confident that his superiority is clear and need not be flaunted. His neat, golden hair barely reaches his shoulders, and his sharp-featured face is always clean-shaven. Veridis carries no visible weapons (though he has an invisible *two-handed sword* +2) and wears no armor (though he has hidden magical protections). Instead, he wears a snow-white shirt and pants with a red or black vest.

A true master of the chant, Veridis Mov knows many, many things. Of particular interest to the PCs at this point, Veridis knows the history of the ruined world of Ranais (as detailed in Chapter III), and that a dark and powerful presence recently came to Crux in search of something (see "Recent Events," below, to learn how Veridis gained this knowledge). But remember, Veridis Mov is no selfless, good-hearted hero – he cares only for the well-being of Crux. Thus, he hasn't yet acted on his information, preferring to bide his time until he can figure out how to use it for his – and his town's – best advantage.



HIGH POINT

Everyone knows that Veridis Mov *really* runs things in Crux, but the closest thing the burg has to an “official” leader is Constable Nachen Jon (Pl/♂ human/F7/LN), a beefy, serious, and sincere man in his forties. The constable is a blood chosen by Veridis – with the perfunctory agreement of other town personalities – to keep the peace and defend Crux from threats or unwanted elements. The job is pretty simple; as explained above, most folks who might stir up trouble steer clear of the burg.

Nachen Jon’s brown hair is clipped very short and his hard, full face is usually covered in stubble. He’s not in the least bit corrupt, but he does *anything* that Veridis tells him to. And one of his most important duties – as there are so few lawbreakers to worry about – is to make sure that the factions keep their noses out of Crux. Veridis doesn’t twig to any faction’s beliefs and even considers them (and their endless philosophical debates) a waste of time. As a result, the constable keeps an eye on any visitor who openly displays a faction symbol, but he comes down hard on berks who seem to be interested in proselytizing or setting up a faction post.

Nachen operates out of a small fortress called High Point. This wooden keep is, naturally, the highest point in Crux, allowing the constable a view of the entire town. The whole place is literally built into the trunk of Yggdrasil, just as a stone fortress might be built into the side of a cliff. From here, Nachen maintains a force of a dozen watchmen who assist him in his duties. They run a small jail in High Point to hold wrongdoers and troublemakers until (and oftentimes after) the berks are tried in the Court Square.

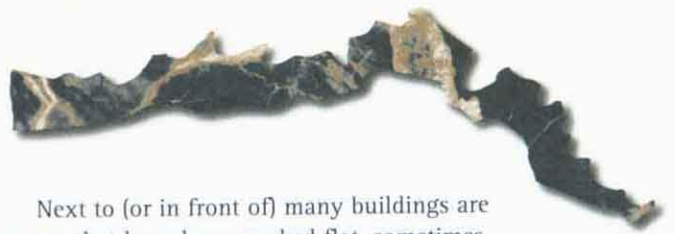
COURT SQUARE

The center of town is an open square used to try cases and settle disputes in a public forum. Veridis rarely visits the court unless he receives a particularly compelling plea to preside over a decision. He likes to leave the folks of Crux free reign in such matters – or at least maintain the illusion of such.

Court Square consists of an open area flanked by two small buildings (storehouses for town records, which are not very well kept or organized). When a criminal is brought to trial, the constable or one of his watchmen presents the case from a raised platform in the center of the court, while the townsfolk fill the wooden benches nearby to listen to the arguments and make a judgment.

OTHER IMPORTANT SITES

Not surprisingly, all structures in Crux are made of wood. Steep-pitched roofs of heavily thatched wooden shingles rise up from each home or shop. Living on a giant tree, the folks of Crux are accustomed to a lack of flat spaces, and each building corrects the angle of the surface on which it stands. Thus, all of the peaked rooftops point in the same direction on the massive branch.



Next to (or in front of) many buildings are terraces that have been worked flat, sometimes surrounded by an ornate but relatively impractical wooden fence. A careful eye notices the delicate scrollwork around almost every door and the embellishments on the trim about windows and eaves. Buildings in Crux are made by folks who know their wood and can work miracles with it.

Although most structures in the town are private homes, the PCs can visit any of the following shops and locations:

TANNERY. The bashers here make simple leather goods from goat skin. The lumbering Bloi Nivin (Pl/♂ human/F2/N) runs the business with three young apprentices and two hired hands. Bloi is a major chant-monger, which essentially means that he likes to gossip. He finds an excuse not to get involved in most affairs, but he’ll gladly rattle his bone-box about whatever a body wants to hear.

WOODWORKERS’ GUILD. The only guild in Crux, this group of craftsmen uses the plentiful supply of wood to create beautiful tools, furnishings, and other items. Unlike many guilds, these folks have a religious reverence for their work and their material. The head of the guild is Marlus Van, a matronly, middle-aged woman as sturdy as the tree she venerates. Her graying black hair is cut short, and she usually wears a gray smock and a brown leather woodworkers’ apron.

Marlus is a priestess who worships Yggdrasil itself. Like the ratatosk, she and many other guild members see the taking of wood from the World Ash as a ritualized, solemn task – accepting the gifts of the divine. This devotion makes the guildhouse the closest thing Crux has to a temple. See, most residents of the burg are descendants of the sods who fled Ranais, and they feel their people were betrayed by the gods (even though few, if any, know of the exact events that led to the world’s destruction). Thus, they’re not quick to build temples or churches. Fact is, Crux is decidedly nonreligious. If the constable didn’t keep out the factions, it’s likely the Athar would’ve tried to move in and take advantage of this attitude.

VARGAS BOL, SMITH. Vargas Bol (Pl/♂ human/F4/NG) is the burg’s one and only metalsmith, creating virtually every metal object in Crux. ‘Course, these items are pretty rare, considering the town’s location. A bald, barrel-chested basher with tough, tanned skin, Vargas has been told that he’s just exactly what a body expects to find when wandering into a smithy. Good-natured Vargas doesn’t mind. He’s as quick to laugh at jokes as he is to offer a kind word or deed to a basher in need.

LUCKY LAM. This kip serves travelers from out of town, but it’s definitely not a place a body’d want to call home. There are five rooms over the alehouse, where the bub is cheap – though a berk gets what he pays for.

LAIBOR'S LIVERY. Laibor Tal (Pl/♀ human/0-level/NG) maintains a livery of sorts in Crux. Though she owns no riding animals, the livery has a full complement of beasts of burden. On Yggdrasil, that means large, sure-footed goats or wide-backed giant beetles. Neither's easy to control, but both are useful on the tree. The beetles, in particular, can crawl upon any surface, which is especially useful when the gravity shifts or disappears altogether.

All of Laibor's goats and beetles cost about as much as a mule, and they can carry the same load – which is what one might say about Laibor herself. Her compact, sinewy form has more power than most men twice her size. Still, she's quite comely, with brown hair pulled back off her round face. Folks say she's more interested in animals than in people, but that's not entirely true. Laibor's not one to spurn a potential friendship.

THE KING'S TABLE. This is a top-shelf tavern and inn catering to planewalkers passing through Crux. The inn has eight rooms, most of which are usually occupied on any given night.

TOOLS. This simple building is marked only by the crude sign that names the place for the kind of items sold within. Targas Yid (Pl/♂ human/F1/N), a crotchety old basher, runs the store, which specializes in tools important to tree-dwellers – spiked boots, grappling hooks, rope, axes, picks, and so on.

THE MARKET. Here collectors of nuts, berries, and shoots sell their wares, alongside goat herders and a few nonguild craftsmen. The area is open and unregulated, but it runs smoothly due to mutual respect among the vendors, long-standing unwritten rules, and territorial claims passed down through generations.

A few merchants – the twin bakers Revis and Tyron, the cobbler Vengra Poole, and a mercer and tailor known as Wised Ayved – operate their businesses in the Market. What's more, Dymvasis Ren (see “The Storehouses,” below) maintains a sizable space here to sell imported goods. Of all these folks, only Tyron (Pl/♂ human/F2/LG) is likely to get involved in helping the PCs investigate recent occurrences. If he perceives the heroes to be trustworthy, top-shelf bloods, he's quick to offer his aid.

✓ **THE DEWCOLLECTORS.** Most folks in Crux set out sheets each night to catch a little dew – it's virtually the only source of water other than rain, which is very rare. But a trio of enterprising bashers specialize in gathering and selling the moisture. These three are Rahn Jateliff (Pl/♂ human/0-level/NG), Mellifli (Pl/♀ half-elf/0-level/CG), and Sterkad the Saved (Pl/♂ tiefling/0-level/CG). The town's goat herders, in particular, rely on the three dewcollectors between rains to give their flocks water to drink.

THE SLAUGHTERHOUSE. This building serves as a location for preparing and storing goat and boar meat. Not all folks in Crux earn their jink from travelers; some make a living rais-

ing goats or hunting the indigenous wild boars found on Yggdrasil. Six people work at the slaughterhouse, rendering meat and salting it down.

However, one of the six bashers – a lanky, ruddy-skinned berk named Molhas Vreid (Pr/♂ human/T6/Doomguard/CE) – isn't what he seems. His job at the slaughterhouse is just a cover; Molhas is really in Crux to learn the dark of the World Ash. He and a few other members of the Doomguard (including a few high-ups) want to see if it's possible to destroy the plane-spanning tree. If Molhas learns about the tainted area of the tree known as the Warpwood (see “Warpwood,” later in this chapter), he tries to check it out.

THE VINTNER'S. Zebrinth (Pl/♀ bariaur/F2/N) is one of the few bariaur in Crux. She's called kip in the burg for only seven years, but in that time she's come to be well accepted. One reason is the strange, heady drink she makes from secret ingredients she gathers from Yggdrasil. Although she refers to her concoction as wine, it actually tastes more like a gentle ale, but one with a flavor like nothing else. The wine sells for twice the cost of other such drinks, but those who like its unique, delicate flavor find it well worth the price.

Zebrinth works alone, in a small shop that also serves as her home. For a bariaur, she's fat, listless, and slow, and her demeanor is quiet but friendly.

THE STOREHOUSES. Located just outside of town, these buildings hold goods shipped to the burg by the wealthy importer Dymvasis Ren (Pl/♂ human/0-level/N). The blood buys grain, vegetables, water, bub, manufactured items of metal or stone, and much more. He has a number of friends and contacts in Sigil and leans toward the outlook of the Fated faction, though he hasn't (and probably won't) try to gain an official membership. Dymvasis is aloof and unfriendly, though he's quick to expect charitable help from others if he's in need – an attitude sure to keep him out of the ranks of the Fated.

◆ RECENT EVENTS ◆

Veridis Mov finally came upon a foe he can't manipulate, frighten, reason with, or even compromise with – Tenebrous. At first, the Abyssal lord came to Crux simply because of chant about all the knowledge packed into Veridis's brain-box. Tenebrous secretly picked the blood's mind dry in short order, gaining a few bits of valuable information but learning nothing about his missing wand. Still, the fiend quickly tumbled to the town's usefulness as a base of operations – after all, it crouched in Yggdrasil, the plane-spanning tree. Tenebrous eventually departed Crux to search for his wand elsewhere, but he left behind agents: a number of visages, placed secretly throughout the burg.

No one in Crux has the dark of any of this. Veridis knows only that a great wicked presence came to town in search of something and left without finding it; the blood's got no clue

that his own head was probed in the process. As for the visages, other townsfolk have begun to feel that *something's* wrong in their burg, but no one has any details. Veridis alone suspects that some kind of evil influence still lingers in Crux, but even he doesn't know what it is.

NOTE: In this chapter, the PCs become aware only of the poisonous effects of Tenebrous on Yggdrasil itself. They won't encounter any visages until Chapter III, "Masks." For more details on the visages, refer to the monster description in the Appendix of this book.

◆ RA+A+OSK ◆

The ratatosk – squirrel-like humanoids that live on Yggdrasil and consider themselves protectors of the sacred tree – have long since given up on Crux. When the town was first built, the creatures got into everything, causing all sorts of chaos and minor calamities. But the folks of Crux were so stubborn and stern that the ratatosk eventually went away.

They no longer harass the residents or even stray into the town. Fact is, for the most part, the tree-natives try to pretend that Crux doesn't exist.



'Course, people in Crux still flap their bone-boxes about the ratatosk. Current chant in town is that the creatures're upset about something. While not many folks care all that much about their welfare, it's widely accepted that the ratatosk have some sort of communion with Yggdrasil. Marlus Van and the rest of the Woodworkers' Guild are particularly bothered by the creatures' unease (and actually have a great deal more respect for ratatosk than do other residents of Crux).

No one realizes the dark of the disturbances, but a presence of godlike power and ineffable evil like Tenebrous just can't come to a place like Yggdrasil without being felt. The tree itself stirred when he appeared, his proximity polluting the World Ash so deeply that it'll take many seasons to recover. The ratatosk, too, quickly learned that something was amiss. Thus alerted, they began to notice the movements of the visages. Always curious and protective of the tree, the squirrel-like humanoids observed that the visages seemed to center their activity in Crux.

SNØØPING AROUND

While in Crux, the PCs hear about the ratatosk situation casually at first, probably from a patron in a tavern or a merchant on the street: "Yep, them squirrely ratatosk sure seem upset lately, don't they?"

Only by asking around do the heroes tumble to any substantial information. Most townsfolk are used to running into ratatosk if they stray far from Crux, though the creatures usually keep their distance. Lately, though, the ratatosk are visibly agitated, running up and down the tree with wild, staring eyes. Just last week, a ratatosk came into Crux, manically leaping from rooftop to rooftop and shouting "Dark times! Dark things! Dark people!" for 20 minutes before scrambling off again. Another creature was found slain, viciously hacked apart near Dymvasis Ren's storehouses – and no perpetrator's been found. (The ratatosk are so irritating that folks don't care about it a *great* deal, but it's still worrisome.)

Lucky or persistent PCs are referred eventually to the Woodworkers' Guild, and specifically to their leader, Marlus Van. If the heroes ask, Marlus gives her own opinion of the recent troubles:

"Here on the Great Lifegiver – that's the holy mother Yggdrasil – we have to learn to live with the ratatosk. They're the shepherds and protectors of the mother's will. But trunk and tree, they can be exasperating! Ah, well. No one can truly grasp the upper branches or the deepest roots of the World Ash. No one can know all of her secrets. She makes use of the ratatosk, the great eagles, the beetles, and even humble folks like us."

It shouldn't take a graybeard to figure out that Marlus worships Yggdrasil. Fact is, if asked, she goes on even fur-

ther with her philosophy that the World Ash is the creator and supporter of the multiverse. She believes that the planes sprung into being as the tree stretched her branches, and that Yggdrasil still supports the planes today, keeping them poised above the eternal void.

On the subject of the ratatosk, she tells the PCs that the leader of the nearest pack is Glittereye, and that he, like Marlus, is a devotee and channeler of the tree's power. If the heroes don't seem to bear Glittereye or Yggdrasil any ill will, and if they treat her with respect, Marlus even directs them to the ratatosk high-up's lair.

HUNTING RA+A+OSK

If the PCs go looking for ratatosk, they're easy to find – even easier if Marlus gave them directions. Fact is, if the heroes leave the boundaries of Crux and wander along Yggdrasil's branches, they're soon harassed by upset ratatosk, whether they were looking for the creatures or not. (This didn't happen when the party first approached Crux because the ratatosk had figured the adventurers were simple travelers with no connection to the troubled tree-burg.)

Not long after the PCs get out of sight of Crux, two ratatosk appear on small branches above them and begin to *taunt* them (as per the spell). The creatures speak their own language and that of birds, but because they live so near to Crux, they also know a little of the planar common tongue, which they speak in a halting, broken manner. As many planewalkers know, ratatosk love to vex trespassers with gentle riddles, but the pair that confronts the party offers riddles that are dark and dreary, such as:

*Moon and stars are my friends,
but darkness is my mother.
The sun is bitter enemy,
Chasing me as no other.*

[Answer: night.]

*All around sleepers, but never sleeping.
All around thieves, but never thieving.
Makes men blind, but cannot be moved.
Hides men's sins, but cannot be touched.*

[Answer: darkness.]

*River that flows when death is near,
Giver of life, your arrival brings fear.*

[Answer: blood.]

The PCs receive better treatment if they manage to answer the riddles, but they really score points with the ratatosk if they ask for Glittereye – the wise priest of the pack. If this happens, the two ratatosk spend a few minutes quizzing the heroes on their intent (though they also try to tumble to it on their own) and then lead the group to their high-up's lair.

The real challenge in this encounter is communication. The two squirrel-folk know only a smattering of common, so unless the PCs can (magically or otherwise) communicate in a

way the ratatosk can understand, the sods face a good deal of misunderstanding and confusion. These peery little tree-dwellers will *not* give the PCs the benefit of the doubt.

THE LAIR

The ratatosk guide you along the tree, though their nimble climbing-claws and ability to glide from branch to branch allow them to move much faster than you. Whenever they get too far ahead, they stop and wait impatiently, muttering obviously derisive comments now and then about your speed. Eventually, the ratatosk reach a small opening in the side of Yggdrasil, a space just large enough for someone to crawl through. A heady, sweet smell comes from the opening, but it's very dark.

This is the ratatosk lair. It consists of a narrow tunnel – lovingly dug through the bark and into the sweet sapwood – that leads to a single, open den. (Food is stored in a cache hidden nearby.) Although most PCs should be able to squeeze through the narrow passage, bariaur and exceptionally large bashers probably can't. What's more, the tunnel is wet and sticky with sap from the tree, but the ratatosk ignore it; they don't seem bothered by the way it gums up their fur.

The sap, however, is mildly poisonous, inducing hallucinations and delusions in all beings who possess human blood – humans, half-elves, tieflings, and aasimar. Any such berk who passes through the tunnel must make a saving throw versus poison (humans suffer a –2 penalty to the roll) or be affected in 2d4 rounds. And for an affected sod, the world becomes a very different place. Colors change and even begin to peel away from the object they're associated with, spinning freely through the air. Things change in their perspective and importance; a friend's speech seems small and distant, while a small knot in the tree grows vastly important. Nonliving objects speak to the victim, taking on personalities and strange mannerisms. These delusions and visions last for 3d6 rounds.

Within the lair are four ratatosk, including the high-up called Glittereye. None of the creatures understand ground-dwelling humanoids very well anyway, so they won't really notice the odd behavior of sods affected by the sap. However, if the PCs don't quickly start talking about a subject that interests the squirrel-folk, they're kicked out of the lair.

Glittereye, fortunately, can speak planar common quite well. Unfortunately, he's on the verge of becoming a complete barmy. The influence and presence of Tenebrous and the visages have tainted this portion of Yggdrasil, and, therefore, those most in tune with the tree. The pack leader's condition won't help the party's attempts at communication. What's more, Glittereye's condition makes him seem depressed and cynical, especially to canny PCs who know that ratatosk are generally playful. And because ratatosk always imitate their leader, the other squirrel-folk in the lair act the same way.

If asked about Yggdrasil or his own somber mood, Glittereye presents his despondent view to the PCs, using the ratatosk speech pattern of jerky sentence-bursts:

"See, it's this. Like this. Dark-ness. Some-thing foul. Foul. Some-thing's come. Come to. Might-y moth-er tree. Ver-y nast-y. She's not hap-py. Not hap-py. Not. Wants it gone. Ground-ling city. Ver-y. Very bad. Crux."

Glittereye doesn't know exactly what's happened to Crux, but if the PCs seem curious, he takes them out of the lair and leads them to a place he calls Warpwood. The rest of the ratatosk – the other three from the lair, plus the two escorts – accompany him.

◆ LOST+ LI++LE MODRON ◆

This is truly what a body'd call a random encounter. As Glittereye takes the party to Warpwood, they run into a pentadrone – a member of the recent Great Modron March that got lost. The sod now wanders the planes with no idea of how to get back to Mechanus. Ironically, it's been drawn somehow to Tenebrous's presence – and thus this area of Yggdrasil – because of the fiend's time spent as Primus (refer to the Introduction for more details).

The pentadrone has resisted the strange urges and feelings of loneliness and depression that sometimes drive lost modrons mad. Though assaulted at every turn by random disorder (the twisting, gnarled branches of the World Ash are no comfort to one used to the well-tooled repetition of the gears of Mechanus), it remains firm in its resolve and true to its orders. The modron isn't a rogue; it's just lost. Thus, it's kept its original shape.

About halfway between the ratatosk lair and Warpwood, the group encounters the modron, which addresses them.

"Change of directive for nonmodron units," you hear as a creature that resembles a starfish on thin legs teeters awkwardly toward you along the wide branch. "Help this unit return to native Mechanus immediately," it states. "That is all." Its large eyes look at you expectantly.

If asked, the pentadrone reveals that it was part of the last Modron March, and, although it senses a presence of importance on Yggdrasil, it must return to Mechanus. What presence? "Insufficient data," it replies. "Such is not for this unit to question."

'Course, taking this lost modron home might not be in the player characters' power, or they might just refuse. In any case, unless the heroes agree to drop what they're doing and take the pentadrone to Mechanus, the modron points at them and asks: "Current duties for these units?" No matter how the PCs answer, the modron says, "This unit will accompany." Why? "Current status requires further observation of anomalies in environment." Basically, it wants to figure out what's going on.

Naturally, the pentadrone and the ratatosk are not compatible. It ignores their taunts ("Ooh, look! Look at the boxy-body!"), but it won't brook any physical assaults – not even playful ones.

While the pentadrone accompanies the party, the DM can decide its actions. For the most part, however, it observes and tries to analyze each situation as best it can. Despite wanting to return to Mechanus, the modron really does want to learn the dark of the strange presence that has attracted it to Yggdrasil. Even this analytical creature senses that something's not quite right. From time to time, it asks the PCs if they're currently able to take it to Mechanus. It takes refusal without emotion, but in its own structured, ordered way, the pentadrone grows antsy – it's a modron on the edge.

If the group gets into a combat situation or other dangerous circumstance, the pentadrone fights only in its own defense. However, if the PCs actually decide to take it back to Mechanus, it defends them as best as it can along the way. This isn't gratitude, but merely logic.

NOTE: Canny PCs might decide to keep the modron in the party. After all, it can sense the presence of whatever's troubling the World Ash (though, naturally, the heroes still won't



know the source of the disturbance). Even if the cutters don't tumble to this idea until long after they let the pentadrone go its own way, the Dungeon Master should let them find the modron again if they try. Such top-shelf thinking should be rewarded.

On the other hand, if one of the players is already running a rogue modron character, the DM should probably skip this encounter entirely. Otherwise, the pentadrone'll focus only on eliminating the rogue, and the rogue'll focus only on fleeing.

◆ WARPWOOD ◆

Whether or not the PCs encounter the lost pentadrone, Glittereye eventually leads them to Warpwood. Peery or observant cutters notice that the ratatosk leader's depression and dark mood worsen as they travel from the lair to Warpwood. Glittereye creeps slowly along the tree, and it's obvious that the other ratatosk try to mimic him (though they have apparent difficulty in moving at such a somber speed). When the group reaches Warpwood, the ratatosk seem edgier than ever, and Glittereye is practically weeping.

Finally, you arrive at a spot where Yggdrasil takes on a very different look. The wood in this area is rippled in a huge circular pattern, as if something large and heavy had been dropped on the branch and the bark had reacted like water, moving outward in tiny waves. You can't tell if the bark's now at rest or if it's still rippling just beyond the range of your perception. But the most disturbing thing about this strange warping is the intense blackness that makes up its center.

Warpwood is the spot where Tenebrous crossed over from the Astral Plane onto Yggdrasil. While fiends, evil proxies, and even a wicked avatar or two occasionally make their way along the World Ash's roots and branches, they rarely (if ever) have such a corruptive effect. But when Tenebrous stepped onto the branch, he was fairly dripping with rancid negative energy – the force that had revived him from his supposedly eternal slumber. Fact is, a *detect evil* spell or similar magic reveals that Warpwood isn't a source of evil, but rather its effect – the wake of evil's passing.

If asked, Glittereye offers what he knows:

"This ap-peared. Man-y sea-sons. Many. Ago. Is making. Making tree. Mother tree. Sick." The ratatosk seems to be speaking with great effort. "What comes to the tree comes. To those in touch with her." As his speech slows and becomes more regular, a darkness comes to his eyes. "Evil has come to the tree."

With this, Glittereye suddenly lunges at the nearest player character. The ratatosk leader has lingered too close to the Warpwood for too long, unleashing the evil embodied in the bark. This transformation should startle and unnerve any cutter who knows anything about ratatosk – and maybe any

that don't. Simply put, Glittereye has been corrupted by the Warpwood's influence. Now barmy and maniacal, he seeks to destroy all living things, starting with the PCs. (In his addled brain-box, the ratatosk leader is acting in Yggdrasil's name.)

While corrupted, Glittereye is immune to *charm* spells and similar mind-affecting magic. Spells such as *remove curse* and *dispel evil* rid him of the corruptive influence, though *dispel magic* has no effect. If the PCs do nothing to try to "cure" him, Glittereye returns to normal on his own in 5d10 hours.

Unfortunately, the poor sods must deal with the crazed ratatosk right now – not to mention the rest of his pack. The five other squirrel-folk follow their high-up's example and (somewhat reluctantly) attack the party. The PCs probably should find a way to subdue or drive off their attackers without killing them.

At some point during the battle, clever heroes might realize that if what Glittereye said is true, then Crux is in trouble. After all, Marlus Van and the rest of the Woodworkers' Guild are also in touch with Yggdrasil and might also be corrupted. And that is, indeed, what's happening back in the tree-town.

◆ BACK + CRUX ◆

Whether or not the PCs tumble to the trouble facing Crux, sooner or later the bashers probably head back to town. Unless they've lingered with the ratatosk for a very long time, they most likely stumble right into the mess.

Just as you're reaching the edge of Crux, you notice that smoke is rising from one of the buildings! You quickly realize that the noxious fumes are pouring out of a window in the Woodworkers' Guild, and cries of surprise and pain can be heard within.

Inside the guild building, Marlus Van has just dumped oil all over the floor of the main workroom and set it ablaze (having first cast *protection from fire* on herself). Like Glittereye, her communion with the tainted tree has made her suddenly homicidal. To make matters worse, five woodworkers are trapped with Marlus in the burning building, and if the PCs wait until the town guard arrives, a number of the poor sods'll probably be dead – either from the smoke and flames or from Marlus's cudgel and spells.

Any PCs who enter the Woodworkers' Guild must make a saving throw versus poison. The fire is spreading quickly and creating a lot of smoke, and PCs who fail their save are overcome for 1d2 rounds with coughing and choking. After that period, they must make another saving throw each round or suffer the same fate (though they now can gain a +1 bonus to a roll by covering their mouth and nose with cloth, or a +2 bonus by using *wet* cloth). If a PC fails three saves in a row, he passes out from smoke inhalation and dies unless taken out of the building within 3d4 rounds.

Regardless of saving throws, the fire and smoke impose a –1 penalty to attack rolls and similar activities attempted by

anyone in the building. There's also a 20% chance per round that 1d3 sods (woodworkers or PCs) are subject to falling, burning rafters or rapidly increasing flames, either of which inflicts 1d6 points of damage.

- ♦ At some point during the battle, show the players Illo D (on page 170).

Marlus, meanwhile, does her best to kill everyone around her. 'Course, she's normally a peaceful priestess and doesn't have an arsenal of offensive spells ready. Note that *pass plant* allows her to slip into Yggdrasil and reappear anywhere else on the tree, and she uses this trick to escape if necessary (and if she's able). If Marlus does escape, the people of Crux – particularly the guild members – mount a search to find her and help her overcome her problem. The crazed priestess uses this time to strike again, especially against any PCs who attacked her.

Luckily, the corruptive effect is temporary and localized; the contamination of the World Ash extends for only a few miles. Marlus, Glittereye, and other local priests of the tree return to their senses in 5d10 hours. But it's likely that the Warpwood will never completely fade from the tree, even though its influence on priests of Yggdrasil will never rise to such an extent again.

♦ IN+ERFERENCE ♦

As the PCs explore Crux, deal with the ratatosk, and visit Warpwood, a few other factors probably conspire to make their lives more difficult. The Dungeon Master's free to introduce any or all of the following obstacles.

TALISMIN

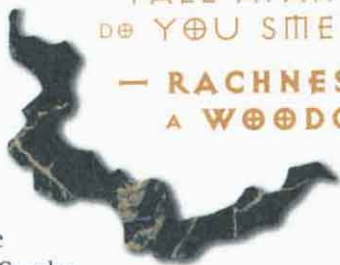
Chances are good that this cross-trading half-elf is still following the group. If she hears of the Warpwood, she might check it out closely to determine what really happened there – her employers'd certainly be interested in learning how something like the World Ash could be corrupted. Talismin might even experiment on a poor sod or two, trying to expose them to the Warpwood's perverse influence. A few ratatosk or even a PC would do very nicely.

If Talismin decides that the heroes need to be eliminated, she seizes upon the fight with Marlus Van as an opportune time

to strike. In the smoke of the burning building, Talismin's knife might find many waiting backs; failing that, she tries to trap the heroes in the flaming structure until they die.



MARLUS VAN IS
+THE LINCHPIN
AROUND HERE.
WHY, I'D WAGER
+HA+ WITH+OU+ HER,
+THE GUILD'D
PRE++Y MUCH
FALL APART+ . . . SAY,
DE YOU SMELL SMOKE?
— RACHNES SIL,
A WOODCRAFTER



VERIDIS MOV

Veridis knows only a bit about what's going on. For instance, while he's known for some time that the Warpwood existed, he didn't realize how strongly it could affect those close to Yggdrasil. Still, he suspects that the blackened area is somehow tied to the evil presence he senses in Crux.

Because he doesn't have the dark of it all, Veridis keeps his eye on everything that happens, refraining from any direct action unless a body looks his way. He's become very peery since Tenebrous's visit, and he doesn't want outsiders like the PCs poking around in what he considers to be *his* affairs – at least, not until he has more need of their help (in Chapter IV).

THE KHAAS+ A

If the PCs have already visited Naphraks but failed to wipe out the khaasta completely, these reptilian bandits are still present and most likely piked off at the heroes for giving them the laugh. Any cutters who wander away from Crux leave the protection that Veridis gives the burg, and an out-of-town encounter with vengeful khaasta is always a risk. This is especially true if the bandit-king Haac(!)nss still lives – and even moreso if the PCs stole any of his circean embers.

♦ AFTERMA+H ♦

This is only the tip of the iceberg. Warpwood's merely a side-effect of the great evil that has come to Yggdrasil (Tenebrous) and the lesser evil it left behind (the visages). And before the PCs can catch their collective breath, the visages make their presence known in Crux (in Chapter III).

If Marlus Van is recovered alive, she's deeply disturbed by what happened to her. She falls into a state of severe depression over her actions and the horrible truth that the World Ash itself has been tainted. The PCs can either help Marlus confront these troubling realizations or just leave her to her own sad fate.

Encounters with ratatosk in the rest of "Out of the Darkness" are likely to resemble those in this chapter – the squirrel-folk will be depressed or agitated. But if the PCs managed to avoid offending the creatures – and perhaps even found a way to help them – ratatosk in later chapters may very well react better to the party from now on. Word travels fast among their kind.



INTERLUDE I

Ever since the Great Modron March, Tenebrous just had to wonder at his own thinking at times. It had become so . . . *orderly*. The years he spent as Primus had tainted him, and that was something he'd never forgive nor forget. He vowed that the modrons would be among those who would suffer his wrath. Yet so many others held higher positions on the "list."

The withered, shadowy form that now served him as his body settled into his throne of bone. Tcian Sumere, his fortress deep within the Negative Energy Plane — otherwise known as the Bottom of the Multiverse — had served him well since he fled the dreaded stupor of the Astral. Perhaps even after he'd destroyed hated Kiaransalee, he thought, he might shape a permanent realm here. This place of cold darkness and eternal hunger fit him well. A smile came to his dark lips, a grin that no man could — or should — see.

Much had happened since he escaped from the Silver Void, since he was reborn into this semblance of life and godhood. How had it all begun? Tenebrous remembered stirring from his deathlike slumber as a cascade of negative energy had infused his shriveled limbs with dark un-

life. He hadn't questioned the strange turn of events that led to his resurrection, but merely clawed his way onto the plane-spanning tree, Yggdrasil, and called to him his closest servants.

At that time, of course, Tenebrous hadn't yet realized that his fiendish attendants had been slain in the same conflagration that robbed him of his realm and his life. And yet they still heeded his call. As he had been given life by negative energy, so did Tenebrous use his own power to bestow upon his servants the gift of a second life. Their writhing, undead bodies pleased him, though he knew that their tanar'ric forms would not last. The former Abyssal lord had inadvertently created a new type of being — an undead fiend. Much later, he would call these creatures *visages*, bless them with special talents, and send them out to gather information.

Ah, *information*. For so long, the "chant," as they called it, was the focus of his new life. Tenebrous needed to learn all he could about what happened after his defeat, the location of his prized talisman, and the best method of exacting his vengeance. He settled most of his servants into their new home at Tcian Sumere, but he'd also stationed a handful on the World Ash — for the tree would be his tool. Tenebrous knew that no one would expect an evil, undead power and his minions to make their way about the multiverse on Yggdrasil. Thus, the tree would serve him perfectly.

Tenebrous then set to finding the Wand of Orcus, for without the nourishment of its wicked energy, he feared his new form might not long endure. Besides — the wand was his, and he would possess its power anew. Ancient lore, stolen from many sources, led him to the dusty Arboreal layer of Pelion, where he found a mighty force of destruction known as the Last Word. What's more, Tenebrous learned — at last! — that his missing wand lay in the Paraelemental Plane of Ooze. So to Ooze he went.

That blithering, simpering Bwimb creature, Tenebrous mused, remembering what had happened when he'd arrived. *Baron of Ooze indeed. He disgusted me. He did nothing but beg for his life. It was a pleasure to kill him. The multiverse is better off without such weaklings.* Ah, but what did he care about making things better?

BWIMB, INDEED.
HOW COULD I HAVE EVER THOUGHT
THAT SUCH A CREATURE
MIGHT HOLD MY WAND?

— TENEBROUS

In any event, Tenebrous had been misled. The Wand of Orcus wasn't there at all.

But the undead deity refused to call off the search. With his newfound power, nothing could stand in his way. One day he would find his wand — one day soon. And yet, Tenebrous was smart enough to realize the danger of being discovered before that day could come to pass. Though his visage servants were useful spies, he needed a way to observe the whole of the Great Ring from a distance. His plan to do so took him to Mechanus, where he murdered and replaced Primus, patron of the modrons. He then commanded the modrons to begin a march around the Outer Planes, even though the next such trek wasn't supposed to occur for some time.

During this march, the modrons uncovered the dark of many subjects, and Tenebrous gathered information on a level beyond even his greatest hopes. His focus was narrowing. Through the modrons, he learned that the Wand of Orcus rested somewhere on the Lower Planes, and that it had been hidden away after his demise by two drow slaves.

Finding the pair, however, proved difficult. Maanzecorian, the illithid keeper of secrets, knew that one of the slaves still dwelt in Kiaransalee's realm. Tenebrous ripped that knowledge from its mind before he uttered the Last Word and destroyed the essence of the illithid god. Its entire Gehennan realm boiled away upon the deity's death, but Tenebrous escaped before he himself was consumed.

Still, Tenebrous needed more. Where was the other slave? Where else might he uncover the knowledge of the cosmos, the secrets that would lead him to his wand? Perhaps the lesser creatures of the planes would know. The noctrals of Mount Celestia? The fiends? The observers? What of the mysterious Keepers? No, there simply wasn't enough time to hunt down numerous individuals scattered across the multiverse. Tenebrous needed more potent sources of information.

The power Camaxtli was said to know many secrets. He claimed, in fact, to know them *all*.

"Let us see, then," Tenebrous muttered aloud, "how well you can *keep* them, little god. . . ."



CHAPTER III: MASKS

"By that time, it was all over."

"Over?" I asked. "How could it be over?"

"There was nothing more. It was just — over." Imeskam looked at me, shaking her head slightly, her face all scrunched up.

Could what she said really be true? Things like this don't just happen and then end. As I was rendered immobile by my own confusion, Imeskam got up and took a cup from the nearest cupboard. I watched in silence, not really letting my mind process what my eyes told me until she sat down again — with her cup full of wine.

Just yesterday, she'd tasted that same wine and announced that she would "sooner drink shorge milk than this swill." But now Imeskam sat across from me and poured her drink down her throat in big gulps. I watched, motionless, as she drained her cup and smiled.

Then I knew it wasn't over. This wasn't Imeskam.

◆ MORE TROUBLE IN CRUX ◆

Things don't really lighten up after Chapter II. Even if the player characters fend off the ratatosk assaults, put out the fire in the Woodworkers' Guild, and restore Marlus Van to sound mental health, the real danger has yet to be discovered. Some PCs might show interest in finding the source of the corruption at Warpwood. Others might ignore it and prepare to go on their way. Either way, trouble rears its ugly head. Soon after the events of Chapter II, a corpse is found in a room at one of Crux's inns — a corpse with a horrible secret.

GETTING THE PCs INVOLVED

By this point in the adventure, only the most reluctant of adventurers will try to avoid getting involved. After all, the PCs have experienced several strange events for which they have no real answers. As soon as they discover more foul activity and realize that the trouble in Crux isn't over, they'll most likely be eager to stay and tumble to the solution of the mystery.

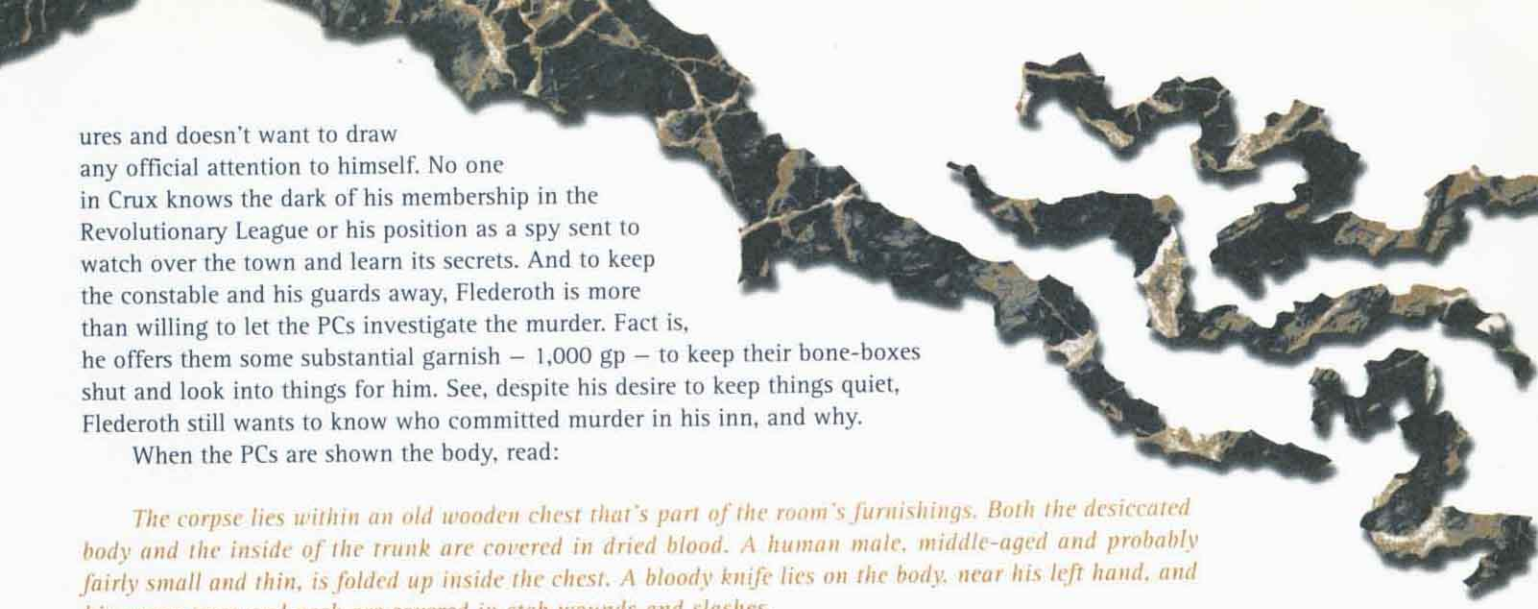
Still, if the PCs need a bit of prodding, the DM can place the murdered corpse in the room next to theirs at the inn where they're staying. Or the body could be found when the heroes are in the tavern below the inn. A less desirable choice is to have someone who saw the PCs help with the fire at the Woodworkers' Guild approach the characters when the corpse is discovered and directly ask them for help. (This person could even be the innkeeper, Flederoth.)

◆ DEAD MAN'S TALES ◆

Once the PCs arrive at the scene of the crime, they learn what's happened. A maid, Ashinn Ces (PI/♀ human/0-level/NG), investigated a foul odor coming from one of the inn's guest rooms and discovered a horribly mangled corpse within. When the PCs show up, Flederoth the innkeeper (PI/♂ githzerai/F3/Revolutionary League/CN) is busy trying to quiet Ashinn, who's naturally very upset.

Because of his secret ties to the Anarchists, Flederoth hates authority fig-

BLACK IS GRAY,
AND YELLOW'S WHITE.
BUT WE DECIDE
WHICH IS RIGHT,
AND WHICH IS
AN ILLUSION.
— MUDDESI BLU,
A BLEAKER



ures and doesn't want to draw any official attention to himself. No one in Crux knows the dark of his membership in the Revolutionary League or his position as a spy sent to watch over the town and learn its secrets. And to keep the constable and his guards away, Flederoth is more than willing to let the PCs investigate the murder. Fact is, he offers them some substantial garnish – 1,000 gp – to keep their bone-boxes shut and look into things for him. See, despite his desire to keep things quiet, Flederoth still wants to know who committed murder in his inn, and why.

When the PCs are shown the body, read:

The corpse lies within an old wooden chest that's part of the room's furnishings. Both the desiccated body and the inside of the trunk are covered in dried blood. A human male, middle-aged and probably fairly small and thin, is folded up inside the chest. A bloody knife lies on the body, near his left hand, and his upper torso and neck are covered in stab wounds and slashes.

Anyone who examines the body – even a berk with no special medical knowledge – can tell that the sod's been in the dead-book for a number of days. Those who know the dark of such things would say the victim's been dead for three to five days. But that won't ring true to Flederoth (assuming he hears of the pronouncement). The innkeeper insists that he spied the poor sod going up to his room only yesterday. Flederoth can even supply a name to go with the bloody body – Renik Crothson, a merchant from Ysgard looking to start a business in Crux. Unfortunately, the innkeeper doesn't know much else about him.

If the PCs look around Renik's chamber, they might pick up a few clues. Despite all the blood on the inside of the trunk (even the lid), there's none to be found in the room or on the floor. What's more, there's no evidence of a struggle. The room's still full of the sod's possessions, and nothing looks like it's been disturbed. However, if the PCs think to look for the room key, they discover it's nowhere to be found.

THE DARK OF THE MURDER

Renik Crothson killed himself. He was mentally manipulated by one of the visages in Crux to crawl into the trunk with a knife and stab himself until dead. The fiend then adopted Renik's form so that it could move about the burg unnoticed. The visages had hoped it would take longer for the body to be discovered.

If the PCs have a magical means of communicating with the dead, they can contact Renik's spirit and tumble to the truth of the suicide. Considering the way Renik did himself in, however, even an addle-cove can guess that some other force guided his hand. But at this point, there's no way for the PCs to figure out who or what coerced him, and Renik himself (his spirit, anyway) has no idea.

◆ FURTHER INVESTIGATION ◆

With Flederoth's jink in their pockets, the PCs are obligated to do a little poking around. Plus, they're more than likely a bit curious, especially after seeing the corruptive effects of Warpwood (though they may not yet realize that both events are connected).

One of the most obvious ways to pick up more chant on Renik is to ask around town. 'Course, while that's a canny move, the PCs have to go about it in a subtle manner. But unless the heroes have already aroused the suspicions of the townsfolk, no one gets too peery if the cutters are both delicate and shrewd with their questions.

No matter in which inn the DM sets the murder, a few folks in the tavern below remember seeing someone of Renik's description coming and going, though no one remembers exactly when. The PCs get much the same response throughout town – people remember seeing Renik but don't know anything else. However, Targas Yid, the toolmaker, has more to say.

"Yeah, I know the berk. You mean Renik, ah . . . somethin'erother-son. I just seen 'im yesterday. Over by the constable's High Point, there. Yeah. He'd said last week that we'd git together'n wigwag 'bout his bringing me some goods ta make ma tools. That's what I do, ya know. Wal, when I seen Renik yesterday, I

gave 'im what for, 'cause he never showed. But when I said that, the piker jes' ignored me like I was barmy or somethin'. I'm agin folks breakin' their word – ya won't catch me doing business with that stag-turner."

'Course, what old Targas really saw near High Point was the visage posing as Renik. The undead fiends use a dark alley near the fortress as a meeting spot. If the PCs snoop around High Point, they might spy the visages in the shadows (see "The Mark," below).

A S+RANGE VISI+OR

Top-shelf thinkers might decide to watch Renik's room. With the dark of the murder kept quiet, someone – perhaps even the killer – might poke around the scene of the crime, unaware of Renik's demise or the discovery of the body.

The day after the corpse is found, anyone keeping an eye on the room is rewarded as a shadowy figure approaches and knocks upon the door. This basher is Kair-aama (Pl/♂ aasimar/M6/Fraternity of Order/LN), a barmy Guvner who has business with Renik. Kair-aama's skin is as milky-white as his hair, though his eyes are a piercing green. If the PCs follow him when he leaves the inn, they'll observe that he merely returns to his small case at the edge of town.

However, if the heroes watch Kair-aama for any length of time, they definitely notice some unusual behavior. See, while adhering to the Guvners' general philosophy, the aasimar believes that he can circumvent the order of everything through specific, precise rituals. As he walks around the burg (or, indeed, does anything at all), Kair-aama constantly makes odd gestures and mutters strange words. If the PCs get close enough to hear, they can make out that the berk's reciting chains of numbers, sometimes accompanied by the name of whatever object he's using. For example, before opening a door, he might hold up his first two fingers and say, "Seven, seven, eight, seven, door, seven." In this way, he believes he changes reality to keep himself safe, healthy, and prosperous.

The PCs might really have to work to learn the dark of Kair-aama's activities, as he's not particularly forthcoming with information. He used to live in Sigil and serve as a minder for a Guvner factotum, but he was fired after his strange habits came to light. Ever since, he's lived in Crux. Despite his upper-planar heritage, Kair-aama no longer has any concerns but his own. Thus, he was interested when Renik Crothson approached him in the Lucky Lam tavern and claimed to have a foolproof jink-making scheme. He was even *more* interested when Renik offered him 120 gp just to come to his room in two days' time and hear him out. That's why he was knocking on Renik's door.

The creature that approached Kair-aama was actually the visage posing as Renik, who'd been killed. The fiend hoped to lure the aasimar into a trap, so that another visage could kill the sod and replace him. Naturally, Kair-aama has no knowledge of any of this; he continues to look for Renik all over town.

The visages, meanwhile, still think that the aasimar would make a good victim. They didn't attack him at Renik's room because they suspected that someone might be keeping tabs on Kair-aama, and they held off until they could be sure of striking unseen. The fiends're willing to wait until the time is right. If they manage to replace the aasimar, a body who's been watching the sod quickly notices that "Kair-aama" no longer follows the same ritualized behavior that seemed to govern his life.

◆ THE MARK ◆

With all the folks who spotted Renik after he'd supposedly been killed, not to mention the change in Kair-aama's behavior, the PCs should tumble to the idea that something is killing and replacing the people of Crux. The heroes might have their eye on the so-called aasimar, or maybe they get lucky and find "Renik" prowling around the shadows. (By this point, the visage probably knows that the real Renik's body has been discovered and is laying low until it can take a new form safely.)

Whether the PCs follow Renik or Kair-aama, they eventually see their mark meet with something in the dark shadows of an alley near High Point. If the cutters keep watch for several evenings, they observe a number of secret meetings and finally see the true "face" of their enemies.

Out of the darkness, you catch a glimpse of a creature unlike any you've seen before. The ghostly apparition is at least somewhat noncorporeal, with a wispy, translucent body that seems to have no constant form. The only thing solid about the creature is its head, which, while somehow giving the impression of festering decay, is almost entirely concealed by a garish mask. The jesterlike visage portrays a sinister leer that shows no joviality – a mockery of the countenance it flaunts. This is the face of evil.

If the PCs dare to follow one of the visages after it leaves the alley, they might very well be surprised to see it head out of Crux, proceeding along a branch that the PCs haven't yet explored. Its path is winding and queer, but careful cutters should have no problem keeping up and remaining out of sight.

Eventually, the visage makes a turn down a hidden branch that the PCs notice is blackened and gnarled, devoid of leaves or buds. The visages altered the limb by drawing on the corruptive power of Warpwood, and now the twisted, malformed branch reaches into Baator – specifically, into Ankhwugaht, the desert realm of the Egyptian power Set.

While the PCs watch, the visage moves along the branch until it reaches the spot where the limb disappears into a large, shimmering portal. The creature passes through the portal – which is always open – and vanishes.

See, Tenebrous commanded the visages to journey to Set's realm and steal a rare blossom called *desert's night*, known (among other things) for its ability to restore memories

taken by the River Styx. Tenebrous suspects that the berks who hid his wand away fell victim to the dark river, and he hopes to use the flower to bring back their lost knowledge.

Because *desert's night* grows only in Ankhwugaht, the visages forced the corrupted World Ash to bend one of its branches directly to Set's realm. (Luckily, the fiends no longer have that power; they were able to twist Yggdrasil only when the evil taint was still strong.) But the Lord of Evil recently become aware of the intrusion and has ordered his minions to find out what's going on and put a stop to it. Nekrotheptis Skorprios, one of Set's proxies, has tumbled to the idea that the invaders might seek the prized flower, but he isn't sure — and besides, he doesn't know why they'd want it.

THE GUARDIANS

If the PCs use the portal immediately after they watch the visage pass through, they step into Ankhwugaht just in time to be ambushed by three minions of Set. The guardians waited by the portal to keep the visages out of their master's realm, and they mistake the PCs for their foes (which might very well have been the tailed visage's plan all along).

The moment you step through the shimmering disk of color, you're struck by the dry heat of a desert. The sky above is charcoal, streaked with dusky red. Nothing but sand dunes surround the shriveled branch as it tapers to the size of a log and then a twig, though an ebony river snakes its way through the darkness just at the edge of your vision.

Before you can look around any longer, however, figures leap out of the night at you, singing a song of death.

If the PCs merely approach the portal but hesitate to pass through it, the three minions jump through to Yggdrasil and attack the group. Either way, if the PCs can understand the language of Ankhwugaht, they realize that the strange, dirgelike song sung by their assailants praises Set and describes the



HOW FRAGILE THE MIND IS, HOW EASY TO MAKE IT A THING OF PLAY.

— A VISAGE



task of defending his realm against intruders. When the fight begins, the minions appear to be dusky-skinned, well-muscled men wearing black and gold garments. If seriously pressed, however, they turn into giant scorpions and continue to attack. They won't retreat or surrender.

If the battle occurs on the Baatorian side of the portal, the PCs can see their mark — the visage they'd been trailing — slip away into the darkness of the desert realm.

keep the *desert's night* safe, Nekrotheptis won't live long enough to make use of the heroes' information (see Interlude II). In any event, minions of Set escort the heroes all the way back to the portal to make

sure that they leave.

'Course, if the DM wishes to expand this portion of the ride, he can throw in encounters with a giant desert snake or two, a pack of hyenas, or crocodiles, all of which are intelligent and all of which automatically attack any good bashers in the realm. The PCs might even encounter some of Set's petitioners, who're always looking to get ahead in one way or another in this harsh place. Eventually, however, the heroes run into the minions and their proxy high-up and are forced to leave Ankhwugaht.

◆ THE MIDNIGHT DESERT ◆

Player characters brave enough to venture into Set's realm after defeating the guardians find no trace of the visage. If they wander around, however, it won't take long before they encounter more minions of Set, who patrol the area regularly looking for the intruders. This time, six minions — all appearing as men dark of hair, skin, and eye (as above) — approach the heroes, but they don't immediately attack. Instead, one of them informs the PCs in a heavily accented voice: "Our master wishes to speak with you."

While some leatherheads might be terrified by this news, thinking that they're going to be brought before Set himself, real bloods know that the minions must mean a proxy — a power wouldn't speak with a bunch of planewalking sods. And they're right, of course. If the PCs are willing, the minions escort them to the temporary headquarters of Nekrotheptis Skorpios (Px/♂ minion of Set/F13,T15/LE), a regal pavilion made of black material. Hundreds of minions camp around the pavilion, which is also surrounded by an honor guard of 20 minions in the forms of giant snakes.

The minions bring the PCs before Nekrotheptis, who asks the heroes to explain their purpose in Ankhwugaht. The proxy is coolly polite in his questioning, and he even offers the group cups of good wine and a plate of fresh dates. Nekrotheptis looks much like the other minions, though his dark complexion and disarming eyes also give an impression of smoldering flames and black ashes. Canny cutters'll tell him the truth about the visages, and if they do, the proxy does the same.

"These mysterious foes you describe are the reason my troops and I are here," he explains. "We seek to stop them. We believe they are after a rare flower known as desert's night. But no one may steal from the realm of the Lord of Evil." The imposing man waves his hand regally. "Return to your portal and begone. We have the defense of this realm well in hand. Look to your own lands, my friends."

If indeed the PCs tell Nekrotheptis where the visages are coming from and what they've seen in Crux, the chant is quite valuable to him. Unfortunately, even though he manages to

◆ A LONG TRIP BACK ◆

After being tossed out of Set's realm, the PCs probably try to head back to Crux. It seems to them that they can retrace their steps without problem. However, though they make their way with good speed, they don't reach the tree-burg. Fact is, after hours of walking, the PCs might begin to realize that they really haven't moved at all (even though the scenery's been changing).

Here's the dark of it: The visages know that the bashers wigwagged with Set's proxy and probably learned the nature of their mission to obtain the *desert's night*. That's not something the undead fiends want the PCs to know, so they plan on preventing the heroes from returning to Crux with that chant. One of the visages secretly ambushed the heroes when they came back through the portal to Yggdrasil, using its lucidity-control powers to make them think they were moving when they really weren't.

As soon as the PCs tumble to the idea that they're not making any progress on the World Ash, each cutter should make a saving throw versus spell. Those who succeed can begin to walk normally along the branch, quickly leaving their companions behind in the foliage. They also see a ghostly apparition floating not far away through the leaves — the visage that'd been controlling their perceptions.

Unless all of the PCs make their saving throws, those who free themselves from the visage's control most likely go back to find their comrades. That proves difficult — the visage next uses its power to make it seem like disembodied human arms and hands attack the returning heroes. But since they're peery now, the PCs can make another saving throw versus spell to avoid the new effect. This time, those who succeed see that the affected sods are being assaulted by their own arms (which're under the control of the visage). If a basher strikes one of the "disembodied" arms, he inflicts damage upon himself without realizing it.

Meanwhile, any PCs still caught up in the original "can't

get anywhere" effect are allowed new saving throws since they're no longer the focus of the visage's attention. Overall, with all the confusion, it's likely that the group gets separated in the thick foliage of Yggdrasil. To make matters worse, the visage stirs up a nest of giant beetles (the World Ash is thick with them) to attack the heroes.

If any sods break free of the disembodied arm effect, the visage then tries to make them think that normal-sized beetles are crawling all over them as the giant-sized insects attack. Again, the PCs get a saving throw, but those who fall prey to the new trick believe themselves to be completely covered in stinging, biting beetles that scramble into their mouths, ears, and so on. There's a 50% chance that victims try to brush off the imaginary beetles while fighting the real ones, and a 50% chance that they ignore the imaginary insects and focus only on their giant-sized attackers. In the latter case, however, the berks have such a hard time trying to ignore the smaller bugs that they suffer a penalty of -3 to all die rolls, and their Armor Class worsens by 3.

Only when the heroes begin actively searching for the visage amid the leaves does it slink away – unless the characters are addle-coved enough to separate, that is. If the PCs split up, the undead fiend attacks one of the lone party members, hoping to kill and replace him without his companions' knowledge.

NOTE: Modrons aren't affected by the visage's power to control lucidity. If the party includes the lost pentadrome from Chapter II or even a rogue modron PC, the logical cutter might be a useful tool in judging which sensations are real and which are induced.

If the PCs didn't follow the visage to Ankhwugaht in the first place, the DM can use this scene any time the heroes leave Crux and try to make their way back. In this case, the characters won't know about the *desert's night*, but the visages will still consider them potential trouble-makers and try to keep them from returning to the tree-burg.

A TIME AND PLACE ◆ +⊕ CALL KIP ◆

Once the PCs return to Crux, they can rest easy for a bit, catching up on their meals and their sleep. After that, however, they must decide what to do next. From here on out, events in this chapter should be even more confusing, mysterious, and disorienting. The PCs probably realize that they face an enemy that can control what they sense and duplicate the appearance of others. How can they trust anyone – even each other?

The Dungeon Master can exploit this knowledge to add tension to the scenario. Seemingly suspicious activities by ordinary folks can lead the PCs into following the wrong leads and jumping to the wrong conclusions. Careful use of the visages' power can make the heroes worry if they should ever completely trust their own senses.

At this point, the PCs might try to get lanned to the current chant, poke around town, or just go to the authorities.

'Course, going to the high-ups means turning stag on any deal they might've made with the innkeeper Flederoth, but that's a choice the cutters must make on their own. No matter what the PCs do, the visages are aware of their presence and try to shake the heroes' confidence in their own sanity.

CURRENT+ CHANT+

By hanging around Crux and picking up the latest chant, the PCs can learn (or simply overhear) the following:

- ◆ Things still aren't right with Yggdrasil. An evil presence still seems to lurk in the area. Folks can *feel* it.
- ◆ Travelers coming from the Astral report finding a great deal of residual negative energy (just like from the Negative Energy Plane) in the Silver Void.
- ◆ There seems to be a good deal more activity than usual around the portal to Ranais. Nobody special – just lots of folks coming and going.
- ◆ Some people in Crux've been acting strange lately – not all *that* weird, but just different. One of the folks said to be acting strange is Constable Nachen Jon. But it's hard to say, really, as no one's seen the constable around much.
- ◆ A berk just back from Sigil says that Bwimb, the baron of the Paraelemental Plane of Ooze, is dead. Few folks care, wondering, "There was a baron of the Plane of Ooze?"
- ◆ Rumors fly that a big-time power just went to the dead-book. No one knows which one or what the circumstances were, but if the chant's true, there are bound to be repercussions somewhere.

The Dungeon Master is free (and encouraged) to add red herrings to this list. After all, folks in Crux talk about a lot of different things.

SEARCHING FOR SIGNS

If the PCs decide to look around the town for clues about what's going on, the DM should set up encounters with bashers who may or may not be visage duplicates. Even normal citizens can seem suspicious, either because of a berk's own paranoia or because a real visage has been manipulating perceptions.

A fiend's mind-peel can work like this: If a PC looks around a building or glances down a street, an indeterminate figure seems to be watching him from a distance. When the sod moves ahead to investigate, the figure's gone. The visage also can make it appear that normal folks on the street glare suspiciously at a hero, but if the basher keeps chasing people who aren't there, the looks may very well become real. To

make matters worse, the visages can cause the PCs to hear screams from far off in the distance, see nonexistent secret doors in dark alleys, and smell rotting flesh.

Just when the heroes can't believe their own senses and fear that they've gone barmy, they find something real — another dead body. This time, the corpse is buried under leaves and brush behind a building in town. The poor sod was put in the dead-book quite recently. Virtually anyone in Crux can identify him as one of Constable Nachen Jon's watchmen, and a few know his name — Redahl Wim. He's been stabbed in the back.

THE PROPER AUTHORITIES

Eventually, the PCs probably go to High Point to talk to the constable, whether it's to give him the chant or get the chant *from* him. Unfortunately for the cutters, by the time they reach the small fortress, Nachen Jon's been put in the dead-book and replaced by a visage, his corpse hidden away in his room.

The "constable" is interested in whatever the PCs have to say and hears them out, trying to play the part of the concerned protector. He asks questions and tries to tumble to ex-

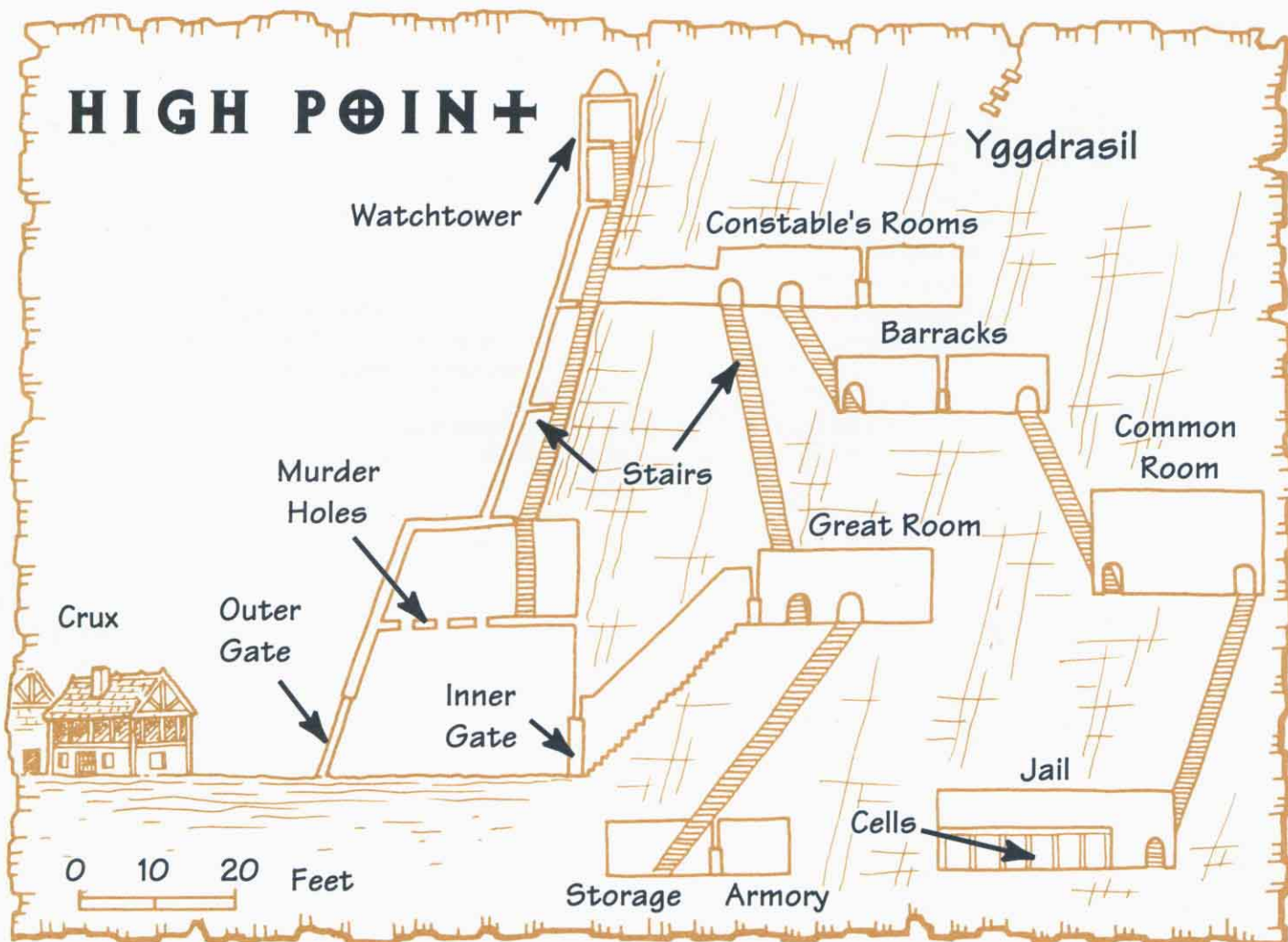
actly what the heroes have learned. If the berks don't seem to know much — in other words, if they've come to High Point too early in the adventure — the so-called constable assures them that he'll look into things. However, if the PCs appear to be well-lanned or to have dug up the dark of something the visages want to keep hidden, the heroes might be in danger.

Peery bashers spot Redahl Wim — or, rather, the visage that has replaced him — watching them carefully. If the PCs take too much notice of it, however, the visage uses its lucidity-control powers to misdirect or confuse the group while it slips away.

In any case, if the PCs don't seem like much of a threat, the "constable" allows them to leave and go on their way, though they'll be watched. If, on the other hand, the visages decide that the heroes' time has come, the fiends attack. Refer to "Within the Hearts of Men," below.

VERIDIS MOV

Bold cutters might go straight to Veridis. 'Course, he can't tell them all that much. As related in Chapter II, Veridis knows that a force of great evil briefly visited Crux, and he



suspects that some malicious presence still lingers in the tree-burg, but he has no specifics. What's more, Veridis is experiencing something he's not used to: fear. He's lost control of his town, and he's got no idea what to do.

If the PCs appear to have a potential solution, Veridis helps them (or exploits them) in any way possible. But here's the catch: The cutters really have to seem to know what's going on and what they're doing. A blood like Veridis Mov won't put everything on the line for a bunch of leatherheads or barmies.

GIVING IT + THE LAUGH

Naturally, the PCs can simply try to leave Crux and forget all about the trouble there, but that's not really the stuff of heroes. Furthermore, the visages just won't allow it. The undead fiends do what they can to stop the cutters from getting away. They don't want anyone to learn of their presence in Crux and their interest in Set's realm — especially not folks outside of the immediate area.

If the PCs try to leave, the visages use their lucidity-control powers to make the berks think they're making progress, but after an hour or so of travel, they wind up back in Crux. If that tactic fails, the fiends use their powers to bring attacks by beetles, boars, ratatosk, or other bashers from Crux to stop the PCs from getting away.

WITHIN + THE HEARTS ♦ OF MEN ♦

Eventually, the visages realize that they have to eliminate the PCs entirely. When they decide to make their move, the fiends try to ambush the heroes at High Point — their lair in Crux. Naturally, if the berks go to High Point on their own, the visages' job is all the easier. Otherwise, the fiends must peel the group into coming.

Here's how: Wherever the PCs are staying, they receive a written message from Constable Nachen Jon asking them to come to High Point to answer a few questions. Witnesses even remark that they saw the note delivered by the constable himself. 'Course, the messenger was really the visage that replaced poor Nachen.

THE LAYOUT OF HIGH POINT

OUTER GATES/BARBICAN. The outer gates are made of iron — probably the largest mass of metal in all of Crux. These huge valves are usually open, though a wooden portcullis is often lowered behind them. The barbican is a small chamber between the outer and inner gates, and the room above has murder holes so guards can rain arrows and boiling oil down on invaders.

INNER GATES. The inner gates are made of iron-bound wood, and they give way to a staircase leading up to the Great Room.

GREAT ROOM. Here, official dinners would be served and important visitors entertained — if such activities ever took place. But neither Nachen Jon nor Veridis Mov cares for that sort of pomp, so the Great Room is rarely used.

A large table fills the center of the room, and long tapestries (all depicting different representations of the World Ash) hang on the walls. If High Point were ever invaded, a foyer outside of the Great Room would serve as the fortress's last defense, with a final wooden portcullis that can be dropped at the top of the stairs.

WATCHTOWER. Like the entire front facing of High Point, this wooden tower has been built right into the side of Yggdrasil. It can be reached only by passing through the constable's office. Narrow windows let guards look over the entire town, not to mention launch arrows at invaders or drop water on fires that might be started as part of an assault on the fortress.

CONSTABLE'S ROOMS. These chambers serve as Nachen Jon's office and sleeping quarters.

BARRACKS. Twelve watchmen bunk in the two barracks, six per room. The accommodations are simple but comfortable.

COMMON ROOM. This small chamber is where bashers stationed at High Point can relax, chat, and eat. As there's no kitchen, the food is simple and uncooked, though hot meals are often brought up from the King's Table, the nearest tavern.

STORAGE/ARMORY. These two large rooms serve as storage for food, supplies, equipment, weapons, and armor. Both chambers are crammed full of material, some of it very old.

THE AMBUSH

Constable Nachen Jon, Redahl Wim, and one of the other watchmen have all been killed and replaced by visages. Another undead fiend waits in hiding on the stairs leading down to the Storage/Armory area, but it hasn't yet taken any sod's form. In addition to the four visages, the false constable has told three ordinary watchmen that the PCs are wanton murderers who've come to Crux to practice their bloody arts. The three guards have heard such horrific lies, in fact, that they're eager to put the heroes in the dead-book. Thus, the heroes face seven opponents — four visages and three ordinary guards.

When the PCs arrive at High Point, a normal guard greets them at the open outer gates and escorts them up to the Great Room. By the time they reach the top of the stairs, though, the berks hear the huge iron gates slam shut below. (The gates were closed by a visage posing as a guard, who hurries to catch up with the group in the Great Room.) If the PCs ask their escort why the gates have been closed, he shrugs and says, "That time of day, I guess." Canny cutters should be put on the alert.

The moment the PCs enter the Great Room, the trap is sprung. The visage-guard coming up from behind shuts the wooden portcullis at the top of the stairway, making sure to remain on the steps. At the same time, the escort tries to grab the last PC to enter and throw him into the path of the falling gate. To do so, the escort must make a successful attack roll. If an unlucky hero is hurled under the portcullis, he must make a successful Dexterity check to avoid being crushed for 10d6 points of damage. Even if he makes the check, the sod still ends up on the other side of the portcullis, facing the visage-guard. Not only is he cut off from the rest of his group, but he must also immediately make another successful Dexterity check to avoid falling down the long staircase for 3d6 points of damage.

'Course, that ain't the berk's worst problem. The visage-guard uses its lucidity-control power on this lone victim, making the stairs seem infinitely long and extremely slippery. Each round, the PC must make another Dexterity check. Each time it is failed, he falls a certain distance down the seemingly endless stairs (DM's discretion), suffering 1d6-3d6 points of damage. If it has to, the fiend pretends to be an ordinary watchman and fights the hero with its sword, hoping to trick the PC into thinking the real visage is somewhere else and that the "guard" isn't the main threat.

Meanwhile, the rest of the player characters must deal with the ambush in the Great Room. As soon as the portcullis closes behind them, the PCs face two visages — the "constable" and "Redahl Wim" — and three real watchmen (one of whom was the group's escort). Two guards charge the group with intent to kill, while the third tries to subdue the PCs, a bit leery of dealing death even though he's been told of the atrocities supposedly committed by the heroes.

Lastly, the visage hiding on the steps leading to the Storage/Armory area might try to use its powers to maneuver or lure a single PC down the staircase so it can slay (and perhaps replace) him.

WHAT'S REAL. WHAT'S NOT?

What really makes things difficult is that, as the guards close in on the PCs, the two visages in the Great Room alter the perceptions of the heroes. Each round, they cause the sods to experience a completely different set of images and sensations. At first, the PCs believe they're standing in the middle of a jungle that's too thick to see through. Next, they find themselves back in the Great Room, but the chamber's dimensions are 10 times their normal size. After that, the whole room disappears, and the bashers think they're falling through an endless void.



All PC actions that're influenced by the altered perceptions suffer a -4 modifier to the die rolls. For example, while in the jungle scene, the PCs believe they can't see the guards they're fighting, so their attack rolls are made at -4. 'Course, the three guards aren't affected by the visages' power. Everything seems normal to them, and they make all rolls as usual.

The PCs can try to overcome the altered perceptions by making successful saving throws versus spell. However, because the visages change the perceptions each round, the heroes must make new saving throws each round to avoid getting caught up in the effects.

The visages try to use their lucidity-control powers to separate the PCs. What's more, the fiends help the guards fight physically, but only within the confines of the altered perceptions of the heroes. In other words, the creatures won't do anything that's not appropriate to what the berks are experiencing at the time. For example, while in the jungle scene, if a PC thinks he's fallen into a hidden pit full of spikes, a visage might claw at the sod just as the victim "feels" his flesh strike the imaginary sharp points.

If a visage gets a chance, it stops altering the group's perceptions and instead uses its *domination* ability to pit one PC against another. No more than one fiend devotes its energy to this tactic, however, for the others must concentrate on using their lucidity-control powers.

SURVIVING THE BATTLE

Obviously, the ambush is a difficult and deadly trap. The best way for the PCs to succeed is for one of them to act as a "reality anchor" — one person who focuses all of his attention on seeing through the altered perceptions. While the PC concentrates on keeping reality from appearing to change, he can take no other actions.

The benefit is that any heroes within 50 feet of the anchor need not make saving throws to perceive what's actually going on. Each round, the anchor makes one saving throw for the whole group, with a +3 bonus to the roll. As long as he succeeds, everyone's perceptions are normal. Furthermore, victims of a visage's *domination* power gain a +3 bonus on their saving throws to break free of the control.

A modron party member would be quite helpful in this encounter. It'd serve as the perfect reality anchor, for its focused, orderly mind is automatically resistant to a visage's lucidity-control power. Naturally, if there is a modron with

the heroes, the visages do their best to destroy it with physical attacks.

If the PCs slay three of the four visages, the remaining fiend tries to give them the laugh by making its way to the portal to Ranais (located just outside of High Point; see the map of Crux on the poster sheet). If the visage posing as the constable is killed, the real guards surrender and ask for mercy. However, if the

heroes manage to convince the guards that they're not the bloodthirsty killers they were made out to be (through reaction rolls or merely good role-playing), the watchmen might help the planewalkers fight against the remaining visage.

During the battle, the PCs should try not to kill any of the real guards (assuming they can tell which is which). The watchmen are of good alignment and are the town's protectors; they were simply duped into attacking the group. Still, if such a thing occurs, most folks in Crux forgive the PCs — as long as the dark of the visages' lucidity-control powers comes to light. (The Dungeon Master should be somewhat lenient, too.) Nevertheless, it might be hard for some of the townspeople to treat the PCs as valiant heroes if they slew any innocent guards.

◆ WHEN THE SMOKE CLEARS ◆

With the defeat of the visages in High Point, the PCs should believe they've wrapped up all the trouble in Crux. As far as the heroes are concerned, the fiends have all fled or been put in the dead-book, and the Dungeon Master should do everything possible to convince them of that fact (even though it's not true). No matter how long the PCs search Crux for more evidence of the creatures, they won't find any.

Veridis Mov shows up and thanks the player characters personally, giving them each a reward of 200 gp for their trouble. He and the townsfolk then begin to make plans to appoint a new constable, rebuild any damage, and get on with their lives.

It's over. Time to go home.

For the PCs, that probably means Sigil, which is a good thing — the next chapter of "Out of the Darkness" starts in the City of Doors after a considerable amount of time has passed. The DM can fill that time however he likes, though it would be a perfect spot to run a portion of "Into the Light." The flowchart on the inside back cover of *Dead Gods* suggests running Part Two, but Part One works just as well (if it hasn't been used yet).



WE SPIN OUR WEBS
OF DECEIT
AND CAPTURE SOULS
LIKE FLIES
FOR OUR SPIDERY MEALS.
— A VISAGE



CHAPTER IV: MESSAGE FROM THANATOS

"Yes, well, don't you go worryin' 'bout ol' Rotting Jack, now. My life's pretty good here, me bein' a proxy an all." The babau's face contorted in a mockery of a smile. And soon I'll be more than that, Jack thought. "Course, under Orc — I mean, under the former ruler" — the fiend looked about with nervous haste — "I was a proxy, too. Things were different then." As Jack spoke, he peeled a layer of maggot-ridden flesh from his right forearm and sniffed at it. "But," he whispered conspiratorially, "they weren't all that bad."

The undead drow shambling alongside the fiend nodded. Perhaps that was all he — it — could do. The drow had been a great and respected servant of Kiaranalee before she'd had the berk killed and eventually re-animated into the unliving creature it was now. The thing's current duty: Fetch water from the River Styx and bring it to Lachrymosa. But then Rotting Jack had appeared and began babbling about himself — a common occurrence in Thanatos.

The babau tipped his head back and lowered the strip of rotted skin into his wide mouth, swallowing it without chewing. "Now, you know

all about . . . the former master, right? I mean, you were one of 'em that hid his stick away. I know you did that way long ago, while you were livin' and all, but do you remember —"

Jack stopped, suddenly aware of another presence. He spun around to see a dark shadow looming over them and just had time to fling himself to the ground before something swooped past. When Jack looked up again, the undead drow was gone — carried away, wordlessly, by the shape?

"What a way to go," the babau said to himself. He wondered if the drow had been able to scream the first time it'd been put in the dead-book. It seemed to Jack that screaming was an important part of death. To be denied that was a real shame.

Jack had no idea what the shadow might have been, but only a leatherhead would be surprised to see such a thing happen. This was Thanatos, after all. Still, the dark shape had seemed a little familiar. It'd almost looked like . . . no, it couldn't have been him.

DEATH IS
A PRISON,
BUT THE LIVING
ARE ITS
PRISONERS.

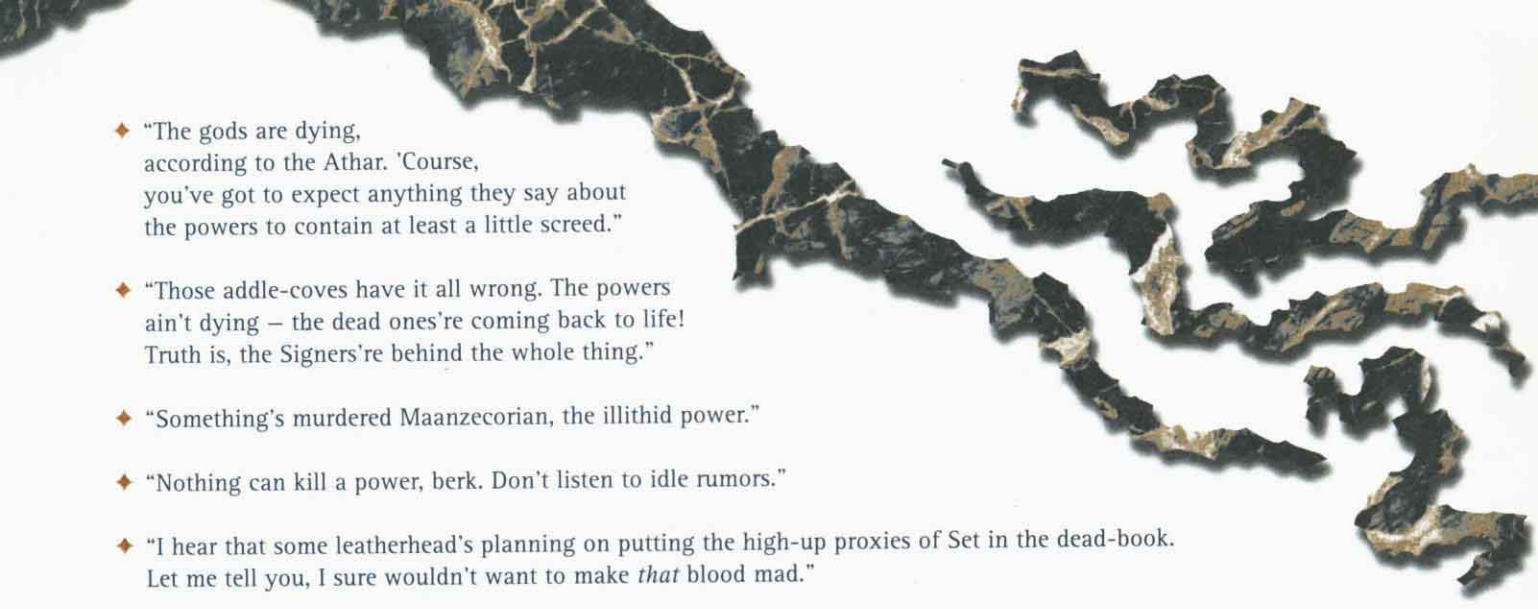
— A DUSMEN
PROVERB

◆ CHANT IN THE CAGE ◆

In this chapter, the player characters get dragged back into the events involving the visages, and, ultimately, Tenebrous himself. Summoned by Veridis Mov, the PCs return to Crux (perhaps by way of the prime-material world Ranais), spy on a meeting of undead fiends, and pick up clues to the existence and location of a mysterious fortress known as Tcian Sumere.

At the start of this chapter, the PCs are more than likely back in Sigil. As mentioned previously, the Dungeon Master can allow as much time to pass as he likes before bringing the heroes back into the main story. Between the end of Chapter III and the beginning of Chapter IV, the DM could run a short Sigil adventure, perhaps a portion of "Into the Light."

During that time, the cutters can't help getting lanned to all the chant sweeping through the City of Doors. The following tidbits — some true, some false — are on the lips of just about every bone-box in Sigil. The heroes can learn the information from any source:

- 
- ◆ "The gods are dying, according to the Athar. 'Course, you've got to expect anything they say about the powers to contain at least a little screed."
 - ◆ "Those addle-coves have it all wrong. The powers ain't dying — the dead ones're coming back to life! Truth is, the Signers're behind the whole thing."
 - ◆ "Something's murdered Maanzecorian, the illithid power."
 - ◆ "Nothing can kill a power, berk. Don't listen to idle rumors."
 - ◆ "I hear that some leatherhead's planning on putting the high-up proxies of Set in the dead-book. Let me tell you, I sure wouldn't want to make *that* blood mad."
 - ◆ "Bwimb, the Baron of the Paraelemental Plane of Ooze, is lost."
 - ◆ "Bwimb? Who cares?"
 - ◆ "I heard that Apollo was put in the dead-book right in his home on Olympus."
 - ◆ "The latest chant is that Tomeri is lost, too."
 - ◆ "Tomeri? Who's that? Or should I say, who *was* that?"
 - ◆ "The Astral's not going to be big enough to hold 'em all, I tell you."

BLAMING THE FACTIONS

Not everyone in Sigil puts stock in the rumors, but those who do want to know who or what is responsible for killing the powers. Many Cagers suspect faction involvement — after all, one group or another seems to take credit for just about everything that happens in the multiverse. And if the DM's also running "Into the Light," which prominently features the Athar and the Sign of One, those two factions move to the top of everyone's list. (Although the adventures in "Out of the Darkness" and "Into the Light" aren't closely related, the DM's free to play upon faction paranoia to make it seem as if the two scenarios are part of the same grand plot.)

Most folks immediately blame the Athar, and bloods who know of the Godslayers — the faction splinter group on the Astral — point their fingers there. But the high-ups in the Athar release no official statement. They're as much in the dark as everyone else. And as happy as they might be to hear of the death of a few powers, they're worried about a possible backlash that could harm the faction. Gods don't die without consequences, after all.

Berks who like to consider themselves clever thinkers say that the Athar are too obvious a target, that the real culprits are just trying to pin the blame on the Defiers. Some of these bashers claim that it's the Sign of One who's at fault. Chant is the Signers want to prove their philosophy (and show off a bit) by bringing a dead power back to life. When they couldn't find a corpse to their liking, they imagined a few gods into the dead-book just so they could bring 'em back later.

The truly intelligent cutters in town realize that mortals just don't kill gods. If the powers actually are dying in numbers (and no real proof's been offered yet), then something big is going on — something far beyond the scope of ordinary folk. But most people don't like to hear such talk. It's not as much fun. Fact is, it's downright terrifying.

That's part of the reason folks like to look to the factions for answers, and the Athar and the Signers aren't the only groups to get involved — or to receive their share of the blame. Here's how the rest react to all the talk about powers falling to the Astral:

THE BELIEVERS OF THE SOURCE.

Many Godsmen feel that powers aren't born, but *made* out of those who succeed and ascend throughout a succession of lifetimes. It stands to reason that gods can be unmade as well. Perhaps the "murdered" powers are merely those who fell back down the evolutionary ladder.

THE BLEAK CABAL.

Bleakers've always scorned those who turn to the gods for answers, when real truths can only be found within. Maybe the idea of fallen deities is just the kick in the pants folks need to realize that the cosmos ain't supposed to make sense. Maybe now they'll look inside themselves.

THE DOOMGUARD.

To the Sinkers, the death of gods is a sure sign that the multiverse is progressing toward cherished entropy. While most factioneers don't encourage more murders, they're glad to spread disturbing rumors, heightening a general sense of panic.

THE DUSTMEN.

Powers are dying? Good for them – only in death can they reach a state of purity. 'Course, they'd better dissect their passions and understand themselves before then, or they'll still be denied the ultimate truth.

THE FATED.

Takers won't waste time or tears crying about deities that get put in the dead-book. They figure that any god who can't handle himself didn't deserve to be a power in the first place. Greedy faction members might try to relieve deserted temples or distraught priests of a power's "unclaimed possessions."

THE FRATERNITY OF ORDER.

While the Guvners study the matter with logical interest, they find themselves the target of accusations as well. Have they discovered a cosmic loophole that lets them prove that the powers simply shouldn't exist?

THE FREE LEAGUE.

The Indepts try to live and let live – or die, as the case may be. Besides, they hate subscribing to a single philosophy, so most Indepts probably wouldn't flock to a power's banner in the first place.

THE HARMONIUM.

The Hardheads'd like to hammer out what they consider to be the bumps of the multiverse, to make it all fit according to *their* ideal. Whoever's killing gods seems to have a different plan – one that must be stopped.

THE MERCYKILLERS.

It's bad enough when an apple thief or cony-catcher escapes the due punishment of law. The Red Death feel that those who commit spectacular crimes – like slaying deities – must pay equally staggering prices.

THE REVOLUTIONARY LEAGUE.

If the Anarchists could find a way to kill *more* gods and do it *faster*, they probably would. There's no better way to smash institutions than to undermine deep-rooted faith. This kind of attitude makes the League a handy scapegoat.

THE SOCIETY OF SENSATION.

Many Sensates are no doubt intrigued at the thought of the incredible sensations a cutter must feel as he wrings the divine life from a deity. Fact is, some folks believe the faction's engineering the deaths solely to experience the ultimate thrill.

THE TRANSCENDENT ORDER.

The Ciphers believe that the gods haven't died; they've simply blended thought and action in perfect harmony and become one with the multiverse. Other, more lurid explanations are nothing but screed.

THE XAOSITECTS.

More gods, fewer gods, no gods – it makes little difference to the Chaosmen. Chant is the Xaositects have stumbled across a fantastic new weapon and are using it on the powers, just because they can.

A SUMMONS

The PCs can react to the rumors however they like. But canny heroes might match the story about Maanzecorian's death with their illithid encounter on the Outlands (from Chapter I). And if they check around with a few well-lanned spivs about Set's proxies, they learn that Nekrotheptis Skorpis – the blood they met in Chapter III – is definitely still alive, though chant is he's preparing to defend Ankhwugaht against some kind of assault.

Whether or not these odd facts raise their suspicions, the PCs eventually receive a written note from Veridis Mov, asking them to return to Crux:

Dear friends,

Hoping that this finds you in good health and spirit, I humbly ask from you a boon. Because of circumstances that concern you directly, I ask that you return to Crux as soon as possible. Once you arrive, you'll see my reasoning to be quite clear. Time and secrecy are of the essence.

Yours,

Veridis Mov

Unless the PCs did some serious digging the first time they were in the tree-burg, they probably didn't learn about the shortcut from Sigil to Crux through the prime-material world of Ranais. In that case, Veridis's note also includes instructions for them to seek out someone named Vlrc in The Lady's Ward of Sigil – she can give the group the chant on the quickest route to Crux.



THE QUEEN OF SIGIL

Looking around The Lady's Ward for someone named Vlrc takes some time. Most folks don't know the name. But if the PCs persist, they eventually ask a basher who says, "Oh, you mean the queen!" He points the heroes toward a clock tower that stands in Penate Square, not far from the Twelve Factols restaurant and tavern.

Penate Square is a quiet, somber intersection of three wide streets. Most folks bustle through the area as quickly as they can, saying little and remaining focused on their own business. At the center of the square stands a tall tower with a round clock face on each of its four sides. No one seems to pay much attention to the tower.

If the PCs look closely at the top of the tower, they notice movement behind one of the slightly translucent clock faces. (Investigating the tower draws a little attention from passersby, but not much.) A low door set in one of the tower's sides is obviously locked, and knocking brings no reply. However, calling out for Vlrc does.

The door opens soundlessly, and a long, narrow head – not the least bit human – peeks out. It appears to be the head of a large insect, cocked to one side in a curious pose. "Yes? Can I help you?" The creature seems to chatter more than speak, and the clicking voice is unsettling but definitely female.

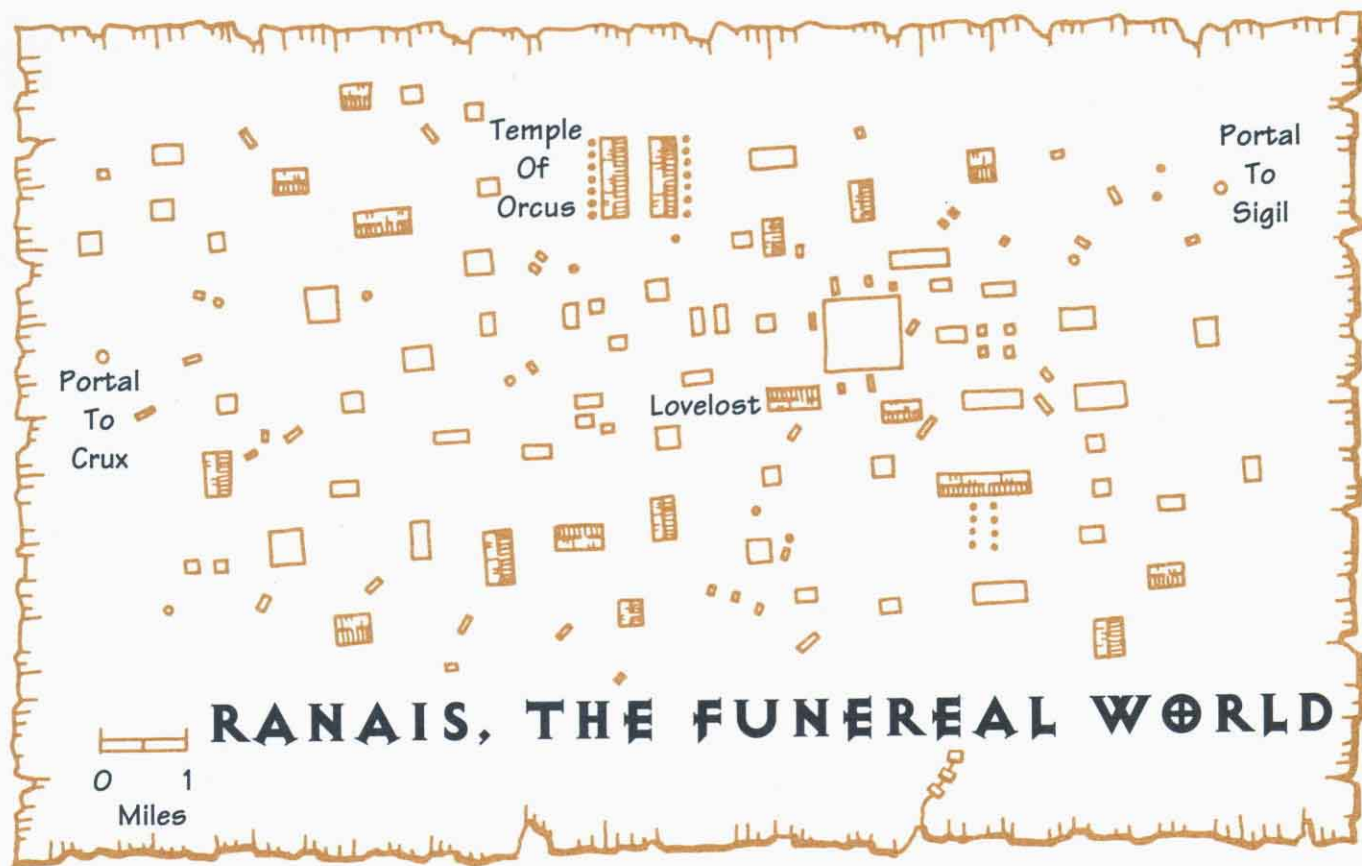
♦ Show the players Illo E (on page 171).

Vlrc is a formian queen, kidnapped from Arcadia at birth by a group of marauders and eventually sold as a curiosity in Sigil. Due to the trauma (and possibly the environment), she never grew to her full size or gained the abilities that should have rightfully been hers as a queen.

Named and raised by her human clockmaker owner, Vlrc shows few signs of her insectlike nature, though she's well aware of the formians, their culture, and her proper place in it. Even when she earned her freedom, Vlrc never wished to rejoin her own kind. Instead, she earns a living in Sigil as an interplanar merchant, though her first love is clocks – she's in charge of the tower in Penate Square. But she doesn't appreciate being mocked with the nickname "Queen of Sigil," which some Cagers call her.

Through her many trades, Vlrc became an acquaintance of Veridis Mov, and she can tell the PCs how to get to Crux from Sigil: Take a portal to the prime-material world of Ranais and then travel about 15 miles to another portal that leads to the tree-town. The portal to Crux is always open, and like all such doorways on Yggdrasil, it resembles a color pool. As for the portal to Ranais, it's a set of double doors on a stable in the Market Ward; the key is a tattered piece of white leather.

Vlrc doesn't ask for any reward for her trouble, but most bloods'll give her some garnish – which she'll gladly accept. In general, the PCs find the formian to be well-mannered, pleasant, and extremely intelligent.



THE TRIP + CRUX

The Dungeon Master is free to invent the details of Ranais's portal to Crux. The specifics don't really matter, as long as Vlrc gives the PCs directions to the right spot.

However, it's possible that the heroes'll try to find their own way back to Crux. (Perhaps the encounter with Vlrc doesn't go well, or the berks don't want to ask for anyone's help.) For example, they could catch a handy portal to the Outlands, locate the fallen trunk in the realm of the Norns, and climb back to the tree-burg — after all, it worked before.

At this point in the game, traveling through Ranais provides the PCs with spooky atmosphere, possible encounters with wraiths and visages, and a bit of useful information. But if they avoid passing through the prime-material world, it's not a disaster. Just skip over "A Dead World" and continue with "Back in Crux." The cutters must return to Ranais later anyway to find a portal to the secret fortress of Tenebrous, and that's when the DM can use the information below.

◆ A DEAD WORLD ◆

When the PCs step through the portal to Ranais, they emerge in the middle of a quiet, seemingly dead city, mostly in ruins. (Refer to the map on page 51; the heroes arrive at the spot marked "Portal to Sigil.") Fallen columns lie alongside marble buildings and jumbles of rocks, beams, and other rubble. Once-great cathedrals have become stone skeletons, and august, many-storied structures stand as silent as giant tombs. While everything seems ancient, the city's remains exude a feeling of undisturbed preservation.

Ranais's sun hangs high above, tiny and white, providing little warmth or illumination. It's a world forever in the grip of night. Those who know its history refer to it as the Funereal World, or sometimes just Funereal. See, the planet was once populated with bashers who revered death (though they had no knowledge of or connection to the Dustmen faction). Fact is, each city devoted itself to a particular death god, and many burgs worshiped Orcus. When the great city known as Moil turned away from Orcus, however, it was cast into a demiplane — most likely forever — and the rest of the world was hurled into cataclysm and chaos. Those who could, escaped (and some of them fled to the planes and founded the town of Crux). The rest perished, the dead-book burgeoning with their names.

When Orcus was reborn as Tenebrous, he commanded his undead servants — the visages — to make Ranais their lair. After all, the world still resonates from its links to death and to the revived god. Many of the fiends have also established a base in Crux, but the tree-burg's just a minor stop between their master's point of resurrection and the world once devoted to him.

'Course, the PCs don't know any of this. To them, Ranais is just a dead world, and as soon as they arrive, they probably start heading for the portal to Crux. The trip covers about 15 miles, but most of it's through a ruined city that seems to have

once been a fabulous place. Toppled marble columns, crumbling painted and frescoed walls, decayed gardens, empty avenues with pillared sides and cracked pavement — the ruins seem a quiet vestige of a virtually unknowable past.

For the first half-hour or so, all the PCs have to worry about is the cold, calm weather (it's about 30 degrees) and the slow progress through the rubble and debris. But before long, they encounter one of the poor dead spirits of the nameless city through which they walk. They're stalked by a wraith hungry for warmth and life.

The cutters first tumble to the danger when they hear a mournful wail from behind them. Whether they investigate or not, a few minutes later they hear the sound again — closer. But the wraith doesn't attack outright. Instead, it tries to strike from a shadow or from behind and then scurry back into the darkness. If a PC presents a holy symbol (as if to turn the wraith) or attacks the creature with an enchanted weapon that can cause it harm, the wraith flees, crying out, "Your lives are ours on which to feed! You belong to the Lovelost. . . ."

THE LOVELOST

The Lovelost are spirits of berks who survived the climactic upheavals that long ago destroyed Ranais. While most of the people fled, some were unable to leave in time or simply chose to stay behind and die along with their beloved home. Forced to live the rest of their lives on a ruined world, they eventually passed into the dead-book and now continue to haunt their fallen cities as wraiths.

They haunt the PCs as well, dogging their heels as the heroes make their way toward the portal. Although hundreds of the Lovelost still inhabit this part of Ranais, the undead creatures attack the PCs one at a time (in the manner described above), more to toy with the heroes than to actually destroy them.

If any canny bloods turn a wraith or inflict a great deal of damage on one, it flees. If the PCs follow, they embark on a tense chase through the ancient wreckage, soon finding themselves in a long, abandoned courtyard that's open to the dark sky. As they stand in the quiet sanctuary, three wraiths calmly appear and begin to speak in eerie unison:

"We are the Lovelost. When this world died, we were forced to live on, without home, without family, without love. Even when we died, we lived on . . . and on. And the one who did this to us was he whom we had worshiped. He whom we had held above all others.

"We heard that, in time, even he had entered the halls of death, and this gave us joyless satisfaction. But now even that has been taken from us, for he lives again. His servants roam not only this world but those nearby, for his former temple holds an ancient pathway. He seeks knowledge of that which he has lost. He seeks revenge.

"Yet, as a speck can irritate the eye of a man, a man can thwart the plans of an immortal — at least for a time. For can a man not eventually remove the speck?"

"Pass through this city now, and taste the fruit of his works. Choose your path afterward as you will. We will plague you no further."

With that, the three wraiths disappear. The PCs are free to finish their trek to the portal with no more interference from the Lovelost. If they activate the portal and step through, they find themselves again in Crux; skip ahead to "Back in Crux," below.

SEARCHING THE RUINS

If the heroes decide to spend some time on Ranais before heading to Crux, they find trouble enough to satisfy even the most courageous (or addle-coved) among them. Aside from various undead spirits and monsters that roam the world (even beyond the Lovelost), the visages are also present — as the wraiths warned.

The fiends' current base of operations is a small church only partially in ruins. Though it was once a temple of Orcus, all signs of its former dedication are gone, stripped away long ago by the inhabitants of the world. But unless the heroes mask their approach with incredible skill, four visages lurking inside the temple detect their presence and take control of their perceptions. Thus, when the berks first spot the temple, they see only what the fiends want them to see — in this case, the church as it looked long ago:

Ahead, a structure rises from the ruins, intact and pristine. Its walls, though painted black, are strewn with bone-white inscriptions written in languages that are beyond you. Horrible, somber music pulses out of the building, accompanied by discordant chants and sounds meant to imitate moans of pain. Darkly clad people, cloaked in hoods as black as the night sky, march solemnly and silently toward the large open doors, over which a stone ram's head watches with malice.



Because the worshipers aren't real, none of them react in any way to the PCs, except to turn and silently beckon them toward the temple. Meanwhile, one of the four visages tries to use its *domination* power to make one of the heroes enter the church. Any PCs that approach the doors find they can't see inside, but they do feel the incredible evil and malevolence that issues forth from within. The ghastly music intensifies, and the entire experience becomes almost dreamlike.

The PCs must resist entering the wicked temple. If one of the heroes sets foot inside — no matter what the reason — all is lost for him. The Dungeon Master can rule that the berk drops dead or becomes eternally corrupted and unsuitable as a player character, perhaps to return later as an NPC foe. That's a terrible fate, however (and likely to elicit howls of protest from players), so the DM should spare no description of the bitter, foul evil felt by anyone approaching the doors. It should be abundantly clear that entering the temple is the *wrong* thing to do.

Course, the best thing the PCs can do is realize that there's no way a temple — complete with worshipers — should be found in such fine condition in the middle of a dead world. If they tumble to this oddity (or even guess that they might be victims of a visage's power to alter perceptions), they can make saving throws versus spell to shake off the effects.

Those who make the roll see only the ruined church — no worshipers, no music, no black paint, no inscriptions, and no stone ram's head.

Any PC who sees the temple as it truly is can enter the building and suffer no consequences.

If that happens, the four visages try to flee before they're spotted.

The inside of the church is completely ransacked and devoid of decoration or furnishings; not even an altar remains. But a PC who enters with his wits about him might detect a portal at the far end. The key — the act of extinguishing a light source — is known only to the visages. The portal leads to

Tcian Sumere, Tenebrous's secret fortress on the Negative Energy Plane. It's the "ancient pathway" the Lovelost mentioned.

If the heroes figure out the portal key and step through to Tcian Sumere, skip ahead to Chapter V, "The Bottom of the Multiverse." Hopefully, though, they'll continue instead to Crux to find out why Veridis Mov summoned them.

◆ BACK IN CRUX ◆

Depending on the PCs' actions when they were last in Crux, they may or may not be particularly welcome. In any case, they have no trouble making their way to the home of Veridis Mov.

Here's the dark of it: If the heroes thought they'd killed or driven off all of the visages in the battle at High Point, they were wrong. Some time after the PCs left Crux (depending on how much time the Dungeon Master wants to let elapse between Chapter III and Chapter IV), the undead fiends made their presence known again. Veridis fears that the creatures will destroy his town and everything he's built over the years if they're allowed to continue. So he sent a message to the heroes for help. After all, they had a hand in dealing the invaders a defeat before, and they're best prepared to do so again.

When the PCs arrive at his case, Veridis tries to make them comfortable and offers them fine food and drink. Then he makes the following offer:

"Well met, my friends. I'm grateful for your attendance and attention. You've no need of my telling you that something vile has come to this once-fair city. You're not . . . what is it you call them? Oh, yes: addle-coves. On the contrary, you fine folks are the ones who've dealt with this evil force most directly — and please don't think the people of Crux don't appreciate it.

"But the disease that grips our city has not yet been eliminated. The creatures have returned. And because you have an edge, given you by experience, I'd like to implore you with all the means at my disposal to finally and completely rid Crux of this foul plague. If you will, I shall be most grateful."

Most likely, the PCs ask for details about the latest troubles. But just as Veridis begins to explain, a knock at the door interrupts their meeting.

IMPOSSIBLES

Veridis opens the door to his case to find a townswoman (perhaps even someone the PCs remember having seen before) carrying a small child. The woman's flaxen hair hangs in her face and her simple dress is torn and dirty. "Monsters!" she cries. "Monsters attacking my home!"

Unfortunately, the woman and the child are really visages. The fiends, aware of the PCs' presence, hope to gain entry to Veridis's house and confuse the group long enough to launch a surprise attack. The creatures want to kill the PCs, and the fact that they're willing to stage such a direct assault should signal the heroes that the visages're getting a bit desperate.

'Course, that doesn't help the PCs with the fight at hand.

Veridis, naturally, defends his home and guests to his fullest ability. By now, the heroes should have no doubt that he's a force to be reckoned with, both politically and physically. But the blood has no guards or special defenses in his home, and his cat, Zin, is nothing more than it appears — it certainly doesn't get involved in the fight.

JOB OFFER

After the group deals with the intruders, Veridis gives them the chant on the current troubles. Thanks to his many connections, Veridis has learned that the visages based in Crux and the surrounding area soon expect the arrival of a messenger bearing important information. Many of the fiends plan to gather at a secret meeting spot to hear the messenger's news. Veridis believes that it's vital to pick up the berk's chant — that it may contain the means of ending the fiends' threat once and for all.

Veridis offers to pay each player character 2,000 gp for helping out — 500 gp now, and the rest when the threat to Crux is vanquished. If the heroes accept, Veridis tells the cutters that the messenger is due to appear two days hence at a spot on Yggdrasil called the Salience. It's about a full day's walk from Crux, but Veridis provides excellent directions.

◆ THE SALIENCE ◆

As a body travels around the World Ash, he's likely to see a few amazing sights. For example, giant eagles make their roosts on some of the upper branches. Chant says the great birds can fly off of Yggdrasil, winging their way through invisible aerial paths that take them to any of the planes touched by the tree. No one knows this for sure, but it's clear that the eagles come from and go to *somewhere*.

Another mystery of the eagles is the Salience, a monument or cathedral built in and around a huge rift on one of Yggdrasil's branches. Chant is the birds created it long ago for some unknown purpose but deserted the place soon after. In any case, the Salience fell into ruin and has since been abandoned, making it a perfect spot for a secret meeting of visages.

As Veridis said, it takes the PCs a full day to walk from Crux to the Salience. (Refer to the map of Yggdrasil on the inside front cover of *Dead Gods*.) The trip isn't troubled by visages — the undead fiends aren't prepared for the heroes' continued interference — but that doesn't mean things are easy. At about the halfway point (or at any time when the group stops to rest), a ratatosk appears on a branch high overhead. Not surprisingly, it begins to launch taunts down on the planewalkers.

If the PCs attack the ratatosk or threaten it with harm, the creature scurries away and won't return. If it's merely ignored, the ratatosk eventually leaves, though it returns later with more taunts. But if the heroes try to communicate in any way with the ratatosk — especially if they show it some respect (rather than treat it like a lowly animal) — the squirrel-

man clambers down the branch to talk with the cutters. When it reaches their level, six more ratatosk emerge from hiding places in the foliage.

"Ch-ch-chant is this, huma-ma-ma-mans," one of the ratatosk chitters. "Bird place bad," says another. A third adds, "We folk can show you folk – you folk how to get in." Then the first ratatosk speaks again: "Avo-vo-void the ev-v-il." Finally, a fourth squirrel-creature pipes up: "You get rid – rid of bad-ness. This help – help moth-er tree. Help us much."

Essentially, these spying little bashers've tumbled to the PCs' destination and want to help them against the visages, believing that it'll serve the greater good of the World Ash. The ratatosk won't enter the Salience or fight the undead fiends, but they agree to lead the group to the right spot (though they may not reveal any of this until they actually reach the Salience).

A+ + THE SCENE

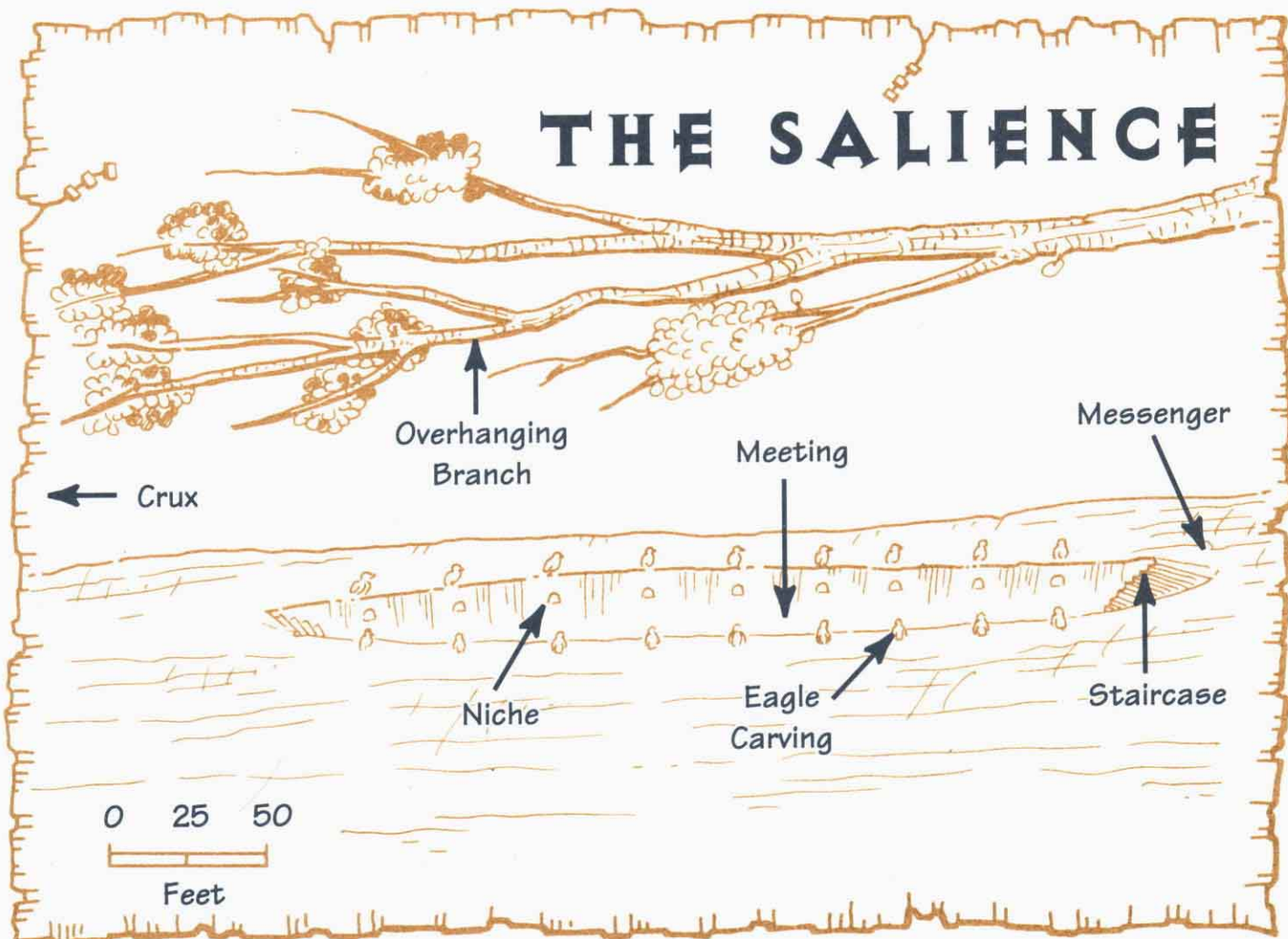
The Salience was created in and around an ancient scar in the bark of the tree. This scar is 20 feet wide, 30 feet deep, and about 240 feet in length. The giant eagles carved a staircase

into either end. Some say they did it so that nonflyers could easily get into the area; others say it was because all beings were required to walk into the Salience – it was too holy a place to do otherwise.

The giant eagles fashioned the entire scar into a long gallery with niches gouged out of the sides. On the rim of the scar above each niche, they placed a carved wooden eagle. Ever since the real eagles abandoned the Salience, the eight-foot-tall carvings have been the imposing rulers of the gallery. But in time, a few have become damaged and one has disappeared altogether.

By the time the PCs arrive, eight visages have gathered at the bottom of the scar to await the messenger from Tenebrous. These eight fiends are the only ones left on all of Yggdrasil; destroying them here and now would cleanse the tree of their evil influence. 'Course, only an addle-cove'd just blunder in and attack.

If the ratatosk accompany the PCs, they show the heroes the safest and most surprising route into the Salience – from above. See, the area's become overgrown since the timelost days when the Salience was actually used, and Yggdrasil's branches now hang low over the gallery. With the squirrel-folk's help, the PCs can climb onto a branch and gain a vantage point right above the visages, well hidden but still within earshot.



If the PCs don't have the ratatosk's aid, they're on their own. Top-shelf rogues might still be able to sneak in close or climb up into the overhanging branches; well-cast spells might solve the problem, too. The Dungeon Master should also keep in mind that while the visages are naturally peery and want to keep their meeting a secret, they aren't expecting interlopers.

Refer to the map of the Saliency on page 55.

THE MESSENGER

Canny PCs wait for the messenger to arrive before making a move. The chant they pick up by eavesdropping on the meeting proves to be far more important than destroying the visages themselves.

The ethereal creatures are silent and practically motionless, obviously waiting for something. After a time, they begin to writhe in apparent anticipation as wisps of smoke or steam begin to roll down the steps on one side of the gallery. The ghostly monsters give it their full attention. The cloud of mist takes the form of a small, winged humanoid creature with pale green skin. It makes its way down the steps and announces, "I bring news from Thanatos."

Tenebrous himself commissioned the messenger – a mist mephit named Rish-shissistris-shas – to carry word to his servants on Yggdrasil. From the smug expression on its fiendish face and the confident manner in which it holds its wispy body, the mephit clearly realizes the importance of its employer, its message, and its position.

The Dungeon Master should let each PC make an Intelligence check at -3. Those who succeed remember hearing somewhere that Thanatos is one of the layers of the Abyss. (Naturally, any heroes that already know of Thanatos need not make a check.)

The mephit continues to address the visages. "Your master commands you to remain near the tree-city. Very shortly, he shall remove the insect that thwarted your previous efforts and shall recover the bloom himself. For at long last, one of the perpetrators has been located and is now securely held within Tcian Sumere, at the Bottom of the Multiverse." The small, misty creature pauses for effect. "Your master has also bid me to add: 'None shall rest until my vengeance is complete. All who stand in my way shall face the wrath of that which was wrought in the ancient halls of the realm now known only for dust.'"

As noted in Chapter III, Nekrotheptis Skorprios prevented the visages from stealing the *desert's night* bloom from Ankhwugaht. Now, Tenebrous has decided that he will travel to Set's realm, annihilate the proxy for his impudence, and bring back the blossom himself. And it's vitally important that he succeeds – the visages have finally captured one of the berks who buried the Wand of Orcus, and the *desert's night* is needed to restore his missing memories.

Even if the PCs tumble to part of the message and realize

that Nekrotheptis Skorprios might be in danger, they can do nothing to prevent the proxy's coming death. (See Interlude II for details.) Most likely, though, the heroes decide that they should investigate Tcian Sumere, the place the mephit spoke of, which is located somewhere at the bottom of the multiverse – whatever that means.

But the characters don't have much time to puzzle out the mephit's words. As soon as the messenger is done speaking, the visages suddenly and viciously attack it – probably much to the heroes' surprise. The mephit's plenty surprised, too, and doesn't stand a chance. Once the visages have rended the poor sod into bits, one of the fiends simply states, "No one may know the master's secrets!"

NOTE: Extraordinarily smart cutters might realize (or later discover) that "the realm now known only for dust" is an oblique reference to Pelion, the third layer of Arborea. That's where Tenebrous gained the power of the Last Word.

ATTACKING THE VISAGES

At some point, the PCs probably launch an attack upon the evil creatures in the Saliency, perhaps even while the visages are busy destroying the mephit – it provides an excellent opportunity for surprise. If the heroes hide in the branches directly over the fiends, they're only about 10 feet above the rim of the Saliency and 40 feet from the bottom. It's easy enough for them to hurl spells and missiles down at the visages, and a cutter could slide down a rope and move into melee combat range in just one round.

Assuming that the visages are caught off guard, it takes them a few rounds to bring their lucidity-control powers to bear upon the planewalkers. With a little luck, a well-coordinated attack by the PCs could devastate the undead creatures in that time.

On the other hand, it's possible that the visages get the best of the heroes, especially if the berks rush in like barmies and hack at their foes like crusaders in a war. While valiant, this method might result in a quick trip to the dead-book unless the PCs get some assistance. Kind Dungeon Masters can allow anywhere from one to 10 giant eagles to fly to the sods' aid (depending on how much help the PCs seem to need and how generous the DM feels).

See, the eagles notice that someone's defiling their ancient sanctuary and move in to investigate. These canny birds size up the situation quickly and set their talons to tearing apart the visages. The eagles' assistance should be enough to help the PCs gain victory – or at least keep them from being slaughtered.

But nothing's free in the multiverse. After the battle, the giant eagles warn the heroes that they're unhappy with the violence that has disturbed the Saliency. At some point, the Great Conclave of Eagles will demand recompense both for their help and to make up for the sacrilege. This serves as a springboard for a future adventure: The DM can have the eagles call in the debt, summon the PCs to Yggdrasil, and charge them with performing some task.

GETTING TO THE BOTTOM

If the PCs want to find Tcian Sumere, they first must tumble to the meaning of the mephitis reference to “the Bottom of the Multiverse.” Luckily, that’s not too hard. Most graybeards recognize the term, and it’s easily found in most Sigil libraries or bookshops with tomes on planar lore. It’s an old slang nickname for the Negative Energy Plane.

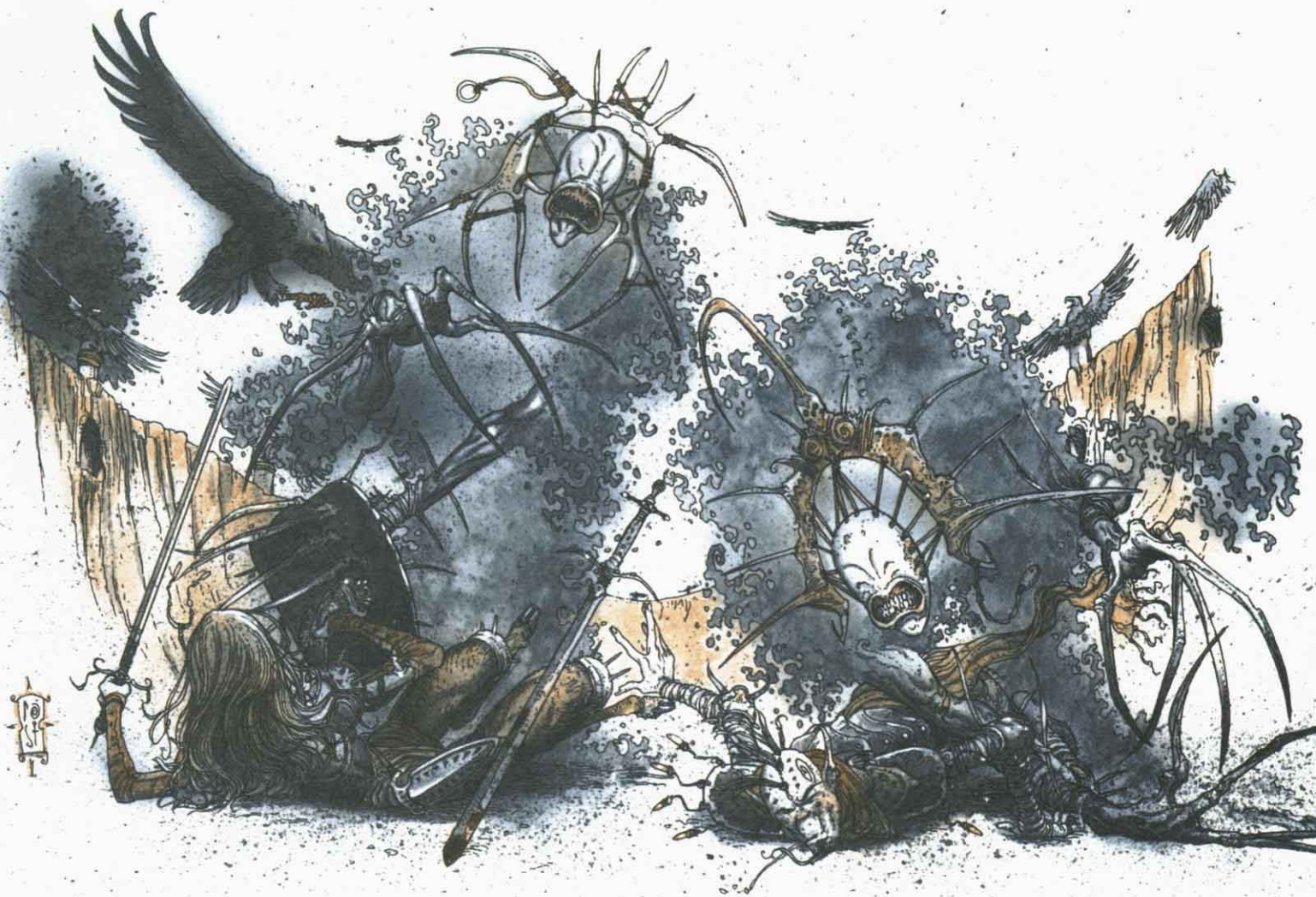
Tcian Sumere, however, isn’t so easy to find. Fact is, there’s no record of it anywhere. As noted earlier in this chapter, the portal to the fortress is found in the old temple on the prime-material world of Ranais. If the PCs missed it when they first visited that world, they still have a few different methods of picking up the chant:

- ♦ Find a visage (or let one escape from the Salience) and follow it. Eventually, it goes to the temple – the undead fiends’ base of operations.
- ♦ Conduct research about Ranais. Although they find no mention of Orcus (such was the strength of the magic Kiaransalee used to eradicate the Abyssal lord), the

bashers can learn that the people of the world worshiped dark gods, and that a temple dedicated to one of these powers contained a secret portal. This kind of digging takes at least a week in a good library, and though the lead is vague, it gets the PCs looking in the right place. (The Lovelost also spoke of the temple and its “ancient pathway.”)

- ♦ Talk to Veridis Mov. Most folks in Crux are descendants of those who escaped the ruin of Ranais. A few townsfolk know of their ancestors’ dark past, but Veridis is a font of ancient knowledge. He can tell the PCs about the temple and the portal, and he’s even heard the name “Tcian Sumere” before. ‘Course, he has no idea that the visages are currently using the old church as their base.

Once the PCs learn of the temple, they need to return to Ranais, figure out the key to the portal, and pass through to Tcian Sumere. That’s probably the only method of reaching the hidden fortress – unless a berk feels like journeying to the Negative Energy Plane and spending a few decades (or centuries) searching the void.



A foul wind brought a new chill to the balor's normally hot flesh, but Glyphimhor didn't mind. The Master liked it cold.

CHAPTER V: THE BOT+OM OF +HE MULTIVERSE

The fiend studied the approach to Orcusgate again — for what seemed the eight hundred millionth time — and still all was quiet. Surely the greatest and grandest city in the infinite Abyss was impregnable. Surely the defenses he'd designed to guard the major land approaches to the fortress of Orcus would win his lord's favor.

Surely he'd win the Master's trust. And surely Glyphimhor would betray that trust as soon as possible.

Thoughts of betrayal and ambition warmed the balor's chilled flesh as fire rippled down his skin. As master of Orcusgate and lieutenant of Orcus himself, Glyphimhor was in charge of the defenses — an important task, especially now that the war with Demogorgon and Graz'zt had heated up. What's more, the new

prisoner within the fortress — Baphomet himself — made security an even more important issue. Rumor had it that mortals from the Prime Material Plane were on their way to either obtain or destroy (with mortals, who could tell?) the Wand of Orcus. But hardly a day passed that some fool didn't attempt such a feat. Glyphimhor believed that the Master had spread rumors about the wand throughout the planes for just that reason. He liked prey to wander into his traps.

Speaking of traps, it was time for Glyphimhor to check the Hexagon and Pentagon Mazes to see that the traps were re-set and that the iron golem still functioned. The thing had been acting up, and . . .

No. Glyphimhor sighed — or would have, if he could. It was not time. Those duties were

all in the past. His existence now was an eternity trapped within an energy cell, revered by insane visages. The days of power and glory were gone.

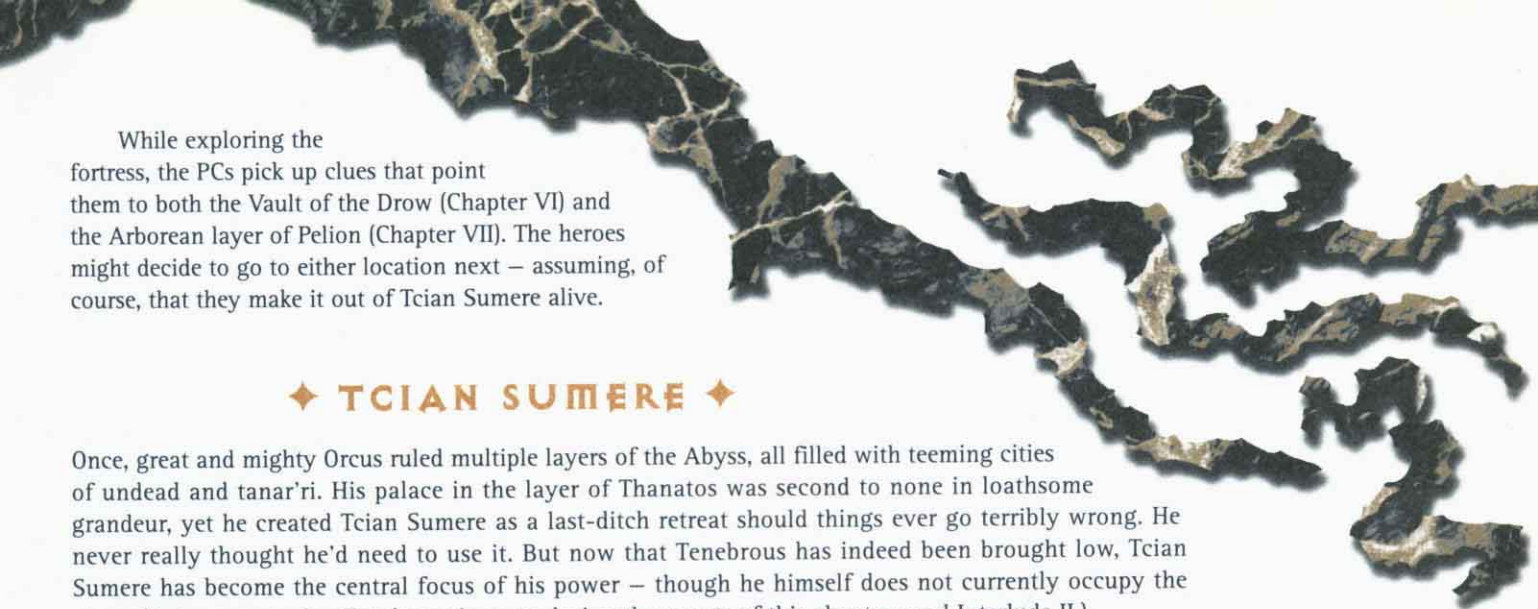
The balor felt he'd have been better off if he'd never escaped the assault, if the hated drow goddess had just finished him off, too. . . .

THE PHRASE
"R0++EN +0 +HE C0RE"
RINGS FALSE,
F0R EVIL S+AR+S
W+HIN I+S 0WN HEAR+.
— SHAY+H MARL DRIM,
A GENASI S+ONE CHAMPION

◆ THE RIDE TURNS DARK ◆

Up to this point in the adventure, the player characters have confronted only the agents or corruptive influence of Tenebrous — the visages in Crux, the Warpwood, and so on. But now they take the plunge into the heart of the former Abyssal lord's power: Tcian Sumere, his secret fortress on the Negative Energy Plane.

The PCs learned of the fortress while spying on the meeting of visages in the previous chapter, and they probably overheard the mephit messenger speak of "the perpetrator" held there. This captive is a drow named Kestod, one of the two berks responsible for hiding the Wand of Orcus long ago. The heroes don't know that, but they're likely to scour Tcian Sumere for the sod anyway, figuring that anyone held prisoner by the visages is probably an important blood.



While exploring the fortress, the PCs pick up clues that point them to both the Vault of the Drow (Chapter VI) and the Arboreal layer of Pelion (Chapter VII). The heroes might decide to go to either location next — assuming, of course, that they make it out of Tcian Sumere alive.

◆ TCIAN SUMERE ◆

Once, great and mighty Orcus ruled multiple layers of the Abyss, all filled with teeming cities of undead and tanar'ri. His palace in the layer of Thanatos was second to none in loathsome grandeur, yet he created Tcian Sumere as a last-ditch retreat should things ever go terribly wrong. He never really thought he'd need to use it. But now that Tenebrous has indeed been brought low, Tcian Sumere has become the central focus of his power — though he himself does not currently occupy the place. (To learn just what Tenebrous is up to during the events of this chapter, read Interlude II.)

If the PCs dare to infiltrate the fortress, they have one advantage: Neither Tenebrous nor his servants ever dreamed that anyone would ever learn of its existence, much less *find* it. Thus, the heroes won't encounter too many guards or visages watching over the stronghold. But they'll still find Tcian Sumere strange — and challenging in the extreme. Despite the layer upon layer of magical wards that allow the fortress to exist on the Negative Energy Plane, those without a link to the plane (in other words, living beings) feel a distinct difference while in Tcian Sumere. Most visitors'd describe it as a feeling of hunger all around them. Others might say it's as though something were tugging at their very spirit at every moment, trying to draw them into a horrible void.

Tcian Sumere exists as a cluster of linked “bubbles” of safety within the Negative Energy Plane. (Refer to the map of the fortress on the poster sheet.) These spherical zones of relatively normal reality are joined by magical passages that writhe and sway like conduits. A body who peers into one of these passages can't see farther than 10 or 15 feet, but the length of the corridors doesn't matter. As soon as a PC enters one, he's automatically pulled along by an enchantment until he's spat out the other end. The trip takes 1d4 rounds, and the sod can't turn around or stop en route. The corridors aren't physical hallways — they're magical paths.

Spells with finite ranges can't be cast through a corridor. Thus, if a wizard in Area 4 tries to send a fireball down the passage to Area 10, the magic never reaches its target. But the spellslinger can teleport from Area 4 to Area 10. This limitation applies to spell-like powers as well, so a visage can alter a PC's perceptions only if they're both in the same area.

On the other hand, sound travels down the corridors fairly well. Folks in a bubble can hear a tussle taking place in an adjacent area, and the tolling of the bell in Area 4 resounds throughout all of Tcian Sumere. If the fortress is obviously under attack, the inhabitants concentrate their defenses around the prison, where their most valuable treasure is kept — Kestod.

The Dungeon Master needs to keep a few other things in mind:

- ◆ Healing (both magical and natural) is difficult in Tcian Sumere — only half the normal amount of hit points are restored.
- ◆ Due to the strength derived from the negative energy all around them, no undead creatures (including the visages) can be turned.
- ◆ Most areas of the fortress have no gravity, and the air is cold and thin. Missile ranges in these areas are doubled, but breathing is difficult, and the PCs find that physical exertion is more tiring, requiring frequent rests (or Constitution checks, if the DM desires). Living bashers can move along only by pushing themselves off of something from time to time (except in the corridors, as noted above). Undead creatures can move freely, as if flying.

At this point in the adventure, the PCs should remain in the dark. There shouldn't be any way for them to link Tcian Sumere to either Tenebrous or Orcus. Even the idol in the temple (Area 4) shouldn't give them much of a clue (unless the heroes have top-shelf knowledge of obscure religions). Besides, even if the

sods do learn the name “Tenebrous,” there’s no reason they should link it with Orcus.

Overall, if the PCs (and the players) are frustrated and confused as to what’s going on in Tcian Sumere, the DM should know he’s done his job well. It’s far too early in “Out of the Darkness” to reveal the identity of the murderer.

◆ ARRIVAL ◆

When the PCs step through the portal in the temple on Ranais, they arrive in Tcian Sumere at the spot marked “A” on the map.

You find yourselves floating within a spherical chamber made of some kind of black metal. The only light is that which emanates from your own bodies, as though your very life force makes you stand out like a beacon. There’s no gravity here, no sense of up or down. Your breath is visible in the cold, still air. The place is as quiet as death.

Here’s the dark of it: The heroes’ life force does indeed stand out on the Negative Energy Plane. Any of the undead creatures in Tcian Sumere can detect it within 30 feet no matter how the PCs might try to hide (with *invisibility* spells, illusions, or anything else). There’s just no way to mask the glow of life here.

Corridors lead away from the spherical room in six directions (including up and down), but the PCs won’t realize their nature as magical conduits until they push into one. No matter which route the cutters take, they end up in one of the guard posts (Area 1).

This end of the portal is formed by the bounded space of the room itself, and the portal is two-way – it leads back to Ranais. The key to activate the return trip is one of the “consecrated” bones found in the temple here (Area 4).

◆ THE LAYOUT ◆

As the PCs make their way through Tcian Sumere, the DM should remember that most chambers have no gravity, requiring the heroes to push off of walls and solid objects and “swim” through the air. Thus, movement and combat’ll work a bit differently.

1. GUARD POST

Each of these six areas’re attended by Tcian Sumere’s minders – ghouls. Tenebrous created these dreadful, disfigured creatures long ago, and they feed upon the physical forms of sods who’re brought here and “freed” of their life force.

As you pass through the strange corridor, pulled down its winding length by unknown sorcery, you begin to note a fetid, rotting odor. Unable to stop, you’re thrust into a dark, spheri-

cal chamber – much like the one you just came from, only larger. But you’re no longer alone. A hissing, rasping sound comes out of the darkness as corpse-like monstrosities lurch forward toward you.

Each guard post holds 10 ghouls. If the PCs flee into another area, the guards don’t follow. They always maintain their assigned post unless commanded otherwise by a visage.

If the heroes destroy all 10 ghouls in a particular area, the essences of the slain creatures leave their physical bodies and join together before the PCs’ eyes. They form a single entity identical in appearance and ability to a spectre, which attacks the cutters with wailing fury.

2. CAULDRON OF LOST SOULS

Whenever a living being dies in Tcian Sumere, the ghouls feed upon its physical corpse. But the spirit of the deader comes to this area, where it’s forced to join others like it in a huge cauldron, stewing together in a horrifying cacophony of anguish and angst.

Another spherical room, this area has a flat, round platform at its center made of thick black iron. Sitting upon the platform is an immense cauldron of similar composition. Banners of black silk hang from the “bottom” of the platform, floating haphazardly in the gravity-free environment.

Anyone peering into the cauldron sees a swirling maelstrom of color. The pot is warm to the touch, but the contents have no temperature or tactile feeling at all. However, if a PC does “touch” the spirits within, he begins to hear – softly at first – moaning, whining, and screaming coming from the cauldron. Faces stretch out of the colors, beseeching the poor sod with imploring looks. (If any PCs have died while in Tcian Sumere, their faces will be among the spirits.) The victim must make a successful saving throw versus spell or flee the room as if under a *fear* spell. Note that none of the other heroes can hear the wailing or see the faces – unless, of course, they also touch the spirits.

There’s only one way for the PCs to help (or even affect) the spirits. Priestly magic such as *dispel evil*, *remove curse*, or even a simple *bless* spell causes the cauldron to crack, crumble, and finally burst. The trapped spirits then fly free of the broken prison’s confines, but they can’t leave Tcian Sumere – they’d be instantly destroyed by the Negative Energy Plane. Thus, they wander about the fortress noncorporeally, unable to interact with or affect the real world.

Most likely, they look for bodies to inhabit, animating fallen bashers not yet devoured by the ghouls. There’s a good chance (75%) that a spirit eventually settles in its old body, probably after a few other spirits have had their chance but have been ousted by the rightful owner. Thing is, unless a corpse is healed of the damage it sustained that caused it to die in the first place, no spirit – not even the rightful inhabitant – can animate the body for more than 2d6 rounds.

'Course, any berk who dies in Tcian Sumere after the cauldron shatters no longer has anywhere to go. His spirit is forced to roam about the fortress, and his corpse is animated by other spirits in 2d6-round "shifts." Naturally, the sight of a recently dead friend suddenly jumping up and undergoing numerous personality changes should trouble the PCs greatly.

3. MORIBUND SHADOWS

This chamber of shades and shadows is one of Tenebrous's favorites.

At the end of the corridor, you reach a chamber with dimensions you can't easily determine. A dim light seems to come from somewhere, casting shadows around the strangely angled surfaces of the place. Though all is still within the room, the shadows begin to shift and move as you watch. They flow like slow, seeping liquid across the walls of the room, giving the place a sinister, unquiet feel.

All of the shadows here once belonged to various sods who now rest quietly in the dead-book. See, Tenebrous has somehow found a way to bob spirits of their shadows, and he's locked them up here like treasures in a vault. Though the shadows shift, writhe, and flit about, they pose no real danger to bashers who enter — despite what the PCs might think.

The chamber itself is really a series of uneven rooms with multifaceted, asymmetrical walls upon which the strange shadows are cast. Here and there, the walls have been fashioned to make the shadows look monstrous; they resemble leering skulls, giant raking claws, horrid faces, and so on.

4. TEMPLE OF THE KNELL

This is a temple dedicated to Tenebrous, though that fact won't be obvious to the PCs. What *will* be obvious is that the temple is similar to the one they encountered in the visages' "illusion" on the world of Ranais (assuming that the heroes fell under the fiends' spell and perceived the ancient image of that horrible church).

This chamber is long and narrow, roughly rectangular in shape. It appears to be a temple of some sort, though the religion is obviously a dark and sinister faith. Shelves set into the walls hold rows of skulls, and the scrollwork around the shelves depicts loathsome images of fiends and undead.

At one end of the temple hangs a gigantic iron bell engraved with crudely made scenes and pictures. At the other stands a 15-foot-tall stone idol of a ram-headed humanoid, its muscular arms outstretched. The stone is black, though threads of a greenish mineral weave their way throughout. At the feet of the statue, a pile of bones is arranged in a very precise pattern.



◆ Show the players Illo F (on page 171).

Close examination of the bones reveals them to be the remains of humans and elves. They were arranged in their pattern during a religious ritual conducted by the visages some time ago. Tampering with the bones accomplishes nothing, but one is needed to get back through the portal in the chamber where the PCs first arrived.

THE CIRCLET.

If the heroes climb up onto the statue and examine it closely, they spy a narrow gold band around one of the ram's horns — the circlet of control for a skeleton warrior. Long ago, Orcus trapped the spirit of a mighty basher named Anarchocles within the circlet. Whoever wore the band gained the power to control the actions of the skeleton warrior and see through its eyes. The Abyssal lord's servants knew that the circlet was one of their master's most valued treasures, though they didn't know why. So when the servants fled Thanatos after their lord's fall, they brought the band to Tcian Sumere and placed it on the image of their god — no one had any idea of what else to do with it.

Here's the dark of it, though: Orcus safeguarded the circlet not because of what it could do for him, but rather because of how it might be used *against* him. See, when Anarchocles died, Orcus removed the skull from the corpse (which was destroyed) and placed it upon the end of a long iron scepter, which was then infused with some of the Abyssal lord's essence. This item became known as the Wand of Orcus.

The circlet can cause trouble for Tenebrous in two ways. First, whoever wears the band on his head and gets within 80 yards of the wand can see through the eyes of the skull. More importantly, though, if the circlet is touched to the skull, both turn to dust (as with any skeleton warrior and its circlet), effectively destroying the Wand of Orcus.

'Course, the PCs aren't likely to realize this. The gold band probably just seems a minor (if mysterious) treasure. But it becomes extremely important if the heroes get within 80 yards of the Wand of Orcus (which they will, in Chapter VIII). See, the spirit of Anarchocles is aware of what transpires outside the circlet. If he senses that the wand is near, he tries to force the PCs to touch the circlet to the skull, destroying both (and granting poor Anarchocles the eternal peace he craves).

THE BELL.

Though the PCs may spend time wondering about the circlet, the main focus of the temple is really the large iron bell at the other end of the room. Eight feet in diameter and engraved with crude scenes of death and undeath, the magical bell gives the dark temple its name. It tolls loudly whenever anyone enters the dead-book within Tcian Sumere. What's more, if a priest of Tenebrous (who are extraordinarily few now) dies anywhere in the multiverse, the bell gives a heart-shaking knell.

Anyone who's in the temple when the bell rings must make a successful saving throw versus spell or be struck unconscious with fear and loathing for 1d10 minutes. Victims who fail the roll must make a second saving throw versus spell or be permanently afflicted with some sort of psychosis or paranoia. The Dungeon Master can determine the details of each illness, though they should relate directly to the history and experiences of the affected PC.

Berks who try to ring the bell on their own encounter great difficulties. The bell's so heavy that a Strength of 15 or greater is required to move it at all. And even if a basher's able to move the bell, he discovers it makes no noise — there's no clapper within. When the bell rings, it does so through sorcery. Still, if a PC's determined to cause the bell to ring, he can bash it with a heavy object or weapon. If this occurs, the sod who hit the bell gets his reward — he (and he alone) is affected as if the bell rang normally in his presence. What's more, the unscheduled noise draws the attention of any nearby visages, who arrive in a few rounds.

Finally, if the temple bell is removed or damaged in any way, it loses all magical properties.

5. SACRIS+Y

Eons ago, Tenebrous (then called Orcus, of course) was a simple tanar'ri who ascended to power, becoming first an Abyssal lord and eventually a deity in his own right. His method of attaining godhood is dark (such a secret would be worth all the jink in Sigil), but one thing's for certain — when Orcus gained true immortality, he gave up his physical form forever.

Afterward, his new priests and followers preserved the essence of their lord's remains in a large phylactery, which they later smuggled out of Thanatos when Orcus was slain and his realm usurped. The faithful servants brought the phylactery to this chamber in Tcian Sumere.

You appear at the entrance to this cylindrical room, which is at least 30 feet above the surface of the floor (with the ceiling rising about as high above). An uncountable number of bones, desiccated and brittle, rise up from the floor in a tremendous heap in the middle of the chamber, reaching almost the level of the entrance. On the top of the pile, where the flattened stack forms a small platform, sits what appears to be a dirty glass container about 5 feet tall. Much of the container is covered in a crusty film, though within you can see a deep green fluid. Solid or semisolid chunks of disgusting organic matter are suspended in the muck.

A narrow black bridge joins where you now stand with the top of the pile of bones, and another bridge leads away from the pile to the exit on the other side of the room. The pull of gravity here makes you realize that, unlike most areas of this strange fortress, this room has a definite "down." The need for the bridge is clear.

◆ Show the players Illo G (on page 172).

Neither guards nor traps protect the bridge. Nevertheless, noisy cutters who draw attention from other areas of Tcian Sumere find this chamber a dangerous place for a confrontation. If a fight occurs on the narrow bridge – which has no side rails or anything else to protect a berk – the likely result is a fall 30 feet down into the brittle pile of bones that covers the hard floor.

To the untrained eye, the phylactery might look like a tall, thin flask containing a vile potion or poison. Occasionally, for no apparent reason, the green liquid bubbles slowly – but just a bit. *Detect magic* and similar spells reveal that the phylactery itself is magical and that it contains a small amount of magic. However, those traces are just from preservative spells and the natural tanar'ric composition of the essence. The phylactery has no particular use, though it exudes a strong aura of evil and corruption.

Truth is, destroying the phylactery is simple. It's exactly what it appears to be – a tall glass container. But the contents are highly toxic; any PC who touches the liquid must make a successful saving throw versus poison at –2 or die within one round. What's more, if the container is broken, anyone within 20 feet must make a successful saving throw versus poison or sustain 1d6 points of damage from the fumes and spend the next 1d10 rounds coughing and choking.

And what's accomplished by destroying the phylactery – the housing of the former bodily essence of a god? Nothing. Tenebrous's servants may have kept the container as a relic of unholy power, but the former Abyssal lord isn't harmed or weakened by its destruction.

6. OBSERVATION TOWER

This chamber has a definite orientation. When the PCs reach the end of the corridor and enter the room, they start to ascend the staircase up into the "tower."

Ahead of you now – or, rather, above you – rises a spiral staircase made of stone. You feel the pull of gravity here. If you want to ascend the steps, you must do so in a conventional fashion.



This area was built for the sole purpose of viewing the Negative Energy Plane. Here, and only here, a body can see into the plane itself – though admittedly, there's not much to see. The tower has three levels, each consisting of a round room with numerous windows that look out upon the vast, black void.

On the first level, a number of stark benches face the windows. On the second level, the PCs find a few more benches and a table covered with strange, unfathomable papers that're either completely black or filled with indecipherable series of wavy lines and odd symbols. These documents are maps and charts of the Negative Energy Plane, but there's no way for the heroes to realize that. The papers are literally unable to be understood by living creatures. Only undead cutters could make any use of them, and then only on a very esoteric level. To the right of the tower, the maps and charts might be worth as much as 5,000 gp, but to most, they're just worthless sheets of parchment.

The uppermost level of the tower is the most dangerous. The inhabitants of the fortress rarely visit or even monitor this area, and as a result, a new creature has settled in the tower. A xeg-yi – a native of the Negative Energy Plane – has bypassed the wards and barriers that protect Tcian Sumere from the void and made its way into the upper chamber.

This room seems empty except for something that looks like a small black explosion – a concentration of energy about 5 feet in diameter. Then the nimbus of black turns toward you, showing two gray, lifeless orbs that give you the impression of eyes. Bolts of cold, hungry energy writhe outward like pseudopods or whips. You feel something within you drawn to this strange thing, like iron filings to a powerful lodestone.

This alien creature finds the interior of the fortress fascinating, but it's frightened to explore. Still, the xeg-yi is a possible ally for the heroes, for it's no more predisposed to attacking the PCs than it is the undead. If the cutters can somehow communicate with the xeg-yi, it might be convinced to help their cause in exchange for the chant on its odd new environment and the planes from which the PCs hail. It had no idea that anything lay beyond its native plane, and it's keen on learning more. 'Course, having a creature of negative energy around – even as an ally – can be dangerous due to its energy-draining nature.

If the xeg-yi feels threatened by the heroes or even simply misinterprets their intentions, it attacks them.

7. SEPULCHRAL (WORKROOM)

This chamber, holy in the eyes of those devoted to Tenebrous, is used to create undead.

Even before you notice this room's contents, you sense something immediately disturbing – there's just an evil aura about the place. Long stone tables occupy the center of the chamber, stained with dark dribbles of something foul. Shelves along the walls hold all manner of jars, bottles, and flasks, some filled with liquids and syrups of nauseating colors and consistencies. Here and there, the line of containers is interrupted by a large, dusty tome. Lastly, a long, low table near the back displays a number of silvery metallic tools and instruments with purposes that seem better left unknown.

The workroom has a slight amount of gravity – just enough to keep things in place. It's the area where corpses are treated with all manner of necromantic unguents, loathsome procedures, and repugnant spells to turn them into undead creatures. A master of the undead like Tenebrous can even shape inhuman creatures like tanar'ri into undead servants – hence the visages.

Most of the books on the shelves detail the anatomy of various races and creatures, all from a magical or necromantic point of view. A few contain formulae and procedures for preparing corpses, mummification, and undead animation.

Two doors lead into separate storerooms. One contains more chemicals and strange ingredients in small casks, pouches, and glass flasks. The other has a few large glass containers filled with a clear liquid in which float various human and humanoid body parts – arms, hands, legs, and even heads. The pieces have been preserved for use as needed in the horrid surgeries conducted here.

Many evil wizards and necromancers would pay a hefty pile of jink – thousands of gold pieces – for the books and materials found in the workroom and the storerooms. But the real value of the room is a magical secret door that leads to Tenebrous's chamber. If the PCs examine the work tables, the DM should make appropriate rolls to see if they find any secret doors. Those who succeed discover that one table slides easily to one side. If moved, the table functions as a switch,

opening a conduitlike corridor (similar to those found throughout Tcian Sumere) in the middle of the floor. The berk who moved the table is automatically and immediately drawn down into the corridor and whisked to Area 11.

8. PRISON (OUTER ROOM)

If the PCs're searching through Tcian Sumere for the prisoner mentioned by the mist mephit, they're on the right track coming here. But before they reach the actual cells in Area 9, they must get past the formidable protections of the outer prison chamber.

Because Kestod is such an important captive, the outer room is manned at all times by a visage and a flesh golem. The golem obeys all commands given by the visage (or any true servant of Tenebrous) and, unless told otherwise, automatically attacks any living beings who enter the area. The doors on either side of the outer room also obey the visage's verbal orders. If it detects intruders or thinks an escape is likely, the undead fiend commands the huge iron doors to slam shut. Once the valves close, the PCs can open them again only by making a successful bend bars/lift gates roll or by destroying the doors, which can withstand up to 100 points of damage.

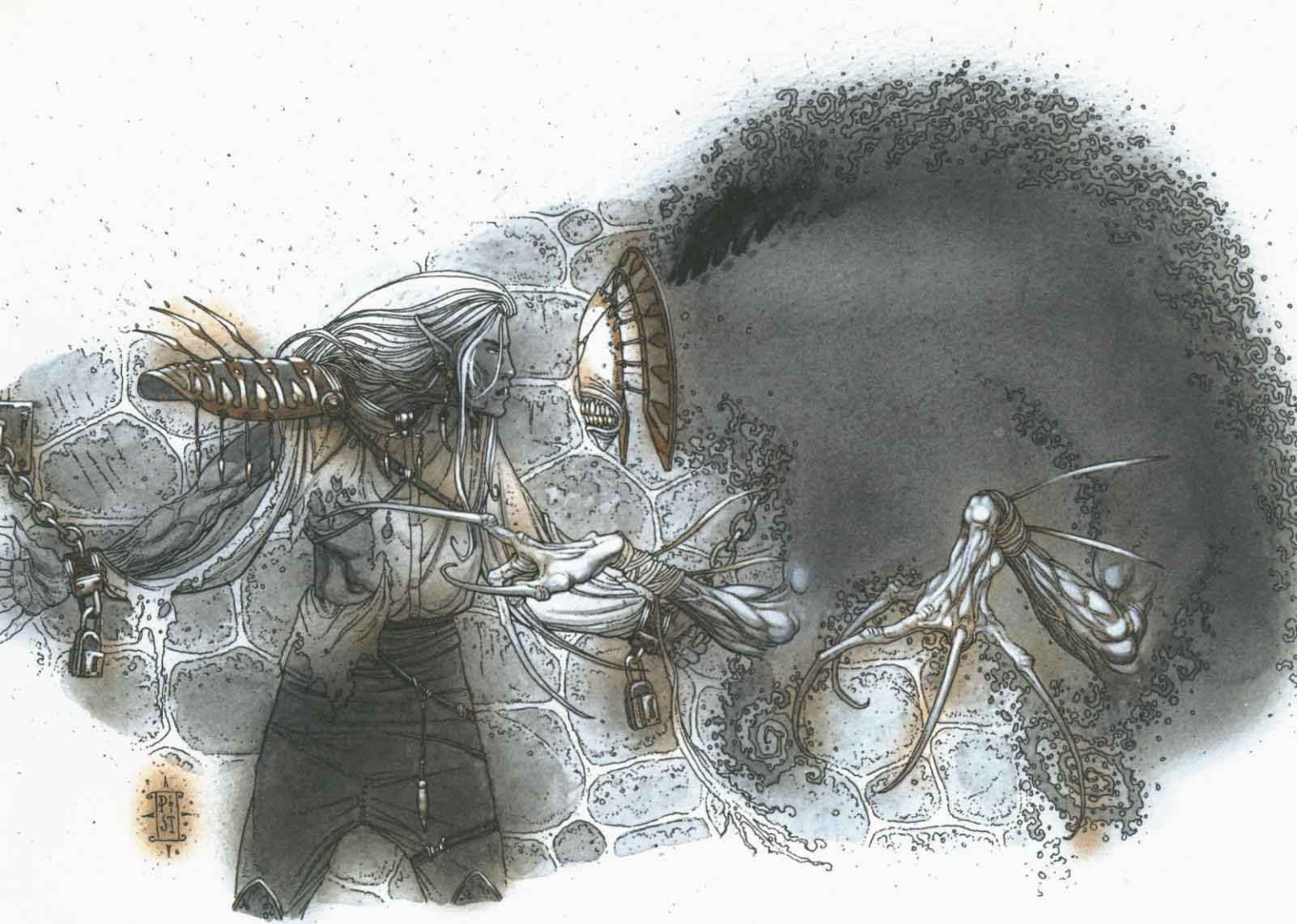
However, if the visage has its way, the heroes will never reach the outer chamber in the first place. See, the room gives access to two passages that lead to secret doors in the approaching hallway. The doors have secret sliding panels that let a body view the hallway while hidden. Unless the PCs go to extraordinary lengths to mask their approach, the visage is aware that they're coming down the hallway. It spies on them through one of the secret doors and uses its lucidity-control powers against the berks. The fiend might make them think the hallway is never-ending, make them think they're moving forward when they're actually returning to the place they started from, and so on – anything to keep them away from the prison. If necessary, the fiend secretly tries to alert other visages in Tcian Sumere to the heroes' presence.

9. PRISON (INNER ROOMS)

The area at the end of the passage is a torture chamber, filled with all manner of implements: racks, barbed instruments of pain, cauldrons for boiling oil, manacles and cages for prisoners, and so on. However, all of these devices show signs of neglect. Fact is, they've never been used, as Tenebrous and his servants rarely take captives.

That's why most of the prison cells are empty. Of the six that line the hallway, only one is currently occupied – the farthest cell on the right as a body walks in. Inside that cell, a visage guards an ancient drow named Kestod. The two wait silently, the visage concentrating on using its powers to the fullest to keep Kestod from using his.

See, Kestod's a vampire. Long ago, when he was an ordinary mortal, he was brought from the Prime to serve Kiaransalee. When the drow goddess deposed Orcus and took over Thanatos, she commanded two of her servants – Kestod and



one other – to hide the Wand of Orcus where it would never be found. After the pair returned from their task, Kiaransalee drowned them both in the River Styx, robbing them of their memories so they could never reveal the wand's location.

Time passed, and eventually Kestod was brought back into Kiaransalee's service – this time as a vampire, with little or no memory of his former life. Unfortunately, Tenebrous found out what Kestod had done and had him captured and brought to Tcian Sumere. During his imprisonment, Kestod has learned from his tormentors that he and another servant of Kiaransalee – a drow named Erehe – hid the Wand of Orcus. But thanks to the Styx, Kestod has no idea where they put it.

That's why Tenebrous wants to obtain the *desert's night* bloom from Baator. The flower restores memories drained by the Styx, and Tenebrous hopes it'll make Kestod remember where he hid the wand. The proxy Nekrotheptis Skorprios foiled the undead fiends' attempt to steal the blossom from Set's realm, but Tenebrous has taken matters into his own hands (see Interlude II). All the visages must do is keep Kestod safely imprisoned until their master returns with the *desert's night*.

If the PCs peer into Kestod's cell, they see the visage and the vampire engaged in an odd game of concentration and waiting.

Inside the dank, dark cell, a ghostly shape hangs in the air, a plain white porcelain mask the only corporeal thing about it. But the figure isn't facing you – it's focused on the cell's other occupant, a sod chained to the far wall by his hands and feet, his body covered in tattered rags. The prisoner's flesh has a charcoal hue and his angular features are elvish, but there's something about the dark, deep-set eyes and elongated canines that makes you realize he's no ordinary elf.

The arrival of the heroes might break the stalemate. If the PCs try to enter the cell, the visage uses its powers to fend them off as quickly as it can, hoping to keep the prisoner restrained at the same time. But the fiend's got little hope of doing both. If the cutters slay the visage or even occupy it for more than two rounds, Kestod uses the opportunity to take on a gaseous state. The vampire then floats directly above a wooden weapon or weapon shaft that the PCs have with them and reforms – committing suicide.

Kestod's loyalty to Kiaransalee is so strong that there's virtually no way to keep him from ending his (un)life. He's convinced that as long as he exists there's a chance he could unwillingly turn stag on his goddess and reveal the location

of the Wand of Orcus. Thus, he does all he can to send himself to the dead-book.

Before he dies, though, Kestod tells the PCs — his “saviors” — something that he managed to keep secret from the visages. See, the fiends knew that a drow named Erehe was involved in hiding the wand, but that was all they could learn. Kestod refused to reveal anything else about his former comrade. But the vampire knows that Erehe is an important wizard located in the Vault of the Drow, a subterranean community on the prime-material world of Oerth.

“The other . . . Erehe,” whispers the elvish creature, weakly. “Vault of the Drow . . . on Oerth. Destroy him, too. He must not remember what he’s forgotten . . . these fiends need the location. Don’t let the murderous god win. . . .”

How did Kestod remember anything about Erehe after being drowned in the Styx? Simple — he didn’t. His chant about the other drow is something he picked up *after* Kiaransalee brought him back as a vampire.

In any event, the PCs probably feel quite frustrated. They found one of the mysterious “perpetrators” only to watch him die, and now they must travel to Oerth to seek someone *else*. Chances are, too, that they haven’t tumbled to the dark of Kestod’s and Erehe’s roles in the whole scheme, so they won’t really know why they should chase down the other drow. But that’s fine. Remember, the cutters shouldn’t yet realize what Tenebrous is up to — or even that Tenebrous (or Orcus) is the villain. All they should know at this point is that the visages and their dark master — whoever he is — desperately want some information known only to Kestod and Erehe.

KEEPING KESTOD ALIVE:

If the heroes have absolutely nothing on which the vampire can impale himself, or if the DM simply wants to keep him alive, Kestod doesn’t have to do himself in. Once freed, he can assume his mist form and escape through the walls into the Negative Energy Plane. Before he goes, though, he still needs to tell the PCs about Erehe so the cutters know where to find the drow wizard.

That’s no problem. After all, Kestod’s loyalty to his goddess is such that he’d be willing to fall on a stake so he couldn’t be forced to spill the beans about the Wand of Orcus. And he’s just as willing to put Erehe in the dead-book so *he* can’t fall victim to the visages, either. Thus, just before the vampire turns to mist and flees Tcian Sumere, he either asks the PCs to see to Erehe’s death or resolves to kill the drow wizard himself. Either way, the heroes learn where to find Erehe.

10. VISAGES

If the invading bashers have been so stealthy that they haven’t yet alerted the undead fiends to their presence in Tcian Sumere, they find six visages gathered in this chamber.

A singular shaft of dark blue light cuts through the center of this cylindrical room. The stony walls of the chamber have been completely covered in carvings of faces of all sorts, so that the entire room is filled with leering, weeping, laughing, staring images.

If the visages are here, they’re at rest, floating in a ring around the shaft of light and staring at it with a complete lack of awareness. Fact is, if the fiends haven’t been alerted so far, they won’t even notice intruders in this area for three rounds — unless attacked, of course, in which case they immediately defend themselves.

More than likely, however, these six visages will be encountered elsewhere in Tcian Sumere, responding to disturbances caused by the PCs. Their duty is to watch over the fortress, protect it from intruders (though invaders are extremely rare at best), and make sure everything goes according to Tenebrous’s desires.

The shaft of light is virtually all that’s left of a servant of the former Abyssal lord, a servant all but destroyed centuries ago by Kiaransalee. The light used to be a balor named Glyphimhor, who ruled an Abyssal city that surrounded the old citadel of Orcus. The visages in Tcian Sumere now revere Glyphimhor as a mighty servant of their god, and they occasionally come here to rest and focus on his essence.

If any PC touches the shaft of blue light, the ancient spirit of Glyphimhor appears before the group.

The intensity of the light begins to wane, but as it does, a dark shape appears before you — a shriveled husk of an inhuman figure. It shudders and shakes feebly, with flesh that looks like it might once have rippled with muscles now hanging loosely upon weak bones. You think this creature once stood over 10 feet tall, but now its stooped body barely reaches 7 feet.

“I am Glyphimhor,” the figure says quietly, “master of Tcian Sumere. Do not be deceived by my appearance.” It raises a clawed hand, rotting flesh dripping like syrup with each motion. “I am still foremost among the servants of the master. I also know the ancient magic of Pelion that he wields. My words can also slay.” Its voice intensifies, as does the light in its eyes. “Bow down before me, worms!”

◆ Show the players Illo H (on page 172).

Glyphimhor is bluffing. He doesn’t know the secrets of his master’s magic. ‘Course, in his bluff he inadvertently revealed vital clues about the nature of Tenebrous’s power (the Last Word) and its source (Pelion).

Truth is, Glyphimhor is nothing but a shade — a virtually harmless spirit longing to be more. Kiaransalee let him flee Thanatos after her victory over Orcus, but she cursed him to forever remain in this defeated and pitiful state. Naturally, Glyphimhor made his way to Tcian Sumere, but even his newly resurrected master has been unable to restore the balor to his former glory.

If challenged, Glyphimhor tries to send his foes away by using his *suggestion* and *fear* powers. If physically defeated, he simply returns to his state as a shaft of blue light. But if the heroes somehow convince Glyphimhor that they can help restore him (which won't be easy — all conventional magic has thus far failed, so he's not likely to believe them), he turns stag on Tenebrous. He is, after all, still a tanar'ri, a creature with no true loyalties. If convinced, Glyphimhor tells the heroes:

- ♦ His master is Tenebrous, a fallen power come back from the dead.
- ♦ Tenebrous is killing proxies and powers with magic that he learned in the ruins of Pelion.
- ♦ Tenebrous needs some vital secrets from two drow that long ago lost their memories. One of the drow is currently held in the prison.

Glyphimhor *won't* reveal that Tenebrous was once Orcus, or anything about Thanatos or Kiaransalee. And if the PCs really do help the tanar'ri, he turns stag on them in the end and tries to destroy them utterly — he *is* a balor, after all.

II. THE MASTER'S CHAMBER

This room is difficult to reach, since the corridor that leads here is hidden in the floor of Area 7. But if the PCs make it here, they find themselves in the chamber where Tenebrous himself dwells (if such a term can be applied to a power, even one reduced in strength) on the rare occasions when he's actually present in Tcian Sumere. It's similar to, but far more modest than, the throne room from which he ruled his Abyssal layers.

Red velvet carpeting covers the floor in the circular room ahead of you. A large throne built of skulls of all different kinds of creatures dominates the chamber. Floating next to it is a chessboard, the pieces arranged in mid-game. A small pool of still water lies before the throne, while behind it sits a large potted plant. Two iron doors suggest exits on the other side of the room.

Tenebrous has always been fond of games of strategy. In effect, his current schemes are little more than a chess game on a multiversal scale, and the pieces on the chessboard by the throne are telling. One side is composed of tanar'ric and undead figures, though the central piece — the king — is noticeably missing. The other side is made up of mortal heroes, and prime-material PCs might recognize one or two figures as champions of good from the distant pasts of their worlds. (Any berk who expected the other side's pieces to be

baatezu're probably unaware that Tenebrous never cared for the Blood War, seeing it as a waste of time and energy.)

The small pool in front of the throne is a scrying device, able to view any area in Tcian Sumere. Currently, it shows the prison cell of Kestod, the drow captive. If the PCs haven't yet done anything to free Kestod, the pool still shows the prisoner and a visage guard. Note that the cutters have no idea how to change what's shown in the pool.

The potted plant is a yellow-blossomed, tri-flower frond, a carnivorous plant that attacks any sod who comes within 3 feet — that's how far its tendrils can reach. The throne falls within this area of attack. The plant tries to induce a coma in its victims, coat them with a deadly enzyme, and drain their fluids (for details, see the plant's statistics in the Appendix).

Both of the iron doors are locked. A human skull is set into the center of each door, and if the

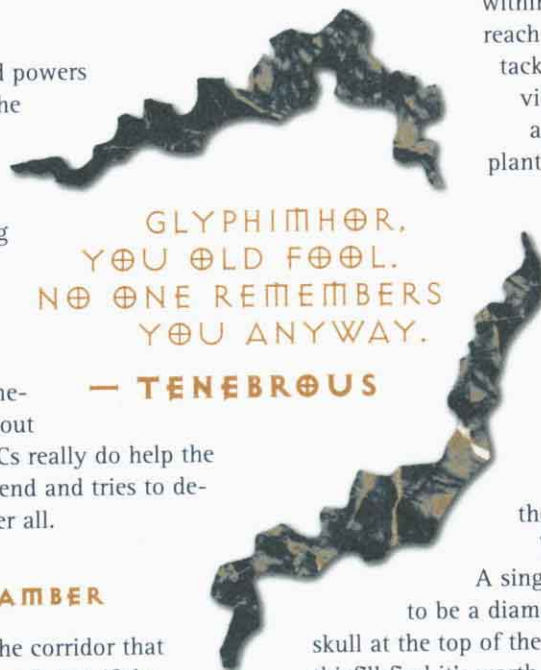
PCs open either jaw, they discover a keyhole hidden within. Only Tenebrous has the keys to these locks, but a top-shelf cross-trader should have no problem picking them if he so chooses. The doors lead to the storeroom (Area 12) and the vault (Area 13).

The throne itself is fairly unremarkable. A single black jewel of great size — it appears to be a diamond — is set into a cyclopean humanoid skull at the top of the throne. If the great sparkle is taken, the thief'll find it's worth a great deal of jink — about 8,000 gp. A canny basher'll expect it to be magical, though, and it is. The jewel functions as a *gem of seeing*. However, a *really* canny (or peery) blood'll expect it to carry a curse or ill effect, and it does. See, Tenebrous set this gem into his throne because he can see through it at all times; he can thus view his personal chamber even when he's far away. If the PCs take the sparkle along with them, Tenebrous will be aware of everything they do. But that's not the worst part. The former Abyssal lord enchanted the jewel with a special form of *succor*; at any time, he can summon its bearer to him.

Finally, a crude map of Pelion is hidden amid the skulls that make up the lower portion of the throne. If the heroes search the area, they find the piece of parchment fairly easily. The Dungeon Master should show them the map on page 101 (it appears at the end of Chapter VII, "The Ruins of Pelion").

12. STOREROOM

This chamber contains a device that Tenebrous stole from the prime-material world of Athas. Thousands of years ago on that world, a bunch of bashers called the rhuisti developed a type of science known as life-shaping. The process involved the creation of living beings that could be used as tools, weapons, transport, and so on.



Tenebrous hoped to use the life-shaping device to help his rebirth. See, in his weakened, undead condition, Tenebrous can't create avatars to carry out his will in the physical world. All of his godly essence is housed in his semiphysical necromantic state. With the device stolen from Athas, he thought he might be able to free enough of his essence to create an avatar — or perhaps even trigger a metaphysical change that'd restore his normal deific state.

Neither worked, perhaps because of Tenebrous's tanar'ric essence or the fact that he's not a living being. In any case, the former Abyssal lord stored the device here so that when he had the time, he could take it into the sepulchral and try to alter it necromantically. But addle-coved PCs might try to use it on themselves.

The device looks like a 3-foot-high semicircular wall made of dry, chitinous flesh. A large, egglike pod is connected to the outer rim of the curved wall. An armlike extension projects upward and inward from the top of the wall, with a cup-like end. It looks very much like a cutter's head would fit inside the cup, though it was obviously meant for shorter folks (the rhulisti were halflings).

The device is able to project a body's mind into a biological construct contained within the pod, but the brain-box isn't transferred — it's copied. Thus, the user controls both the construct and his own body at the same time. If a PC puts his head in the cup, the device instantly examines his mind, duplicates certain organic structures, and places them in the

construct. In 1d4+1 rounds, the humanoid bursts free of the casing, and the activator PC starts to experience everything both through his own senses and those of the construct.

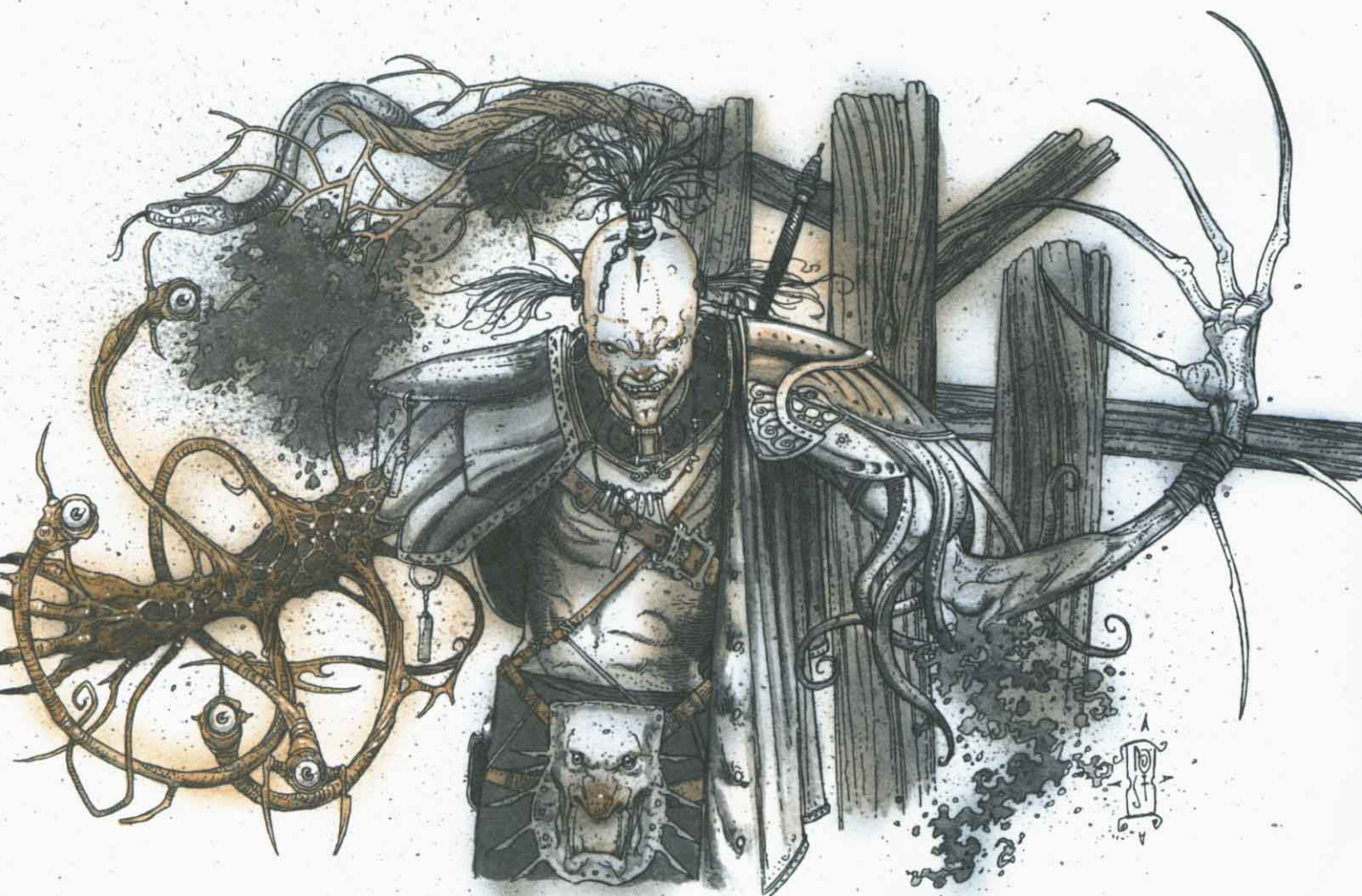
Read this to the whole group:

There's a tearing sound as the large pod on the other side of the device rips open. A figure almost 7 feet in height pulls itself out of the egglike casing, covered in organic ichor. Its skin is gray and its features humanlike but poorly shaped — like a statue created by a sculptor with little skill (or perhaps just little concern for aesthetics).

The activator PC has a slightly different experience. Read the following to the berk who stuck his head in the cup:

Your vision becomes blurry. Suddenly, you see nothing but darkness — yet you still see everything around you. You feel cramped and wet — yet you stand perfectly dry and comfortable. Then you break free of your tight surroundings, and the darkness is gone. You see . . . a tall gray figure. You see . . . yourself.

Here's the dark of it: The sod now controls both the humanoid and his normal body, though with difficulty — fact is, it's maddening to experience the world through two different sets of senses at the same time. Refer to the Appendix for the humanoid's statistics. As for the PC's normal body, each of his



ability scores is permanently decreased by 1, and his attack rolls and saving throws permanently suffer from a -1 modifier. What's more, the construct and the PC are linked. When one sleeps, the other must also, and if the two move farther apart than 10 feet, both fall unconscious.

The real problem is that there's no way to reverse the process. The sod can't pull his mind out of the humanoid's form — he's stuck in two bodies. If one of the bodies is put in the dead-book, the basher goes on living in the other, though the shock sends him into a coma lasting 2d4 weeks. But the PC might not have a choice. Seeing out of two sets of eyes will slowly drive him insane over the next 4d4 months. By the end of that time period, he'll have to kill one of his two bodies in order to keep his sanity.

In the meantime, though, the situation can be a boon or a curse, depending on how the berk handles things. Having an extra body that can operate simultaneously is quite handy. For example, a cutter can watch his own back (at least while both bodies are awake). 'Course, having an ugly, misshapen humanoid around all the time is inconvenient at best.

The life-shaping device works just once, as there's only one humanoid construct in the pod. If another PC puts his head in the cup, nothing happens.

13. VAULT+

This small treasure vault contains four stone urns, a medium-sized chest, and a sword mounted on the far wall.

The urns are 5 feet tall and stoppered with large, heavy lids. Each contains about 1,000 gp, give or take 3d10 gp — sometimes even undead tanar'ri lords need a little jink.

The chest is locked; inside, the PCs find a series of long, thin compartments. Each compartment contains a wand (Tenebrous loves 'em) that's shaped like a scepter and nearly the size of a magical rod. The booty includes: a *wand of magic missiles* (8 charges), a *wand of trap detection* (29 charges), a *wand of illusion* (4 charges), a *wand of illumination* (24 charges), and a *wand of fear* (10 charges).

However, the wands are protected. On the interior of the chest's lid is a plaque written in an ancient, evil tongue (decipherable with a *comprehend languages* spell or a successful ancient languages proficiency check). The plaque reads: "Claim what's yours, now and forever." In order to take a wand safely, a PC must grab it selfishly and proclaim it to be his. Trying to remove a wand otherwise results in the thief suffering 3d4 points of electrical damage.

It's also important to note that the plaque says "forever." See, once a berk successfully claims a wand, he suffers a one-time punishment (3d4 points of damage) if he ever tries to sell it, trade it, give it away, or otherwise rescind his ownership — even after the wand's been drained of charges. If a cross-trader steals the wand, the poor PC still suffers 3d4 points of damage. Once claimed, the wand is his. (This is Tenebrous's strange idea of a joke, but it also exemplifies his religion's tenet that "What's mine is mine.")

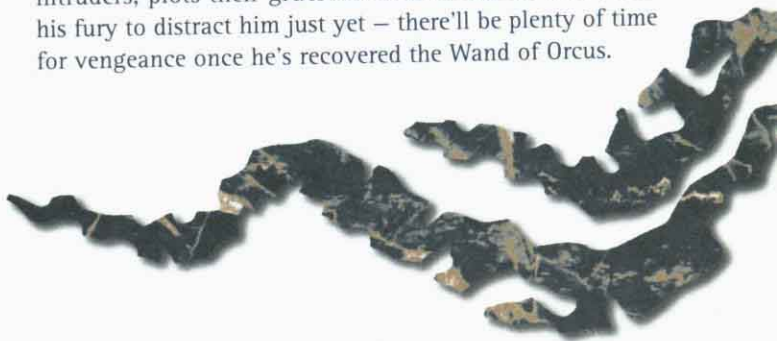
Apart from the urns and the chest, the only other item of

importance is a notched and slightly rusted sword hanging on the far wall. This old weapon is one of the few treasures Tenebrous's servants managed to liberate from Thanatos when Ki-aransalee took over.

The weapon is the *Orcusword*, an ancient blade wielded by Orcus long before he created his infamous wand. Chant is he used the sword eons ago when he was still just a balor, and that he let his greatest servant — greatest *proxy* once Orcus achieved godhood — use it temporarily. When the Abyssal lord died, the weapon lost much of its potency, though Tenebrous still keeps it as a sign of what has come before — and what can still be. He believes that once he regains his former status, the blade will resonate with its original power.

Currently, though, the weapon is a *long sword* +3 (forged in the Abyss) with the ability to cause double damage on a roll of a natural 20. On a roll of a natural 1, the sword breaks. Interestingly, Tenebrous's connection to the blade is somehow greater than even his link to his phylactery. Breaking the sword causes him a great deal of pain, enough to distract him for a few hours from whatever he's doing. If the PCs got into a dire situation where they had to confront the undead power, they could break the sword and distract Tenebrous long enough to escape. 'Course, anyone leatherheaded enough to wind up facing Tenebrous directly probably wouldn't tumble to such a plan.

NOTE: If the heroes break the *Orcusword* right away, Tenebrous immediately feels the pain of the loss, and, after returning to Tcian Sumere and learning what he can about the intruders, plots their gruesome deaths. But he won't allow his fury to distract him just yet — there'll be plenty of time for vengeance once he's recovered the Wand of Orcus.



◆ ESCAPE ◆

Unless the heroes have the power to travel the planes on their own, the only way they can leave Tcian Sumere is the same way they came — back through the portal to Ranais. From there, it's a simple matter of walking back to the portal to Sigil.

If the PCs talked to Kestod in the prison, they might head next to the Vault of the Drow (Chapter VI). On the other hand, if they were canny enough to get the chant from Glyphimhor, or pick up on other clues in the fortress, they might journey to Pelion instead (Chapter VII). It doesn't matter which spot they visit first. The two chapters can occur in either order, as shown on the flowchart on the inside back cover of *Dead Gods*. The DM should just make sure he's familiar with both chapters, especially their starting points.

INTERLUDE II

THE TRUE MEASURE
OF EVIL IS
THE CONTENT IT HAS
EVEN FOR ITSELF.
— KLASANDRAL,
A MONADIC DEVA

The last few had perished on the end of his own blade.

That was assuming, of course, that the things could die. Nekrotheptis Skorprios looked out across the Midnight Desert. Ankhwugaht was always dark, but the proxy's eyes adjusted well. He'd made his home here for over 20 centuries and had learned to adapt to its mannerisms as he would to those of a mate, if he had one. He knew — without conceit, he told himself — that Set (may he be praised and feared) had chosen him well.

The apparitions that assaulted the realm of late were disconcerting. Horrible things had made their way into Ankhwugaht before — this was Baator, after all — but these were something new. These things tried to reach into the minds of others, tried to twist and master them. Skorprios could not abide such tactics. He was a tooth and claw man, as they said in the realm, and he liked his opponents the same way.

The proxy squatted down, consumed by his dark musings, gently pushing sand about with his khopesh sword. His clothing was the color of night, almost as dark as his hair, but not nearly as black as his eyes. Apart from his weapon and the prize in his pocket, he carried nothing. The realm provided him with all he needed.

He scanned the desert again. A shiny black scorpion crossed into his line of sight, about a hundred yards ahead of him. The regal warrior leaped up and crossed the distance quickly enough to snatch the creature before it lost itself in the sand.

"Ah, little *nas khum*," he said to the scorpion in his hand, "tell me if you have seen anything new to the desert this day." His voice, though crisp and clipped, sounded like gravel being crushed by a heavy rock.

"My lord," the scorpion replied, "I have seen much this day. Things have come to the Midnight Desert seeking that which grows here. These things ignore one such as *nas khum*, but I fear they would not feel my sting, anyway, should it come to that."

"Yes, little ally. Your words are true. Now hide in the sand and watch for these creatures. Report to me if you see more of them — and thank the Master that I have this duty for you and am not hungry."

"Yes, lord. Thank you, lord." The scorpion scuttled away as soon as Skorprios set it down. A smile almost crossed the proxy's solid, chiseled jaw. It was good to be the right hand of Set (may he be praised and feared).

Suddenly, a chill wind blew across his face, banishing for a moment the dry heat rising from the coarse sand. Skorprios reached into the pocket at his breast and pulled out a tiny red flower, a blossom the people of Ankhwugaht called *desert's night*. Few outsiders knew it even existed, so the fact that the invaders were looking for it meant — at the very least — that the creatures were well-informed.

But what did they want it for? Skorprios knew, of course, that *desert's night* could be prepared as part of an herbal drink that brought back memories stolen by the River Styx. Such a flower could not grow here in Ankhwugaht without the Master's strict attention and desire, so Skorprios was sure that Set (may he be praised and feared) must at one time have had need of such a potion.

"Oh, little proxy. So devoted to your twice-damned excuse for a master."

Skorprios whirled around to face the speaker of such effrontery. How had such a blasphemous villain come so close without his knowledge? He set his feet firmly on the ground, one slightly ahead of the other, ready to spring at his foe. But what he saw startled him.

It was as if someone had taken a man and squeezed him until all the light was wrung out like water, leaving only the purest of darknesses. The intruder on the sands had the form of a large man – gaunt as though from a long illness – who had never experienced illumination (or perhaps had driven it from himself completely). The invader carried no weapon and made no move to strike, yet there was something inherently threatening about him. Too stunned to attack – at least for the moment – Skorprios just stared. Who was this?

The blasphemer spoke again. “Nekrotheptis Skorprios, proxy of Set.” He said the words as if granting Skorprios his name and title here and now, a gift the Master had already given two thousand years ago. The proxy clenched his teeth and prepared to leap into combat. “You have something that I want.”

Again Skorprios paused. He would do well to learn the creature's motives before killing him. “Speak, thing of darkness and invader of the Midnight Desert, the realm of Master Set, may he be praised and – ”

“Silence!” Yellow eyes flared from daggers to swords as the intruder raised his hands in rage. Only then did Skorprios realize that the being before him was one of incredible power – power far, far greater than his own. The dark thing, though not the equal of Set (may he be praised and feared), was virtually a deity in his own right.

Nekrotheptis Skorprios knew fear.

“I am Tenebrous, though you would know me by a different name. I desire the little weed. You have slain or driven off the emissaries I sent to retrieve it. Now I have come myself, and you are doomed.” With that, Tenebrous spoke the Last Word. Unceremoniously, without the dignity of his station or the honor of battle, Skorprios crumpled like an insect beneath a careless boot. His khopesh sword clattered on the sandy rocks.

Tenebrous reached down to the tumbled mound of limbs and clothing and plucked the *desert's night* from what used to be the proxy's hand.

For a moment, he gazed at the simple flower, wondering at the irony of something so small and insignificant providing him with so much.

No matter. He had the blossom now. Nothing could stand in his way. The prisoner in Teian Sumere would reveal the secret. The wand would be his again.



CHAPTER VI: THE VAULT OF THE DROW

Sounds of battle greeted his ears. The ringing of metal against metal echoed off the cold stone walls, losing nothing in intensity. His forces had been driven back, and the fighting was close. Erehe knew it was time to flee.

He hated it when a situation arose that his magic couldn't overcome — and hate was something he knew well. Nevertheless, nothing he could do would make the Great Gate of Erelhei-Cinlu fall this day. The fiends within the city provided the Kilsek defenders with too much power.

Still, the House of Tormtor could conjure a few fiends of its own, raise its own undead army. Then the forces would return to Erelhei-Cinlu and display severed Kilsek heads on their standards as they took the drow city. Erehe and his mistress would revel in the delicious

pleasure of seeing their enemies suffer torture and humiliation. The Mother of Lusts

would lose her strangle

hold on the Vault of

the Drow. The rise of

the House of Tormtor —

the rise of Erehe (and, of

course, his mistress Verdaeth)

— would begin.

But he was getting ahead of himself. Erehe knew that one could come back from the seemingly all-devouring jaws of utter defeat. (Indeed, he once walked the path of the dead himself, though he remembered none of it.) Thus, before he could truly feel victorious, each and every Kilsek and all of their allies had to be killed, their bodies destroyed for all to witness. Only then would Erehe know joy.

Verdaeth cared only for restoring her consort's missing past. But Erehe focused his efforts on gaining success in the present — and the sweet syrup of domination that would come in the future.

◆ NEW BEGINNINGS ◆

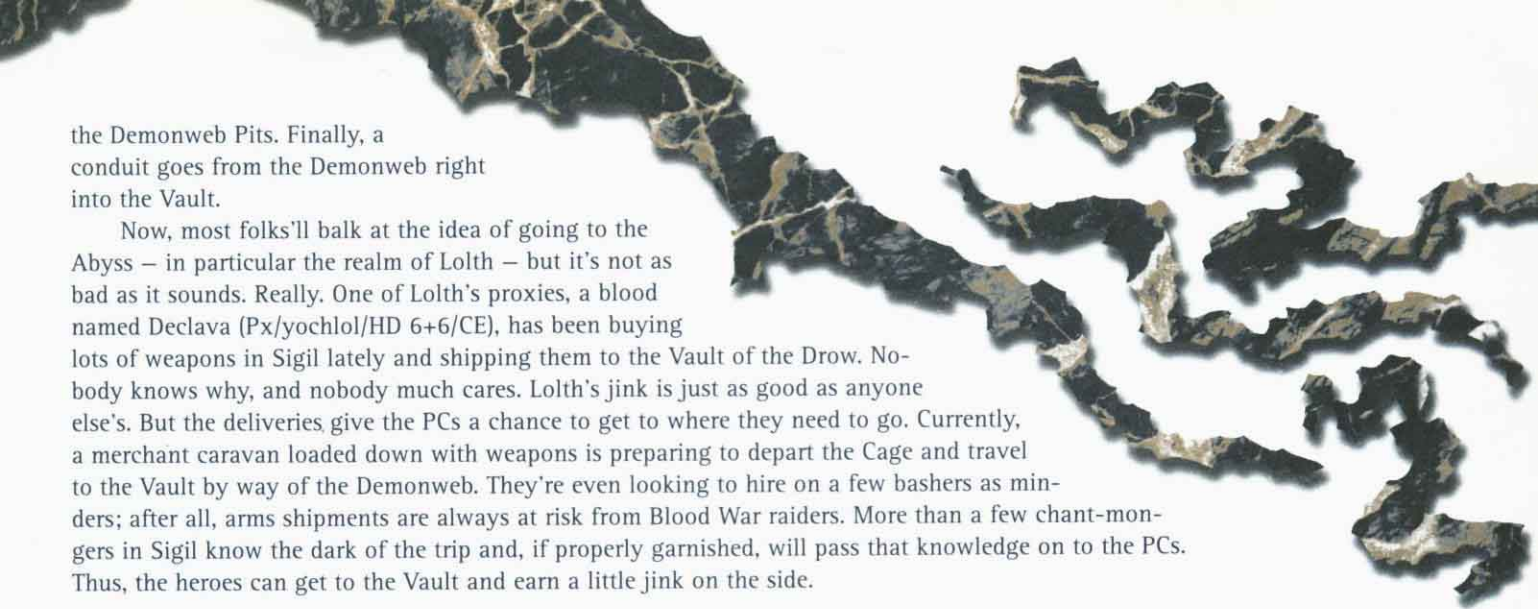
When the player characters leave Tcian Sumere, they hopefully do so with the knowledge that the one person who might know what's going on is a basher named Erehe, found in the Vault of the Drow on the world of Oerth. The Dungeon Master should remember, however, that even at this stage of the ride, the characters shouldn't know the dark of it all. Sure, they know to look for a drow named Erehe, but they don't know he was one of the berks who hid the Wand of Orcus. At most, they know he's somehow linked to Kestod the vampire, and that he's forgotten something that the visages want to recover. But they still shouldn't think to connect it to either Tenebrous or Orcus — fact is, they're probably still wondering whose fortress it was they explored in the previous chapter.

Depending on the PCs, getting to the Vault of the Drow can be easy or hard. Naturally, they first have to ask around or conduct research to determine what and where the Vault is. If any of the heroes are primes from Oerth, they might even know of a portal or conduit leading to that world. Unfortunately, any portal they find probably leads to the surface of Oerth, and the journey from the surface to the Vault — a subterranean cavern miles under the ground — could take months.

No, it's better to go to Sigil (ain't it always?) and dig up the chant on the quickest route to the Vault. It's a trip that leads first to the town of Plague-Mort, then onto the first layer of the Abyss and down to the 66th, otherwise known as

THE VAULT
OF THE DROW —
PROOF POSITIVE THAT
YOU NEEDN'T GO
TO THE
LOWER PLANES
TO FIND THE MOST
DEGENERATE SORT
OF EVIL.

— PHILOMATHY JURAMENT,
PRIME ADVENTURER



the Demonweb Pits. Finally, a conduit goes from the Demonweb right into the Vault.

Now, most folks'll balk at the idea of going to the Abyss — in particular the realm of Lolth — but it's not as bad as it sounds. Really. One of Lolth's proxies, a blood named Declava (Px/yochlol/HD 6+6/CE), has been buying lots of weapons in Sigil lately and shipping them to the Vault of the Drow. Nobody knows why, and nobody much cares. Lolth's jink is just as good as anyone else's. But the deliveries give the PCs a chance to get to where they need to go. Currently, a merchant caravan loaded down with weapons is preparing to depart the Cage and travel to the Vault by way of the Demonweb. They're even looking to hire on a few bashers as min-
d-ers; after all, arms shipments are always at risk from Blood War raiders. More than a few chant-mon-
gers in Sigil know the dark of the trip and, if properly garnished, will pass that knowledge on to the PCs. Thus, the heroes can get to the Vault and earn a little jink on the side.

THE CURRENT+ CHAN+

Before leaving Sigil, the PCs likely catch a bit of the current chant. Even more than before, the Cage is aflame with rumors and innuendo about the mysterious deaths of important figures throughout the planes. For example, distraught priests of Camaxtli (a god of fate) feel certain that their deity has fallen. A few days ago they attacked the Shattered Temple, the headquarters of the Athar, thinking that the Lost were to blame. Many innocent sods on both sides were injured or put in the dead-book before the Harmonium broke up the fight. At present, most folks're holding their breaths, waiting fearfully to see what happens next.

The PCs might also hear that a few planewalkers have reported feeling a strange beckoning while passing through the Astral. Although they were able to resist the call, the experience was unnerving. But no one's gone to the Silver Void to investigate further, and no one seems to know exactly who the "plane-walkers" were. Here's the dark of it: The strange pull is the work of the Guardian of the Dead Gods, he who was Anubis, in his attempt to summon aid. The PCs won't meet the Guardian until Chapter IX.

Though the heroes probably just trundle off with the merchant caravan and ignore all of the latest chant, the DM should feel free to expand on the growing tensions in the Cage for side adventures. If Part Two of "Into the Light" hasn't been used yet, the DM can run it before the cutters leave for the Demonweb.

NOTE: Tenebrous is well aware of the fact that Sigil's abuzz with rumors of his handiwork. He knows that someone will discover his secret plans sooner or later, and this spurs him on to quicker, rasher actions now.

◆ THE JOURNEY ◆

Quavois Faithminder (PI/♀ bariaur/M4/Fated/N) is the head of the merchant caravan traveling to the Demonweb and then on to the Vault of the Drow. She's willing to pay 100 gp to any basher who'll help guard her cargo — magical weapons recently created at Zess's Forge (on the Astral Plane). Quavois doesn't give the PCs any more information than that. The bariaur brooks no nonsense and displays no humor. She's gruff and businesslike, but quite capable. Her long locks are tied into a single braid that'd reach the ground if she didn't tuck it into the belt at her waist.

The caravan consists of four small wagons, each pulled by a mule and loaded down with locked iron chests. Ten servants (laborers and mule-tenders) and six minders (in addition to the PCs) accompany Quavois. Each person provides and carries his own supplies and weapons, and if the characters want mounts, they must obtain them on their own. The wagons' chests hold a total of 500 *crossbow bolts* +2, 50 *short swords* +2, 25 *maces* +2, 10 *short swords* +3, five *maces* +3, three *short swords* +4, and one *mace* +4 (all forged on the Astral). Obviously, the value of this cargo is incredible, but for a goddess such as Lolth, gold is nothing.

The wagons follow a path through Sigil to a wide portal in the Lower Ward, which takes them to a spot on the Outlands just outside of Plague-Mort (the gate-town that leads to the Abyss). Quavois then leads the group into Plague-Mort and through another portal that deposits them on the barren Plain of Infinite Portals, the first layer of the Abyss. From there, the caravan heads into a sloping crevice that winds its way deep underground, eventually passing through a portal to the 66th layer. That's where Lolth's servant Declava is supposed to meet the group and direct them to the conduit to Oerth.

THROUGH THE ABYSS

Though Plague-Mort's no vacation spot, the PCs probably don't see much trouble until they reach the Plain of Infinite Portals. Naturally, under normal circumstances, a trek through the Abyss would be extremely dangerous. But Quavois knows a lot of tricks and is willing to garnish the right bloods and high-ups to ensure a relative amount of safety – not to mention the fact that few fiends'd dare assault a deity's cargo.

If desired, the Dungeon Master could include a few encounters with tanar'ri or raiders (or tanar'ri raiders) in which the PCs need to use their wits or their chivs to save the day and earn their jink. The Plain of Infinite Portals is also home to:

- ♦ Tanar'ri lords that maintain iron citadels and wage war on one another. If the heroes aren't careful, they could easily find themselves marked as enemy spies by a peery high-up or (if the DM's in a really nasty mood) sucked into a fiendish fray.
- ♦ Forests of viper trees, often planted by tanar'ri to guard important citadels, portals, and the like.
- ♦ Ruined cities – towns long ago pulled from the Outlands into the Abyss – teeming with scavengers, opportunists, and exiles (including manes, tieflings, chromium rats, armanites, and mortal mercenaries).
- ♦ The unforgiving burg known as Broken Reach, which is ruled by a succubus named Red Shroud and patrolled by molydei looking for Blood War deserters.

'Course, the DM could put the PCs off their guard by making the trip through hazardous and frightening territory completely uneventful. Sure, the group should have encounters, but not everything needs to be a struggle. Maybe peery tanar'ri lords (or other Abyssal high-ups) send fiendish spies to watch the caravan closely but make no move against it.

NOTE: For more details on the Plain of Infinite Portals, refer to the *Planes of Chaos* boxed set and the PLANESCAPE® adventure *In the Abyss* (2605).

INTO THE DEMONWEB PLATS

Once they reach the Demonweb, the PCs – ironically – couldn't be safer. Declava's been ordered by Lolth herself to make sure the weapons are delivered promptly, so no one in the power's realm dares come near the caravan.

It seems as if you've been traveling forever, but that's probably just a quirk of the Abyss. Eventually, though, the wagons roll into a cold, humid cave – a shallow depression in the side of what appears to be a huge, rocky cliff face. Stretching out into the darkness before you is an unimaginably huge silver web, glistening with moisture. A dark-skinned elvish woman of cold beauty stands calmly and silently on the web, her bare feet resting on the strands as though they were solid ground.

It seems quiet enough. Then you hear skittering sounds from above and behind. You see shapes moving in the darkness. And you realize: All around you are spiders of gigantic size, watching you with countless eyes.

Declava greets Quavois and begins to lead the wagons across the web. The proxy is darkly beautiful, with features that seem too delicate to touch for fear they'd break. In reality, she's as tough a cutter as a body could find. As long as she's present, the caravan has no trouble moving across the web, despite the fact that it seems to be nothing more than a tangled skein of thin, sticky strands.

As they move through the Demonweb, peery bashers note that far off in the distance – probably many miles into the web itself – a giant, spidery form seems to watch them. Considering how big it seems at this distance, the spider'd have to be at least half a mile long! But this monstrosity is actually the mobile, animate fortress of Lolth, the inside of which no cutter ever wants to see.

After traveling for a good while, Declava leads the caravan into another cave on the side of yet another cliff anchoring the web. Within, a winding, moving corridor made of webbing snakes through a starry night sky that's almost silvery. Another yochlol – this one in its natural amorphous form (a horrible mass of gelatinous flesh with eyes and pseudopods) – stands guard but wordlessly lets the wagons pass.

As the group enters the silken corridor, Declava tells them they're taking a conduit that leads to the Fane of Lolth in the Vault of the Drow. Canny bloods will notice that the conduit looks much like one they might find on the Astral – except, of course, that this one's made of spider webs. The same bloods might also recall that most conduits connect the Prime to just the first layer of an Outer Plane, yet this conduit links the 66th layer of the Abyss with Oerth. The path exists mainly through the will of Lolth; many similar false conduits lead from the Demonweb to the prime-material worlds of her worshipers.

THE VAULT OF ◆ THE DROW ◆

The Vault of the Drow is a grand cavern, approximately six miles across, deep under the surface of Oerth. (Refer to the map of the Vault on the poster sheet.) Filled with phosphorescent fungi and strange, glowing minerals, this underground chamber has a subterranean beauty unlike any other. Within this dark fairyland, the sinister, malevolent forces of the drow rule.

They control a fantastic (albeit vile and corrupt) city at the heart of the Vault, as well as strong fortresses, fabulous manors, military encampments, huge mercantile facilities, and fungus farms. Seven noble houses and 16 merchant clans each claim territory in the Vault, each struggling for supremacy, or at least superiority. Not surprisingly, though, the real power here's held by the priestesses of Lolth.

Many years ago, there were eight noble houses. The most powerful of them, the House of Eilservs, tried to take control of the Vault and put into place a new religion — worship of the Elder Elemental God. They had a brilliant scheme to establish a puppet kingdom on the surface of Oerth, but the upper-worlders destroyed the giants they used as pawns. The noble house fell, and the priestesses of Lolth managed to keep their tenuous hold on power. But the changes wrought by the attempt were enough to allow Kiaransalee, goddess of vengeance and the undead, to gain a foothold in the Vault of the Drow, which led to events far more destructive yet.

RECENT HISTORY

After the fall of the House of Eilservs, its ally — the House of Tormtor — was relegated to minor status. It was a simple matter for priestesses of Kiaransalee to approach Tormtor and turn them to the ways of the goddess of vengeance. In exchange for the service of a drow named Erehe (the consort of Verdaeth, ruler of the House of Tormtor), the priestesses promised Tormtor vengeance upon the houses that supported Lolth.

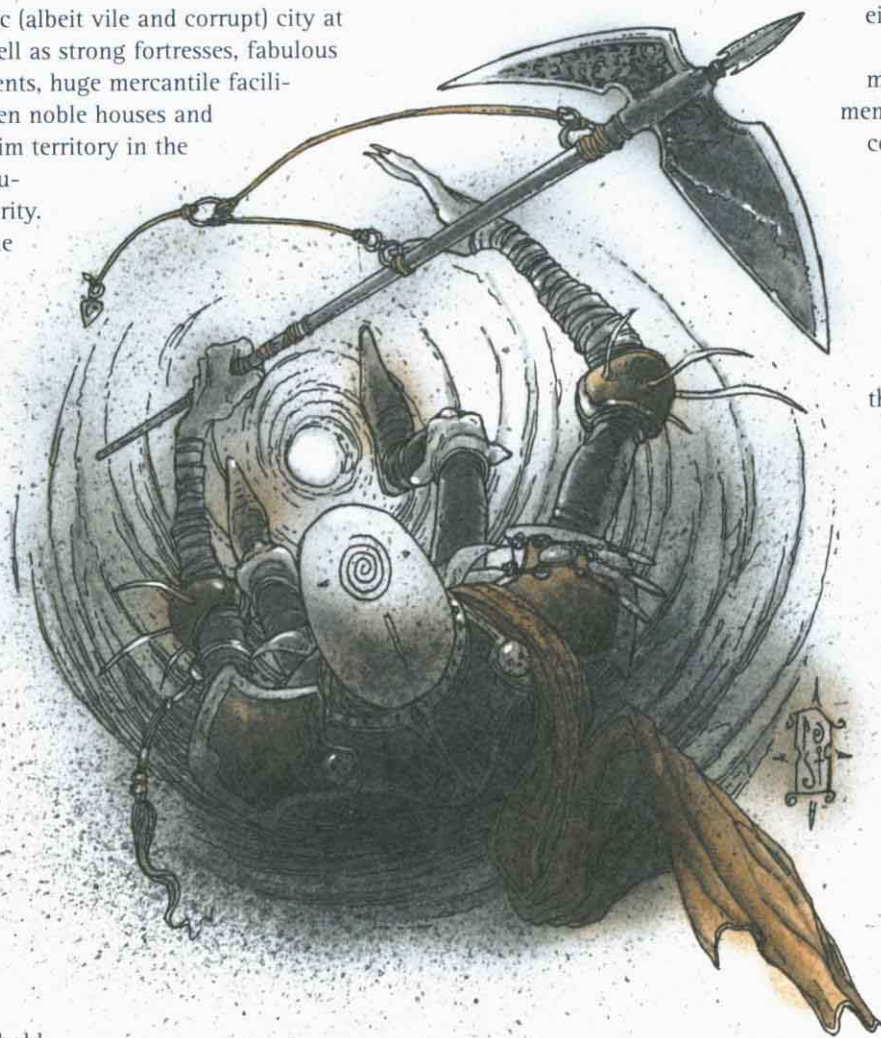
Part of Erehe's service included disposing of the wand Kiaransalee took from Orcus after she slew him. Afterward, the goddess had the poor sod drowned in the River Styx so he'd forget what he'd done. But Verdaeth missed her consort greatly, so Kiaransalee allowed her to *resurrect* Erehe with a scroll. What was the harm? After all, the drow had no memory of his previous life.

'Course, Verdaeth was dismayed by the fact that Erehe didn't remember her either. She searched the multiverse for magic to restore his memory, even making contacts among the githyanki. Meanwhile, her new allies in the Vault convinced her that the other houses not only were at fault for the House of Tormtor's low position, but also were concealing the magic needed to restore Erehe's memories.

The forces of Lolth didn't take that lying down. They noticed Verdaeth's activities and convinced the other houses that blasphemous Tormtor must be wiped out.

To everyone's surprise, though, the githyanki got involved. See, they'd long sought a stronghold on Oerth, and they saw the renegade House of Tormtor as an ideal power base in the Vault of the Drow. The scheming githyanki somehow managed to bring the houses of Everhate and Aleva to the side of Tormtor (though not entirely to the worship of Kiaransalee, which wasn't their goal). That plunged the Vault into a drowic civil war. Fact is, the worship of Kiaransalee, always done in secret, was more widespread than the drow ever realized. Thus, the anti-Tormtor faction quickly found itself reeling from githyanki-supported attacks.

Things got even more complicated when illithids from a nearby section of the subterranean world began to secretly support the drow who warred against Tormtor. After all, gith-



yanki hate illithids passionately. The mind flayers had cause to worry that if a githyanki-friendly regime took control of the Vault, they'd spur the drow on to attack the illithids.

So now the Vault of the Drow is gripped by war. The Kiaransalee/Tormtor/githyanki alliance has the upper hand, but it seems likely that the illithid involvement will balance things enough to greatly prolong the conflict.

As an (important) aside, one of the githyanki managed to help Verdaeth restore Erehe's memories, though in a small way. See, he used forms of the psionic abilities *object reading* and *sensitivity to psychic impressions* to "read" a ring that Erehe had worn in his past life — and continued to wear after his resurrection. Through the ring, Verdaeth learned that Erehe and another drow named Kestod were killed in the River Styx after they buried the Wand of Orcus in Agathion (the fourth layer of Pandemonium).

Verdaeth never told Erehe what she learned about his past, and she put the githyanki who helped her in the dead-book. She knows she's stumbled across chant that's extremely dangerous. The fewer berks who know the truth, the better.

WHAT TENEBOUS KNOWS

Even if Tenebrous has tumbled to Erehe's identity, he's wary of coming to the Vault of the Drow himself. Kiaransalee focuses much of her attention here, and she's probably especially peery ever since the visages kidnapped Kestod.

'Course, it's likely that Tenebrous now knows that the PCs are involved. They *were* just at his very own case, after all. If he's somehow aware of the fact that they're also looking for Erehe, he might let them do his work for him — especially if they took the *gem of seeing* from his throne, as it lets him spy on what they're doing.

Even if the characters found out about Erehe's location in such a way that Tenebrous did not, he eventually tumbles to the dark from some other source. Thus, if the heroes don't reach the Vault of the Drow fairly quickly, Tenebrous sends two or three visages to apprehend Erehe (regardless of Kiaransalee's peeriness). The undead fiends might use their lucidity-control powers to trick the drow into leaving the Vault before they scrag him — just to be safe.

DM NOTES

Even folks on the Outer Planes flap their bone-boxes about the skill with which the dark elves of the Prime Material Plane make magical items and weapons. In the Vault of the Drow, one of the secrets to this creation is the presence of strange energies within the cavern. Without these energies, drow armor and weapons eventually crumble.

However, these energies have at least two other effects on the local area:

- ♦ the spells *teleport* and *teleport without error* are limited to a maximum range of one mile; and
- ♦ the spells *light* and *continual light* produce only a faint brownish glow, rather than a nimbus of bright light.

Both of these restrictions may impede the planewalkers' activities in the Vault, but neither hinders the drow, who hate light anyway and have grown accustomed to the one-mile limitation on teleportation.

Because of the size of the Vault of the Drow, this chapter is considerably more open-ended than others. The PCs might try any number of things, especially once they realize they're caught in the middle of a complex war. The Dungeon Master is cautioned strongly to be aware of this fact and prepare for the possibility that the heroes might stay in the Vault for a long time.

♦ THE FANE OF LOLTH ♦

The Fane of Lolth is a five-story, pagoda-shaped building that's ornately and dreadfully decorated with a spider motif. The outside is adorned with unmentionable scenes of fiends, spiders, and death. Inside, everywhere a body turns, a spidery tapestry or fiendish carving leers at him, and the stairs that lead from floor to floor look like a web.

The first level of the Fane is the main temple, with altars for sacrifices. Two to four guards (female warriors) are stationed in each of the guard rooms, and 11 to 16 servants — sods who clean the temple and wait on the inhabitants — bunk in each of the slave chambers.

The second floor is for the temple troops; over a hundred warriors (all 2nd- to 8th-level) call kip here. But because it's a time of war, almost a hundred more bashers mill about outside the Fane in the cavern known as the Egg of Lolth (see below).

The other levels are reserved for the high-ups that keep things running. On the third floor live the eight priestesses (all 4th- to 9th-level) who staff the Fane. The fourth level holds administrative offices and the quarters of Pel-lanistra (Pr/♀ drow/F8/CE),

the commander of the temple troops and an important figure in the war. Finally, Charinida (Pr/♀ drow/P14 [Lolth]/CE), leader of the eight priestesses, has the top floor all to herself.

Moreover, the temple boasts guardian undead (mostly ghouls and ghosts), giant black widow spiders that roam freely, and gargoyles that roost on the outside. All of the temple high-ups have top-shelf magical items and weapons. Only an addle-cove is going to mess around here.

THE HEROES ARRIVE

When Declava leads the PCs through the Demonweb's spider-web conduit, they emerge in the first level of the Fane, at the other end of the main temple (refer to the map of the Fane on the poster sheet).

The journey through the conduit is disorienting, but it lasts only a few heartbeats. On the other end, you find yourself in a large diamond-shaped room with stone walls and a black floor, with weblike traceries of white. Directly ahead of you is an amber-colored column of light 20 feet across, within which a gigantic spidery creature floats, facing away from you.

The image of the gigantic spider — for that's all it is — represents Lolth. The PCs have little time to look around, however, as two priestesses (Pr/♀ drow/P4[Lolth]/CE) and six warriors (Pr/♀ drow/F3/CE) quickly step forward to unload the goods from the caravan's wagons.

If any bashers were wondering why Lolth's been importing weapons, the answer's now clear. The whole area surrounding the Fane seems to have been ravaged by war — even the temple itself has suffered damage. (In describing the devastation of the battle, the DM should remember that destructive spells and rampaging summoned monsters are as common as conventional assaults and sieges.) Any members of the caravan with the dark of the drow know them to be weaponsmiths of the highest order, so things must be dire indeed if the bloods've stooped to importing the stuff.

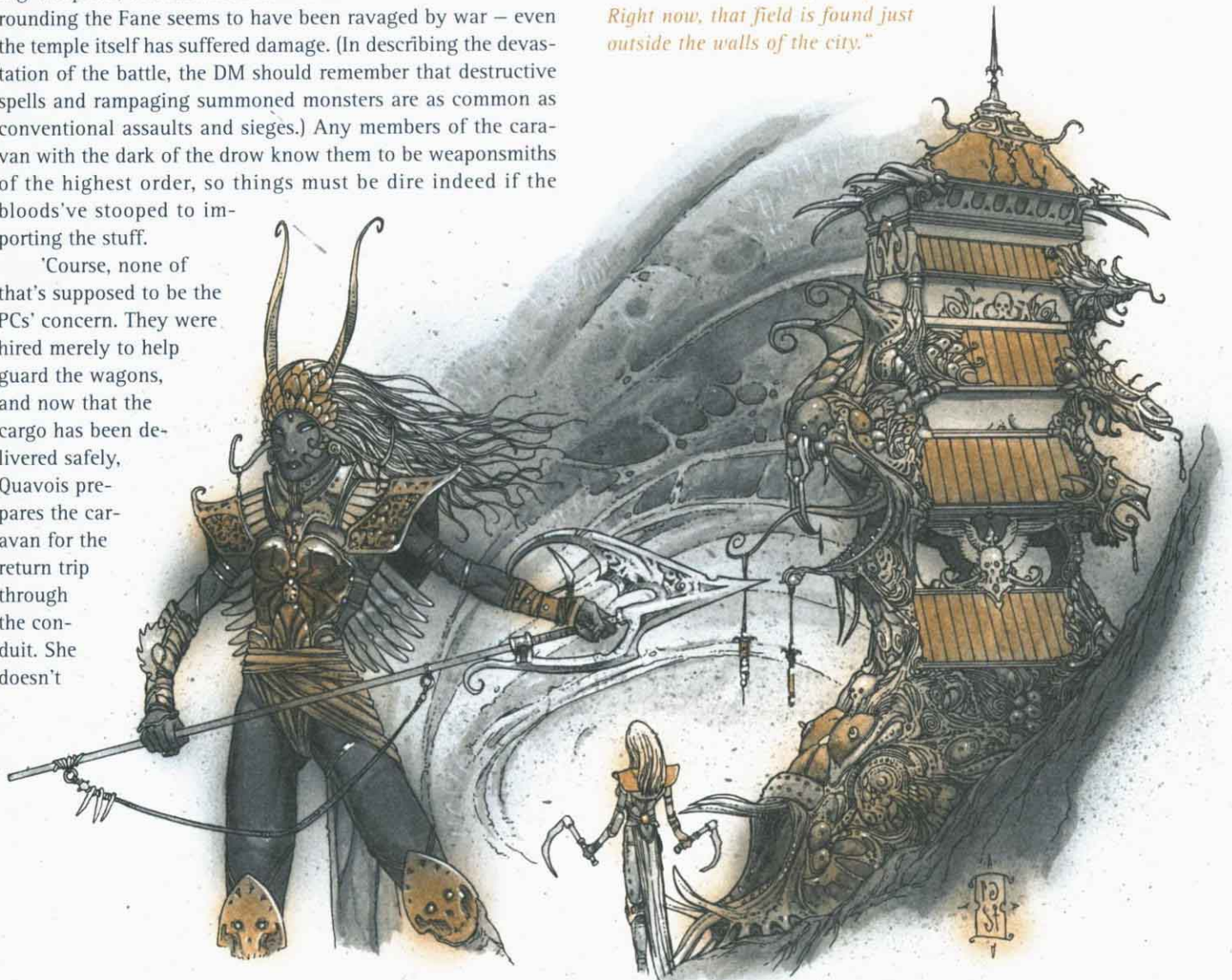
'Course, none of that's supposed to be the PCs' concern. They were hired merely to help guard the wagons, and now that the cargo has been delivered safely, Quavois prepares the caravan for the return trip through the conduit. She doesn't

care if the PCs don't go back with her. The bashers did their job, and she gives them their jink without a word. The weapons have been shipped, so she no longer has any need for minders.

Naturally, staying in the Vault ain't as easy as all that. If the heroes want to stick around, they've either got to slip away from the priestesses (a difficult task, as they're extremely peery of outsiders) or rattle their bone-boxes with a fair amount of guile.

Unfortunately, though the berks have no way of knowing this, asking about Erehe at the Fane is a bad idea. The priestesses know his name all too well and angrily respond: "What do you want with that traitorous worm?" Quick thinkers'll realize that Erehe is on the *other* side of the conflict and answer appropriately. If the PCs tell the drow that they've come to scrag Erehe, slay him, or otherwise do him harm, they get the chant on his location.

"That one's the consort of Verdaeth, leader of the disgraced House of Tormtor. They're usually together — either in their manor or on the field of battle. Right now, that field is found just outside the walls of the city."



That's as friendly as the priestesses of Lolth get. They don't let the group spend any more time in the Fane than is necessary, and they don't provide any more assistance – no matter what. The only reason they tolerate the nondrow bashers at all is that they come from another plane, which puts them in the same rank as the tanar'ri or the yugoloths (whom they respect if not trust).

Leaving the Fane itself, the planewalkers enter what's known as the Egg of Lolth, the large cavern that houses the five-story temple. The place has a strange reddish and green glow, making it distinctly non-Prime in appearance; some berks may wonder if they've really left the Abyss after all. To one side stands a ruined building of yellow stone, a military stronghold that looks like it used to be a despicably carved lesser temple. As mentioned above, a hundred or so female drow warriors move about the Egg, obviously ready to defend the Fane from attack.

A wide passage – like the Fane, decorated with stomach-churning carvings and bas relief depictions of foul practices – leads out of the Egg, winds through the earth for over a mile, and comes out into the Vault of the Drow itself. The roof of the gigantic cavern is shaped naturally like a dome. Where it meets the Vault's walls, it's a few hundred feet high, but at its center, the roof is thousands of feet above the ground.

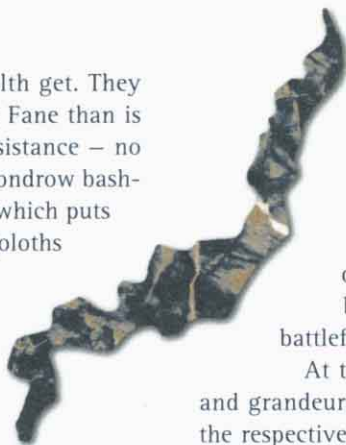
If you didn't know the Vault of the Drow was an underground chamber, you'd swear that you'd just stepped outside into a dark night. The cavern must be many miles across, for the side walls exist only as distant gray blurs – if those blurs are the walls at all. It's difficult to tell, for the light here is dim, just a faint pale lavender glow (probably from some phosphorescent fungi). The ceiling of the cavern, which must be thousands of feet high, is riddled with strange, glowing mineral deposits that shine like stars. In the far distance, the sounds of battle ring through the cavern.

◆ Show the players Illo I (on page 173).

The passage from the Egg opens into an area of the Vault where the noble houses keep their palaces and maintain estates. The boundaries between estates are marked by well-groomed brakes of fungi. This fungi also grows high on either side of the road that currently stretches ahead of the PCs.

◆ THE UPPER VAULT ◆

Ever since the House of Eilservs fell, the Vault of the Drow has had only seven noble houses (described below), though it still has eight estates. 'Course, the one that belonged to Eilservs is nothing but ruin and rubble, but the other seven are still well maintained. They make up the area known as the Upper Vault, which sits on a plateau just above the walled city of Erelhei-Cinlu (see "Erelhei-Cinlu," below). The Flying Bridge connects



the plateau with the Noble Gate, one of the main points of entry into the burg.

Each estate consists of a fortified palace and a tract of land that includes a large area of open terrain. In simpler days, the nobles used these fields to hunt escaped slaves with displacer beasts and conduct huge parties of debauchery and evil. Now the areas are dangerous battlefields strewn with bodies of the fallen.

At the center of each estate sits a palace, the size and grandeur of which is dictated by the size and power of the respective noble house. Most of the drowic civil war has been fought in and around these palaces. Each is surrounded by a large wall that connects to various outbuildings such as small villas, barracks, stables, menageries, and numerous slave pens. What's more, the palaces themselves – which have 30 or more rooms – are defensible structures meant to withstand attack even if the outer walls fall to the enemy.

While in the Upper Vault, the PCs're likely to run across a great deal of trouble. If the bashers keep to the roads, they come upon armed patrols, war parties, and small merchant caravans with goods loaded on giant pack lizards. Any drow encountered on the roads always have an allegiance to one side of the conflict or the other, and they attack any sods who seem to be enemies. Even PCs who claim neutrality might be scragged for good measure and taken to one of the palaces for questioning – remember, all drow are peery of outsiders.

If the PCs venture off the roads, they might run into wild displacer beasts, giant spiders, subterranean lizards, escaped slaves (of any race), spies, or, again, war parties. In such encounters, the bashers can expect to be attacked by any intelligent force they meet.

While moving about the estates, the characters could also have a beneficial meeting with a svirfneblin, or deep gnome, named Viigo (Pr/♂ deep gnome/F6/N). He's a bitter man who hates the drow more than he loves his own life. Viigo has dark eyes, a short white beard, and skin the color of eggshells. He wears exquisitely fashioned chain mail armor and carries a warhammer in his tightly clenched fists.

The svirfneblin sent Viigo to the Vault to spy on the civil war. As enemies of the drow, the deep gnomes plan to do whatever they can to prolong the conflict. If convinced that the PCs aren't affiliated with any drow, Viigo's happy to spill any chant he has about where things are, the nature of the Vault itself, or even a bit about the war. He doesn't really know the dark of the whole matter, but he's tumbled to the basics, and he knows his way around the Vault pretty well. (If the PCs don't seem to show an interest in putting dark elves in the dead-book by the score, Viigo's not interested in helping them.)

Presented below are brief descriptions of each of the drowic noble houses. Three – Tormtor, Everhate, and Aleval – have joined forces, supported by the githyanki and servants of Kiaransalee. The other four houses – Despana, Noquar, Kilsek, and Godeep – support Lolth and have the mind flayers on their side as well.

TORMTOR

This house is the central focus of the rebellious forces. Its palace has become a military fortress, and the surrounding estate has been ruined by warfare. Forty githyanki warriors (Pl/♂ githyanki/F3 or F3,M3/CE) lend their swords in defending the estate. Their support adds such strength that Tormtor's enemies have given up trying to take the place. Currently, the forces here and in neighboring Everhate make preparations to launch an assault against the city of Erelhei-Cinlu (specifically at the Noble Gate), where their foes seem to have amassed their own troops.

If the PCs learned that Erehe is the consort of Verdaeth, leader of the House of Tormtor, they might come to this estate to look for him. But neither Erehe nor his mistress are here. The two spend their time directing the war efforts at the Battle of the Great Gate, already in progress on the other side of Erelhei-Cinlu.

EVERHATE

This house has been dealt great blows, both in casualties and in property damage. The once-regal palace now lies in ruins, managed by 32 bugbear warrior-slaves and their six drow masters. The leader is Regliss (Pr/♂ drow/M7/CE), whose orders are to keep the area free of enemy troop movements or resupply efforts.

The remaining (surviving) nobles of Everhate, including mistress Gahnah (Pr/♀ drow/P10[Lolth],F5/CE), have taken refuge in the fortress of the House of Tormtor. But despite their allegiance to Tormtor, Gahnah and Everhate are still devoted to Lolth. Such is the nature of drow worship – a reverence and respect of power, but no love or loyalty. Drow priestess kills drow priestess, both expecting to be rewarded by their mistress. Meanwhile, the chaotic and evil deity simply revels in the pain and misery of all – even her most faithful servants.

DESPANA

As the PCs proceed away from the Egg of Lolth, the first structure they probably see is the palace of the House of Despana. The fact that this once-great fortress still stands is due more to the priestesses of Lolth than to the might of the noble house. Nevertheless, its finery is marred and blackened from battle.

The walls of this bastion hold many troops loyal to the Spider Queen and the Despana/Noquar/Kilsek/Godeep alliance, including the Miaanue, an elite force of 10 illithids trained for battle. More than likely, some of Despana's military might will be magically transported into Erelhei-Cinlu very soon, while the rest try to make it to the Flying Bridge and the Noble Gate before the Tormtor forces attack.

The former ruler of the house, Tiramar, died in the recent fighting, and the new leader, Nedylene (Pr/♀ drow/P8[Lolth],F7/CE), drills her troops mercilessly, preparing them for future



DROW NOBILITY?
AM I THE ONLY ONE HERE
DETECTING A
CONTRADICTION IN TERMS?

— SHAB HEANLING,
A HALF-ELVEN
ADVENTURER

conflict. She instills fear in her warriors with her *vrock staff*, which lets her use each of the following functions once per day: cause *fear* (as per the spell); inflict 4d6 points of damage on a foe (requires a successful attack roll; no saving throw); *polymorph self* into a vroek for 5 rounds; and summon a vroek for 5 rounds.

NOQUAR

Until only recently, the palace at the heart of the estate of the House of Noquar was under siege by a combined force of githyanki, drow, and bugbear slaves. The fortress stood, however, and the attacking troops pulled back to the palace of Tormtor to prepare an assault against the Noble's Gate of Erelhei-Cinlu.

The weary defenders of Noquar have no intention of joining in the battle at the city. Fact is, Fedarra (Pr/♀ drow/P8[Lolth],F8/CE), ruler of the house, is contemplating withdrawing from the fighting altogether – she sees the war as a conflict that might rage on until all the houses fall. Because of her racial pride, Fedarra hates to see the drow weaken themselves with infighting, which makes them potential victims of outside enemies.

ALEVAL

Earlier in the war, the House of Aleval played a crucial role in the attack against the House of Kilsek. But lately, apart from a few minor skirmishes on the estate grounds, Aleval's seen no fighting. The palace, albeit the smallest of all the drow nobles' cases, is intact and unmarred. See, Aleval has always had the smallest military force of any of the houses, and its alliance uses the palace primarily as a spot from which to watch the road leading toward the enemy estate of Godeep.

It's not known who rules the House of Aleval. A noble named Jijekan (Pr/♂ drow/F3,M6/CE) is the only cutter who's set eyes on the mysterious leader, and he acts as her liaison with the rest of the world. Jijekan himself wears a pair of *wings of flying* at all times and likes to spread the chant that he has fiendish blood in his veins. But any planewalker can see he's no tiefling. Sure, tiefling drow exist, but most of the time they're killed by their elf parents or taken away by their fiendish ancestor.

KILSEK

The Tormtor/Everhate/Aleval alliance took a giant leap toward victory the day that the palace of the House of Kilsek — once the greatest of the noble houses — fell. The attackers scattered the nobles, slew the troops, took slaves, and left forces behind to occupy the remnants of the palace (though a reprisal attack is unlikely.)

The drow who managed to escape Kilsek with their lives now call kip in the city of Erelhei-Cinlu, leading the defenders there at the Great Gate. Fact is, Venrit (Pr/♀ drow/F6,P9 [Lolth]/CE), the former matron of the house, conceived of the plan to take the burg, and she puts to the sword any berk who doesn't swear allegiance to her and her allies. (For more details on the Kilsek rampage through the city, see "Erelhei-Cinlu," below.)

GODEEP

Like Aleval, the estate of the House of Godeep hasn't seen much fighting recently. In the early days of the war, the forces of Godeep were instrumental in attacks on Everhate (their long-time enemies), but since then they've tried to take a more defensive stance. It's said that the reason the Tormtor/Everhate/Aleval alliance has had so much success is that the houses of Godeep and Noquar are so wary. Still, the nature of many of the dark elves — particularly the noble families — is to shun alliances and avoid devoting all to any one cause, so the insular behavior of Godeep and Noquar isn't really surprising.

EILSERVS (FALLEN)

All that remains of the palace on this estate is a ruin. After their failed attempt to unseat the priestesses of Lolth from their position of domination in the Vault, the nobles of Eilservs — those that were scragged, that is — met torture and death, and the palace was razed. Vengeful ghosts and howling spirits haunt the estate now, so no drow willingly tread upon its grounds.

◆ ERELHEI-CINLU ◆

Nearly 30,000 souls dwell in the corrupt, decrepit city of Erelhei-Cinlu. The noble houses, the merchants, and the priestesses of Lolth recruit the talented, intelligent, beautiful drow, and the dregs're left to rot here. The berks wallow in their depravity and vice, ignoring all else — which means it's fairly easy for a few crafty cutters to slip into the walled burg unnoticed.

Not of all Erelhei-Cinlu's residents are drow — fact is, most aren't. Illithids, kuo-toa, bugbears, troglodytes, trolls, undead, humans from the surface world, and even a few fiends and other lower-planar creatures call kip in this city. If a body looks close, he might find a planewalker or two, and

even a handful of tieflings. ('Course, the prime-material leatherheads don't know to call themselves "tieflings," and they're outcasts even among the drow — not because of their evil nature, but simply because of their appearance. Most dark elves have a very narrow definition of beauty.)

Before the drowic civil war, Erelhei-Cinlu was a neutral burg. But in the last few weeks, the Kilsek/Despana/Noquar/Godeep alliance seized control of the town. The move isolated the Tormtor alliance's palaces of the Upper Vault from their main military force in the Lower Vault, which includes the Male Fighters' Society and most of the githyanki warriors (see "The Lower Vault," below, for details).

The conquerors then closed the gates of the burg and put all who wouldn't swear fealty to them in the dead-book. Though many folks escaped through magic or some of the city's secret exits (including the singularly terrifying sewers), thousands were slain. The marauders — primarily Kilseks — sent any leaders or figures of importance among their foes to the leafless tree; their corpses still swing in the cold drafts of underground air currents. Chant is the Kilsek's new illithid allies truly masterminded the slaughter, and that the fiends and undead in Erelhei-Cinlu quickly joined with the murdering drow to take part in the carnage — as the leaders of the scheme knew they would.

The stone wall around the city is 30 feet tall and topped with battlements. Guards patrol the wall and bunk in towers spaced unevenly along the wall's length. Many gates lead into the city, but only two are of any size and importance. Toward the Upper Vault and the plateau of the noble estates, the Noble Gate stands before the Flying Bridge. On the other side of town, the Great Gate — which is much more defensible — overlooks the Lower Vault.

The drow always meant for the Great Gate to be a defense against invaders from outside of the Vault. Now, however, it's the site of a harrowing battle of drow versus drow. Liminis (Pr/♂ drow/F5,M7/CE), the basher in charge of holding the Gate, has as many ghouls, ghasts, and minor fiends under his command as drow, but he doesn't mind. In fact, he revels in the sudden power and influence given him by the war; his job used to be quite dull. Liminis has no great allegiance to the Kilsek alliance — truth is, before war broke out he was a Tormtor sympathizer — but he'll do whatever he must to maintain his position and newfound strength.

PASSING THROUGH TOWN

If the PCs want to reach the battle at the Great Gate (or head into the Lower Vault), they need to figure out a way into, across, and out of Erelhei-Cinlu. A *teleport* spell could span the distance, if the heroes have access to such magic. Otherwise, their best bet is simply to sneak or bluff their way through town. Flying isn't a good idea, for drow archers on both sides are used to airborne foes and fire upon unidentified flying creatures.

The encounters and situations in the burg that could give the PCs trouble are as limitless as they are terrifying. Erelhei-

Cinlu is the home of diseased beggars, thieves, cross-traders, cony-catchers, slavers, murderers, ghouls, vampires, trolls, fiends, and plenty of other monsters – not to mention well-organized platoons of troops (drow, bugbears, and troglodytes) in the service of the Kilsek, ready to slay any berks disloyal to the house or its allies.

Luckily, the PCs have a few advantages. First of all, the city's chaotic, winding streets and haphazard buildings allow the cutters to sneak and hide well. Second, the burg suffers from poor organization. The citizens are degenerate, and the Kilsek high-ups distrust just about everyone. The Dungeon Master should keep in mind that despite their caste system and feudal (or militaristic) society, the drow are creatures of chaos as well as evil, and nowhere is this more clear than in Erelhei-Cinlu.

The PCs might wish to spend some time in town – that is, if they're looking for dark spells, torture implements and techniques, or mind-destroying narcotics. In other words, wise folks make their way through the burg as quickly as possible. The twisted residents have little to offer but pain, misery, and a quick road to the dead-book.

Fact is, the only thing of real value in Erelhei-Cinlu is the chant, and there are plenty of ways to get information. But the PCs can do worse than rattle their bone-boxes with Teri-

gin (Pr/♂ drow/F5/N), a heavily scarred drow who likes to stir up insurrection and rebellion against the evil ruling nobles whenever he can, all in the name of Nilonim – a former lover of whom he never speaks beyond invoking the name.

Terigin's got more chant than the heroes would ever need, and it's even accurate. But it comes at a steep price. The basher demands that the PCs help him and a few of his comrades stop the Kilseks from wantonly murdering the folks of Erelhei-Cinlu. Specifically, he wants to slay Nieriv (Pr/♀ drow/F8/CE), the cruel captain of the Kilsek guard, who leads the culling raids on the populace.

◆ THE LOWER VAULT ◆

The largest portion of the Vault of the Drow spreads out south and west from the walls of Erelhei-Cinlu. The floor and walls of the cavern sprout vast forests of thick fungi that're harvested by drow slaves. Nestled among the stretches of this sunless growth, the villas of the merchant clans stand as strongholds against the dark wilderness. See, despite the reign of the drow, the Vault's still fraught with danger – trolls, ropers, shambling mounds, giant spiders, and other monsters prowl the cavern looking for food.



MERCHANT+ VILLAS

The Lower Vault contains 16 merchant villas, each ruled by one of the drowic merchant clans. The villas are smaller, less-defensible versions of the palaces in the Upper Vault. Though the merchant clans once allied themselves with various noble houses, they're now under the control of the Tormtor/Everhate/Aleval faction. All complied willingly. Even clans that were enemies of Tormtor now claim neutrality, at least, in order to keep business moving. Many merchants who're secretly loyal to the Kilsek alliance operate as spies and infiltrators, but the drow of the House of Tormtor know these stag-turners exist and busily try to root them out.

THE BLACK TOWER

Facing the main road that leads into the Lower Vault, this four-level tower stands on a rocky precipice and serves as the first defense against invasion from outside. Needless to say, it hasn't played much of a role in the current conflict, but the Tormtor/Everhate/Aleval alliance considers the Black Tower secure. Here's the dark of it, though: Recently, four mind flayers – using mental domination rather than physical force – infiltrated and seized control of the tower.

In quieter times, all road travelers who sought entrance to the Vault of the Drow were required to check in with the guards of the tower and don special cloaks marking their status. Currently, however, the mind flayers command the 20 or so tower guards to question all visitors as to their loyalty in the civil war and scrag any berk who professes devotion to Tormtor.

BUGBEAR CAVES

This area, an extensive complex of caves on the side of the Vault wall, is home to almost 500 bugbears (including young). The creatures live in four distinct bands united under a single leader, Gannish, who serves the drow and uses his people to do their bidding. When war broke out, Gannish offered his services to the highest bidder, but he recently threw in completely with the Tormtor/Everhate/Aleval alliance, which he sees as the eventual winner. The bugbear leader knows nothing of the chant about the Kilsek alliance's activities in and around Erelhei-Cinlu.

TROGLODY+E TUNNELS

In this part of the Lower Vault, nearly 60 cave openings – most of them hidden by growths of fungi – appear in the cliff walls. The dark mouths lead to numerous burrows and dens, many of which are empty. See, this honeycombed area was once the kip of a large tribe of troglodytes, but almost all of them have since been conscripted into the fighting. Only a few females remain, and they hide in the back caves, trying to care for the numerous young now without parents.

WAREHOUSES

Here, a row of 16 stone warehouses, each belonging to one of the merchant clans, backs up against the cavern wall. Above the door to each warehouse, a shield bearing the symbol of the appropriate clan identifies the owner. As mentioned earlier, the clans – some willingly, others reluctantly – have thrown in with the Tormtor alliance.

The storehouses are well guarded and well stocked with food and other goods (no weapons, though – they've all been taken by now). If the war continues much longer and the Kilsek alliance continues to hold

only the city, they'll need to raid the warehouses to resupply their troops. Erehe himself has tumbled to this eventuality, and he's commanded warriors from the House of Tormtor to withdraw from the fighting and further secure the area.

THE FEMALE FIGHTERS' SOCIETY

This is the only area of the Lower Vault that actively opposes the forces of the Tormtor alliance. Long ago, a military sisterhood in the service of Lolth built a towered wall and gatehouse to seal off this diverticulum of the main cavern from the rest of the Vault. Within the protected area, the sisterhood spent millennia training drow females in the art of war.

Each of the seven noble houses supports a sorority of warriors here. (Fighters who were loyal to the former House of Eilservs disbanded when that house fell, and they joined the remaining groups instead.) When the civil war began, the high-ups of the society instructed its 500 or so members to fight for those in the service of Lolth – the Kilsek alliance. However, each sorority is more or less loyal to its patron house. Thus, many drow connected with the Tormtor, Everhate, or Aleval houses turned against their superiors or abandoned their posts to join their allies.



WHAT'S YOUR PREFERENCE?
A M+M+ENT+ OF PAIN FOR YOU?
10 GOLD.
A M+M+ENT+ OF PAIN FOR ME?
THAT'S 20. . . .
— A STREET-CORNER HAWKER
IN ERELHEI-CINLU

The githyanki took advantage of this dissension and launched an attack on the sisterhood. Although the well-trained warriors repelled the assault, they suffered enough losses to take them out of the rest of the war. Now the Tormtor alliance ignores the area, and those sympathetic with the Kilseks use the society as a refuge in the Lower Vault.

The compound comprises a large slave barracks, eight sorority buildings (the one formerly housing the Eilservs-sponsored fighters is now used for storage), an armory, a ruined forge, and the main keep of General Telenna (Pr/♀ drow/F9/CE), commander of the sisterhood. In the past, the drow fashioned fine weapons in the forge, with help from creatures of the Elemental Plane of Fire. However, thanks to the githyanki attack, it's now all but useless.

THE MALE FIGHTERS' SOCIETY

When war came, General Relonor (Pr/♂ drow/F7/CE) showed his true colors as a servant of the House of Tormtor and offered his bashers to the nobles and their allies — another factor in the Tormtor alliance's early victories. The fraternity of approximately 500 warriors occupies a compound made of 16 barracks and the wall that joins them. A gatehouse and two towers complete the fortress.

◆ FINDING EREHE ◆

The Vault of the Drow is a big case, and there's plenty for a group of planewalkers to explore, learn, and fight. 'Course, their real goal is to find the drow called Erehe and learn what dark he's keeping — or at least protect him from the visages. Though the PCs don't know that Erehe has lost his memories, that fact'll soon become abundantly clear. However, that doesn't mean the heroes hit the blinds trying to find out the information. It'll just be hard.

First things first, though. The bashers have to find the dark elf before they can interrogate him. Wigwagging with the locals is the easiest way to learn about Erehe (and the war in general), but finding a berk willing to rattle his bone-box to a bunch of nondrow strangers isn't easy. Still, the PCs might succeed with the right mixture of garnish, subtlety, and persuasion.

Canny bloods quickly tumble to the following facts: Erehe is the consort of Verdaeth, matron of the House of Tormtor, the estate at the center of the current conflict. The two are practically inseparable, and they're likely to be found either in their palace or at the primary battle site — the Great Gate of Erelhei-Cinlu.

THE PALACE OF THE HOUSE OF TORMTOR

The PCs can get into the palace in any number of ways, though a direct, open assault is probably the most addle-coved method. Sneaking in's a possibility for top-shelf infil-

trators. But the Dungeon Master should remember that the Vault of the Drow is in a state of war. Defenders inside the palaces and fortresses are extra peery and more likely to kill an intruder rather than question him.

Still, there's infiltration and then there's *infiltration*. Spells, disguises, and outright bribery work here as well as they do anywhere on the planes, and such tactics, if used well, might get a body or two into the palace for a look around. The cutters will tumble pretty quickly to Erehe's absence, but they might also learn his current location — the field of battle before the Great Gate.

THE BATTLE OF THE GREAT GATE

If the PCs manage to make their way through Erelhei-Cinlu and reach the Great Gate at the south side of the city, they witness a fierce battle.

The sound of metal clashing upon metal and the cries of combat are broken by exploding fireballs or the rumbling of some other sorcery. From within the surrounding towers, dark elven archers fire volley after volley of crossbow bolts down at the advancing enemy. Still more warriors — most of them male — repel attackers that try to scale the wall or magically fly or levitate over it. Ghouls and other undead accompany the defenders, greedily tearing at living flesh. A small pack of chasme flying overhead drop a handful of bar-lgura into the enemy hordes, and the apish fiends seem to have little regard for life — even their own.

The attackers are mostly drow warriors of both sexes organized into segregated units. Bugbears and troglodytes form powerful supporting phalanxes to either side. Ladders and grappling ropes carry the assailants into battle at the top of the wall, where a lone, unarmed drow holds off a score of warriors until she's brought down in a flurry of strokes — and turns to mist. Attackers flying on the backs of hieracosphinxes or by means of magic try to gain the other side through the hail of missile fire.

The fight looks as though it's raged for a long time — and seems likely to continue unabated for a good deal longer.

If the PCs figure that Erehe's with the attackers, they might try to leave the city and head into the invaders' camp. But that presents an interesting challenge — all of the gates in the wall are locked and guarded. The chaos of the raging battle might work to the heroes' advantage, allowing them to proceed without drawing too much attention. Still, even if they scale or otherwise get past the wall, the difficulties begin anew — the attacking army looks upon anyone coming from Erelhei-Cinlu as an enemy.

LEARNING ABOUT ◆ THE WAND ◆

Whatever means the cutters use to infiltrate the ranks of the Tormtor alliance – disguise, garnish, magic, or just plain sneakiness – they find the high-ups near the rear of the attack, on a rise behind the advancing forces. Verdaeth, Erehe, and three other Tormtor nobles named Bederiss (Pr/♀ drow/F5,P8[Kiaransalee]/CE), Fecundil (Pr/♀ drow/F4,P7[Kiaransalee]/CE), and Magin (Pr/♂ drow/F4,M6/CE) watch the battle from astride their nightmare mounts. Six trained displacer beasts and six female drow warriors guard them.

Verdaeth, unquestionably the leader, sits the tallest in her fiendish mount's saddle, a long black and purple robe covering her fine chain mail. Erehe seems to have a penchant for the macabre, for his clothing is covered in skulls, bones, and symbols of death. He also wears strange lenses over his eyes that make them appear to be red. The other three nobles, like their ruler and her consort, radiate extreme beauty in a cold, dark way. Their regal garments are ornately embellished and in perfect condition. All five of the drow come across as extraordinarily arrogant and imperious, though Verdaeth will drop pretense in order to get something she wants.

To find out what the drow know about the Wand of Orcus, the PCs might try to talk to them, fight them, restore

Erehe's lost memories, or offer to help the Tormtor's war effort in exchange for information. Each option is discussed below.

TALKING

Canny PCs should realize that this probably isn't a good time to charge in with swords drawn. Truth is, approaching the Tormtor nobles at all probably means a quick trip to the dead-book – unless a cutter uses his brain-box and says something to make the drow (at least Erehe or Verdaeth) want to hear them out. “Kestod sent us,” “We're here about Erehe's memories,” or something similar is a good start.

If Erehe is intrigued by what the PCs have to say, he casts *wall of force* to create a dome around Verdaeth, himself and the heroes – after the bashers first place their weapons on the ground outside the radius of the dome. While the two drow want some privacy to protect themselves from curious ears or stray attacks from the nearby battle, they worry that the request for an audience is just a trick by their Kilsek foes.

What follows is probably a confusing discussion. The drow don't know what the PCs know, but they suspect the bashers have what they want. Likewise, the PCs don't know what the drow know, but they suspect the nobles have what they want. Both sides are peery of the other, and neither wants to show weakness or ignorance.



Smooth talking on the PCs' part gains them a few interesting tidbits — if they ask the right questions and make the right statements. See, if Verdaeth and Erehe believe the plane-walkers know more than they do, they try to bluff using the chant they *do* have and, in so doing, let slip information that proves valuable to the PCs. For instance, the cutters might learn that Erehe lost his memories to the River Styx after serving in the realm of Kiaransalee. They might also pick up chant about the war in the Vault or something even more valuable.

If the PCs bring up Kestod, Verdaeth makes the necessary links and tells them the dark of what happened to the Wand of Orcus — *if* that means the heroes then can offer her new insight into her consort's lost memories. Knowledge that the visages're hunting for Erehe is plenty valuable to the two drow. Verdaeth has no qualms about turning stag on her patron goddess; her obsessive love for Erehe is far stronger than her devotion to Kiaransalee. She's even willing to abandon the war and give the whole Vault the laugh if it means hanging on to the object of her desires.

Unfortunately, the feeling ain't mutual. Erehe's attachment to Verdaeth isn't nearly so strong. He has no special devotion to Kiaransalee, either, and he always bows to Verdaeth's judgment in matters regarding the deity. But Erehe is fiercely loyal to the House of Tormtor, at least in that he enjoys his position of power. If his mistress chose to flee the house and the Vault, he wouldn't follow — fact is, he'd enjoy ruling in her stead. However, if convinced he was as good as lost, that'd be a different matter entirely. Erehe believes in self-preservation before all else.

FIGHT+ING

If the PCs possess great power but little tact, they might try to force Verdaeth to give them the information they need. Even if they're successful, such an action earns them a powerful enemy, one that's sure to show up again looking for revenge. See, Verdaeth's attitude is simple — the best way to make sure that her chant is valuable is to put anyone else who learns it in the dead-book.

'Course, some PCs might just try to kill Erehe so the visages can't get at him. That's faulty logic — Tenebrous is a god, after all, so he'll tumble to the dark of his wand sooner or later. Besides, slaying the drow wizard might be beyond the heroes' power, especially with Verdaeth and the other dark elves around. And if the PCs attack first, without trying to talk to Erehe or Verdaeth, things go from bad to worse. Even if the berks eventually change their tactics, attempts on Erehe's life won't make the drow too eager to share their knowledge later.

The Dungeon Master should remember that Verdaeth is the only living mortal who knows that Kestod and Erehe hid the Wand of Orcus in the fourth layer of Pandemonium. If she dies, the PCs'll have a much harder time learning the wand's location.

REST+ORING LOS+ MEMORIES

Top-shelf thinkers might fetch a blossom of *desert's night* from Set's realm and use it to restore Erehe's memories. The heroes learned of the bloom in Chapter III; perhaps they even had the foresight to grab samples of the rare flower when they first visited Ankhwugaht. In any case, they can give the *desert's night* to Verdaeth in exchange for information. She's delighted at finally being able to fill in her consort's past, and her love for Erehe overpowers her desire to leave the truth about the Wand of Orcus buried forever in his brain-box. The PCs also can restore Erehe's memories themselves, in order to get the full chant straight from the drow's mouth.

All the heroes really need is the general location of the wand, but if Erehe regains his memories, they might take him along as a guide (or he may accompany them willingly). He warns them, though, that they must find a way to reach the cavern that holds the wand. Kiaransalee just whisked him into a secluded area of Agathion and back again; there are no tunnels leading to the spot. Erehe suggests stopping at the Madhouse, the Bleak Cabal's citadel on the first layer of Pandemonium, and from there learning how to get to Agathion (see Chapter VIII for details).

Thing is, both Verdaeth and Erehe are drow, and drow never help anyone unless there's something in it for them. In fact, the Tormtor leader and her consort are particularly diabolical and might turn stag on the PCs at any turn. Canny cutters'll keep a close eye on them. More than likely, though, the two drow really do plan to help the heroes find the Wand of Orcus — but only so they can scrag it for themselves. They can even justify that their actions don't oppose Kiaransalee's wishes; by taking the wand, they feel they're helping to keep it out of Tenebrous's hands.

HELPING +HE WAR EFFOR+

It may be that to learn the needed chant, the PCs must strike a deal with Verdaeth. If so, she agrees to give them the location of the wand — but only if they first bring her the head of Venrit, the ruler of the House of Kilsek. If that's obviously beyond their ability, or if they fail and return, Verdaeth gives them a new task: Kill Liminis, the commander of the Great Gate, and open the gate from the inside.

Verdaeth has no reason to ask the PCs to perform impossible tasks — she wants these things done. Still, she knows the chant about the wand is important, and she wants something worthwhile in return.

VAMPIRE A++ACK

If the DM allowed Kestod to escape from Tcian Sumere rather than impale himself (see Chapter V for details), he might try to kill Erehe and Verdaeth to prevent them from betraying Kiaransalee. For maximum drama, the assault should occur while the PCs patiently try to win the drow's trust. This puts the berks in the odd position of having to defend Erehe

against an attack that they themselves made possible (by freeing Kestod). 'Course, it also means that Erehe will probably suspect treachery, figuring that Kestod and the characters are somehow conspiring to peel him.

◆ LEAVING THE VAULT ◆

The PCs' stay in the Vault of the Drow might turn out to be a lengthy one, especially if the bashers find themselves caught up in the local intrigues and battles. At some point, though, they'll be ready to leave. Oerth has a number of options for travel to the planes, but none of them are easy. For example:

- ◆ The ruins of the forge in the compound of the Female Fighters' Society has a still-functioning portal to the Elemental Plane of Fire.
- ◆ A race of neutral gnomes called the *svirfneblin* live near the Vault of the Drow, and they know of a vortex to the Elemental Plane of Earth (a plane with which they're quite familiar).
- ◆ A portal to the Elemental Plane of Water (specifically the realm of the power *Blibdoolpoolp*) lies in a cavern many miles distant, in a shrine erected to the deity by her servants, the *kuo-toa*.
- ◆ The surface of Oerth has numerous portals, but reaching the sunlit skies requires a journey of many weeks. What's more, most of the portals sit in locations that are secluded, ruined, lost, or well guarded. That's because the denizens of Oerth fear planars, thinking them all to be marauding fiends.
- ◆ Many mages and priests on this world, including those among the drow, can cast spells such as *plane shift*, *teleport without error*, and the like. But, as always, there's sure to be a price.

The most obvious way out is the way the PCs came in — through the special conduit in the Fane of Lolth. But except for the caravans that bring weapons, the priestesses of the Fane don't allow anyone access to the passage to Lolth's Abyssal realm. Just reaching the conduit will take a fair amount of subterfuge and probably some swordplay; after all, the temple and the surrounding area's littered with drow warriors. And even if the heroes make it through the conduit, they'll find themselves in the realm of the Queen of Spiders, uninvited, with drow blood on their blades. To make matters worse, no matter where they go in the Demonweb, the poor sods'll find enemies all around them — drow servants, *yochlol* and other *tanar'ri*, and spiders of large, huge, and giant size.

Hopefully, the PCs will realize that they can't fight their way out of Lolth's realm, and they'll rely on wits and bribery instead. They'd better be ready, because the berks must contend with a fiend as soon as they step out of the spiderweb conduit — a *yochlol* guards every exit and entrance to the Demonweb Pits. All *yochlol* are, more or less, proxies of Lolth. They have the authority to let outsiders into the realm, but the PCs'd better do some fancy wigwagging to make their case. A great garnish — such as a magical item, a special treasure, or a bit of compelling chant — wouldn't hurt either.

If the *yochlol* allows the heroes to pass through the Demonweb, it assigns them an escort: another *yochlol*. That's a good thing, for without the guidance of a native, the PCs'll find the web a huge mass of viscous strands that make it extremely difficult to walk.

The escort leads the bashers to the crevice that winds up to the Plain of Infinite Portals. However, if they ask, the fiend shows them a one-way portal that goes directly into the Hive Ward of Sigil. The portal ain't well known and it only exists now and again, with no discernable pattern. But the PCs are in luck, because it's working today.

Addle-coved planewalkers might choose to fight the conduit guardian or their escort. If the



yochlol can't defeat the berks themselves, they try to warn the other inhabitants of the realm as quickly and efficiently as possible. This might mean retreating to alert others, which'll probably make the PCs think they chased the fiends off and are safe. But spiders lurk everywhere on the web, and the yochlol use them to convey messages. Word spreads quickly of the intruders, and soon the poor bashers could face defenders of the realm at every sticky step.

If the PCs make it to the Plain of Infinite Portals, they probably head back to the gate-town of Plague-Mort and eventually try to reach Sigil (or some other safer ground). On the other hand, truly courageous and stalwart characters might poke around on the Plain, looking for a gate that leads directly to Pandemonium — after all, the sooner they find the Wand of Orcus, the better.


The layer does indeed contain a portal to the Howling Plane; it's fairly commonly used and easily found, especially if the heroes loosen a few fiendish tongues with some garnish. But the portal's not nearby. The cutters must march quite a distance across the layer to reach it, braving whatever Abyssal terrors the Dungeon Master chooses to throw at them.

Truth is, even if the berks just return to Plague-Mort, they're likely to run into trouble along the way. The DM's free to toss numerous obstacles in the party's path, or to give the poor sods a break — especially if they've already been battered and bloodied by this point. In any case, both the Plain of Infinite Portals and the town of Plague-Mort hold cutthroats, cony-catchers, fiends of every type, and all manner of chaotic evil monsters.


NOTE: If the heroes try to fight their way out of the Demonweb Pits and somehow escape alive, the DM should make it clear that they survived only because Lolth didn't care or had more pressing concerns — not the least of which is the war tearing apart the Vault of the Drow. The PCs should realize that, under normal circumstances, there's no way that berks like them can mess with a deity and then give her the laugh.

◆ THE NEXT STEP ◆

Once safely away from the Vault of the Drow and the Abyss, the PCs can decide what to do next. By this point in the adventure, they should have tumbled to the following chant:



THE BEST PART
ABOUT VISITING THE VAULT
IS LEAVING.
— FUNKIN HODDYPEAK,
AN ELF



- ◆ Some creatures, possibly undead fiends, seek a rare flower — *desert's night*, which grows only in Set's realm — that's said to restore memories drained by the River Styx. The PCs might also realize that the creatures serve an ancient, powerful, and secretive master.
- ◆ The creatures also seek Kestod and Erehe, two drow who hid the Wand of Orcus in the fourth layer of Pandemonium and then were drowned in the Styx.
- ◆ Someone or something is killing proxies and gods — some of whom, at least, have been involved in the above circumstances.

Most bashers will be able to piece together this information to get the big picture: Someone, perhaps (probably?) the being once known as Orcus, is searching for the Wand of Orcus. This can't possibly be good. If the PCs are true heroes, they'll realize what they must do: Journey to Agathion and find the wand before anyone else does.

If the cutters have already visited Pelion and read the prophecy found in the Last Spire (see Chapter VII for details), they should be even more certain that Orcus is the villain. And if they haven't gone to that dusty Arboreal layer, clues they found back in Tcian Sumere might push them there now.

However, if the berks need more motivation, the DM can use a stronger (albeit more heavy-handed) method: A proxy of a power they worship or respect pays them a visit. The proxy explains that his deity senses a great evil arising and believes that the PCs have some knowledge of it. He asks the heroes if they indeed know anything about such an impending doom. If they say "yes," the proxy immediately stops them from speaking any further.

"My great and powerful master requests that you not tell me what it is. Apparently, there's a danger in knowing what you know — no one else should be privy to it. My master wishes you to take care of the problem in the most obvious and efficient way. He says that a short-term solution is enough to produce a long-term effect. Quick action, quick thinking, and canny choices can win where brute force is futile. There's nothing more my master or I can say — only you know what you know."

If necessary, the proxy promises the cutters jink or magical rewards. But he can't help directly in any way, and the PCs can't expect aid from any quarter. Once the proxy brings his message, the heroes should realize that their knowledge of Orcus's return is dangerous chant and can't be shared with anyone — not even those they think they can trust.

CHAPTER VII: THE RUINS OF PELION

"Ah, my dear, but what would we do then?" Evreth smiled that tight-lipped smirk that Tchunim always hated. "All the gods are dead. Dead, or scattered to the four winds of the multiverse. Pelion has no more gods."

"But the secret —" Tchunim began.

"Oh, secrets . . ." Evreth interrupted, still smirking. "Secrets we have plenty of. . ."

Evreth could be very annoying.

◆ STEERING THE RIDE ◆

This chapter comes into play if the heroes follow up on clues they found earlier suggesting that they travel to Pelion, the third layer of Arborea. 'Course, it's possible that the PCs missed those leads entirely or aren't sufficiently motivated to make

the trip. But if the Dungeon Master's really itching to use this chapter, he can throw more obvious clues in their

path, perhaps when the party's conducting research or picking up the chant in Sigil. For example, a well-lanned cutter

could reveal that he's heard the mysterious blood putting powers in the dead-book is somehow tied to the ruins of Pelion. That's a bit like knocking the PCs over the head with the information, but once in a while that's what it takes.

NOTE: If the DM can't find a suitable method of getting the PCs to Pelion, all is not lost. When the heroes meet the Guardian of the Dead Gods (in Chapter IX), he provides further incentive for them to visit the dusty layer. But the berks can finish the adventure even if they *never* go to Pelion — it'll just be harder (and perhaps more confusing).

◆ THE GAME GETS WEIRD ◆

During this chapter, the heroes will find a magical device known as the Orb of Kadu-Ra that has recorded events from Pelion's distant past. If the PCs activate the Orb, they vicariously experience those events by playing out the scenes as other characters who lived during that time.

That means the players need to roll up those other characters (hereafter referred to as the "temporary" PCs). So as not to slow down the game, the DM should have them do it sometime before the session in which this chapter will be played. If the players ask why they need new characters, the DM should just say, "You'll see." The fact that they get to play out ancient events should come as a fun surprise. (On the other hand, the DM should probably reassure the players that their beloved original heroes didn't die when they weren't looking.)

The temporary PCs should be standard PLANESCAPE characters of 8th to 10th level. The DM should *not* tell the players that the temporary PCs exist in the dim recesses of the past. But it's fine to give them the following clue: If the characters will be planars, they can belong only to the Dustmen, the Fated, the Fraternity of Order, the Free League, or the Revolutionary League. No other factions are allowed. That's because during the time of the temporary PCs, none of the other current factions existed yet. (Naturally, Sigil did have other factions at that time — including the Expansionists, the Sodkillers, and the Incanterium — but since those groups're long gone, it's easiest to leave them out. The DM's free

PELION'S ONE OF THOSE
WONDERFUL PLACES
WITH NO EXPLANATION.

THE PLACES WE HAVEN'T
FIGURED OUT ARE ALWAYS
THE MOST INTERESTING.

— DESIRA,
A PLANAR SAGE

to allow them if he wants to outline their parameters for the players.)

The temporary PCs can be of any race, and the players can outfit them with whatever mundane equipment they want. If the DM likes, he can give each cutter a few magical trinkets as well, but it's not required. The temporary PCs don't have to have any magical items at all.

Players don't need to spend too much time developing the backgrounds of the temporary characters; they won't be used for an extended period. But the more different they are from the original PCs, the better — the change will feel more dramatic. Players should try different kinds of characters, too. Maybe the player with the great fighter should roll up a doddering wizard, and the one who always plays a thief should be encouraged to try a cleric. But no matter what, the DM shouldn't let anything in the temporary PCs' backgrounds tie directly to the present.

◆ THE JOURNEY TO PELION ◆

For once, getting there's the easy part. Sigil has a portal that leads directly to Elshava, a floating city in watery Ossa (the second layer of Arborea). From there, it's fairly easy for the heroes to find a basher who'll guide them along the path to Pelion.

To reach Elshava, the PCs need to find a pair of sagging towers in the Clerk's Ward that leaned so heavily toward each other that they now touch at their apexes. The one-way portal — which was discovered only recently — is the space between the towers, and the key is any sea shell. Once the heroes step through, they find themselves in an open area of Elshava.

The sea-burg's built to resemble a nautilus shell, in that it's an ever-expanding spiral. It floats upon





'COURSE YΘU DΘN'+
SEE ANY LYCAN+HRΘPES
AROUND HERE.

I'M GΘΘD
A+ WHA+ I DΘ.

— MANHAY+H

the
shallow
sea of
Ossa,

and every-
thing about it has
a watery feel. The
buildings look
like shells, octopi,

or fish, and most of them

seem to be made from mother-of-pearl or coral. Naturally, the newly found portal from Sigil has brought many goods to Elshava that were formerly unavailable (or nearly so).

The floating city's home to sea elves, selkies, mermen, and the like, but the inhabitants simply call themselves Sea Folk, making no distinctions among the various races. The PCs can easily find and hire a few sailors to take them to Pelion in one of the many local coracles (also called *roundboats*). These craft, like the city itself, resemble giant nautilus shells. Bloods with any knowledge of sailing might think they'd be difficult to maneuver, but the Sea Folk have no trouble.

The ichthyoid residents of this thalassic city don't pay you much heed as they carry on their business in the shell-paved streets between the coral buildings. The sailors you've hired are silent and aloof, but they handle themselves skillfully as they prepare their strange round boat for the trip. Peering down into the green waters that surround the city, you note that Elshava floats in shallow shoals — the water's probably only 3 feet deep. But the air is cold and full of mist, and you suspect that the sea is much colder.

The trip to Pelion sets each PC back about 50 gp, and the Sea Folk don't explain their actions or give a guided tour — they just herd the cutters onto their small ship and go. The journey is cold, even though there's only a slight breeze, and visibility's poor thanks to a thick green mist. Still, any basher on the ship can see that the water remains very shallow.

The path to the next layer of Arborea winds through the endless shoals of Ossa, but it doesn't take very long. At some point after three hours have elapsed, everyone on board the roundboat — including the Sea Folk — falls into a deep, restful sleep. There's no saving throw against this effect. It's just how the path works.

When the travelers wake up a short while later, they find that the boat has seemingly run aground — in fact, there's no water anywhere in sight. They've reached Pelion.

All around you, a flat plane of fine, white dust stretches to the horizon. The air is still cold, but now it's extremely dry. Some of the dust blows gently through the sky, and at first you mistake it for snow. But it doesn't take you long to realize the truth. The white particles may be as cold as ice, but they're also dry and choking. Fortunately, the air is still, so not much of the stuff gets lifted off the ground.

The Sea Folk sailors don't seem concerned that you've run

aground, though the dust and dryness apparently annoy them. Fact is, it looks like they're preparing the roundboat for another trip. But there's certainly no water anywhere in sight.

The Sea Folk know that they're at the edge of a planar path and can indeed sail back to Ossa, despite the fact that their boat appears to be stuck forever in a dry desert. Before they leave, the sailors tell the PCs that they won't be back to pick them up — the berks're on their own. If the heroes ask, the Sea Folk remark that the necropolis known as Bal-tiref — which lies in the realm of Nephthys — contains a few portals out of Pelion.

THE DESERT ◆ OF AMUN-+HYS ◆

If the PCs found the crude map of Pelion (on page 101) that was hidden in Tenebrous's throne back in Tcian Sumere, they can ascertain pretty quickly how to get about the layer. If they don't have the map, there'll probably be a little wandering involved. Fortunately, no matter what the cutters do, they end up running into a basher named Manhayth. It's just the nature of Pelion (and the nature of Manhayth).

Manhayth is an aasimar who calls himself a beast-hunter. What isn't immediately obvious is that he hunts *were*-beasts. See, Pelion, despite its location on a plane of good, has a problem with werebeasts of all kinds — including evil, bloodthirsty raiders that travel in vicious packs. Indeed, when Manhayth encounters the party, he's wandering through the desert, looking for lycanthrope prey. And he's always checking the ground for tracks, despite the fact that the wind constantly stirs the white dust all about.

The PCs don't spot Manhayth until he's about 30 yards away — that's the farthest the cutters can see in the blowing dust. The aasimar approaches them swiftly and surely, though he says nothing. He wears dark leather clothing and is weighed down with all sorts of gear, including a variety of weapons. When he gets very close, his spear in hand but not poised to strike, he begins to sniff, as though looking for a particular odor. And that's exactly what he's doing — Manhayth believes he can tell a werebeast by its smell, even when it's in human form.

Once he's sure the PCs are what they seem (woe to them if any party members *are* lycanthropes), the aasimar introduces himself and converses with them in a cordial but gruff manner. He can help the heroes considerably, giving them the chant on Pelion, directions to where they want to go, and warnings about various local hazards.

Manhayth also tells the bashers that Pelion was once occupied by a pantheon of mysterious gods who've long since departed or died, leaving behind only ruins. (If any PCs remark that the powers might've been the Egyptian gods, the aasimar chuckles and says, "Good one, berk.") Within the ruins lie secrets, but few have the patience or foreknowledge to search for them.

P E L I O N

Arrival
Point

Amun-Thys,
The Realm Of
Nephythys

Bal-tiref

Heydril's
Kip

0 15 30
Miles

The
Last
Spire

The
Last
Spire

Secret
Panel

Interior

Brass
Plug

0 10 20
Feet

Secret
Door

Chamber of Secrets

Shaft

Giant
Wraithworm

Statue

Guardian of Secrets

Water

If the PCs came to Pelion for something in particular, Manhayth tells them they're best off going to Amun-thys, the realm of the goddess Nephthys. "Old Nephthys" (as he calls her) doesn't twig well to visitors, but a careful body can get the chant on a lot of topics, especially from a cutter named Tyun Amerinvai. If the heroes want to go, the aasimar gives them thorough directions to the realm, adding, "You'll know you're there when you start seeing the crypts." The trip takes about five full days, and Manhayth travels with the party if invited.

NOTE: The greatest challenge of the journey to Amun-thys is probably finding enough food and water. However, if the DM desires, an encounter with a wraithworm (described in the *PLANESCAPE® MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendix II*) or a small group of lycanthrope bandits would be more than appropriate in this dangerous desert of dust.

WITHIN THE REALM

It's hard to find a desertlike realm when it sits in the middle of a desert. But Manhayth was right about the crypts. As the PCs approach Amun-thys, the sand dunes occasionally part to reveal long-buried tombs. Many are ornate and intricate, but the aasimar (if he's present) warns the party not to disturb them. Nothing piques Nephthys off like some berk looting a crypt.

See, Nephthys is the Egyptian goddess of wealth and the guardian of the dead. Truth is, she got a good deal more powerful when Anubis — the former guardian of the dead — walked off and disappeared. Her realm is filled with necropoli and mausoleums, and Nephthys herself dwells in a dun-colored palace, though the PCs have no reason to go there.

Canny bashers notice a bit of natural life in Amun-thys: white lotuses, tumbling lilies, lizards, rats, and snakes. The sky boasts an occasional vulture or two, and the ground at times gives forth an oasis of water. Sure, it's still dry and unwelcoming, but at least it's better than the rest of Pelion.

Bal-tiref is a vast, silent necropolis, one of the many in Amun-thys. Apart from the rats, scavengers, and undead (particularly ghouls and ghosts), the only inhabitants are a few petitioners who work as embalmers and corpse-preparers. These folks live simply amid the treasures of ancient kings displayed in fabulous tombs. They wear long, purple robes with gold embroidery that'd shame most emperors, yet they

live in small shacks outside of Bal-tiref and eat nothing but gruel.

If the PCs take Manhayth's advice and search for Tyun Amerinvai (Pe/♀ human/O-level/Dustmen/CG), they find her working inside the necropolis. She's gaunt, and her large, staring eyes peer out from the elegant purple and silver hood

of her long robe. In exchange for a little garnish, Tyun lanns the heroes to the dark of a few matters:

Several years ago, a mighty being combed the sands of Pelion for lost secrets that'd grant him even greater power. Tyun believes that the blood was said to be undead. He ended up at the site of an ancient tower that's now long gone.

However, recently another villain unearthed an old treasure that had some ties to the tower. The treasure is called the Orb of Kadu-Ra, and it was stolen from a crypt by a thief named Heydril. The berk's a well-known tomb-robber, and the priests of Nephthys have placed a hefty price on his head. Unfortunately, no one knows where Heydril — or the Orb of Kadu-Ra — is now.

If the PCs want to find the thief, they really need to do some digging. They can slip jink to the right folks to get a description of Heydril (dark hair, deep blue eyes, and sunburned, peeling skin), the locations of places he's been, and the dark of sites he might hit next. Staking out wealthy crypts and waiting for the thief to come by might work as well. 'Course, the latter activity is sure to provoke a confrontation with the ghosts common to Bal-tiref, which attack the heroes outright. (There should be at least three undead for each character.)

In any event, if the PCs manage to find Heydril somewhere in the necropolis, their best bet is to trace him back to his case, so they can get at his stashed treasure. He's certainly not going to carry the Orb of Kadu-Ra around with him.

THE THIEF'S HOARD

Heydril calls kip in the skeleton of a gigantic, unknown beast that died in the desert of Pelion centuries ago. Treated hides stretched over the rib cage provide a little shelter from the wind, not to mention a fine place to hide stolen loot. Born and raised on the Outlands, Heydril heard the call of treasure



when he learned about all the wealthy crypts in Pelion. His excellent skills have enabled him to elude the vengeful watchers of the tombs so far, but he's pushing his luck — if he doesn't quit soon, he'll probably be swinging from the leafless tree within six months.

The thief's surrounded his home with small snares hidden in the dust: spring-loaded jaw traps made from the bones of various monsters. Unless a top-shelf PC rogue leads the way and looks for traps, each character approaching the kip has a 40% chance of stepping into a trap and suffering 2d4 points of damage — as well as alerting Heydril.

- ◆ When the PCs approach the skeleton, show the players Illo J (on page 173).

The cutter fights to defend his case as best as he's able. He's no idiot, though, and won't battle to the death. If faced with certain doom, Heydril offers his assailants anything he can to get them to spare his life. For those PCs who'd like to take the berk for all he's worth, Heydril has amassed a treasure hoard consisting of: 11,349 cp; 2,668 sp; 1,560 gp; and 53 objects of art (statuary, vases, urns, crowns, scepters, braziers, combs, jewelry, and so on) worth 5d100 gp each.

As Tyun Amerinvai said, the thief also possesses the stolen Orb of Kadu-Ra, a beautiful golden sphere. But to Heydril, that's all it is. He has no idea of its true origin or nature, nor of how it ended up in the tomb of the sod he snatched it from.

THE ORB OF KADU-RA

The orb is a magical device able to completely record events so they can be relived later. When recording, the orb creates a magical chronicle of all sights, sounds, smells, feelings, thoughts, and emotions experienced by an individual or group. The orb, and presumably others like it, was created by those who lived in Pelion long ago, probably for entertainment purposes.

What events are currently stored in the orb? The experiences of the temporary PCs — the ones the players rolled up between gaming sessions. See, in an adventure in the distant past, those characters explored a place in Pelion called the Last Spire, a tower that housed the Orb of Kadu-Ra. The presence of the heroes activated the orb, which must be sentient to some degree — it decided that the actions of the intruders were likely to be interesting. Thus, it recorded everything that happened to them.

If examined, the Orb of Kadu-Ra definitely radiates strong magic. To activate the orb, all a PC has to do is hold it in his hands and concentrate on unleashing its power. When this happens, the heroes immediately begin to experience the events stored within. The Dungeon Master should tell the players to set aside their current characters and pull out their temporary ones. But he still shouldn't say why, or even reveal that the orb is a recording device — it might influence the heroes' actions.

The temporary PCs' adventure begins in "Living in the Past," below, and continues through "Back to the Future." The whole scenario should take about 20 minutes to play out. During that time, the original PCs are entranced. If this occurs in the presence of Heydril, he uses the opportunity to grab as much of his loot as he can and give the sods the laugh.

NOTE: What's the point of all this? Well, by the time the temporary adventure ends, the original PCs will have learned everything that happened to the heroes in the past. But they'll know the details particularly well — after all, they'll have lived through it themselves. And that chant'll prove useful as the cutters finish the rest of this chapter.

◆ LIVING IN THE PAST ◆

It's important for the Dungeon Master to remember that the temporary PCs are just that — temporary. That means he can be less forgiving when it comes to character injury and demise. Fact is, the events of the past should be particularly harrowing, and many (if not all) of the temporary heroes may well die.

The DM should also make careful notes of everything that happens when the temporary PCs explore the Last Spire, because their actions might have an effect on the future (the original characters' present).

THE LAST SPIRE

The adventure for the temporary characters begins in Pelion, outside a place known to them as the Last Spire. It's a single conical tower of white stone, with little ornamentation. It has a diameter of 80 feet and stands about 100 feet tall. All around are ruins — foundations, really — made from the same white stone and covered in Pelion's fine, chalky dust. Some appear to have been almost unimaginably large in their day, but all are gone now.

You've come to this desolate place in search of knowledge — knowledge of what lies within this mighty tower that has survived the eons with greater tenacity than the structures around it.

Chant is the spire holds great treasures. Indeed, some say it's a vault. Others claim it holds the essence of the gods that once dwelt here. Still more rattle their bone-boxes about forbidden secrets waiting inside, perhaps even clues to the identity of those who built these ruins. Whichever's the case, you've come to learn the truth.

The spire has an obvious doorway, but chant has it that it's impossible to enter the structure.

Though the planewalkers have already ventured through vast broken cities in "Out of the Darkness," the ruins of Pelion are vastly different from those of the prime-material world Ranais. With all of the dust, the extremely scant nature of the remains, and the mere *feel* of the place, the ruins of this layer

seem much more ancient and mysterious. Those on Ranais might have been more frightening, but they were far less imposing.

The adventure begins here because this is the point at which the Orb of Kadu-Ra begins its magical recording. The orb currently sits within the spire itself, and it takes note of everything that happens in and around the structure.

GETTING IN

The doorway into the spire is a square-set arch, open and empty, though nothing but darkness lies beyond, and no manner of light source – magical or otherwise – can penetrate the blackness. Bashers examining the outside perimeter of the spire find another, identical open doorway on the structure's opposite side. It, too, is impenetrably dark. Anything passing into one of the doorways immediately comes out of the other, as if the space between them didn't exist.

The PCs likely turn to magic at some point, hoping to learn the dark of the spire or to figure a way in. But no spells of any kind provide information about the inside of the tower; no divinations betray its secrets. What's more, the heroes can't enter the spire by magical means – *passwall*, *teleport*, *dimension door*, and the like just don't work. Further, the walls of the spire are immune to destructive magic like *disintegrate* or *lightning bolt*. (Naturally, conventional attacks don't hurt the walls, either.)

The Dungeon Master can make the normal rolls for any cutters who look for secret doors. Success indicates that a PC finds what appears to be the outline of a doorway in the stone, though the bottom of the outline is 10 feet above the level of the ground. The spire's walls are slippery with dust, so climbing attempts suffer a penalty of –30%. But if a canny hero reaches the level of the outline (by whatever means), he definitely discerns what seems to be a door – and an inscription above it. The words read:

The secrets found within are not for those above.

The second line of the inscription is hidden behind a small, removable stone plate directly below the first line (but still above the top of the door). Only another successful attempt to find secret doors will reveal the plate. If found, the second line reads:

Nor are they for those below.

The outline doesn't mark a door at all, but a third (much larger) removable stone panel, behind which lies the last line of the inscription. However, the panel is trapped. If opened, it comes loose and a vile greenish gas billows out of the opening. Anyone within 5 feet of the opening must make a successful saving throw versus poison at –2 or suffer 2d6 points of damage – not to mention a fit of coughing and choking. Furthermore, anyone currently at the level of the panel must make a successful Dexterity check at –4 or fall, suffering 1d6



points of damage. (Sods who failed the previous save vs. poison make the check at -6 due to the gas).

Behind the large panel is the third line of the message:

Look upon that which is first to be false.

This portion reveals that the first line of the inscription is not true. In other words, the only way into the spire is through the top (above). 'Course, the PCs might not figure that out if they don't find the second inscription, or if they get caught up in thinking that the first two lines refer to lofty concepts like good and evil. That's the idea here – not everything's a reference to deep meanings. Sometimes a message means exactly what it says.

If a body reaches the top of the Last Spire (by whatever means), he suddenly and without warning finds himself on the inside. To those viewing from the outside, the cutter seems simply to disappear. But before any PCs manage to enter the structure, the party must deal with a potentially dangerous interruption.

SILENT+STRANGERS

While the PCs try to figure out a way into the spire, they're approached by a few of the locals – whom the heroes didn't even know existed.

Suddenly, a man steps into view just a short distance away. Tall and lithe, he's almost invisible amid Pelion's pale dust, with skin like chiseled alabaster, long hair like spun wool, and eyes that're completely white. A chalky tunic hangs from his taut frame, covering a suit of bleached leather, and the sword in his hand is of pale white iron.

- ◆ Show the players Illo K (on page 174).

The stranger's not an albino, but an elf from a people that outsiders call *alabaster elves*. He says nothing, merely glaring at the PCs. Like all members of his race, he's deaf. Only an attack or an attempt at visual communication provokes him to respond. Any offensive move by the heroes invites similar action from the silent newcomer. And he's not alone: Two other alabaster elves hide amid the ruins, arrows knocked in their bows, watching their comrade's back. If the lone elf appears to be in danger, they'll fire.

Hopefully, the PCs try to communicate through sign language or some other visual means (such as drawing in the dust). But no matter what message they try to get across, the elf responds with hand signs that mean: "Go away. This place is forbidden." See, the alabaster elves regard the area as sacred and never come near. Their legends tell of a pantheon of gods that dwelt here before Pelion was filled with white dust. In fact, their tales say, the dust is the remains of the gigantic white palaces that once covered the layer. The Last Spire is the only standing remnant of

those great days and the gods that lived here.

The three elves have no spoken names; instead, they use hand symbols to designate themselves as individuals. They're deadly warriors who live in tiny tribal villages around the ruins of Pelion. (The origin of the alabaster elves is unknown, and the race has completely disappeared by the time of the original player characters in the present.)

If the PCs attempt to enter the Last Spire, the three elves try to stop them, even if it means attacking. Nothing short of magical coercion will convince them to let anyone poke around the spire. Once the PCs enter the tower, they should have every reason to believe that the elves will wait on the outside (with violent intent) for them to emerge.

INSIDE+THE SPIRE

The interior of the spire is much smaller than it seemed to be on the outside. Fact is, from where the PCs appear, the spire looks to be only a single round chamber, 20 feet in diameter and 30 feet tall.

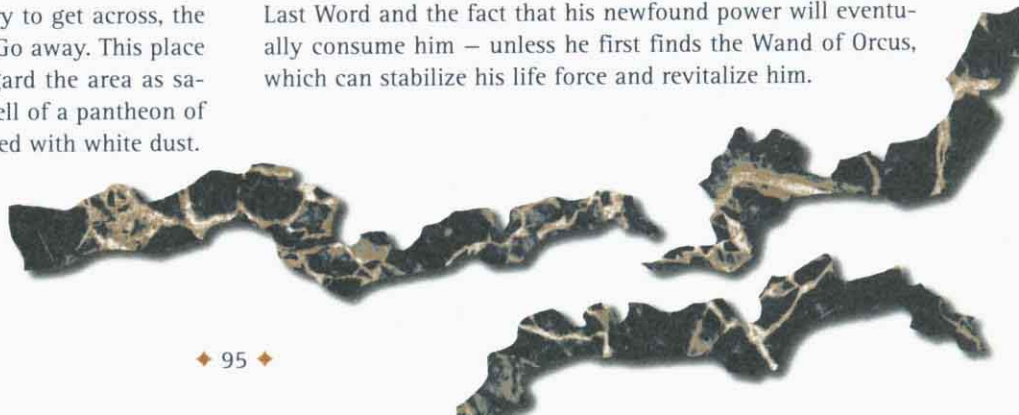
Darkness. Just seconds after reaching the top of the spire, you're thrust into an inky place that you're sure is not at the top of the structure. Oddly, in a way you can't quite explain, your eyes begin to adjust to the utter blackness around you, and you begin to see shapes. Before long, you can see the chamber you're standing in as though it were bathed in a mid-night blue light – although you know it's still completely dark.

At your feet is a large brass plug 4 feet across, with a runic inscription engraved upon its smooth, shiny surface.

Close examination of the plug's inscription reveals the following prophecy, written in an ancient tongue readable only to those with the ancient languages proficiency or a *comprehend languages* spell:

Here in this Bright World shall tread the feet of ineffable Darkness. A great lord of the infinite pit, once brought low, shall find his way here, having pulled himself from death's cold embrace. Beyond, he will find the means for his goal, but the price of vengeance is death again – unless he can find that which was his, now lost.

Wise in the ways of the future, the unknown builders of the Last Spire foretold the coming of Tenebrous. The prophecy refers not only to his return, but also to his discovery of the Last Word and the fact that his newfound power will eventually consume him – unless he first finds the Wand of Orcus, which can stabilize his life force and revitalize him.



The plug is magically sealed. However, a combined Strength of at least 70 (along with tools or poles for leverage) can lift it from the shaft it protects. If a spellslinger first casts *dispel magic* on the plug, a Strength total of 50 is enough to lift it. No other method of removing the plug (such as a *knock* spell or a *chime of opening*) will work.

Once the plug is moved, the PCs see a long shaft dropping down into darkness. There's no indication of how to leave the spire and get back outside. The walls are smooth and have no doors, hidden or otherwise. The shaft is the only way out of the chamber.

DOWN THE SHAFT

The shaft drops straight down for 150 feet, and no stairs or ladder aids the descent – the PCs must come up with their own way down. The passage is smooth, making climbing virtually impossible, and the only thing at the top to secure a rope is the brass plug itself. Luckily, it easily supports the weight of a climber.

At the bottom of the shaft is a large chamber, an underground room with a pool at its center. The pool's filled with a dark, greenish liquid, and it sits directly below the shaft. Fact is, if any PCs look down the shaft, they see nothing but the pool, giving the impression that the liquid is all that lies at the bottom.

That's not true, but the pool is indeed dangerous. A vile essence has collected here from an ancient pestilence alien to this good realm, contaminating the water in the pool. The liquid is now so bone-chilling that the merest touch inflicts 1d4 points of damage, and full immersion causes 2d8 points.

What's worse, the evil residue has spawned a creature. A gigantic crystal ooze (of evil alignment) lives in the pool and attacks anything that enters the chamber – not out of hunger, but spite. It particularly enjoys attacking sods as soon as they emerge from the bottom of the shaft, trying to grab them and drag them down into the foul, green soup.

This deep chamber is roughly circular. The pool lies in the middle of the room, with about 20 feet of space between the outer edge of the pool and the chamber's walls. All around the perimeter of the room, white marble statues stand in regal splendor of an unguessable past. Each statue is of a man or woman, fair of face and long of limb, dressed like nobility. The statues part only where a silver door shines from the wall, set back a few feet into the rock – the only apparent exit.

The greenish water in the pool ripples slightly, as though it slowly seeps in or out through an unseen access. A peery ear hears whispering babble all around, but you can't make out any specific words. Perhaps the ghosts of forgotten gods still haunt this ancient chamber.

The whispers come from the statues themselves. Each holds an impression of the spirits of the beings that once called kip in this place and the ruins above. If a canny basher spends at least three rounds listening to the whispers and then

makes a successful Intelligence check, he picks up enough to determine one thing: These chambers under the ruins are an ancient storehouse of knowledge.

The silver door is magically sealed, as was the brass plug above, but the seal can be overcome in the same manner. However, the door's also locked, its huge key long since lost.

THE GUARDIAN OF SECRETS

When the PCs manage to open the silver door, the really harrowing part of this mini-adventure begins.

As the door opens, an irresistible force flings you into the chamber beyond. You're caught in a maelstrom of wind and energy that must have been created to be a horrific barrier. At the center of the swirling storm, a simple doorway beckons, perched on a 30-foot-tall column of stone. The door glows with the gleam of an activated portal. But coiled like a sinister scourge around the upper portion of the column is a serpent at least 35 feet long, obviously ready to strike at anyone nearing the gate.

The creature is the wraithworm – not a wraithworm, but the wraithworm. The mysterious former residents of Pelion created it to serve as a guardian, and all wraithworms in existence are its offspring. Now, after a slumber of untold centuries, the creature's awake and active.

The PCs are caught in the swirling, sorcerous storm that circles the perimeter of this chamber. Each round, the poor sods're buffeted about for 1d4 points of damage. A character who makes a successful Dexterity check can maneuver a bit in the storm. The sods spin around the room so fast that they make the circuit of the chamber twice per round, but they can make only one maneuvering attempt per round.

If any PC tries to hurl himself out of the still-open silver door and back into the other chamber, he must make his Dex check with a –6 penalty. If the sod lunges for the doorway and fails, he smashes into the wall, suffering 3d6 points of damage, and remains caught in the storm. Even if he's successful in getting through the door, he must make another Dex check at –6 or fly right into the horrid pool; those fortunate enough to avoid that fate still suffer 1d6 points of damage from landing on the hard floor.

The cutters might also try to hurl themselves into the glowing door at the center of the storm. 'Course, that's even more dangerous, as the wraithworm waits for a basher to make such a move so it can strike with its blindingly fast bite. Worse, since the wraithworm's poised and ready and the PC really can't defend himself, the creature strikes with a +2 bonus to hit and the attack ignores all Dexterity and shield bonuses to the victim's Armor Class.

Any sod bitten by the serpent is flung off-course and can't enter the portal (though he can try again next round). Even if the wraithworm misses, the cutter doesn't sail through the door automatically; he must make a successful Dexterity check at –6. Luckily, if he fails the check, he doesn't hit the wall – he



just keeps flying about in the storm. Those making it through the door disappear (since they actually pass through a portal) and wind up in the Chamber of Secrets.

While in the maelstrom, characters who attempt any other activities that normally require die rolls make those rolls with a -6 penalty. This pertains to attacks, saving throws, proficiency checks, and similar actions. Berks who try activities – such as spellcasting – that normally require *no* die rolls must make successful Dexterity checks (with no penalty) to complete their actions.

Dispel magic won't quiet the storm, though spells that calm winds could succeed (though the effects would last only one-fourth as long as they would normally). Spells such as *fly* allow bashers to maneuver in the storm with a +3 bonus to their Dexterity checks. In effect, this reduces the penalty imposed on most actions from -6 to -3. Unfortunately, such magic isn't strong enough to fully negate the winds' powerful effects.

THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS

When the PCs sail through the glowing door into the Chamber of Secrets, they suffer 1d6 points of damage in landing. But they're probably just glad to escape the winds and the wraithworm.

After the horrible ordeal with the swirling storm and the giant serpent, you've finally reached what appears to be a place of safety. A large room sprawls ahead of you, and as you gather yourselves together, you notice strange symbols on the walls. Each symbol forms words in your mind, words that're wholly unfamiliar but somehow painful, causing you to look away before you can fully comprehend them.

The secrets held in this chamber are known as the True Words: words of power so potent that their utterance can destroy mountains, create new life, or slay any being – even a god. Their might is too great for a mortal to possess, and any who try to fully understand one of the words would find his way into the dead-book right quick. If the PCs persist in studying the symbols, the Dungeon Master should increase the pain felt until the berks cease or die. For example, unless they quit examining the runes, the sods might suffer an amount of damage each round equal to half of their remaining hit points (rounded up).

It was here that Tenebrous found (or rather, will find – remember, this is set in the past) the Last Word, which enables him to slay any to whom he speaks it. However, since dying and returning to life, the blood's no longer quite divine enough to wield such might, and the knowledge of the word is devouring him. Only by finding the Wand of Orcus can he regain enough of his former power to survive.

While the PCs get their bearings, they're approached from across the chamber by the room's custodians, Evreth and Tchunim.

Two curious men approach you from the far end of the vast room, where you apparently couldn't see them. One is short and slightly portly, with unkempt brown hair and beard. The other, who seems a bit older, is tall, thin, balding, and clean-shaven. Both wear simple, elegant clothing, though the shorter man's garments appear slightly rumpled.

"Hello," the round-faced basher says, almost making the greeting a question. "What are you doing here?"

The tall, slim man says nothing, but sneers almost imperceptibly.

Long ago, before the gods vanished from Pelion, they left two mortals in charge of maintaining this chamber, which contained some of their greatest secrets. The deities granted these two proxies – Evreth and Tchunim – a fair amount of power and virtual immortality.

Tchunim, the shorter of the pair, comes across as a kind, gentle man. Evreth, however, is smug, sarcastic, condescending, and haughty. The two men aren't guardians, and they don't react with hostility or treat the PCs as intruders. If the bashers've made it this far, there's no sense in that.

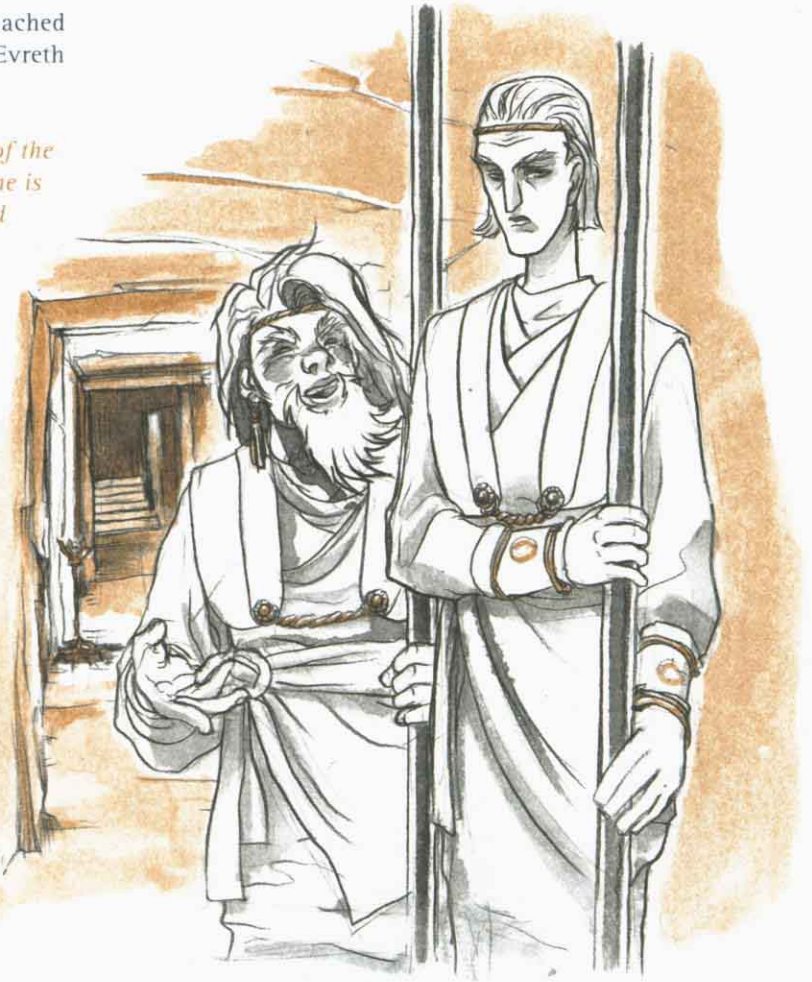
"My name is Tchunim," says the shorter man. "This is what we call the Chamber of Secrets. Each of the symbols you see represents one of the True Words. These words can –"

"Come now, my dear," the taller man interrupts. "I'm sure that brave and powerful heroes such as these wouldn't have just stumbled in here without knowing where they were." The condescension in his voice is so thick you can practically feel it like a barbed whip.

If asked, Tchunim continues with his explanation of the power behind the True Words, though he doesn't know the words' origins. Each time the PCs ask a question, Evreth smiles with superiority, but he does add that the words predate even the gods themselves – though he states it in such a way as to imply that he has contempt even for the powers. 'Course, if asked directly how he feels about the gods, Evreth feigns modesty, though his sarcasm often comes through.

Tchunim and Evreth seem to tolerate each other, but only barely. They never openly argue, however, and if asked, they share the following information:

- ◆ The power of the True Words is such that they quickly consume any mortal who tries to learn them.



- ◆ The gods that made their home in Pelion are either dead or departed for other planes. It happened a very long time ago, and the ruins above were once their great cities.
- ◆ The snakelike creature is the wraithworm, a monster created by the former inhabitants of the spire.
- ◆ The pool of water at the bottom of the shaft has become corrupted by the activities of evil people above on this good plane. (The proxies don't refer to Orcus or Tenebrous; they're speaking of a completely different problem.)
- ◆ The Last Spire, like the rest of the ruins, is beginning to fall victim to the ravages of time. People are already forgetting that it stands here, and soon it will be gone from the land and from memory.
- ◆ The only exit from the spire lies within this chamber: a secret door on the far wall that acts as an always-open portal. Anyone who steps into it emerges from one of the darkened doorways on the outside of the tower.

BACK +@+ THE FUTURE

Once the PCs have learned all they can from the proxies, there's nothing left for them to do but leave the spire. As canny bashers might've feared, the alabaster elves are waiting in force when the heroes exit. This time, however, not three but 20 warriors wait to slay the characters for the unforgivable sin of entering the Last Spire. (This occurs even if the PCs killed all three of the elves that approached earlier – it didn't take long for the rest of the tribe to learn of the deaths.)

The berks can try to talk their way out, but it does no good. Their only hope for survival is to give the place the laugh. But, to be frank, it makes for a better story if they all die. After all, they're just temporary characters. More importantly, their deaths means that when the original PCs find the Orb of Kadu-Ra, the information it imparts to them is truly unique. The temporary PCs never lived to tell anyone what they found within the Last Spire, and they became nothing more than a footnote to the dwindling mystique of the place, which (as Evreth and Tchunim predicted) eventually falls apart.

At this point in the adventure, the Dungeon Master should shift back to the present, to the moment that the original heroes activated the Orb of Kadu-Ra. The DM should now explain to the PCs that what just happened to them – the entire scenario with the Last Spire – wasn't real. The cutters experienced it vicariously, not as if it were a dream or a story, but more as if they briefly lived out other folks' lives. Naturally, the PCs have no idea of when those events actually occurred.

The game now resumes normally, with the original characters. The Orb of Kadu-Ra has no other recordings to share, and it may or may not function again. The device decides for itself when to create its magical chronicles, so the DM can choose when and if it does so.

THE SPIRE ◆ IN +HE PRESENT+ ◆

After learning of the Last Spire, the PCs might try to find it and explore it for themselves. But some cutters might decide there's no need, figuring they already got all they needed to know from the orb. That may be true. However, if the plane-walkers don't yet know who's behind all the trouble, who came to Pelion to learn the True Words (or maybe just one, but which?), or who the prophecy on the brass plug refers to, they might wish to explore the spire in the present. And, indeed, there is more to tumble to within the structure: Tenebrous has paid a destructive visit to the proxies in the Chamber of Secrets.

'Course, finding the spire presents a problem. It's long since collapsed and its rubble eroded (along with that of the other ruins nearby). There's nothing at the site to even mark that it ever existed – time destroys everything, eventually. But because they experienced the actions of the temporary

characters, the PCs possess an innate, almost spiritual feel for direction regarding the Last Spire. In a sense, they've been there before. Finding the right spot takes some wandering, to be sure, but the cutters'll somehow know in their hearts when they're on the right track.

NOTE: If the temporary PCs did something lasting while they were in the spire, such as carving their names in a wall, that evidence might still remain for the original PCs to find. That kind of connection will help to make the past scenario seem all the more real to the present-day heroes, who'll see something in the spire and think, "I did that." On the other hand, the DM can undo any changes that he doesn't want to be lasting – the spire's a very magical place.

This applies to all descriptions below. The details of what's currently found in the spire are subject to change, depending on what the temporary PCs did.

GETTING IN

The PCs enter the spire exactly the same way the temporary characters did, only now there's no structure to climb. If a body somehow reaches the spot where the top of the spire was – a hundred feet up in the air – he vanishes and reappears in the circular room with the brass plug. The plug, however, no longer blocks the shaft. It's been pulled out and tossed to one side. Canny heroes will notice that the plug is *not* where the temporary PCs had left it (the DM might require a berk to make an Intelligence check before tumbling to this fact). Someone else has used the shaft.

DOWN +HE SHAFT+

The room at the bottom of the long shaft still contains the pool of foul water, but the crystal ooze has passed on. If the temporary PCs put the thing in the dead-book, it's nowhere to be found. Otherwise, bits and pieces of the slimy creature are scattered all about, dried and hardened.

A few of the statues lie broken, and the silver door hangs open. (No Intelligence check is needed to realize that the temporary heroes didn't leave things that way.) The sounds of the swirling storm can be heard from within the next chamber. Unless they somehow secure themselves, characters that step within 3 feet of the doorway are automatically sucked into the maelstrom.

THE GUARDIAN @F SECRETS

If the temporary PCs killed the wraithworm, there's no sign of the creature now. Otherwise, Tenebrous slew it when he passed through this room, leaving its body still coiled around the rock column and its head bobbing in the winds. But even though the guardian's dead, the storm still rages, so the PCs must make the same Dexterity checks in order to hurl themselves through the portal.

THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS

The walls of this room, once covered with symbols that stood for mighty words of power, are now blackened, scarred, and destroyed. None of the symbols remain. Selfish in the extreme, Tenebrous didn't want anyone else to learn the secrets he found here.

Only Tchunim occupies the chamber now (assuming that the temporary PCs didn't kill him). He doesn't approach the bashers, but remains on the other side of the chamber, not even noticing their appearance. It's not just time that has changed the poor sod. When Tenebrous came through, he slew Evreth, probably for his smugness. Now, Tchunim's companion is gone, his purpose (watching over the secrets) is gone – Tenebrous took everything from him. The proxy has fallen into a deep depression.

Fact is, Tchunim's barely willing to carry on a conversation with the PCs. He does, however, offer a description of the intruder that killed Evreth and destroyed the symbols. It happened a few years ago, but Tchunim has no idea exactly how long it's been.

"The being that entered our Chamber of Secrets was like nothing I'd seen before. It was gaunt and angular, almost shadowy and ethereal. Eyes, dark and piercing, stared out at us, but the creature said nothing. It seemed to know exactly what it wanted as it glanced around the room and finally found the symbol it sought. In no time at all, it mastered the word – and that alone speaks volumes about the being's nature. I could tell from its changed expression that it had learned the secret. Then it turned upon Evreth . . . poor Evreth . . ."

As Tchunim begins to fall back into painful reverie, a canny basher might think to ask him *which* word the invader learned.

"The . . . the most horrible of all – the word that it spoke to Evreth, almost as if to test it, to see if it really worked. The creature learned the Last Word."

Tchunim says little else. He's distraught at the idea of living forever, all alone, in the Chamber of Secrets. But the PCs can't convince him to do anything else – a faithful servant of the gods certainly wouldn't abandon his post, no matter what the reason. The bashers can't do much more, and before long, they no doubt decide to leave through the secret portal. This is a sad ending to their Pelion adventure, but one that reminds the PCs that they're dealing with a truly evil foe, and evil acts cause folks pain.

◆ WITHOUT THE ORB ◆

What if the PCs never found Heydril or the stolen Orb of Kadu-Ra, or just never figured out what to do with it? Obviously, they won't get to experience the events recorded by the

orb, so they'll never learn of the existence of the Last Spire, much less how to get inside or what might be found there.

If this occurs, a generous Dungeon Master might give the berks another chance to use the orb, or even provide them with some alternate method of finding the spot where the Last Spire stood. 'Course, without having used the orb, they won't know the secret to gaining entrance, and even if they *do* get inside, they won't have much chance of figuring out what's going on. Sure, they could still hear Tchunim's sad tale, but it won't have quite the same resonance to them.

◆ AN ENDING ◆

Once the PCs leave the Chamber of Secrets, they appear back at the former site of the Last Spire. From there, their best bet is to journey back to the necropolis of Bal-tiref, where any leatherhead can point them to a portal to Sigil. (Smart cutters might've already asked the locals about it the first time they were there.)

The portal is – surprise, surprise – the entrance to a crypt. It's easily found, since a previous planewalker scratched out the name on the plaque above the tomb's doorway and instead wrote, "Cage or crypt, it's home." The key is a dust reed, commonly found in Amun-thys (though usually barely alive and extremely brittle). The one-way portal deposits travelers inside the Mortuary, the headquarters of the Dustmen.

If desired, the Dungeon Master can play off the events that occurred to the temporary characters in future adventures. For example, an NPC the heroes interact with could be a descendant of one of the temporary bashers. The DM could even rule that Cardule or Quah-Namog – two NPCs who appear in the next chapter of "Out of the Darkness" – is one of the eventual progeny of the temporary characters. If so, the DM should be sure to remark on the strange familiarity of a mannerism or facial feature in the NPC descendant, or perhaps even give the NPC a unique item that once belonged to the ancient character.

For this to work, the PC progenitor must have survived the events of the Last Spire so he could go on to have children. He could have had them before the recorded adventure took place, but in that case there'd be no unique item to cement the connection – with the PC dead, he couldn't have passed the object on to his children.

Here's another variation: One of the original PCs can eventually discover that one of the temporary heroes is an ancestor of his. But this might mean that the present-day bashers learn the time frame of the recorded adventure, and it's probably best for that always to remain vague.

As a less dramatic (but still entertaining) link to the past, the DM can throw in occasional references to something that the temporary characters did, or even drop one of their names into some other event in the far distant past. Again, the connection should be vague, but the specifics don't matter anyway – it's the reference itself that's fun.

The PALACE of
Nephthys



BAL-Tiref
Necropolis City

- Within the Realm
of Nephthys

Beware
the
Were-beasts



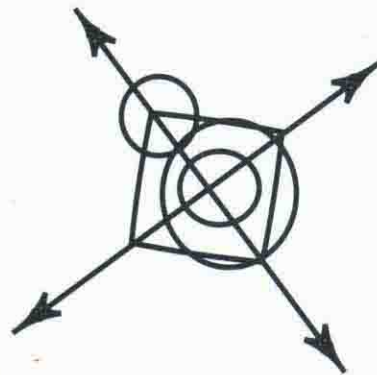
Mysterious
Ruins

Follow
the GRAND
AVENUE

Turn at the
crumbling statue

The Last
Spire

- Seek the Chamber of Secrets
- GUARDED
- Who ARE the Keepers?
- Who ARE the Builders?



Graveyard

of
Giant &
Titanic

INTERLUDE III

Tenebrous seethed with anger.

After journeying across many planes, he had finally returned to his hidden fortress deep in the Bottom of the Multiverse, surrounded by the pure hunger of the Negative Energy Plane. He leaned back into his self-made throne, his shadowy, undead body rustling into the bones and skulls of the terrible seat with a sound that'd drive a mortal man barmy. Yet Tenebrous gained no comfort from the place. In fact, it disturbed him with an unquietness of spirit that he hadn't felt since he rose from his Astral grave. The very walls of Tcian Sumere angered him.

There was a time in the dim past when Tenebrous — using a different name — kept certain servants around for the express purpose of having someone to take his anger out on. If only he'd known then how it would feel to be unable to afford such luxuries in slaves — or even in time.

These days, Tenebrous had no great quantity of either.

Certain forces in the multiverse had obviously learned of his existence, and possibly even his plans. He'd known, of course, that this would

happen eventually, but it still irritated him. In a way, he'd enjoyed his activities up to this point — watching from the shadows, secretly picking up the chant, and slaying whomever got in his way. There was much to be said for subtlety and subterfuge, tactics he'd rarely employed before his death.

But his anger prevented him from focusing on such things at the moment. (In times past, his wrath was something to be feared; entire layers of planes quaked in his outrage. His displeasure usually resulted in death, destruction, and pain. And it would yet again.) Someone had violated Tcian Sumere — his very home. Someone had gone to the Vault on Oerth, the object of hated Kiaransalee's attention, and found the other drow worm who'd dared to touch the Wand of Orcus. Now, even now, the meddlers almost certainly sped to Pandemonium.

Agathion, the fourth layer of the Howling Plane. The answer to the question he'd asked again and again for these last many years. The location of the Wand of Orcus! Yes, it'd take some time to determine the wand's exact position in the caves, but by the lowest layer of the Abyss, he wouldn't let it take so long that someone else might reach it first!

Red anger like bloody bile clouded his mind, but Tenebrous pushed it back, built a dam to hold the flood of fury that threatened to consume him. He knew that if he had any weakness at all, if there was ever a reason he'd failed in the past, it was because of his tendency to be swept away in crimson rage — the same wave that washed over him now. But the task ahead was too important to let his tanar'ric fury engulf him. (Was it the modron in him now, some tenacious logical spark, that made it possible to calm his fiery passions? And if so, was that a blessing or a curse? Tenebrous did not know.) He must locate the wand.

His wand.

He had to stand up from the throne. His outrage wouldn't let him sit still. There were forces attempting to *keep him from his wand! When he was so close! Damn them all! He would crush them and rend their flesh from their —*

He stopped. Must stay calm, he thought. He knew he'd never find the wand if he didn't stay calm.

Tenebrous had learned from his enemies over the last few years — a trait he'd never had before. Perhaps he could learn something from the way they acted. He'd spent much time stealing the secrets they possessed, but perhaps he

WISDØM IS
LEARNING FRØM
ØNE'S MIS+AKES.
GREATER WISDØM IS
LEARNING
FRØM +HE MIS+AKES
ØF Ø+HERS.

— TENEBRØUS

should steal some of their methods as well.

Sweet Tomeri, goddess of wisdom and love — even as he destroyed her home and slew her servants and lovers, she did not get angry. Her cool, calm demeanor would've been the death of him had he not wielded the power of the Last Word. Her demise was certainly . . . pleasurable, but all the more because Tomeri, of all the deities he'd confronted, offered the greatest challenge. And the only reason for it, Tenebrous believed, was that she knew how to keep her wits about her.

Immortality must breed ineffectuality, he thought, or so many powers would not be overcome with anger and disbelief when actually opposed. Eons of comfort and safety led to an inability to cope with challenge and danger. Tomeri, however, was — or, rather, had been — different. He could be different too.

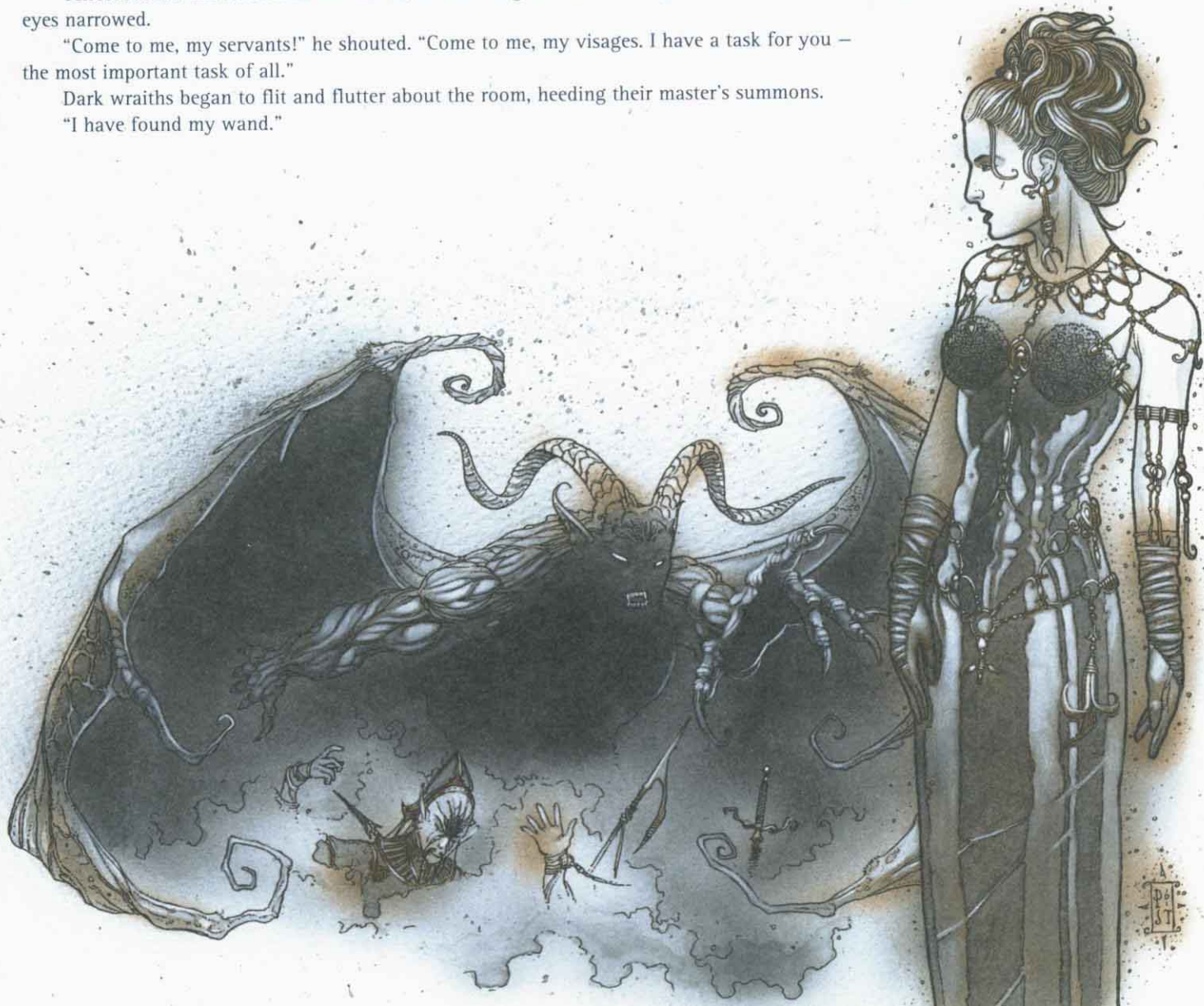
Yes. He would find the wand. He would send the faithful visages to retrieve it. They could slay anything that got in their way — he was sure of that. And now that he knew which plane and layer to look upon, if he just concentrated, perhaps he could *sense* the wand. After all, his connection to it had been so great for so long. Even when he lived as a simple Abyssal lord, uncounted centuries past, he possessed the wand — why, he'd fashioned it himself through painstaking work and vast amounts of energy. So if he could just remain calm . . . focus his anger like a tool . . . reach out across the planes . . . perhaps he could . . . perhaps . . .

Tenebrous sat back down in his throne, a razor-edged smile coming to his dark mouth. His deadly eyes narrowed.

"Come to me, my servants!" he shouted. "Come to me, my visages. I have a task for you — the most important task of all."

Dark wraiths began to flit and flutter about the room, heeding their master's summons.

"I have found my wand."



CHAPTER VIII: DEEPEST PANDEMONIUM

"All this sod-cursed hiding really pikes me off," Pirreg said through his teeth, walking over to the window. He could feel the wagon moving through

the darkness, but there was nothing outside the window to give him any point of reference. The walls of the wagon muffled the wailing of the wind just enough to enable them to talk.

"Well, why don't we just leave the whole plane?" Antha swished her tail nervously and spoke very fast. "We could go somewhere they'd never think of looking, like the plane of Smoke or something. Maybe even the Cage."

"What — have the winds gotten to you?" Pirreg lashed out. "None of those places would work. They'd find us. They'd look in those places first. No, we've got to stay right here. They'd never expect that."

Antha looked at her partner — his tousled hair, his unkempt clothing, his wild eyes. She realized that he was no longer the man with whom she'd left Fortitude. So

much had happened to them since then. Pandemonium had so many horrors to torture a body's soul. She knew that the winds had driven one of them barmy, but it wasn't her. No, Antha wouldn't let it happen to her.

◆ GETTING STARTED ◆

By this point in the adventure, the player characters should've decided to travel to Agathion, the fourth layer of Pandemonium, and find the Wand of Orcus before Tenebrous does. Unfortunately, Agathion's sodding difficult to reach, even if a body knows exactly where he's going. The best plan is to head first to the Outlander gate-town of Bedlam, or even to Pandesmos, the first layer of Pandemonium, which most berks say is the most hospitable — or, to be more accurate, the least inhospitable — layer of the plane.

From Sigil, the PCs can reach either place fairly easily, particularly if any of the cutters belong to the Bleak Cabal. See, the Bleakers have their own portals to both Bedlam and their citadel, the Madhouse (see below). However, if the heroes can't get help from the Bleakers, they can still find a portal to Pandesmos in a dark little alleyway in the Hive; the key is a scream of sincere fear.

PANDEMONIUM

Pandemonium is a place of solid rock with wind-blown tunnels snaking through it. No two passageways seem to be exactly the same size; they range from claustrophobic crawlways to huge tunnels that're miles across. The gravity within the tunnels is usually directed toward the nearest side, so a body can stand on any surface as easily as any other. 'Course, it can be a bit disorienting, what with party members all walking along different surfaces of the same tunnel, and it makes combat a real nightmare.

Sages believe that the tunnels're formed by the constantly blowing — and totally unpredictable — winds. Sometimes they're breezes that do little more than muss a planewalker's hair, and sometimes they're more like hurricanes that bounce a berk around a tunnel like a rag doll. No matter what, though, the winds bring

WIND?
WHAT+ WIND?
— A BARMY
WHO'S BEEN ON
PANDEMONIUM
FAR +00 LONG

with them madness, either from the deafening roar or from the haunting wails of other sods lost forever in the caverns. Fact is, the word “barmy” originated here. It’s no wonder that Pandemonium earned the nickname the Howling Plane.

What’s more, the tunnels are utterly without natural light. Berks need to bring their own, keeping in mind that the winds tend to blow out torches and poorly shielded lanterns in the blink of an eye. Magical sources of light last longer, but they also draw the attention of whatever else might be wandering through the dark tunnels. And player characters who decide to skip light altogether and rely solely on infravision won’t have an easy time of it – the cold stone walls of the passages don’t radiate enough heat to let a PC make out the terrain too well.

It’s no surprise, then, that Pandemonium’s full of folks who’re already insane or well on their way. Still, the plane does have its safehouses – small communities where those who’ve lost their minds and those who want to avoid that fate gather to stave off wind, darkness, and madness for a short while. In these places, the PCs can pick up the chant just like they would anywhere else: by wigwagging with the locals. They just have to get used to talking to barmies. If they can do that, they can learn about Agathion in at least three spots:

- ◆ **THE MADHOUSE.** This is one of the friendlier burgs on all of Pandemonium. It’s a citadel in Pandemos run by the Bleak Cabal – those leatherheads actually seem to *like* the mind-bending plane. Because the Madhouse is the most welcoming of the three sites, it’s probably the PCs’ best bet for getting the real chant and hiring a somewhat trustworthy guide.
- ◆ **BEDLAM.** Bedlam, the gate-town to Pandemonium, has more of an evil taint. See, whereas the Madhouse is a shelter *against* the horrors of the plane, Bedlam is a bastion *representing* its twisted madness. The town has fewer berks willing to help a body out or even listen to his questions.
- ◆ **WINDGLUM.** This burg in Phlegethon (the third layer) has a real attitude. The locals don’t like outsiders, and they wear their status as exiles and outcasts like a badge. A planewalker can find beings here from just about every race in the multiverse, sods who piked off the wrong blood and found themselves on Pandemonium as a result. Most folks refer to the locals as “the Banished.”

Although the Madhouse is the most likely to prove helpful, all three towns have their share of madmen, addle-coves, and well-lanned spivs. ‘Course, canny PCs might consult graybeards in Sigil (or other cities) to learn about Agathion before ever setting foot on the Howling Plane, but they’ll just tell the bashers to ask around on Pandemonium anyway – no one off-plane seems to know the first thing about the mysterious layer.

Once the heroes talk to the right chant-mongers, pay the right garnish, and deal with the right barmies in just the right way, they tumble to the name of the place that’s said to have the dark they need: the Cynosure.

NOTE: For more information on Pandemonium, refer to the *Planes of Chaos* boxed set (2603).

◆ GUESTS OF THE CYNOSURE ◆

Part circus, part fortress, and part caravan, the Cynosure is a nomadic group of bashers who travel about the first layer of Pandemonium in huge wagons. Folks flock to the Cynosure for entertainment, for the bloods put on the best and wildest shows that most anyone’s ever seen. What’s more, outcasts and fugitives come to the Cynosure to hide – the caravan’s main fortress is a sanctuary like no other.

What’s a traveling show like the Cynosure doing on the Howling Plane? Nowhere else would such a diverse group work together for a goal like entertainment, and no one but the barmies of Pandemonium would accept such a thing. That’s not to say that all the members of the Cynosure are insane, but, truth is, no one lives on the plane for any length of time and hangs onto his outlook and ideals. Some berks are quick to point out that Pandemonium – one of the loneliest planes – doesn’t have much of an audience. What they don’t realize is that folks come from all over the multiverse to see the Cynosure, but that’s still

not the point. See, the show's the thing. It's not the audience or the jink — it's the *show*. (Don't get it? Stand out in the winds for a while longer. Understanding'll come eventually.)

The Cynosure didn't just spring up overnight. Long ago, a prime-material spellslinger named Uynchar deBebos — also known as the Wandering Wizard — created a floating castle with which to roam his world. However, as powerful as he was, Uynchar had even more powerful enemies. They banished him and his castle to Pandemonium and figured that was the end of that. Typical clueless primes — it was just the beginning.

Uynchar started taking in other folks on the plane who were outcasts like himself. Within the castle walls, protected against the wind, they sang songs and performed tricks for amusement and comfort. Word spread, and the castle began to draw cutters who were interested in seeing "the show." Uynchar grew to like being the center of attention, and the Cynosure was born.

'Course, the poor sod went a little barmy toward the end of his life, and he proclaimed that the Cynosure should never stop moving — that no single location was worthy of hosting the show permanently. And, except when necessary (such as to let the draft animals feed and rest), Uynchar's wish is still carried out today. Fact is, the constant movement is another benefit to those using the Cynosure to hide from the outside world.

The current members of the Cynosure regard the long-dead Uynchar as a hero and genius. Today, the traveling company consists of 300 humans, tieflings, half-elves, githzerai, gnolls, bugbears, elves, halflings, and bariaur. A hill giant and a pair of gremlins are also part of the group. Alignment and race aren't that important here; rather, a loyalty and feeling of community ties the Cynosure together amid the chaos of the plane. Each member has a specific role (performer, stagehand, guard, laborer, and so on), though most carry out many different duties, and almost everyone can drive a wagon.

THE WAGONS

The 58 wagons that make up the caravan range wildly in size, but all are garishly painted and decorated, making the Cynosure a sight to behold even before a body gets in to see the show. Only the main part of the fortress-theater floats; all of the other wagons roll through the tunnels normally. Many of the wagons' owners place whistles and bells on their transports so the winds of Pandemonium do more than just howl — they create an oddly pleasing cacophony of sound. All wagons sport hooded lanterns to provide illumination, and colored screens over many of the light sources produce an even more ostentatious visual effect. Thus, with the music and

sound coming from the wagons (and the theater itself) and the flamboyant appearance of the caravan, the Cynosure is unmistakable, even at a great distance.

THE MAIN FORTRESS-THEATER. An amazing sight to behold, this structure (or vehicle, or whatever a body calls it) is actually a huge magical construct with a number of attached wagons. The main portion of the fortress-theater is a floating stone castle that glides 4 to 5 feet over the surface of the ground, moving as dictated by the Cynosure. The interior is primarily a theater where many hundreds of spectators can watch the show. The castle's tough, too — the upper portion is well-fortified with parapets and ramparts on its crenelated walls, and turrets from which defenders can repel attackers.

Ropes, chains, and wooden walkways attach large wagons and carts to the main building. The best performers (and the castle defenders) live in these wagons. But they're also used for guest quarters, storage areas, workshops, and other applications as needed, since the auditorium takes up so much space within the main structure.

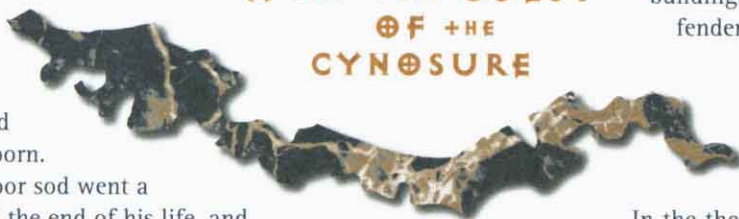
In the theater, the Cynosure performs garish extravaganzas with acrobatics, magic, illusions, animal acts, dancing, singing, and all manner of other diversions. The spectacles often feature many acts performing at the same time, creating an overwhelming riot of entertainment. Between the castle's thick stone walls and the din of the show, a body quickly forgets the howling winds outside.

THE WAGON-KIPS. These carts, most of which are the size of normal wagons, are pulled by mules, oxen, or (rarely) horses. Two or three performers, or one performer and his family, live in each wagon. (The Cynosure is a close affair, and a performer's family members are often performers themselves.) Because the caravan rolls onward so much of the time, one person must always remain with each wagon to drive the animals.

THE SUPPLY WAGONS. Naturally, it's sodding difficult to supply an operation like the Cynosure. These folks have the dark of Pandemonium, though, and they know where to find food and water for the caravan's people and animals. If they know they won't be able to find something along the way, they bring it with them in huge wagons and replenish the stock whenever they pass by or through settlements like the Madhouse. Each supply wagon is 15 to 30 feet long and is pulled by large teams of strong animals, such as oxen, bison, or mules.

THE BATTLE WAGONS. These extremely fast vehicles are tiny wagons — more like armored chariots, really — pulled by the best horses, or even howlers or nightmares. If the Cynosure comes under attack, the battle wagons charge out of the caravan formation and drive into the ranks of the enemy with

I LIKE PRETTY LIGHTS.
SHOW MAKE ME HAPPY,
EVEN IN SAD PLACE.
— DRUG,
A HALF-OGRE GUEST
OF THE
CYNOSURE



wild abandon, hoping to sow confusion and break the attackers' morale as well as inflict heavy damage.

TOP BILLING

The leader of the Cynosure and star of the show is a wizard-acrobat named Ophiliana (Pl/♀ tiefling/III11,T10/Bleak Cabal/CN). A manic-depressive sod, she's either flamboyantly sanguine or near-catatonically depressed. Her mood swings are sudden, but they don't occur one right after another; Ophiliana doesn't bounce back and forth between moods like a barmy.

If a body wants sanctuary within the Cynosure, he's got to approach Ophiliana and convince her of his need for long-term shelter (longer than someone sitting through a few shows, that is). The berk should also be ready to pay a fair garnish to help cover the caravan's general upkeep. Whether she's up or down, however, Ophiliana's a compassionate soul, more likely to accept a suppliant than turn him away.

As a performer, her favorite stunt is creating dazzling magical illusions while balancing in or hanging from death-defying positions. Anyone can see her just by buying a ticket to the show. Getting to

talk to Ophiliana for other reasons depends on her current mood. However, the tiefling's generally social and enjoys the company of others. She particularly craves attention and flattery and is easily swayed by a cutter skilled at rattling his bone-box.

A smart berk can guess at her attitude about the Cynosure: She doesn't tolerate anything that stands in the way of the performance, whether that means the show in general or her own place as the star. Truth is, she mercilessly crushes anyone who hinders the show.

Confusingly, the other members of the Cynosure also refer to their leader as "the Cynosure," in part because the tiefling embodies the show like no one else.

BOARDING

Not too long after the PCs reach Pandemonium, they find the Cynosure traveling through one of the cavernous passages that wind through Pandesmos. But the caravan doesn't travel in single file. The wagons occupy different positions in the roundish tunnel, so carts go almost all the way around the circumference of the passage.



It's easy to catch up with the Cynosure. Assuming that the heroes don't look or act like raiders, the folks on the wagons greet the PCs warmly and tell them to pass through the carts until they reach the fortress-theater, which is close to the center of the caravan. Once there, they must pay admission in order to get inside and see the show. Prices depend on whether they want to sit in the bleeder seats (2 sp each), the barmy's balcony (1 gp each), the crown seats (5 gp each), or the grand circle (10 gp each).

THE SHOW

Like a grand circus, the show runs continuously in the theater. Several acts perform at the same time, competing for the audience's attention. The spectacle never begins or ends, so the PCs don't need to worry about when to take their seats. There's always something to see.

One of the central figures in the show is Lorimmos, a hill giant. At different times during a performance, he: juggles huge boulders; holds up a platform on which a number of half-lings execute feats of acrobatics; and suspends a singer hanging from a rope held in the giant's teeth. Meanwhile, tumblers with flaming torches swing about on trapezes while musicians play and clowns cavort. Trained dogs, birds, bears, and owl-bears as well as *charmed* leucrotta, perytons, and other beasts do tricks. A seemingly endless cascade of dancers, singers, actors, comedians, acrobats, and a myriad of other entertainers display their talents for the audience's pleasure.

♦ Show the players Illo M (on page 175).

The whole thing is such a welcome change and blessed respite from the screaming winds of Pandemonium that even those driven to the brink of madness are soothed and refreshed. 'Course, what with the Howling Plane being tainted by evil, only a true addle-cove'd let his guard down completely. Though most of the members of the Cynosure are fairly honest, a few knights of the post and cony-catchers lurk among them – and certainly among the audience. Almost without fail, a pickpocket tries to bob one of the PCs, or a cross-trader tries to run a peel.

One common trick used against sods obviously new to the Cynosure involves a con man selling programs to the show. Thing is, there is no program. It's just gibberish on a piece of paper, but most folks don't realize they've been had until the berk's long gone.

The Cynosure posts a few guards (many of them bug-bears or gnolls) here and there to deter such peels, but not all of *them* are beyond bobbing rubes, either. Still, the Dungeon Master should remember that such activity is the exception, not the rule. Overall, in the wind-racked tunnels, it's a lot safer inside the wagons than out.

During the show, the PCs can ask around about anything they'd like – the entertainment is such a loud, boisterous spectacle that the audience members aren't restricted from talking. The noise is also a good cover for sensitive conversa-

tions. The show puts folks at ease, too, so most don't mind giving a fellow show-goer a little chant or advice (as long as the berk doesn't ask too many questions – that's just irritating). Canny PCs will take this opportunity to learn all they can about the Cynosure.

HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT+

The chant-mongers in the Madhouse (or Bedlam or Windglum) were right: The Cynosure is the best place on the whole plane to learn about Agathion. But that doesn't mean it's easy. Many a berk hides out in the caravan, taking sanctuary among the performers, and they all have secrets. Only a few, however, know anything about Pandemonium's deepest and darkest layer.

Two such sources are Pirreg, a human fighter, and Antha, a bariaur priestess. Once part of a group of lawful good bloods from Fortitude, they came to Pandemonium to find the legendary deva known only as Blind Righteous, who was said to be imprisoned somewhere in Agathion. Unfortunately, the entire group – except for Pirreg and Antha – either died or went stark raving mad. The two survivors raised the ire of a marilith named Iuthaccab while escaping from a secret tanar'ri acropolis hidden in Phlegethon. (Apparently, the tanar'ri wanted to locate something in Agathion as well, but the two planewalkers never discovered what it was.)

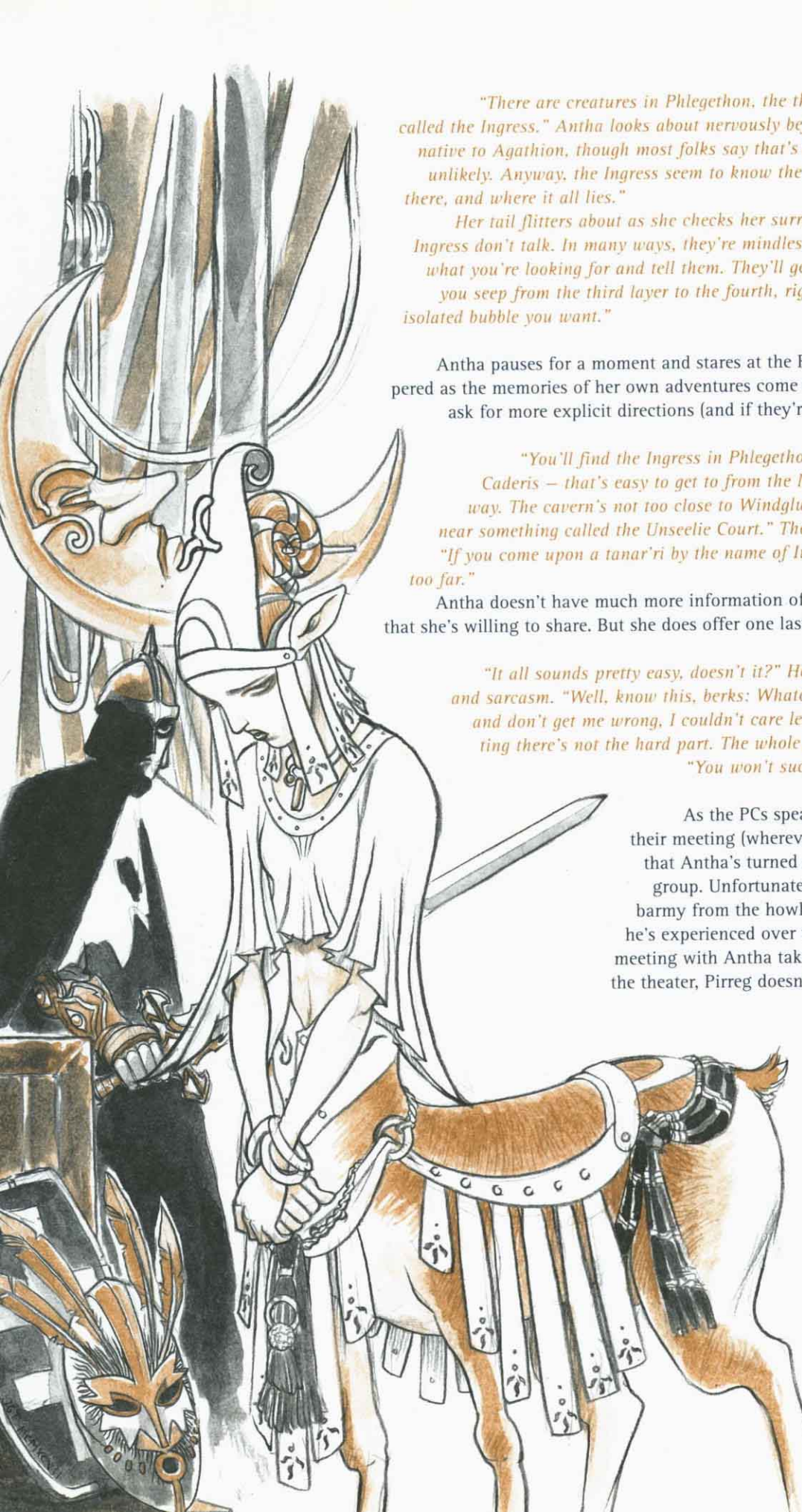
Pirreg now plans to stay in the sanctuary of the Cynosure for the indefinite future. Truth to tell, he's become a bit touched in the head, though he's not fully insane. The sod refuses to talk to the PCs, answer their questions, or help them in any way.

Antha, however, is desperate to escape from Pandemonium and return to Fortitude. All she wants is a quick way off the plane, whether it's a spell, a magical item, or enough jink to buy one (at least 5,000 gp). Directions to the nearest portal aren't good enough – she wants something concrete. Besides, the bariaur doesn't want to go out into the howling winds again if she can help it.

If the PCs promise to help her, Antha slips out when Pirreg's not looking and meets with them in secret to discuss the terms. If they don't suggest a meeting place, she does – an area underneath the Cynosure's stage, where the trained beasts are kept. The place is noisy (because of the show above and the beasts themselves), but it's relatively private. In exchange for the heroes' aid, she gladly shares with them any secrets she knows – except one.

See, the most pitiful thing about Pirreg and Antha ain't that they were once champions of goodness and have now become pathetic wretches. No, the worst thing is that the sods actually *found* Blind Righteous, but they were so concerned about their own safety (they were pursued by a horde of bulezau and babau) that they didn't take the time to free the deva. This is, of course, a secret they'll never willingly tell.

Still, the PCs shouldn't press Antha too much on the matter. They're probably far more interested in reaching Agathion, and the bariaur indeed has the dark of it.



"There are creatures in Phlegethon, the third layer of this damnable plane, called the Ingress." Antha looks about nervously before continuing. "Chant is they're native to Agathion, though most folks say that's impossible, or just pretty sodding unlikely. Anyway, the Ingress seem to know the dark of the whole layer – what's there, and where it all lies."

Her tail flutters about as she checks her surroundings again. "The trick is, the Ingress don't talk. In many ways, they're mindless. You've got to know just who or what you're looking for and tell them. They'll get you there. Somehow, they make you seep from the third layer to the fourth, right through the stone and into the isolated bubble you want."

Anthia pauses for a moment and stares at the PCs, growing irate and short-tempered as the memories of her own adventures come rushing back to her. If the cutters ask for more explicit directions (and if they're smart, they will), she says:

"You'll find the Ingress in Phlegethon, in a cavern near a place called Caderis – that's easy to get to from the Madhouse. Folks there'll know the way. The cavern's not too close to Windglum, though I've heard say that it's near something called the Unseelie Court." The bariaur sneers and adds quickly, "If you come upon a tanar'ri by the name of Iuthaccab, you'll know you've gone too far."

Anthia doesn't have much more information of value to the PCs – at least, none that she's willing to share. But she does offer one last comment:

"It all sounds pretty easy, doesn't it?" Her words are sharp with bitterness and sarcasm. "Well, know this, berks: Whatever it is, wherever you're going – and don't get me wrong, I couldn't care less about what you're doing – getting there's not the hard part. The whole plane is cursed."

"You won't succeed."

As the PCs speak with Anthia, Pirreg bursts in on their meeting (wherever it is), blind with rage. Thinking that Anthia's turned stag on him, he attacks the whole group. Unfortunately, Pirreg's beyond reason, finally barmy from the howling winds and the horrible events he's experienced over the last few months. If the heroes' meeting with Anthia takes place in the beast kennel under the theater, Pirreg doesn't hesitate to let loose some of the

creatures (such as a pair of owl-bears) to cause destruction and chaos. The commotion brings members of the Cynosure – guards, performers, and workers – within six rounds.

Once the PCs get all the chant they need from Anthia and defeat (or escape from) barmy Pirreg, they most likely give the Cynosure the laugh.

◆ GETTING IN DEEP ◆

If they haven't already done so, the characters should make plans for what to do once they actually get their hands on the Wand of Orcus. Just as important, they should devise a method for leaving the layer of Agathion (since they'll use the Ingress to get there).

Antha suggested that the PCs visit the Madhouse. If the cutters ask around in the Bleaker-run citadel, the Dungeon Master should allow them to obtain a one-use magical item with which they can escape Agathion – a scroll inscribed with *plane shift* or *teleport without error*, a *cubic gate* with only one charge, or the like. Whatever they find, it should require a lot of jink (from 5,000 to 10,000 gp) or perhaps a trade for a worthwhile item they already have. Sure, the PCs must pay the music for getting something so valuable, but they should be *able* to find it as a reward for thinking ahead and realizing that they'll need it.

HIRING A GUIDE

To reach the third layer of Pandemonium, the PCs must follow a path through the winding passages of the plane. By walking through the tunnels, it's possible to travel from Pandemos to Phlegethon, but the cutters'd be smart to find a guide, directions, or at least a map.

In the Madhouse, a Bleaker by the name of Scould (PI/♂ human/F5/Bleak Cabal/N) makes his daily jink by guiding sods through the horrors of the Howling Plane. He knows the right paths and portals that let travelers pass from layer to layer. Scould's old, wrinkled, and withered, but he's still healthy enough to hold his own in a fight or on an arduous journey. When guiding folks, Scould carries a staff with a lantern attached to the end. The lantern has a *continual light* spell cast within it, but a body can't tell that by looking. What's more, Scould knows all the tricks to avoiding the screaming winds as much as possible.

Unfortunately, though, he's still been touched by the madness of the plane. As a result, he hates men. Though he's male himself, the berk trusts only women – and he trusts them completely. He won't guide an all-male group, fearing that they'd take him out of the Madhouse and bob him. If the PCs don't have any females among their number, they'll have to figure out another way to win Scould's help.

PANDEMONIUM'S TOLL

The trip down through the first three layers of Pandemonium takes six to seven days. During this journey, the group's troubles number three (according to the multiversal rule): blindness, deafness, and madness.

Scould's lantern alleviates the blindness, but its light unfortunately draws predators like a magnet. The guide can also help with the second problem; he's willing to sell the PCs special earplugs for 1 gp per pair. The plugs're made of Carcerian vard gum, and they effectively drown out the plane's wind

even when it's at its strongest and noisiest. Unfortunately, a body wearing the earplugs can't hear *anything* – including his companions' voices. Still, temporary deafness is better than the permanent kind.

Finally, though the earplugs help reduce the madness brought by the constant wind, they don't stave it off entirely. Dungeon Masters with access to the *Planes of Chaos* boxed set (2603) may wish to use the madness rules presented in that product. Otherwise, the DM should require the PCs to make occasional saving throws versus paralyzation, with failure indicating an eruption of a short bout of depression, hysteria, paranoia, or some similar ailment. Keep in mind, though, that the madness should be disheartening, not debilitating.

Blindness, deafness, and madness may indeed trouble the PCs, but the creatures of Pandemonium pose a more direct threat to the party. Gangs of bloodthirsty, barmy gnolls or bugbears (escapees from the realms of their deities); wild howlers; roaming tanar'ri, yugoloths, or slaadi (all usually on their way somewhere else); and any number of prime-material monsters have wandered to or been banished to the Howling Plane. Virtually everyone and everything a planewalker runs across is nasty, and most of 'em are insane to boot.

Fortunately, Scould knows the ways around hazards of the physical terrain like crumbling cave-ins, dangerous crossings of foul rivers, and areas where light (and sometimes even magic) doesn't work. But the PCs should be ready for anything. Pandemonium is as inhospitable as any of the Lower Planes.

◆ RIVALS ◆

Scould takes the cutters as far as Caderis, a ruined fortress within a cavern that now serves as a waymeet for travelers and others on the plane. The place is run by a tiefling named Bosetti Col Turmac (PI/♂ tiefling/F10,T11/Dispossessed/CE), a foul-mouthed and foul-minded berk who chargés a great deal for wretched food, disgusting bub, and uncomfortable lodging.

As a body can well imagine, not many folks visit Caderis. Fact is, the PC group is nearly alone in the fortress – except for another group of bashers also looking for the Ingress. They sit around one of the few standing tables within what was once the great hall of Caderis Castle, and they're a vile and strange bunch, even by Bosetti's standards.

The room is dim and smells of waste, rot, and cheap bub. A blue-skinned man with white hair and dark eyes sits behind what might pass for a bar. He silently watches you come in. Seated around a large, round table – amidst the broken remains of a few other tables and chairs – is an odd-looking group of berks. A human with long black hair and a long black beard quietly sips from a broken mug. Next to him sits a basher who must be 9 feet tall, with mottled green skin and wild, green hair. On the other side of the table, a long, plump, wormlike creature downs a cup of swill with one of its four arms. Around the creature stand three dirty, disheveled, four-armed humanoids, each leaning on a thick wooden spear.

Cardule, the human leader of the group, pays little heed to the PCs as they arrive. Gak, his troll minder, doesn't even glance at them. Baaravda, the wormlike creature, is more nervous and looks long and hard at the heroes, sizing up their potential threat. (Baaravda is a member of a race that calls itself the ormyrr; chant says they come from Arcadia, though Acheron seems more likely. For details, refer to the *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® Annual Volume One* [2145].) His three reave hireswords do nothing until they're told – Baaravda pays them good jink to keep still and hold their tongues. Overall, it's an eerily silent moment.

Though there's no way for the PCs to know this, the most addle-coved, leatherheaded thing they could possibly do in here is mention the Ingress. See, Cardule, Baaravda, and their hirelings also seek the mysterious creatures, for they're on their own hunt for something in Agathion (the Dungeon Master can decide what that is). If the berks discover that the PCs are looking for the Ingress, they'll try to ambush the heroes and put them in the dead-book. Cardule and his bunch're all a little barmy, accustomed to more lawful (and certainly quieter) environments, and they're particularly paranoid.

Thing is, Bosetti the proprietor knows where the Ingress is, and he gives the PCs directions if they ask about it and slip him at least 10 gp. Then he adds, "Another gentleman was in here just yesterday asking about the same thing. . . ." At that point, Cardule yells, "All right, that's it! Too many people know about this. You must all die!" With that, his group leaps up from their table and attacks the characters.

Even if the PCs keep mum about the Ingress, they might still be in trouble. Baaravda convinces Cardule to use an *ESP* spell to try to learn the cutters' plans. The ormyrr's worried that the characters are rivals (and he's right, in a way). 'Course, there's no reason both groups can't find and use the Ingress, but that's not the way these bashers think.

◆ THE INGRESS ◆

Assuming that the PCs survive Caderis, it takes them about an hour to walk to the cavern where the Ingress dwells. But that's only if Bosetti provided them with exact directions. If all the sods know is what the bariaur Antha told them, it takes six hours to find the right cave.



The twisting passages of Phlegethon are worse — rougher, narrower, less defined — than those you've traversed in the layers above. The winds are stronger here, as well, and they always seem to blow against you.

Finally, in a side cave off a particularly windy passage, you spot something that might indicate you've arrived. A great beast, bloated and grotesque, rests its bulk here. The thing is so fat that you wonder if it could move at all. Pinkish gray skin covers the creature, with no sign of hair. A single obese, practically atrophied limb is visible, the others perhaps hidden under the voluminous layers of the beast's folded flesh. A tiny head looks your way, and the creature seems to beckon you into the cave.

This fat, bloblike being is the Ingress Mother. If the PCs enter the cavern and approach her, she uses her visible "arm" to lift up great folds of her hanging flesh, and from underneath squirm out dozens of tiny humanoids. These creatures are the Ingress. As Antha said, they don't speak, but they do scamper right up to the characters. Each is only 3 to 4 feet tall, spindly thin, and hairless, with the same skin color and wide eyes as the Mother. The Ingress all make hand motions toward their mouths and begin grabbing at the PCs' packs or anywhere else the characters might have food.

♦ Show the players Illo L (on page 174).

The Ingress continue to take the party's food until satisfied that the cutters have surrendered everything they carry that is even passably edible. Once the Ingress have the food, they carry every crumb to the Ingress Mother and feed it all to her — a truly repulsive sight.

Afterward, the Ingress turn and look at the PCs expectantly. If the characters tell the creatures where they want to go (and they must be specific — just saying "Agathion" isn't enough), the tiny Ingress swarm around them and even climb on top of them until the sods can see nothing else. The heroes are shoved, pushed, and maneuvered through the mass of flesh until they can't be sure if they're surrounded by the Ingress or somehow caught in the folds of the Mother's sticky, putrid flesh.

Slowly, the sensation of skin fades, and the PCs feel as though they've turned to liquid and are seeping through miles and miles of rock at a rapid rate. The strange journey comes to an end when they feel as though they splash onto a hard surface and their bodies reform. During this weird experience, the cutters see nothing, so there's no way to prove whether their disturbing sensations are accurate or not.

♦ AGATHION ♦

Once the Ingress send the PCs to the deepest bowels of Pandemonium, they find themselves in a small cave with three tubelike passages extending away from them. 'Course, they see this only if they've brought some light — Agathion's just as dark as the rest of the plane. Unlike all the places the cut-

ters have traveled through for the last week or so (at least), there's no wind. Everything is still — so still, in fact, that the poor wind-ravaged sods probably find it quite unnerving.

Refer to the map on page 113. The PCs arrive at the spot marked "A." The floor of this and every cave in the complex is littered with the bones and skulls of humans and humanoids. Note that the network of caverns is just one of many in Agathion, but even if the characters manage to pass through the rock walls, they won't reach any of the others. They're just too far away.

The Wand of Orcus lies in the Reliquary, the central cavern of the complex, protected by invisible barriers. Interestingly, the wand itself created the maze of caverns that stretches outward from the bubble in which it lies. Though weakened since its master died, the wand is still intelligent and commands subtle but extraordinary power. Ever so slowly, it's eating away at the surrounding rock, hoping to breach into another cavern and expose a way out so that someone might come and get it.

If, at any point, a PC carrying the circlet taken from the Temple of the Knell in Tcian Sumere comes within 80 yards of the wand, the cutter feels a strange sensation coming from the golden band. He becomes aware of the nearness of the wand, though he doesn't know its exact location.

AN UNEXPECTED ENEMY

The half-ogre Quah-Namog is a priest of Orcus — perhaps the only mortal priest of Orcus left. For untold years, he's suffered without his spells, using various potions and other magic to prolong his life, waiting for his patron to return. Finally, it happened: Quah-Namog prayed to his power for spells, and the energy rushed in.

Determined to stay in spiritual contact with his master, he focused all his concentration on the evil lord. After months of unholy meditation, the prime-material berk suddenly felt an urge to come to Pandemonium. Using an *astral spell*, he projected himself to the top layer of the Howling Plane and then made his way to Agathion. Quah-Namog is the basher that Bosetti mentioned — the other traveler who asked about the Ingress. He arrived just one day ahead of the PCs.

When the heroes show up, the half-ogre hides in the shadows at the spot marked "Q" and observes them for a few minutes. Might they also serve Tenebrous (the name he now knows his master uses)? If possible, Quah-Namog tries to grab just one of the PCs — perhaps the sod bringing up the rear — and question him regarding his allegiances and intentions. The priest does whatever he can to stop the enemies of Tenebrous, but he's canny enough to know that direct confrontation'll probably destroy his astral form. He strikes instead from the shadows, with hit-and-run (or cast-and-run) tactics. Fortunately for him, there are numerous caves and passages in which to run around and hide.

Quah-Namog knows that Tenebrous will die again if he doesn't recover his wand soon. It's all on the line here and now, and the priest has come to Agathion to make sure his

patron wins. The Dungeon Master could even have Quah-Namog let this chant slip while confronting the heroes – it's important that they know how much Tenebrous's success depends on regaining the wand.

NOTE: The DM should remember that Quah-Namog isn't really in Agathion at all. His true body lies protected on the Prime Material Plane, and he's using magic to project his astral form into the caverns. 'Course, the PCs won't know that. They can't detect the priest's silver cord, though they might get suspicious when they realize that he carries no nonmagical items (those objects can't be astrally projected). If the bashers slay Quah-Namog's astral form, the priest makes a successful system shock roll, returns to his physical body, and restores himself to full health in time to confront the PCs again in the next chapter.

EXPECTED ENEMIES

No matter what the PCs do in the course of the adventure, Tenebrous eventually learns the location of his wand, collating chant gleaned from various gods (now dead), the Great Modron March, the vampire Kestod, and perhaps even the drow Erehe. He then sends his visages ahead to scout out the area, fully intending on coming to Agathion himself to recover what once was his. His long quest at last nearly fin-

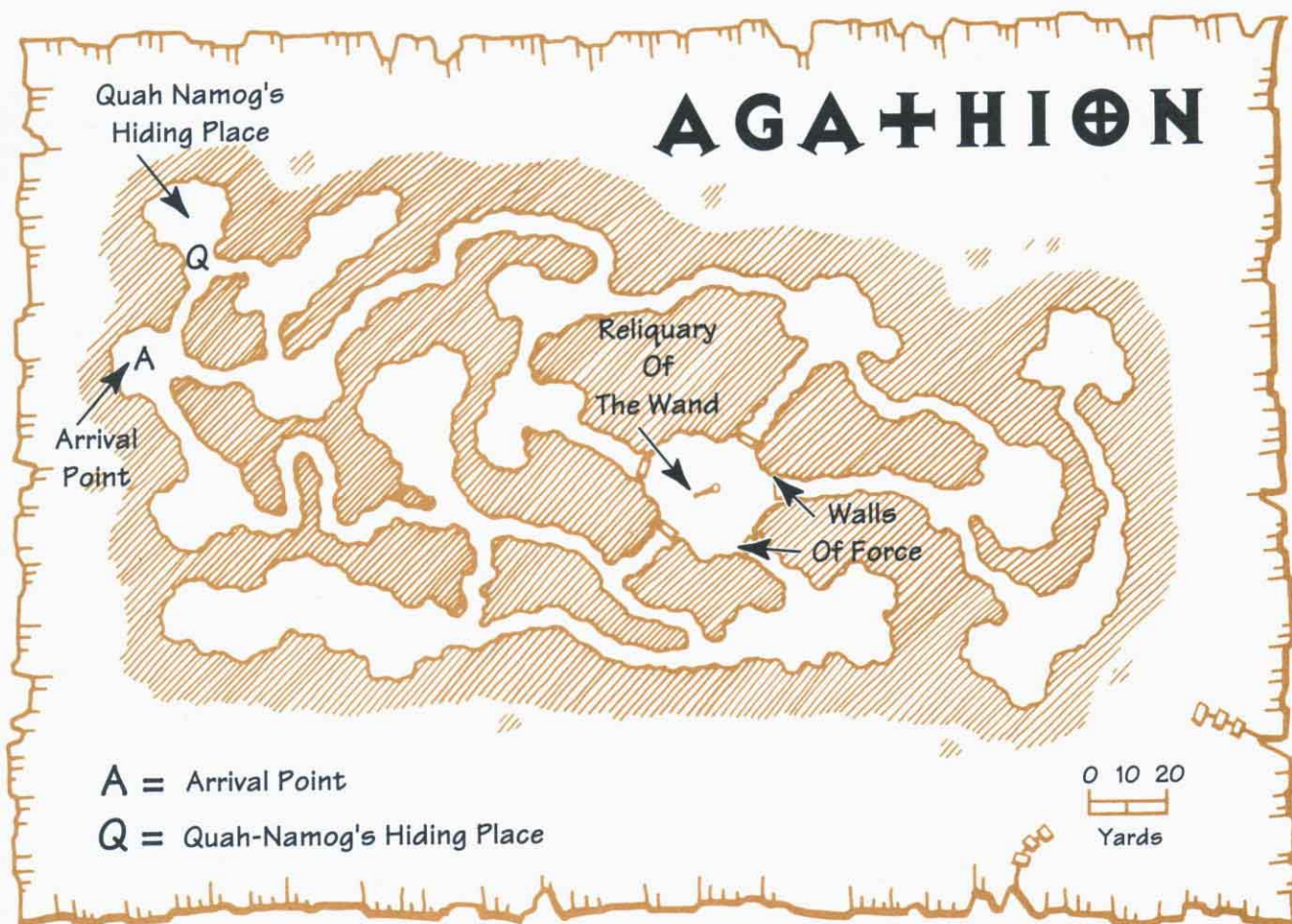
ished, Tenebrous plans to kick off a reign of terror and vengeance.

About 10 minutes after the PCs arrive in Agathion, two visages appear in the cave complex at the site marked "A." They don't need to use the Ingress; Tenebrous sends them under his own power. The Dungeon Master should try to gauge the time the heroes spend here so he knows approximately when the undead fiends appear. Due to the actions of Quah-Namog, the confusion of the maze of caves, and the difficulty of getting into the Reliquary, it's unlikely that the PCs reach the wand before the visages arrive.

THE RELIQUARY OF THE WAND

The inner chamber of this area holds the Wand of Orcus, a 3-foot long iron scepter with a human skull set into one end. The wand sits upon a pedestal in the center of the cavern, and the entrances are sealed with invisible barriers similar to *walls of force*. The PCs can bring down a barrier by one of three methods:

- ♦ cast a *disintegrate* spell on the barrier;



- ◆ get a devotee of Kiaransalee to touch the barrier in her name;
- ◆ inflict at least 50 points of damage upon the barrier by smashing it with bones (and *only* bones; no other objects affect it).

If a PC with the circlet sees the wand upon the pedestal, the sensation from the golden band grows stronger. Should he actually wear the circlet on his head and concentrate, the cutter must make a Wisdom check. If he succeeds, he suddenly sees things from the perspective of the skull atop the wand – and he knows the three different methods for destroying a barrier. Breaking concentration breaks the point-of-view shift.

Once the PCs get into the Reliquary, it's a simple matter to take the wand from the pedestal. Normally, such an act would be dangerous – the Wand of Orcus is infamous for its ability to strike dead anyone who touches it. However, the wand's lost some of its power. A *detect magic* spell still reveals it to be highly magical, but the wand has lain mostly dormant since the death of its creator. Tenebrous can revive the power within the object, but at the present time, it's safe to touch.

That is, it's safe for most berks. But if a PC who wears (or simply possesses) the circlet grabs the wand, he suddenly feels compelled to touch the skull to the golden band. This action destroys the circlet, the skull, and the character – instantly. 'Course, the sod with the circlet isn't *forced* to touch the wand; he must make a conscious choice to march over and pick the thing up. If he does so, the only way he can avoid instant death is by concentrating on controlling the wand *before touching it*. In other words, the player must announce to the DM that his character will try to master the wand or at least resist its evil influence. That way, the PC can touch the wand without being compelled to thrust the skull and circlet together, though the desire to do so is still strong.



The point is important enough to bear repeating: If the skull makes contact with the circlet at any time, both are destroyed, as is any leatherhead who happens to be touching the golden band. The iron rod isn't affected by this, but without the skull, the wand becomes completely inert. Thus, the only safe way to destroy the Wand of Orcus is to place the circlet on the ground (or some other surface) and then touch the skull to it.

Why does the golden circlet have the power to ruin the wand? Remember, when Tenebrous (as Orcus) created the object, he used the skull of the great warrior Anarchocles to power its dread magic. But he confined the basher's spirit to the circlet.

When brought near the wand, the spirit of Anarchocles does all he can to free himself from his prison – and that means getting someone to destroy the circlet and what's left of his body (the skull). The ancient warrior doesn't care that the holder of the circlet will die, too. Fact is, Anarchocles wants to kill anyone he can – especially any sod in possession of the circlet – in an insane revenge for his im-

prisonment. (For more information on circlets, see the "Skeleton, Warrior" entry in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL™* tome.)

SENDING THE WAND AWAY

If the PCs never took the circlet from Tcian Sumere, there is no method within their power to harm the Wand of Orcus. The best they can hope for is to keep it from Tenebrous by using great magic to send it (and perhaps themselves) far away.

Of course, that assumes the berks *have* such magic. But even if they don't, all is not lost. See, if a character concentrates on the wand, he receives a vision: By sacrificing one of their spirits to the wand, the PCs can reactivate one of its major powers – the ability to *plane shift* itself anywhere in the multiverse. Thus, by willingly giving one of their own lives, the heroes can send the wand out of the fiend's reach.

That's enough to win the day. After all, the undead lord can't survive much longer without his wand (the power of the Last Word's eating him up from the inside), and he's staked everything on a final quest to the Howling Plane. If Tenebrous doesn't find the Wand of Orcus in Agathion, he'll be written into the dead-book for a second time.

◆ VICTORY OR DEFEAT ◆

While the heroes decide what to do about the Wand of Orcus, Tenebrous is on his way to Agathion to reclaim his prize. Hopefully, the PCs manage to destroy or banish the wand, or at least figure out a way to leave the caverns. Otherwise, they're in a *lot* of trouble.

IF THE WAND IS DESTROYED OR LOST

Seconds after destroying the skull (or sending the wand to a far-off plane), each character suddenly sees the following image in his mind's eye:

A shadowy form races through strange landscapes with frantic speed. Suddenly, it stops, and the toothy mouth of its gray, wraithlike face opens wide and lets out a terrible, soul-wrenching scream. The ethereal figure begins to grow in size and substance, quickly taking on the appearance of stone. In moments, it completely petrifies into the shape of a bloated, ram-headed humanoid contorted in horror and pain. Then it slowly fades away.

Tenebrous is dead — again. Without the power of the wand, he's unable to stabilize his own essence, and the fury of the Last Word consumes him. The former Abyssal lord falls to the Astral, becoming one more giant chunk of debris floating through the Silver Void.

If PCs are still trapped in Agathion, a deity of good might secretly reward them for their service to the multiverse by transporting them to the Outlands, leaving them just outside the gate-town of Bedlam. 'Course, this bit of divine aid is up to the Dungeon Master's discretion; it's not the best solution to the problem of a trapped party. The poor sods could simply remain stuck forever in the caverns. It'd be their own tough luck for failing to think ahead and bring along a method of escape. (Another option: The Ingress might one day send another bunch of travelers into the same area — cutters smart enough to bring a means of exiting the layer.)

IF TENEBROUS ARRIVES

If the PCs haven't destroyed or banished the wand by the time Tenebrous arrives, they're as good as lost. They have no chance of winning at combat, trickery, or negotiation. Tenebrous wants them dead, and while he might not be the power



WHAT?
I + THOUGHT + YOU
BROUGHT + THE CUBIC GATE!

— A PLANEWALKER IN AGATHION
+ HIS COMRADE,
AS TENEBROUS APPROACHES

he once was, he still has enough strength to annihilate them instantly and utterly. The Last Word can slay gods, so it's certainly enough to rip apart a handful of puny mortals.

In this situation, the PCs have just one hope of survival: If they took the *Orcusword* from Tcian Sumere, they can break it now, causing Tenebrous enough pain to delay him for 1d3 hours. That might give the heroes enough time to escape (and take the wand with them), destroy the skull, or magically send the foul thing far away.

Otherwise, Tenebrous is victorious. He destroys the characters, reclaims his wand, and regains his former position of power, free to bring untold evil and chaos to the multiverse. Kiaransalee is doomed, and for a time it seems that no other deity dares to oppose Tenebrous for fear of falling to the Last Word. This should shake up a PLANESCAPE campaign — or indeed, any AD&D campaign that involves the planes — considerably.

Eventually, a gathering of greater gods will learn the history and nature of the Last Word and devise a means to oppose or nullify its power. Stripped of his stolen magic, Tenebrous will no longer have complete mastery over the multiverse. Sure, the berk'll still be a threat, but he'll no longer be invincible.

For more information on the effects of Tenebrous's return, refer to the "Aftermath" section at the end of the next chapter.

◆ THE FATE OF THE WAND ◆

Assuming that Tenebrous didn't regain the Wand of Orcus, the PCs have either destroyed the skull at the end of the rod or somehow kept the object out of the undead power's reach. If the wand is still in the heroes' possession, they need to determine whether to keep it, entrust it to a mighty force for good, or bury it where no one will ever find it again (by dropping it into the River Styx, sending it to the plane of Vacuum, and so on).

Whatever happens, the Dungeon Master should pay particular attention to the whereabouts of the wand. In the next and final chapter of "Out of the Darkness," the priest Quahnagog returns, intent on capturing the wand and using it to awaken Tenebrous from his Astral slumber — again.

The multiverse might yet have reason to shudder.

CHAPTER IX: THE DEAD-BOOK OF THE GODS

Defeated? Hardly.

The half-ogre priest rubbed his hands together compulsively. There was something unnerving about searching the Astral Plane for the rocky corpse of his

own patron god. But he kept his mind on the task. Those intolerable fools he encountered in Agathion would be the first to feel the wrath of the master once he was finished. And if Tenebrous didn't want to punish them, Quah-Namog would do it himself.

After all, he'd already come so far and done so much. Ash Vodiran had been extremely difficult to find, and that confusing city called Sigil didn't make things any easier. Vodiran came so highly recommended, though, that Quah-Namog knew he'd prove well worth the effort and expense.

And indeed he did.

The master thief's eyes sparkled at the very idea of stealing the artifact. In fact, Vodiran actually seemed disappointed that it had been so easy for him to obtain ("scrag," he'd said).

Yes, the job had cost Quah-Namog virtually all the gold he could steal or extort on his home world, but now he had it. He had the Wand of Orcus.

Unfathomably exhilarating, thought the priest – to hold the master's greatest symbol in his own hands. Nothing could stop him now. Nothing could defeat him. Tenebrous would live again.

◆ THE RIDE RESUMES ◆

This chapter takes place quite some time after the player characters deal with the Wand of Orcus in the caves of Agathion. Assuming that they survive, they can return to Sigil (or wherever they call home) and rest for as long as they wish.

During this period, they're free to take part in other adventures. If the Dungeon Master's using "Into the Light," this'd be an especially good time to run Part Three of that scenario.

Meanwhile, the priest Quah-Namog recovers from his encounter with the PCs in Agathion. He sets off to find the Wand of Orcus (this time in his true physical form), hoping to restore his master to life once again. At the end of the previous chapter, the heroes either kept the wand, hid it, or gave it away. No matter where it ends up, Quah-Namog hires the top-shelf thief Ash Vodiran to steal it for him. Vodiran can easily overcome any locks, barriers, guardians, or magical wards put in place to protect the wand, and the PCs eventually learn that it's gone missing from wherever they left it.

NOTE: Even if the PCs used the circlet to destroy the wand's skull, the iron rod remained, and that's what Quah-Namog seeks. Totally destroying the Wand of Orcus is not an option. Oh, it might be possible for a mortal to annihilate such a mighty artifact – a creation of a god – but the PCs have no idea how to do it, and neither does anyone else they encounter.

A+ LEAST+
+HA+ WHOLE
ORCUS BUSINESS IS
BEHIND US NOW.
— A PLANEWALKER
WHO SHOULD
KNOW BETTER

◆ THE SILVER VOID ◆

If the PCs can somehow track the wand, they learn that it's now on the Astral Plane. Should they decide to chase after it, they must find their own way there. Otherwise, the Dungeon Master must use some other method to get the heroes to journey to the Silver Void.

Here's one method: A Sigil merchant named Ryshane Dumuore (PI/♀ human/0-level/Society of Sensation/NG) offers the bashers a job to deliver and safeguard a large payment of gold to a weaponsmith named Zess, a rogue modron who lives and works on the Astral Plane. The jink's in the form of 100 gems (each worth 1,000 gp), which are stored in a padded steel box that's locked, trapped, and magically sealed. The task should take only a few days, and Dumuore pays each character 200 gp for his trouble.

'Course, the DM can also devise another reason for visiting the Astral, something more appropriate to the specific group of planewalkers and what they're doing at the time. The PCs might be sent on a mission for one of their factions, pass through the Silver Void on their way somewhere else, and so on. The method doesn't really matter. As long as the heroes get to the Astral, this final chapter can truly begin.

As its nickname implies, the Astral Plane is an endless, silvery void. A few strange lights float through the infinite distance, and now and again a conduit winds its way through the calm, quiet serenity. While on the Astral, folks maneuver by the power of thought alone — the smarter the berk, the faster he moves. Specific details on travel, combat, and other topics are found in the PLANESCAPE® sourcebook *A Guide to the Astral Plane* (2625). However, the real focus of this chapter is the gigantic corpse of Tenebrous, which operates under its own rules. Thus, *A Guide to the Astral Plane* is handy, but it's not required for this adventure.

THE GUARDIAN OF THE DEAD GODS

Shortly after the PCs arrive on the Astral, they see an awe-inspiring sight:

With an abrupt suddenness, almost as though he were peeling back the folds of Astral space, a tall, muscular man appears ahead of you. His long, angular face is somewhat canine — perhaps that of a jackal. His black hair is long and wild, his eyes deep abysses that take but never give. And though his luminous black skin reflects the strange lights of the Astral, there is a coldness about him reminiscent of cemeteries, tombs, and funeral shrouds.

The imposing man moves quickly but gracefully toward you. When he gets close, he fluidly raises one arm and points off to your right. With the finality of the grave, he says, "It is not yet over."

This is the being known as the Guardian of the Dead Gods – he who was once Anubis of the Egyptian pantheon, guardian of the dead. He watches over the fallen powers who float through the Astral, fending off any who might disturb his charges. But the Guardian – for reasons of his own – does not always act. Sometimes he allows mortals to interfere with the gods' long sleep. None can truly fathom his actions or motives.

Currently, the Guardian has chosen to alert the player characters that something big is happening. He points directly toward the petrified body of Tenebrous (though it's not in sight) and refers to Quah-Namog's plan to resurrect the former Abyssal lord.

If the PCs never went to Pelion and explored the Last Spire (in Chapter VII), the Dungeon Master can use the Guardian as a final opportunity to incorporate that chapter into the adventure. After the Guardian delivers his warning, the DM can have him also give the heroes the following hint about Pelion:

"He learned, rather than earned, his might. The dusty realm of sister-friend-rival Nephthys holds the key. He left his mark there in the short time that he did not rest here. Learn his secrets there, in the dust."

Many a well-lanned basher knows (or can learn) that the realm of Nephthys lies in the desert of Pelion. This should be enough to prod the PCs to pay a call to the dusty layer.

◆ CORPUS DEI ◆

If the PCs proceed in the direction indicated by the Guardian, they soon come upon the corpse of Tenebrous.

At first, it seems as though you're racing toward an immense island of stone suspended in the Silver Void. But as the island grows larger, you realize the truth. Your eye follows the lines and contours of the rock and suddenly makes out muscular arms, stout legs, and a horribly bloated belly. Wide horns spiral outward from the head of this gigantic humanoid, and massive draconian wings stretch out from the figure's back, completing the misshapen statue. The contorted "island," which is at least 4 miles long, is made entirely of dry, gray stone.

As the characters approach, they're drawn down toward the corpse by the sphere of energy that surrounds Tenebrous. In their mind's eye, they see the hunched figure of Quah-Namog clutching the Wand of Orcus. (If the heroes destroyed the skull that topped the artifact, they notice that a new one's been affixed – one that still glistens with the blood of its previous owner, a poor sod killed by Quah-Namog.) The half-ogre priest stands atop the head of Tenebrous, holding the wand high and chanting loathsome, evil words that defile the very air by their utterance.

Within a few moments, the PCs "land" on Tenebrous,

finding themselves standing on what they take to be his feet. An uneven, rocky landscape stretches out ahead of them, separating them from Quah-Namog. Refer to the map of Tenebrous on page 119.

While on Tenebrous, the cutters are no longer subject to the laws of the Astral Plane. Instead, they're within the closest thing that Tenebrous has left to a realm. The body of the god has normal gravity, which means that, to reach Quah-Namog, the PCs must physically travel over the rocky surface of the corpse, scaling steep inclines and skirting treacherous chasms. They can't rely on spells like *teleport* or *dimension door*, which only transport them back to their starting point at the god's feet.

The gravity extends only 1,000 feet above the surface of the corpse. If a cutter flies, levitates, or leaps higher than that distance, he "falls off" the body and ends up in normal Astral space outside of the island's gravity. To return, he must approach Tenebrous as he did the first time, in which case he's again drawn to the feet.

What's more, unlike other god-islands, only the top of Tenebrous (which is really his front, since he's lying supine) has gravity. Heroes can't cross around to his back and sneak along underneath his body. Sods who get too close to the edge of the corpse fall off, though, as before, they can return easily to the god's feet.

Lastly, while on Tenebrous, the characters find that time and space (and the spells that affect them) operate normally, without any of the strange alterations that can occur on the Astral.

FACES OF DEATH

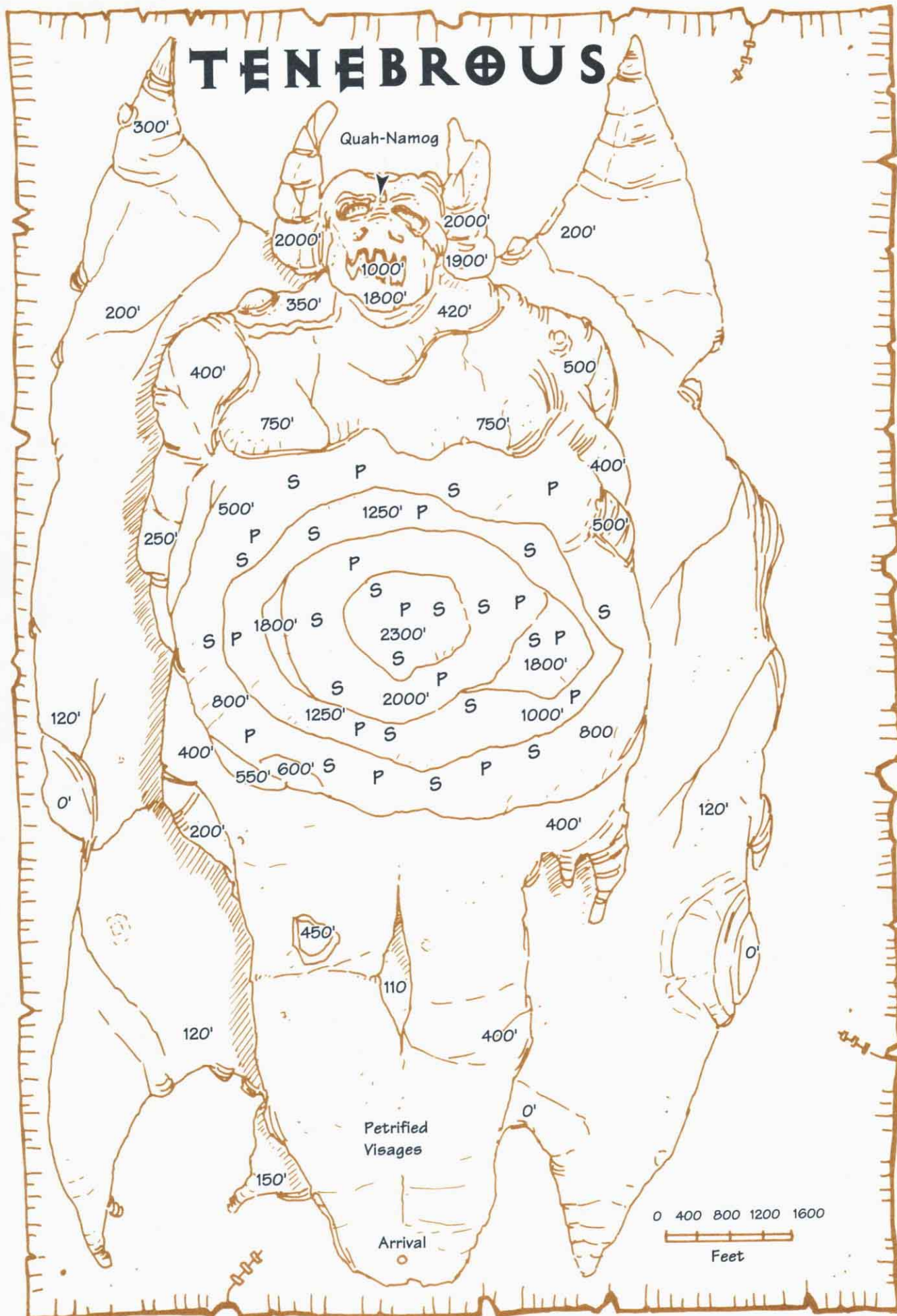
When Tenebrous died (for the second time), many of his undead servants were taken with him. Now these visages are frozen on the Astral along with their master, trapped with the power and force that created them – a justice that'd make a Mercykiller proud.

Great numbers of visages occupy the corpse of Tenebrous. Their petrified forms fill out a forest of stone, cold faces and bodies wracked in eternal pain and misery. Some of the visages appear to be human at first (in other words, frozen in someone else's stolen form), but there's always something monstrous about them that reveals their true nature – clawed hands, a twisted and elongated face, or something sinister about the eyes.

The fiends are dead and pose no physical threat to the PCs. But their proximity to Tenebrous means that their lucidity-control powers still swirl about them like an aura of evil. Even in death, the visages're able to make the heroes wonder what's real and what's not.

Thus, as the sods move through this horrid landscape, the Dungeon Master should really put them on edge. They begin to see movement out of the corners of their eyes. They hear faint noises like crumbling stone coming from just behind their footsteps. If a PC turns around, the petrified visage he just passed seems to be in a slightly different pose than it was

TENEBOUS



before. If a cutter stops to listen, he hears the sounds of something moving, though it's always behind him or just out of sight.

If the bashers actually attack the frozen visages, they find the things easy to destroy — they seem to be made of dry stone that crumbles easily. However, if the PCs completely smash one of the visages, the creature's essence is freed from its entombment here and escapes into the void with a hideous, mocking cackle.

FRUITS OF DEATH

Past the forest of faces, the danger to the PCs becomes more real and more immediate. As they proceed up Tenebrous's prodigious belly (a 2,000-foot ascent), skills involving climbing or mountaineering become quite useful. Though the rough stomach has ledges and cracked handholds and very little of the ascent is completely vertical, rope and other climbing gear come in handy. Without such aids, the planewalkers need to make Dexterity checks (three for the entire trip) to keep from falling while scaling the uneven ground. A failed check indicates a tumble of 1d3×10 feet, with the poor sod suffering 1d6 points of damage per 10 feet fallen.

To make matters worse, as the PCs reach the summit of the stomach, Tenebrous's body begins to spew forth the essence of his nature: undead and unlife.

SKELETAL HORDES. When the PCs reach the top of the belly, skeletons burst forth from the rock at the places marked "S" on the map. A total of 3d8 skeletons emerges, a few from each spot.

Immediately ahead of you, cracks begin to form in the ground, accompanied by a rocky crumbling and crunching noise. With a rumble and a burst of befouled air, clawed, skeletal hands burst forth from the punctured wound of the dead god's flesh. Stony, earth-covered undead, animated with foul necromantic energies, rise from the ground and move toward you, their malicious intent quite obvious.

Once unleashed, the skeletons look for living flesh to rend and destroy. Though skeletons aren't usually dangerous foes to top-shelf cutters like the PCs, the sheer number of these undead makes them a serious threat. However, turning attempts work better than they normally do: No matter what the level of the priest or paladin, a successful turning means that 2d6 of the skeletons crumble to dust. But there's a catch. All undead thus turned are replaced at the beginning of the next round by a same number of new

skeletons that burst forth from the ground. These new foes can likewise be turned (destroyed), but they, too, are replaced the next round.

Thus, the only way the heroes can permanently rid themselves of skeletons is by combat. Turning 'em won't do it. And to make matters worse, beginning 1d6 rounds after the first group of undead emerges, the marked areas issue forth another batch of 3d8 skeletons every three rounds. (That should prevent the PCs from lingering too long on the belly.)

POOLS OF UNLIFE. Even here on the Astral, which has no link to the Negative Energy Plane, Tenebrous is full of negative energy. The party's trip over the belly causes the energy to burst forth like fluid from underground springs in the locations marked "P" on the map. The liquid congeals into pools and runs down the god's sides like tiny streams, draining the life force from any berk who touches it (1d12 points of damage) or merely gets within 3 feet (1d4 points of damage).

Ten rounds after the energy begins pouring out of Tenebrous, the entire corpse quickly grows cold. Anyone standing anywhere on the dead god suffers 1 point of damage immediately and another point every 10 rounds thereafter. (Quah-Namog is immune to this effect.)



THE EVERCHANGING FIEND

At some point during all this madness, the planewalkers encounter a strange being that represents Tenebrous throughout the various stages of his existence.

At first, the being appears to be a fat, grotesque human – probably a foul wizard or a wicked priest, judging by the evil affectations and horrid symbols on his clothing. But the figure shrinks as if melting, becoming a wormlike larvae. It then bloats and takes the shape of a manes, then a bar-lgura. Next, the being mutates further, changing to become a floating chasme, and then a vrock. The vrock screeches and becomes a hezrou, which immolates and transforms into a huge, fiery balor. The loathsome balor bloats, its head growing ramlike, adopting the traditional form of Orcus. This shape in turn takes on a rocky countenance (signifying his first death), which then becomes the shadowy Tenebrous. Finally, the whole transformation starts over again, as the wraithlike form solidifies into the obese, evil human.

What's going on? Well, before Tenebrous (then known as Orcus) became an Abyssal lord, he worked his way up through the ranks of the tanar'ri. Before that, he was a larva, and before even that, he lived as a mortal. And as he now lies in death, the god's memories of his past manifest themselves as the shapeshifting being that prowls his rocky surface.

Each transformation takes a round. The being can't be harmed, nor can it inflict harm – fact is, it can't physically affect anything. However, it can speak with the PCs if they approach it. The manifestation's lesser forms have scant knowledge and respond simply to questions; as the shapes grow more advanced, they gain more and more knowledge. 'Course, the manifestation won't reveal much about itself (and won't do anything foolish, like give its name), but it may offer important information – as long as the cutters ask canny questions and direct them to the right shapes.

But it's not as if the creature's dying to rattle its bone-box. The larvae and the manes can't converse in any way, and most of the other shapes aren't willing to help the bashers without a good reason. Still, the PCs might be able to convince the forms to brag, boast, and otherwise glorify themselves. This being is, after all, the manifestation of Tenebrous's past – or, rather, his memories of the past – so it's consumed with his view and his version of things.

Eventually, the everchanging creature grows tired of the PCs and moves on, wandering the surface of the dead god.

CLIMBING THE HEAD

Quah-Namog believes that he can bring Tenebrous back from the dead. It happened before; it can happen again. Using the Wand of Orcus as a focus, the priest begins chanting, making up a ritual as he goes along. (Not surprisingly, he couldn't find an established method of bringing a god back to life.) Quah-Namog plans to culminate his improvisational ceremony by casting a *resurrection* spell that he has on a scroll.

The priest is encouraged by the fact that his spellcasting

powers returned when he arrived on his patron deity's corpse. He doesn't know if it's due to a strange quirk, if it's because Tenebrous died so recently, or if it means that the god's not as dead as he appears. And Quah-Namog realizes that he won't learn the dark of it until he does all he can to restore his master.

After the PCs cross over the corpse's stomach and chest, read the following:

Ahead and above, you see what must be the loathsome head and face of the dead god – and you hear a strange mumbling sound coming from that direction. The voice grows louder, borne on a light Astral breeze, until you determine it to be a deep-throated chant – foul words you don't understand. The chanter is most certainly somewhere on the horned head of the corpse.

No matter how the PCs approach the head, the ascent is difficult. Scaling the god's "jowls" amounts to a vertical climb of approximately 1,600 feet. Climbing skill or mountaineering proficiency is required. Sods without such abilities must either get help from able climbers or find another way up (such as magical flight).

Once they've reached the top, the PCs face the 800-foot-deep pit that is the immense, cavelike mouth of Tenebrous. This horrible place is a breeding ground for bats and varrangoin – two kinds of creatures not normally native to the Astral Plane. They fly up in dark clouds, screeching eerily, and attack anyone coming near the mouth.

Each character is attacked by one lesser varrangoin (Type II) and approximately 50 normal bats under its control. All varrangoin immediately breathe clouds of fire as they swoop in to attack the heroes, but they refrain from doing so again for fear of hurting the normal bats that begin to swarm around the party. Because of the bats, the PCs find it difficult to see, fight, or do much of anything besides feel the raking talons of the varrangoin.

The sides of the mouth-pit are riddled with caves and passages that provide roosts for far more varrangoin and bats – and possibly worse.

◆ THE RITUAL OF REVIVAL ◆

Quah-Namog stands and chants on the base of Tenebrous's brow, right between his master's eyes. Around him lie the sacrifices he's made to complete his enchantment and power the ritual. The priest has destroyed a *book of exalted deeds*, a *mace of disruption*, a *holy sword*, a *talisman of pure good*, and a *white robe of the archmagi*. He's also slain three poor elves who were his enemies back on his prime-material home world.

Before you, on a rise between two wide, shallow pits, stands the evil priest you encountered in Agathion. This twisted soul's horrid, necromantic finery consists of bones and skulls strung across his bare chest, blood-red breeches covering his legs, and a black cloak fluttering in an Astral breeze.

His head is adorned with the skull of a horned horse – most likely a unicorn. The priest holds aloft the Wand of Orcus in one hand and an unrolled scroll in the other.

Around him, pages ripped from a golden book are tossed about in the light wind. Broken bits of unknown items and weapons lie at his feet. But most horrible of all, three dead humanoid figures sprawl before the chanting priest, eviscerated. They appear to be elves.

♦ Show the players Illo N (on page 176).

If Quah-Namog sees the PCs approach, he quickens the pace of the ritual by skipping right to the final portion – the use of the *resurrection* scroll. But the spell takes 10 rounds to cast, and the PCs likely reach the priest in a round or two. Under normal circumstances, Quah-Namog wouldn't have much chance of success.

But the current circumstances are far from normal. Remember, the half-ogre's standing on the body of the being that he's trying to resurrect – not to mention the fact that the being in question was a powerful, evil deity. Somehow, on some level, Tenebrous gets involved.

TENEBRØUS TRIUMPHANT

Before the PCs can do anything to disrupt the reading of the *resurrection* scroll, they find themselves seemingly transported to another location.

Suddenly, everything grows blurry, and you have the well-known sensation of magical transportation, as if you were teleported away. After a few seconds, the world reforms around you. The scene is familiar – but unbelievable.

You stand in the City of Doors, yet somehow you realize that you've also been catapulted into the future. The burg you once knew so well has become a charnel house. Bodies lay strewn about streets red with blood. And in the middle of the carnage is a sight that makes your mind reel.

A huge, bloated, fiendish figure – the very god whose body you walked upon in the who-knows-how-distant past – stands amid a number of slain foes. You see among these corpses great beings whose images once decorated temple halls: Zeus, Thor, Paladine, Mystra, and more. Most incredible of all, the ram-headed fiend holds above his head the last of his enemies, her body broken and sagging:

The Lady of Pain.

Sigil is dead. The multiverse belongs to Tenebrous.

♦ Show the players Illo O (on page 176).

Naturally, this scene isn't real. The PCs are still on the Astral, still on Tenebrous's body. But some spark that yet flares within the rocky corpse has reached outward and, on a subconscious level, altered the perceptions of the heroes (much as the visages did in the past). 'Course, many canny bloods will realize that this horrid scene can't be real, and the Rule of Threes dictates why. First of all, a body can enter Sigil



only through a portal – no other means of magical transportation works. Second, gods can't get into the Cage, so Zeus and the others couldn't possibly lie at Tenebrous's feet. And third, the Lady can't be beaten in a simple brawl.

Nonetheless, the sight is disturbing. Cutters that try to resist the perception must make a saving throw versus spell. Even if they're successful, they don't break through the mind-peel – it is generated by a power, after all – but they do perceive a bit of the true reality. They can hear Quah-Namog casting the *resurrection* spell, and a successful spellcraft proficiency check lets them realize that the scroll will take 10 rounds to read.

All they have to do is disrupt the casting of the spell. But it ain't as easy as all that. As the heroes perceive their current surroundings, the priest's hiding in a nearby building while he reads the scroll. And they've got to find him before they can stop him. A successful Intelligence check is required to follow the sound of Quah-Namog's voice, and the degree of success determines how long it takes to locate him.

Here's how to figure it: Determine the margin by which the PC made the check. Then subtract that number from 10. The result is how many rounds it takes to find Quah-Namog's hiding spot. For example, if a character with an Intelligence of 13 rolls a check of 9 (a difference of 4), he's able to follow the voice and find the priest in 6 (10 minus 4) rounds.

If several bashers make successful Intelligence checks, they use the best result (in other words, the least number of rounds) to determine how long they race around Sigil before finding Quah-Namog. Note that PCs who failed to see through the altered perception don't get to make the required Intelligence checks to find the priest – they believe in the reality of the scene and don't hear his voice at all.

When the heroes find the building that Quah-Namog's hiding in, though, their troubles *really* begin. Tenebrous throws down the Lady's broken body and goes after the party. Because the berk isn't real – and because the true Tenebrous is the one creating the current scene – the PCs can't hurt "faux Tenebrous" in any way. But each round, he can strike at and automatically hit one character, inflicting 4d10 points of damage. Unfortunately, these wounds are real and lasting – they won't disappear when the altered perception evaporates.

With time at such a premium, the best strategy is for one PC to slip into the building where Quah-Namog hides, while the rest hold off the Abyssal lord (as best they can, anyway). Inside the building, the PCs spy the scene they first observed when they climbed up to Tenebrous's brow: Quah-Namog, surrounded by sacrifices, holding the Wand of Orcus, casting a spell from a scroll. Any successful strike against the priest – or any other major disruption of his reading – stops the spell.

◆ THE END ◆

If the heroes prevent the *resurrection* spell from being cast, the unreal vision of Sigil fades from their senses, and they find they're still on the Astral Plane. (Remember, they still have any wounds suffered in the battle.) But now they're floating in the middle of the Silver Void, with Quah-Namog and the rocky corpse of Tenebrous nowhere in sight. Bashers making an Intelligence check realize that they haven't moved – this is where the dead god was just moments ago.

No attempt to find Tenebrous on the Astral is successful. What's more, the Guardian of the Dead Gods isn't around to answer questions to satisfy mortal curiosities. The PCs are left with yet another mystery.

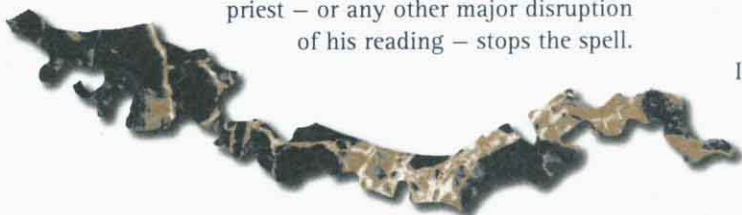
WHAT+ REALLY HAPPENED?

Even if the PCs don't tell anyone about their experiences, eventually a planewalker passing through the Astral notices that the corpse of Tenebrous (or Orcus, if that's the name by which the berk knows him) has vanished. And once he starts rattling his bone-box, the news spreads quickly throughout Sigil. Sure, the true fate of the deity's left for the graybeards to debate and the peery to worry about, but plenty of folks have their own opinions. Thus, whether the heroes brag about their exploits or keep silent, they eventually hear some of the following chant making the rounds of the Cage:

- ◆ The last effort put forth by Tenebrous (the altered perception of Sigil) was a final, desperate gamble. Since it didn't work, Tenebrous was completely consumed and is gone forever.
- ◆ Quah-Namog had a contingency plan. Tenebrous is still dead, but his corpse has been hidden away while the priest plots to bring him back again.
- ◆ The Wand of Orcus itself intervened. It destroyed, saved, or permanently changed Tenebrous.
- ◆ The god never really died at all. Sure, his first death (as Orcus) was real enough, but he returned (as Tenebrous) imbued with negative energy. Thus, when he fell again to the Astral, that energy kept him *undead*. Quah-Namog's efforts weren't enough to resurrect him fully, but they sufficed to restore Tenebrous to his shadowy near-power state.

IF +HE PCs FAILED

If the cutters didn't see through the altered vision of Sigil or didn't find Quah-Namog in time, the priest completes his spell of *resurrection*. But the multiverse doesn't suddenly come to an end. Instead, Quah-Namog and the corpse of Tenebrous simply vanish (as described above), and the heroes're left floating on the Astral.



Is Tenebrous truly back among the living? Who knows, berk — can a mortal really resurrect a god? No one knows the dark of it, but the chant's still the same (again, as above). The graybeards debate the screed, and the peery — and the canny — watch for the power's return.

How will the return of Tenebrous affect a PLANESCAPE campaign? To answer that question, the Dungeon Master must decide two things. First, did the *resurrection* spell restore Tenebrous to full power or to some lesser state? Second, is the restored Wand of Orcus just as strong as the original, or is it weaker — or perhaps just a totally powerless symbol? If both Tenebrous and the wand have regained their full might, well, sooner or later all hell breaks loose on the planes (for details, refer to "If Tenebrous Arrives," at the end of the previous chapter).

◆ AFTERMATH ◆

Whether or not Tenebrous returns to life, the multiverse has undergone a number of changes as a result of his nefarious plan — and will continue to deal with the repercussions for some time to come.

Here's the final list of powers slain by Tenebrous, along with aftereffects.

- ◆ **Bwimb**, Baron of the Paraelemental Plane of Ooze. As a result, a minor power struggle occurs on the Plane of Ooze, but most folks pay it little heed.

- ◆ **Primus**, ruler of the modrons. He's quickly replaced by a promoted secundus.

- ◆ **Maanzecorian**, illithid god of secrets. Ilsensine now becomes the unquestioned supreme deity of the mind flayers.

- ◆ **Tomeri**, goddess of wisdom and love. Her death is felt most heavily on the Prime, where the bulk of her human worshipers dwell.

- ◆ **Camaxtli**, god of fate. As with the death of Tomeri, the Prime suffers the most. Chant holds that Quetzalcoatl, head of the pantheon to which Camaxtli belonged, has sworn vengeance against the murderer and vowed to search the planes until he's found.

Nekrotheptis Skorprios (proxy of Set) and Evreth (proxy of the unknown gods of Pelion) also fell, and Tenebrous no

doubt killed many, many others of lesser importance. For months afterward, chant spreads of other gods and beings of power supposedly slain. Most rumors prove to be nothing but screed. Still, the Athar gain support from the widespread belief that the powers're more vulnerable and less godlike than previously thought.

When Kiaransalee discovers that Tenebrous was Orcus, she's said to be driven to the brink of barminess with paranoia. She begins fortifying her realm against what she fears (for many years afterward) will be the inevitable coming attack by her old foe.

Yggdrasil heals its wounds; the visages are gone and do not return. The portal leading from the tree to Ranais closes, however, cutting the people of Crux off from not only their ancestral homeworld but the Cage as well. The tree-burg remains a central crossroads on the World Ash, Veridis Mov still its leader and protector.

Tcian Sumere disappears, though no one knows if it's been destroyed or simply moved. However, the portal found in the temple on Ranais is definitely gone — in fact, the whole temple vanishes along with it.

War continues to grip the Vault of the Drow. With Kiaransalee's attention focused elsewhere, the tide turns against the House of Tormtor and its allies, making a Lolth-free Vault and a githyanki outpost unlikely.

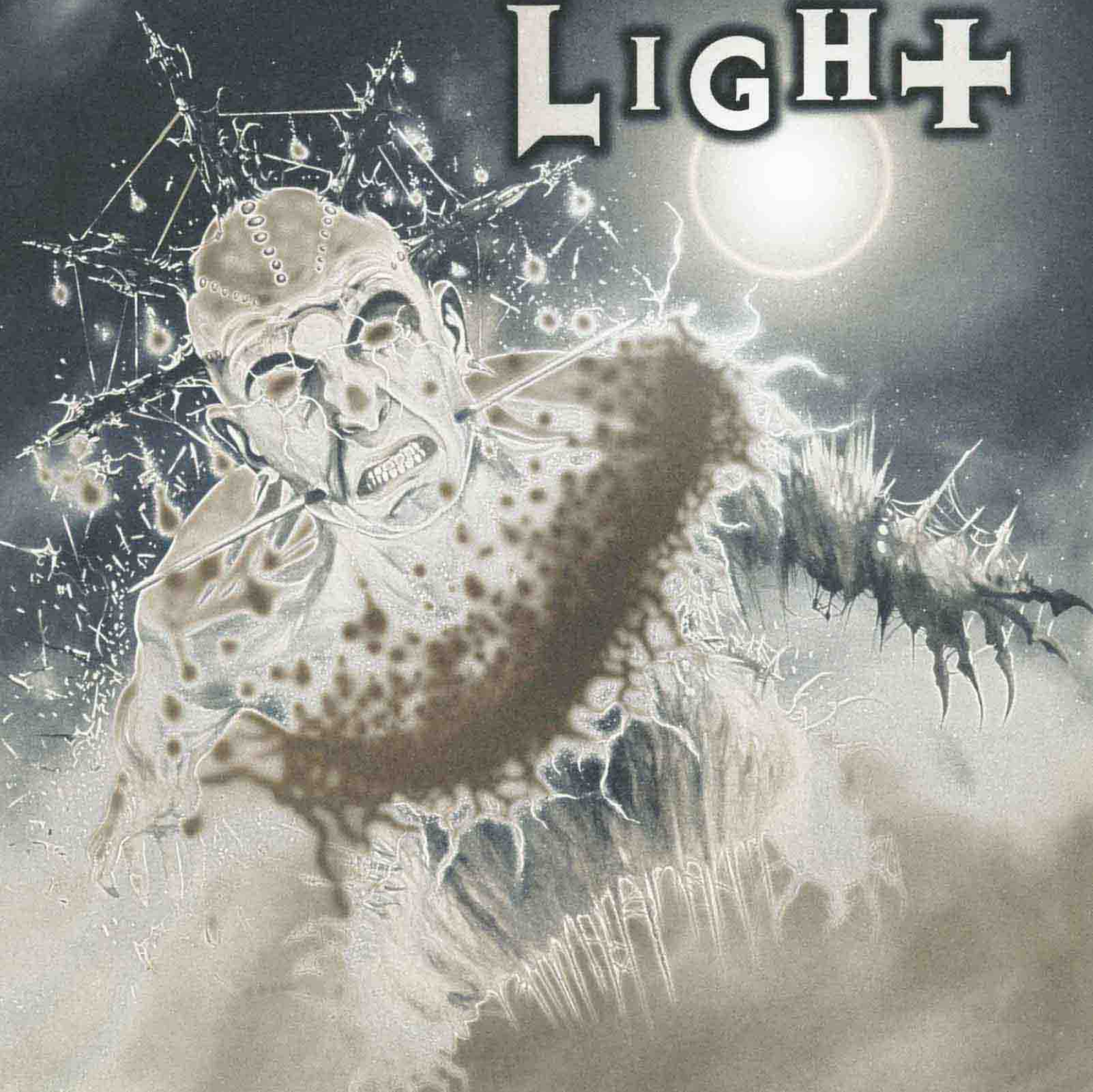
Pelion and Pandemonium see little change. The Last Spire and the Chamber of Secrets become even more obscure, until virtually no one in the multiverse remembers they ever existed. The Cynosure continues to flourish, and the show goes on. . . .

FOR THE PLAYER CHARACTERS

The heroes earn a bit of fame from having played a part in opposing Tenebrous, enough to net them respect, job offers, and perhaps even rewards from concerned parties. If they managed to ensure that Tenebrous stayed dead, the Dungeon Master should also grant each PC bonus experience points — exactly enough to gain one level. This XP is in addition to whatever the characters gained during the course of the adventure.

Fame is fleeting, however, and nowhere is this more true than on the planes, where there's always new chant, new heroes, and new tales. The planewalkers should enjoy the attention while it lasts but prepare to get on with their lives afterward.

INTO THE LIGHT



"Good evening. Welcome to the Ubiquitous Wayfarer, where the bub comes cheap and cheaper still the ... well, never mind. You've probably heard that joke already.

"Tonight I'd like to stop the music for a little while and tell all you good folks a tale. Sure as Sigil, it's a ghost story – a tale of a haunted church. But no mere unquiet mortal spirit haunts the place; instead, the church holds the essence of a forgotten god. I guess that makes this a god story. It's a tale of devotion and betrayal, of love and hate, of passion and death. But enough of my rattling bone-box. On to the story.

"Let me begin by saying ..."

INTRODUCTION

◆ BACKGROUND ◆

The old church had stood for longer than anyone could remember. It was less a measure of time's passing than of the fragility of mortal memory: Truth was, no one

could recall when it had actually been built. The old, nondescript stone building had but one story, a sagging roof, and a few dirty, soot-stained windows. It was the sort of place that most folks just walked right by every day and never paid any heed – especially in the Cage, where far more interesting sights than the surrounding architecture constantly demand a body's attention.

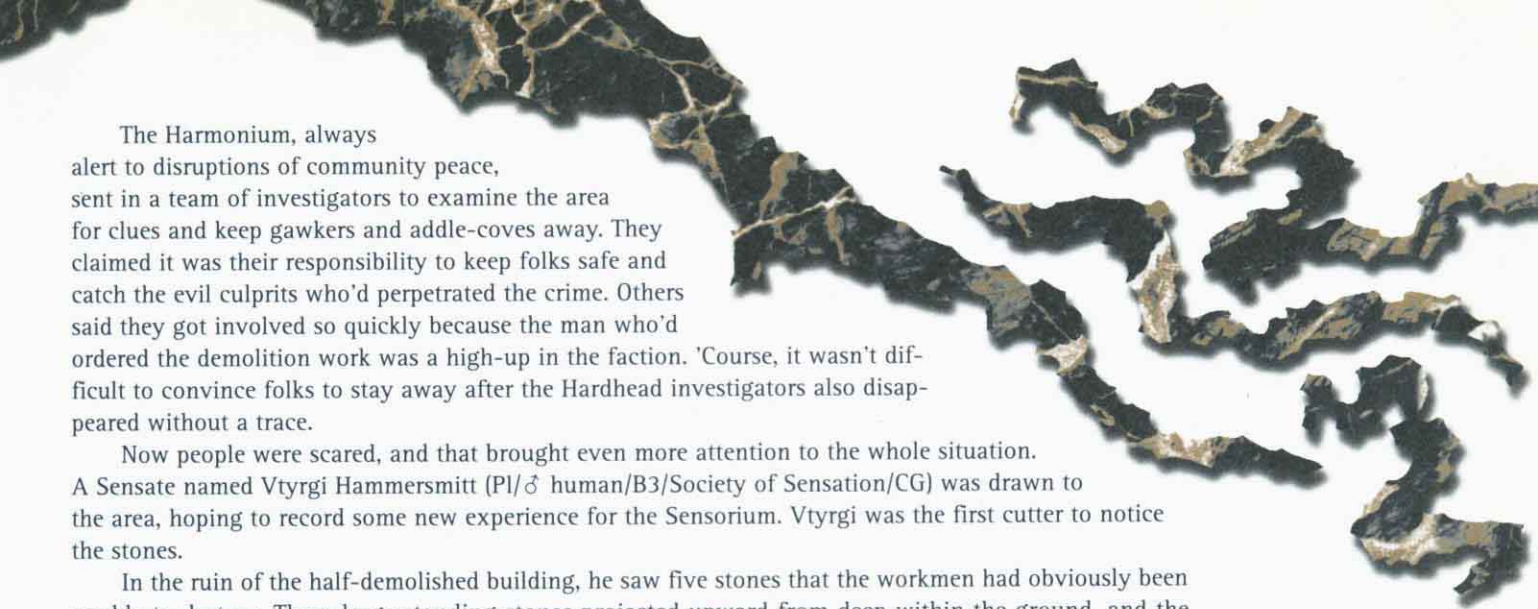
When some enterprising basher bought up the land around the area and proposed to knock down the church, no one protested. Most folks hadn't even realized that it was there until the workmen came to knock it down. People paused for a moment to watch as burly men with hammers brought down the walls stone by stone, then shrugged and moved along. Perhaps they scowled at the noise, but they realized it wouldn't take very long to demolish a building as small as the church. Maybe they even noticed that a dabus or two watched the destruction, but it wasn't strange to see the dabus interested in something like that, was it?

All seemed normal until folks heard the chant spreading quickly through the Lower Ward: The workmen tearing down the old church had all disappeared.

Naturally, when something bad happens, the first thing berks want to do is place the blame. Sure enough, folks pointed fingers everywhere. A dozen bashers who swing hammers for a living don't disappear everyday, and they don't get scragged without a ruckus, either. Some said that fiendish slavers had taken the men for dark work on the Lower Planes. Others claimed that a faction was responsible, though it was always the enemy of the claimant that was supposedly guilty. A very brave (or foolish) few blamed the dabus that they'd seen in the vicinity.

Suddenly, the denizens of the Lower Ward started asking questions they'd never bothered – or thought – to voice before. "Whose church was that?" "What power or faith was it dedicated to?" "Who had worshiped there?" "Where were the priests?" Rumors wormed their way into the chant that secretive, dark cultists had used the church to sacrifice the workers to an evil god. And a few particularly top-shelf thinkers wondered why no one knew anything about this church – and why nobody thought that very fact was curious in and of itself.

EVEN THE GODS
AREN'T IMMUNE
TO TRAGEDY.
— BETTEN GUIL,
A POET



The Harmonium, always alert to disruptions of community peace, sent in a team of investigators to examine the area for clues and keep gawkers and addle-coves away. They claimed it was their responsibility to keep folks safe and catch the evil culprits who'd perpetrated the crime. Others said they got involved so quickly because the man who'd ordered the demolition work was a high-up in the faction. 'Course, it wasn't difficult to convince folks to stay away after the Hardhead investigators also disappeared without a trace.

Now people were scared, and that brought even more attention to the whole situation. A Sensate named Vtyrqi Hammersmitt (PI/♂ human/B3/Society of Sensation/CG) was drawn to the area, hoping to record some new experience for the Sensorium. Vtyrqi was the first cutter to notice the stones.

In the ruin of the half-demolished building, he saw five stones that the workmen had obviously been unable to destroy. These large standing stones projected upward from deep within the ground, and the walls of the church had seemingly been built on or around them. Once the stones were pointed out, it was clear to everyone that the megaliths were older and of a different composition than the walls around them. Again, folks wondered why no one had noticed this before.

The Athar closed off the area, claiming it was a "religious hazard." The Harmonium agreed about the danger, although they made no comment on the pamphlets that the Athar disseminated — tracts that described the obvious threat that temples posed when they were built within a community. Tensions rose when a band of Signers demanded (and were refused) entrance to the half-ruined church. The Athar announced that the entire area would be demolished as soon as they could determine a safe way to level the place. The Signers protested and continued to insist on their right to enter the church, although they would not say why or for what purpose.

THE DARK ☉ OF THE CHURCH

Centuries — or perhaps millennia — ago, the last worshipers of a faded religion traveled onto the Astral Plane to seek the body of their deity, long since fallen into the eternal sleep of a god's death. In a final act of devotion, they stood upon the stony god-isle and, with great ritual and solemn reverence, cut it into pieces. Once finished, the worshipers brought the pieces of the god to Sigil, the City of Doors, and used them to erect a monument to the former power: the five standing stones. The devotees themselves drifted into obscurity (and ultimately the dead-book).

Eventually, people forgot what the monument was and what it had represented. The energy around the monument was still quite evident, and so adherents of another (now equally forgotten) religion built a temple around the standing stones, incorporating them into the new church structure itself. As time passed, the second faith also died and slipped away out of memory.

The church stood vacant for hundreds of years, until the area came into the possession of Cruigh Manathas (Pr/♂ human/O-level/Harmonium/LG), a blood of great wealth and influence. When he bid his workmen to tear the place down, they encountered the power of the standing stones and were absorbed into them. The Harmonium investigators were likewise drawn into the stones (see Part Three for details).

Now, both the Athar and a group of Signers have tumbled to a modicum of truth about the stones. The Defiers're determined to see the church and the stones (and therefore the remnants of the god) destroyed. The Signers — or rather, a hidden cabal within the Signers — want to attempt to restore the god right here in Sigil to prove their own "imagining" power and philosophy supreme. What neither side realizes is that they've been manipulated into conflict by a cutter with a very old grudge. Perhaps unlocking the mysteries of the stones is the only means to avert disaster.

THE PLOT THICKENS

The factions have been played for rubes. A clever fighter named Argesh Fiord has been controlling the situation from the beginning, and his motivation is nothing less than war between the Signers and the Athar. Years ago, Argesh was a member of the Sign of One. When his wife, a priestess of Bast, was killed by a barmy Athar, neither the Signers nor the Athar did anything about it. Feeling betrayed by both fac-



tions, Argesh hunted the crazed priestkiller on his own and put him in the dead-book. Both factions have long since forgotten the entire incident – but Argesh remembers.

In his youth, Argesh had been an explorer, the kind of berk who poked into old ruins to scavenge worthwhile material or just to see what was there. He'd explored the nameless church, and with the help of an ancient journal, managed to uncover the dark of the standing stones. It was his greatest find and his greatest secret. He kept quiet, knowing that the knowledge he'd gained would come in handy one day. He was right.

After his wife died, Argesh secretly purchased the land on which the old church stood. Not long after, he faked his own death and in his will bequeathed the land to a Harmonium merchant with whom he was mildly acquainted – Cruigh Manathas, the first gully in an elaborate peel.

Meanwhile, Argesh took on a false identity and made contact with a disgruntled Signer, an enchanter named Mhavor. Argesh subtly convinced Mhavor that the key to Signer power was indeed to raise a god from the dead, and that the Signer who succeeded would most certainly be the greatest of them all (perhaps even the One). Argesh knew that once he'd heard enough, Mhavor would eagerly leap at the chance to lead a group of Signers into the church. All he needed then was for the Athar to oppose the attempt.

Argesh timed things perfectly. Just when Cruigh made the mystery of the church public, Argesh fed both Mhavor's Signers and the Athar the chant that an actual dead god lay inside. The clash was inevitable – and best of all, whoever won and went inside the church would fall prey to the standing stones' power. Argesh could just sit back and watch.

◆ PREPARING FOR PLAY ◆

"Into the Light" is a PLANESCAPE® adventure for characters of virtually any level, since it involves very little combat and focuses on detective work and problem-solving skills. The adventure is a companion to the larger quest in this book, "Out of the Darkness," and can be played together with it or as a separate scenario.

Although a few maps appear throughout the text, the poster sheet contains one additional map showing the inside of the old church and the various locations visited in Part Three. To see this large map, the DM should unfold the poster sheet all the way.

As with "Out of the Darkness," full statistics for major players in the adventure appear in the Appendix. For minor

characters, abbreviated stat lines appear after their names, right in the text.

"Into the Light" uses the factions heavily, and it takes place entirely in the City of Doors, though this fact might seem questionable in Part Three. The DM should be familiar with the factions as presented in the PLANESCAPE Campaign Setting boxed set. *The Factol's Manifesto* (2611) expands on this information, though that book isn't essential for this adventure.

It's important that neither the Sign of One nor the Athar be depicted as "the bad guys," even if the PCs end up pitted against them. No faction should ever be portrayed as all bad, all good, always right, or always wrong. Ultimately, each group is at times both friend and foe, good and evil, right and wrong. When examined as a whole – from the perspective of the entire planar setting – the factions should always be far more than simply villains or benefactors.

Like all good PLANESCAPE adventures, "Into the Light" has no cut-and-dried ending. Though the mystery of the standing stones is probably solved by the ride's end, big questions are still left unanswered – perhaps more important questions than those raised by the mystery itself.

USING "OUT OF THE DARKNESS"

While the two adventures in *Dead Gods* can be played separately, the DM can also insert the three parts of "Into the Light" into the course of "Out of the Darkness." Thus, the episodes of "Into the Light" become a subplot of the more epic quest, breaking up the intense focus of that dangerous challenge with a very different kind of adventure.

The flowchart on the inside back cover of the book shows the recommended method for combining the two adventures. For more information, refer to the Introduction section of "Out of the Darkness."

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

Part One of "Into the Light" occurs before "Out of the Darkness" begins. The PCs first hear of the situation at the church, and they're sent by a neutral faction or interested party to find out the dark of it. During their investigation, they run into numerous other folks trying to ferret out the same information.

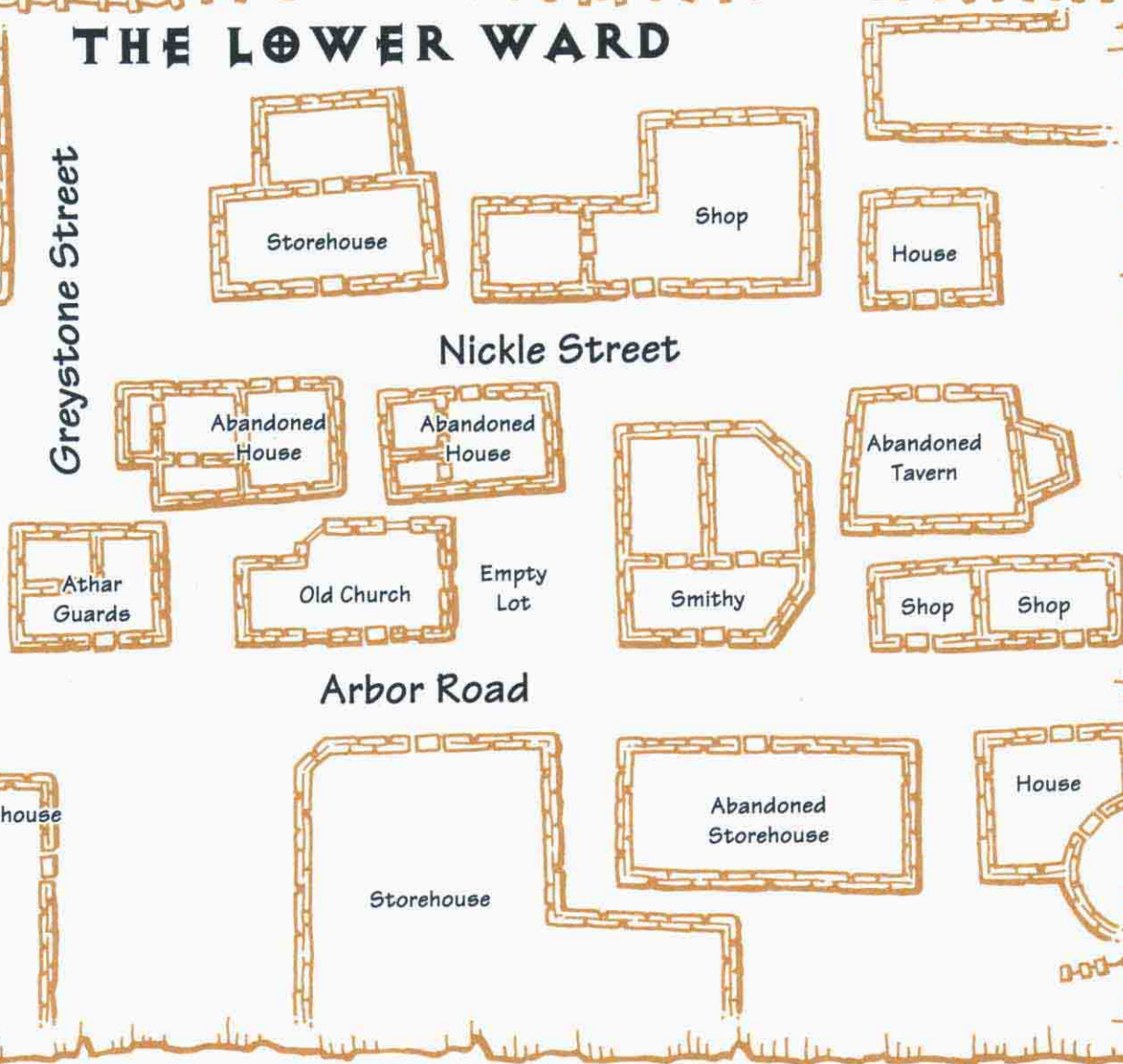
Part Two takes place when the adventurers first return to Sigil after their ordeals on Yggdrasil (right after Chapter III of "Out of the Darkness"). The conflict between the Signers and the Athar comes to a head, and the cutters must help to soothe tensions before the clash evolves into full-blown faction war.

After Chapter VIII of "Out of the Darkness," the PCs're drawn back into Part Three of "Into the Light." Argesh Fiord finally makes his move, and the heroes discover the mystery of the church, experience a dead god's memories, and hopefully are wise enough to resolve the matter once and for all.



THE LOWER WARD

Greystone Street



PART ONE: INITIAL FORAYS

It seemed to Argesh that the beginning was always the hardest part. At the beginning, a body never knows if he's foreseen all the various contingencies. What if the berks involved do something unexpected?

Hmmph. Difficult even to imagine, he thought to himself. The addle-coves he'd been dealing with could be led about like children — no, like animals. A body just needed to study their weaknesses and then exploit them. And who had

more weaknesses than the self-righteous, posturing factions that live in the lice-infested hole of their self-imposed Cage?

Argesh knew he had nothing to worry about.

◆ GETTING THE PCs INVOLVED ◆

Faction politics and the intrigues of the city's high-ups may or may not catch the attention of the heroes, but in this particular case, it doesn't matter much. A factor or agent summons the characters and makes them an offer they shouldn't refuse. A number of possibilities are presented below, but no matter how PCs become involved, the DM can then run "Learning the Chant" to bring them up to date.

NOTE: If desired, the DM can let the heroes find out the background (given in the Introduction) on their own. Then they can dig up the information in "Learning the Chant" and follow the clues according to their own motivations.

VENGEANCE
IS VENGEANCE,
NOT MATTER
HOW DIFFICULT,
TIME-CONSUMING,
OR CONVOLUTED THE PLAN.
— ARGESH FIORD

- ◆ **FACTION HIGH-UP.** Naturally, when two factions clash, the rest want to know what's going on. The DM might select an agent from the faction of a particularly loyal character, a faction that has helped the PCs in the past, or simply one that the cutters're likely to help. If the heroes have no particular ties, the Fated make fine sponsors — they like to know the dark of everyone else's business so they can exploit it to their own ends. (It's strongly recommended that the hiring faction *not* be the Athar or the Signers, as this would drastically change the adventure.)
- ◆ **WEALTHY BLOOD.** In this case, the PCs likely won't know the identity of their employers — or why they want chant on the church. Literally anyone might be interested in the matter, from prosperous merchants in the Great Bazaar to proxies of various powers to the arcanaloth chant-broker Shemeshka the Marauder.
- ◆ **CRUIGH MANATHAS.** The owner of the church property hires the PCs to investigate the whole thing. In this scenario, however, Cruigh would be more suspicious of the Signers and Athar, rather than just scared of the church (see "Cruigh Manathas," later in Part One). He wants to know why they're fighting over his land, wondering if he's the owner of something more valuable than he'd first thought.

LEARNING THE CHANT

In this encounter, the agent selected by the DM summons the characters. Since the DM chooses the agent's employer to fit the campaign, he should also work out the details regarding this individual.

The envoy greets the PCs and treats them to whatever form of refreshment they request. Throughout their meeting, he's extremely generous and accommodating, showing the heroes respect and courtesy. Eventually, the talk moves on to the business at hand:

"Here's the chant: Word on the streets has it that the Signers and the Lost are ready to come to blows at any moment. Now, obviously, this sort of thing occurs now and again, but right now no one has any idea why — and that's not acceptable. There seems to be some disagreement about a tiny church in the Lower Ward, but it seems unlikely that such a thing could provoke hostilities to this degree.

"So, here's the deal. We want you to poke around a little, park your ears in the right places, and find out what's really happening. As long as you're discreet, there shouldn't be much danger or difficulty involved."

At this point, the PCs probably have a few questions. The representative answers them as best he can.

Why us? *"It's very simple. I suspect that something big is brewing. You'll likely have to do some poking into faction secrets. We can't send any of our regular agents into such a situation — there's too much of a chance that we'd be implicated and possibly even dragged into the whole mess. This kind of investigation requires a delicate touch. If you're caught doing something that we don't want to be linked to, we'll deny this entire conversation ever occurred. We'll deny ever having any connection with you. You're on your own — but that's why we're filling your pockets with jink, isn't it?"*



What's this about a church? *"Apparently, there've been some strange disappearances at a church scheduled to be torn down in the Lower Ward. The Athar have recently surrounded this place – I wonder how the owner of the property feels about that? But now, suddenly, some Signers are demanding to get in. No one knows why."*

Any other leads? *"Just one. A basher named Hulester used to be a high-up member of the Athar. Turns out he's really an Anarchist. He was recently found out, and the whole thing was pretty public, so the poor sod's days of infiltration might be over for good. His own faction probably won't touch him now with a 10-foot pole (unless it's got a sharpened point on the end), at least until the heat dies down. Hulester might know more about what the Athar are up to, and he's got no loyalty to them. . . ."*

The agent doesn't know much more about the situation. He offers each character 200 gp, plus a bonus of 200 more if they get the information back to him within a week *and* he thinks they've done a thorough job. Once they've been lanned to the chant, they should come directly to him, but not before they're ready with the total picture. He wants to know the big "why," and he wants details. Pretty simple.

Here's the dark of this conversation, though: The agent hiring the player characters is actually an infiltrator working for the Sign of One. He's been told by his high-ups that a group within his own faction is involved with the situation at the church, but the rest of the Signers don't know what they're up to, or even who

belongs to the secret subgroup. Further, the Signers want to know if the Athar have any information, and what they're planning to do with the church.

◆ F A C T I O N C O M P E T I T I O N ◆

The faction or high-up that hires the PCs isn't the only one interested in the situation. Mhavor's Signer subgroup and the Athar are intimately involved, and once they discover (independently, of course) berks poking into their affairs, they both commission folks to block investigations or stop the PCs. Several other factions send in their own investigators, each with their different orders and levels of interest. Some are potential allies, but most (sadly) are more likely rivals and even enemies.

THE SIGN O F O N E

The Sign of One – or, more correctly, a subgroup of Signers – is one of the main factions mixed up in this adventure. Mhavor's secret subgroup started the trouble by trying to break into the church. Meanwhile, the rest of the faction waits to hear the chant from their agent – the one who hired the PCs.

The Signer involvement's a little complicated. See, Argesh Fiord's dupe Mhavor used to be a member of the Will of the One, a splinter group of the Signers that had been rising in prominence due to the machinations of its leader, the water genasi Prisine. However, that group's recent upheaval and embarrassment (for particulars, see the adventure *Doors to the Unknown* [2626]) had brought on censure from the Signers' Factol Darius. Besides, Mhavor felt that Prisine's

obsession with bringing back the dead god Aoskar was just too dangerous and controversial. (For more information on Prisine and the Will of the One, consult

Uncaged: Faces of Sigil [2624].)

Mhavor left the Will of the One to form his own secret splinter group, the Way of the One.

The DM should note that splinter groups such as the Will of the One and the Way of the One are still considered part



of the Signer faction. However, they follow their own agendas that sometimes conflict with the faction's overall goals. The highly individualistic nature of the Sign of One's philosophy inspires many such subgroups.

When Mhavor's secret group of Signers finds out that people are looking into their business, they hire an assassin to put an end to the intruders' inquiries. These aren't evil bashers (for the most part), but they're desperate to carry out their plan – and secrecy is imperative. The Way of the One appoints the half-elf Gremmith Mi to the case.

Once assigned, the wizard-assassin stalks and attempts to put the PCs (or other investigating NPCs) into the dead-book. Gremmith is a short, overweight man who abhors physical exercise, combat, and even contact with other folks. He uses only spells or his magical blowpipe to attack. He won't be hired, however, unless the investigators (including any of the NPCs) attract the attention of the Signer group.

It's up to the DM to determine if the assassin is hired and when he strikes. But Gremmith probably won't become involved until the PCs confront the Signer known as Elchis (in the "Secret Meetings" encounter, later in Part One).

THE ATHAR

The Athar's side of the story is fairly simple: They just want to keep everyone out of the church. They're assembling a team of wizards to examine the place, but that'll take some time. Meanwhile, the Lost (with the Harmonium's backing) have authority over the area.

Now, the Athar know that the situation has aroused the curiosity of a lot of berks. Therefore, they've assigned a group of "troubleshooters" (five 5th-level fighters) to divert anyone poking their noses into the business. Like the Signer assassin, these cutters stay in the background until someone actively starts prying into the affair at the church. Unlike the assassin, however, the troubleshooters won't kill their foes. Instead, they attempt to throw investigators off the track. The troubleshooters plant false leads, give the PCs bad chant under phony identities, and bribe real sources (like the people in the neighborhood of the church, including the folks at the Ubiquitous Wayfarer) not to talk. They can be a great hindrance to anyone seeking the needed information, but the PCs – if they're canny – have a few chances to catch the troubleshooters' influence before it throws off their investigation.

Traditionally, the troubleshooters pay a garnish of 10 gp to convince folks not to talk. If a PC offers more than this, most berks not only rattle their bone-boxes about what they know, but they turn stag on the troubleshooters that bribed them in the first place. Also, peery cutters might tumble to the fact that their contacts are lying. If a player states that his character is suspicious about whether he's being told the truth, allow the character a Wisdom check at –4. If the check is successful, the character sees through the lie.

The DM should keep in mind that while the troubleshooters are good, they can't be everywhere and they can't spoil every lead. What's more, if a PC ever threatens one of them,

the troubleshooters aren't beyond using force. Fact is, by the end of the scenario, they'll probably resort to that anyway.

OTHER FACTIONS

The headings below describe the other factions' reactions to the disturbance at the church, as well as any cutters they assign to investigate the matter.

THE BELIEVERS OF THE SOURCE.

The Godsmen don't become involved except to caution their Athar allies to remain calm and try to find a peaceful solution to the situation. It's not entirely an altruistic stance – their own headquarters, the Great Foundry, lies near the seat of the conflict, and they don't want to be drawn into someone else's war.

THE BLEAK CABAL.

"Who cares?" sums up the faction's view nicely. 'Course, that's how they view almost everything, so a body shouldn't be too offended by their apathy. Individual Bleakers might get involved out of simple curiosity.

THE DOOMGUARD.

A mystery surrounding an abandoned church doesn't seem to be the kind of thing to promote entropy, but the Doomguard want to explore the possibility nonetheless. Lari Chant-Finder, a githzerai thief, volunteered to check it out. As her nickname suggests, Lari's able to find the dark about any subject, given enough time. Physically unremarkable, she blends into a crowd well, which is one of the keys to her success. Lari knows a great many folks throughout the City of Doors and has a good, intuitive feel for finding the right bloods and asking them the right questions.

THE DUSTMEN.

Once they hear the rumors of a dead god, the Dustmen oppose the idea of Signers bringing the power back to life. If it's dead, then it's obviously gone to a higher plane of existence and shouldn't be dragged back. A Dustman or two might want to investigate the rumored power's unique deceased state, but otherwise they're not interested.

THE FATED.

The Takers aren't specifically involved, but they watch the situation closely to see which faction ends up being strong enough to claim the church. In their minds, whoever holds it has the right to keep it. As explained above, the Fated may also be the faction that hires the PCs to look into the matter. Remember, however, that the agent who hires the PCs also reports back to the Sign of One.

THE FRATERNITY OF ORDER.

To the Guvners, anything unknown is just a mystery waiting to be solved. To this end, they assign the human paladin Malweis to investigate. The basher's also sympathetic to the views of the Harmonium and the Mercykillers, so he's not likely to

look kindly on anyone suspected of breaking the law. He's as direct and unsubtle as they come, especially since he wears a *ring of truth*, but he's not without his own certain charm. Malweis is tall, blonde, and handsome. He works alone, and he won't give the PCs any help, since that might be considered turning stag on his own faction. Nevertheless, he would come to the PCs' aid (as he would help practically anyone) if he thought they were in danger. If Malweis determines a basher to be evil, however, the paladin shows him no mercy.

THE FREE LEAGUE.

As usual, the Indeps encourage members of their faction to act as each individual sees fit. The faction has no overall response to the situation, although recent tensions between the Free League and the Harmonium may drive some Indeps to defy the Hardheads' dictates at every turn.

THE HARMONIUM.

The Harmonium namer Cruigh Manathas owns the land that the church sits on, and he's the one who inadvertently began this whole mess. After his workmen and then a Harmonium investigative team disappeared, the Hardheads were all too willing to agree with the Athar that the place was a hazard. For the moment, they're letting the Athar watch over the church and they've simply stepped up the nearby patrols to keep the peace. If things get out of hand, however (as may occur at the end of Part Two), the Harmonium takes stronger measures to guard the church and make sure that no one gets in.

THE MERCYKILLERS.

The Red Death has more important things to do than watch over an ancient building. They're keeping tabs on the situation through the Harmonium patrols, and though they're not currently involved, they'll appear right quick if they think there's justice to be done.

THE REVOLUTIONARY LEAGUE.

There's no organized response from the Anarchists (go figure), especially since they've just been exposed by the revelation of Hulester's status as their spy among the Athar. They might very well want revenge on Hulester for his incompetence. . . .

THE SOCIETY OF SENSATION.

A Sensate'd probably say that there wasn't anything very interesting about guarding a dusty old church – not much potential for new experiences there. 'Course, who can ever tell what a Sensate might find fascinating?

The Sensate Vtyrgi Hammersmitt (the first one to notice the standing stones) continues to hang around the area, hoping that something will happen to spark a new experience that he can add to the Sensates' catalog of sensations.

THE TRANSCENDENT ORDER.

The Ciphers, though primarily involved with their own inner search for unity with the multiverse, aren't completely oblivious

to events in the Cage. Therefore, they've hired the wind duke Ivth Nanright to find out what the Signers are doing. Ivth's known for getting results, which is why the Ciphers have faith in him. Unfortunately, the genasi is as evil and twisted as they come. A small man, Ivth has light blue skin and long white hair that never seems to stop moving about, as though it were being blown by a chill wind. Ivth employs four barghest minders and has 38 cranium rat spies throughout Sigil.

This cruel basher uses any means to achieve his goals, and he's not beyond murder, torture, or anything else. In fact, Ivth doesn't consider any act too low. Ivth is probably the biggest threat to the PCs during the first part of the ride. If he finds out that the characters (or the other NPC groups) are looking for the same information that he's after, he plots and carries out their murders. He uses any method to hurt his foes – he'd even hold an innocent family member hostage to get at a rival.

The barghests stay around Ivth, although they're not always out in the open. They often hide in their canine forms. The cranium rats work for Ivth because he's good at ferreting out secrets, and anything that he learns they know as well. (Sigil's cranium rats have taken the idea that knowledge is power as their own credo.) For the moment, these creatures serve Ivth unconditionally. The rats spread out individually to destinations picked by the genasi, observing what they can and then gathering together again to increase their intelligence so they can process the data and communicate it to their master.

The DM should remember that Ivth is likely to kill those he sees as competitors, and if he knows that he has such rivals, he might kill any sources of chant he comes across as well. The PCs should have ample opportunity to see the trail of blood that he leaves. It might even serve the plot to have the PCs discover either the paladin Malweis or Lari Chant-Finder murdered by Ivth's hand (after the PCs've encountered the victim previously).

THE XAOSITECTS.

Whatever. The Chaosmen do as they always do – anything, nothing, and everything (sometimes all at once). It's about as easy to predict what the Xaositects will do as it is to find an honest man in Sigil.

◆ TIME LINE OF EVENTS ◆

The time line below shows key events during the adventure, starting when the PCs begin their investigation. Thus, Day 3 is three days after they begin, Day 6 is six days after, and so on. Remember, traipsing around a city the size of the Cage takes a good deal of time. The DM must track the heroes' movement because it will become important to match their progress against that of their competition. If one of the NPCs reaches an important source of information before the player characters do, the source might say something like, "That's funny, a fellow was here last night asking me the same sorts of questions. . . ." Confrontation with these competitors is highly rec-

commended. The PCs should know that others are looking for the chant, too.

Only the activities of Malweis, Lari, and Ivth are detailed; the time line shows which of the important avenues of inquiry they reach each day. Once the assassin Gremmith Mi and the Athar troubleshooters become involved (as noted in the encounters below or as determined by the DM), the DM should track their movements as well.

NOTE: A map of the important areas of the Lower Ward appears on page 129.

Day 0 – The PCs begin investigating.

Day 1 – Lari Chant-Finder begins to investigate the Signers and the Athar at their faction headquarters and elsewhere.

Day 2 – Malweis begins his investigation by trying to enter the church; he fails and just escapes with his life. Lari continues to investigate the Signers and Athar. Ivth's cranium rat agents begin scouring the church's neighborhood. (Local folks notice this and begin talking about the sudden increase in cranium rats in the area.)

Day 3 – Malweis interrogates sods at the Ubiquitous Wayfarer, but Hulester won't talk to him. Lari continues to investigate the Signers and Athar.

Day 4 – Malweis talks with people around the neighborhood. Lari continues to investigate the Signers and Athar; by the end of Day 4, she knows that only a splinter group of the Signers is involved, and even knows a few of their names. Ivth questions folks in the Ubiquitous Wayfarer.

Day 5 – Malweis talks with more sods around the neighborhood. Lari attempts to get information out of the Athar guards at the church, to no avail. Ivth sends his rats to the Shattered Temple.

Day 6 – Malweis continues to talk to folks around the neighborhood. Lari interrogates sods in the Ubiquitous Wayfarer and the local neighborhood. Ivth's rats go to the Hall of Speakers, while Ivth himself goes to the Hall of Records and then to talk to Cruigh Manathas.

Day 7 – Malweis tries to get into the church again. Lari speaks with Barmy Kank and Cruigh. Ivth's rats go to the church, while Ivth attempts to capture one of the guards there and torture him for information.



◆ THE RIDE ◆

With its many characters, motivations, and treacheries, "Into the Light" can be a complex adventure to run. But once the DM has all the personae straight, he's ready to tackle the PCs' actions. Keep in mind that the cutters may take any of the courses of action described below in any order. Plus, they'll almost certainly try things not covered here. The DM has to be ready for anything.

The heroes probably start by finding the failed spy Hulester, but what they do next is entirely their choice. They might investigate a number of supposedly fine prospects that turn out to be no help at all; for example, no libraries or bookshops have any material on the church. The DM should embellish and detail such potential leads without making it obvious that they're dead ends. Areas of investigation that prove fruitful are discussed below.

FINDING HULESTER

Any number of sources can tell the PCs that Hulester (PI/♂ human/F10/Revolutionary League/CN) spends his nights at a tavern called the Ubiquitous Wayfarer. A number of bashers can even give a verbal description of him – which is one of the reasons he's out of work. The Anarchists don't have much use or respect for a spy who's easily recognized as one of their own.

The Ubiquitous Wayfarer is a prominent tavern in the Lower Ward, not far from the old church. The three-story establishment is known as a friendly, safe place. Refer to the map on page 137. The bottom floor holds a taproom, kitchen, and larder (the cellar beneath stores nonfood items). The upper two floors contain rooms to let. The bub flows freely, meals are filling if not fancy, and many planewalkers hang about because folks believe that the Wayfarer contains over two dozen portals.

The tavern is full to capacity tonight, and something about the look of the place tells you that it's full every night. The smell of smoke, drink, and middle-class Cagers is thick in the air, as is the din from the talking and the two mediocre musicians playing pipes in the corner. A large statue that several folks seem to be studying very carefully stands in the center of the taproom. The man you recognize from descriptions as Hulester sits by himself by a wall.

Not surprisingly, Hulester's not talkative. The middle-aged, gruff-looking basher denies any involvement with the Athar or the Revolutionary League, and he brandishes a (stolen) Sensate symbol to prove it. If the PCs continue to press him, he says in his gravelly voice, "Hey, berks, leave me be. I'm only here for the bub and the scenery."

As he says this, anyone watching him notices that his eyes fall upon the woman behind the bar. She's Riae Blackhome (PI/♀ human/O-level/Fraternity of Order/LN), the proprietor of the Ubiquitous Wayfarer. Hulester fell in love with

her while posing as one of the Athar, and his infatuation ruined his cover. He lost all interest in his mission and focused his attentions on her. His is an unrequited love, however, since he's never even had the courage (or perhaps the know-how) to approach her.

Hulester won't spill his knowledge or even admit that he knows anything unless the PCs somehow bring he and Riae together. 'Course, the berk'd never ask for that kind of help – he's content to simply watch Riae in silence – but once the characters learn about his infatuation, they might come up with the plan on their own.

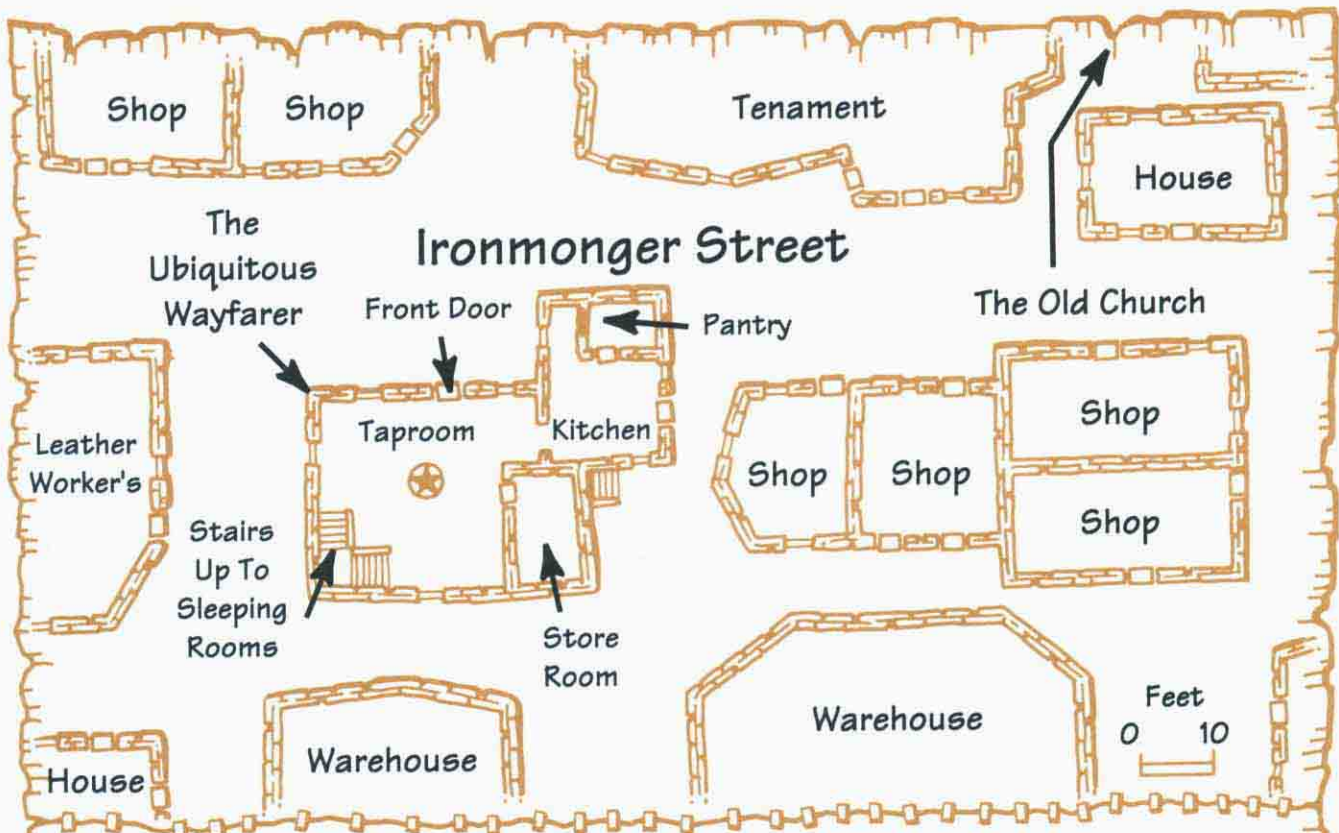
Riae wouldn't strike most berks as being the object of someone's obsession. Years of hard work show in her face and hands, and she pulls her graying hair severely back from her face so it doesn't interfere with her work. A simple frock stained with other people's bub drapes her stocky frame. Unfortunately for the PCs, she's never noticed Hulester and has no interest in getting to know him. Only a persuasive talker could convince her even to come out from behind the bar.

If the PCs successfully bring the two together (which means introducing them and getting them past that initial awkward stage), Hulester is so grateful that he tells the PCs what he knows about recent Athar activities:

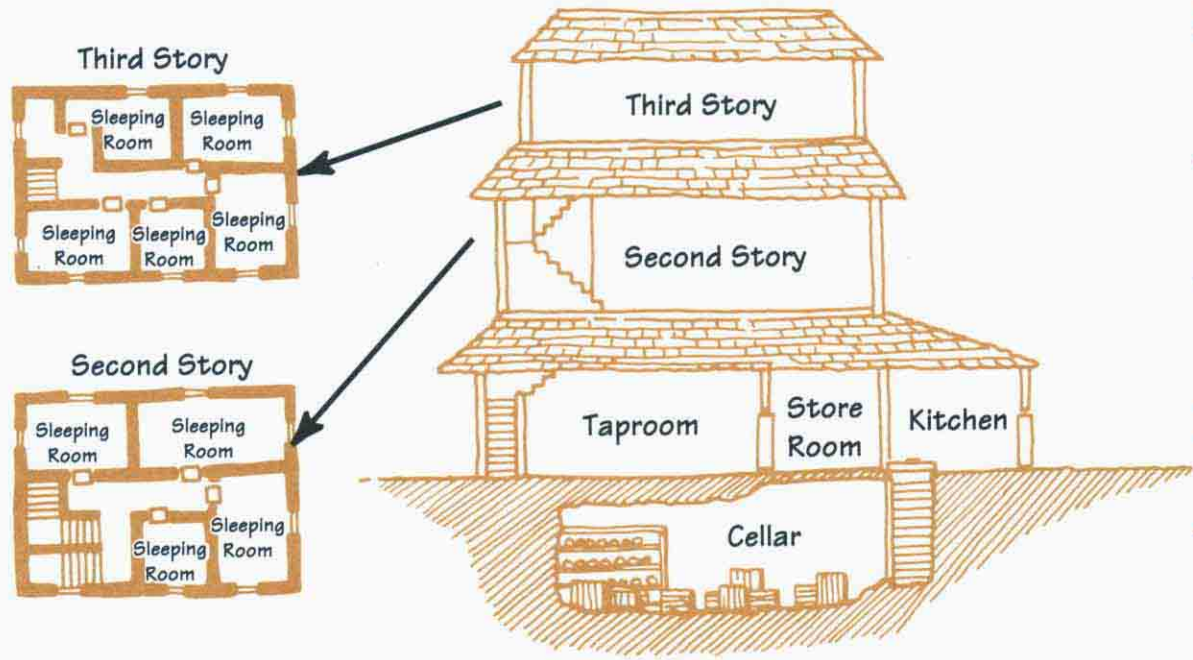
- ◆ The faction recently found out about a church (just up the street, he points out) where folks have been disappearing mysteriously. Almost immediately, the whole faction mobilized to cordon the place off.
- ◆ Other factions are involved, too. The Signers apparently want into the church, but the Athar are willing to fight to keep them out. The Harmonium also have some ties to the place.
- ◆ Rillern Postaff, an Athar factor, heads up the operation. She's supposedly the one who convinced Factol Terrence of the mission's importance.
- ◆ Rillern had posted Hulester in the tavern to keep an eye out for potential trouble. The Athar probably have a new plant or two in the Ubiquitous Wayfarer right now.

That last bit is quite true: An Athar spy is present, and at this point in the ride, the faction's troubleshooters pick up the PCs' trail. The DM must decide how much they interfere with the characters' investigation.

NOTE: If the heroes don't win Hulester over, they can pick up the same chant from other sources, but it takes longer. They're left behind by the other investigators and may not be able to make up the difference, as those involved (such as Barmy Kank or Elchis) might disappear (or be killed) before the PCs reach them.



THE UBIQUITOUS WAYFARER



⊕+HERS A+ THE TAVERN

Hulester isn't the only berk at the Wayfarer with chant to share. There's also Phol Nerris (Pl/♂ human/F6/Free League/NG), a well-known blood in the neighborhood. His large bulk belies a kind face behind his bushy black beard, and he's capable and generous in helping folks sort out their problems. Phol has but one weakness: the Ubiquitous Wayfarer's puzzle statue.

See, the magical statue at the center of the tap-room, which depicts a barmy old wizard with a long beard and a pointed hat, speaks riddles – a new one each week. If the PCs move near, they hear the current riddle:

"My eyes are old and I can't eyeball a measurement to save my life. I've a mug that holds five fingers of bub, and another that holds three. I'm thirsty enough for four fingers of that fine stuff, but any more than that lays me out flat. What am I to do, for my bone-box is ever so dry. . . ."

Here's the solution: Fill up the mug that holds five and then fill the other mug from the first until the mug that holds three is full, thus leaving two fingers of bub in the five-finger mug. Empty the mug that holds three and then pour the bub from the other mug in. Now, fill up the five-finger mug and pour from that enough to fill the mug that holds three (which is exactly one finger's worth). That leaves four fingers of bub in the mug that holds five. 'Course, another solution is to use the first part of the trick to measure out two fingers, drink it down, and then do it again.

Poor Phol is caught up in this puzzle and can't solve it for all the jink in Sigil. He's too preoccupied to talk with the heroes, though if someone were to help him solve the puzzle, he'd be so relieved that he'd gladly tell what he knows about the church. Phol's heard that a small group of Signers plans to



break past the Athar blockade. The attempt might not happen for a week or two, but it's definitely in the works. He overheard one of the Signers involved call another "Elchis." This Elchis looked to be a full-blooded elf.

Additional sources of information at the tavern include Nherid (Pl/♀ tiefling/T2/Xaositect/CE), who sports long black nails and black eyes with no pupils. She points out Wilphesh Gidderskins (Pl/♂ bariaur/F4/Free League/N), saying that the bariaur's been poking around the tavern every night, asking the same questions as the PCs. She suspects that he's a faction spy. 'Course, this information won't come without a little garnish, and unfortunately, it's a complete lie. Nherid just doesn't like Wilphesh and wants to send a little trouble his way.

A number of folks in the tavern (including Wilphesh) can tell the heroes to find an old basher named Kank who wanders the streets nearby at night. Many folks've heard him talking about the church, but no one's ever paid much attention since Kank's thought to be a little barmy.

BARMY KANK

If the PCs search the streets near the Ubiquitous Wayfarer or the church at night, they come across a gaunt, leathery-skinned man dressed in light but tattered hides and sporting a staff made of bones tied together with hardened leather strips. Kank (Pr/♂ human/M3/N), a Clueless from the prime-material world of Athas, didn't take the transition to the planes well. He's completely barmy now and thinks that he's a time-traveler come to his world's distant past. He needs no incentive or garnish to rattle his bone-

box. In fact, the PCs might have a challenge getting him to pike it – especially if they give him any encouragement.

As a "time-traveler," Kank feels free to pronounce prophecy now and again. He's been focused on the old church since he heard the chant about the disappearances there. Now he spends his time telling folks: "The end of Sigil is coming, and it will come from that church. A great war will issue forth from that spot, and every person in this great city will die because of it." The PCs might think this is true prophecy because it sounds a little like what Cager doomsayers have been saying already, but it's all screed from Kank's own addled brain-box.

He's also seen the "floating picture-people" (the dabus) poking around the church. Most importantly, he knows how to sneak past the Athar blockade. At night, if a body can slip past the three guards watching the back of the church, he can crawl inside unnoticed through a hole in the back wall. (Kank occasionally used the church as shelter on rainy nights; Argesh left him alone because he was obviously no threat.) 'Course, Kank won't say anything about the hole unless asked about the church itself.

THE REST OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Canny bashers might wonder why no one else has ever paid attention to the church. At first, it might seem to be a simple case of Cager self-absorption. But after the PCs talk to a number of people, they notice a similarity in the locals' stories. Folks just never noticed the church. They knew a building occupied that part of the street, but they never knew or cared what it was. The thought of noticing the place never entered their minds. People are seeing it now as if for the first time.

Truth is, the magical force surrounding the stones *did* subtly prevent the Cagers from seeing or wondering about the church. The remnants of the god's consciousness warded away attention to prevent just the sort of circumstances that are occurring now. (See Part Three for more information on the power.)


If the PCs talk to a lot of folks (more than 10), they also find a cutter who says she noticed that the dabus seemed interested in the workmen as they tore down the church. If asked, a few others remember that fact as well.

THE HALL OF RECORDS

Assuming that the PCs can enter the Fated's headquarters and gain access to its information — a process that requires some smooth talking and substantial garnish — the heroes learn that Cruigh Manathas, a Harmonium namer, currently owns the land on which the church stands. He apparently inherited the deed many years ago from someone named Argesh Fiord. While Cruigh is easily found, further information about Argesh is not.

CRUIGH MANATHAS

The wealthy Hardhead Cruigh originally ordered the church to be torn down. Now he's afraid of the place, after losing not only a team of construction workers but a group of Harmonium soldiers and investigators as well. He feels that some kind of curse lies on the building, and he has no problem with the Athar's quarantine of the area — and neither, he points out, do the Harmonium high-ups. Cruigh gladly tells interested cutters the story of the disappearances (as related in the Introduction), as he loves to be the center of attention. Thus, a lot of folks have heard these stories, and the chant is spreading fast. It's likely that Cruigh's tales become more embellished with each rattle of his bone-box.



Cruigh knows nothing about the dabus interest in the church, nor has he ever heard anything strange about the building other than the recent disappearances. If someone tries to tell him about the dabus or the fact that no one noticed the place for years, he gets angry and says, "Hey, whose story is this, anyway?"

If asked about Argesh Fiord, Cruigh tells the PCs that the berk was a crazy old priest. (Cruigh is wrong — Argesh was never a priest, but his interest in the old church made him appear to be.) Cruigh didn't know him well and has no idea why Argesh left him the land when he died.

THE SHATTERED TEMPLE

At some point, the PCs probably visit the Shattered Temple, the faction headquarters of the Athar. This ancient, ruined, Lower Ward temple doesn't get a lot of visitors, but that doesn't mean that they're unwelcome. A tiefling guide named Caylean (Pl/♂ tiefling/R4/Athar/CG) can give folks tours and answer general questions. Under no circumstances can they speak with Rillern Postaff or Factol Terrance, but they might be able to speak with Rillern's aide Jeanskar if they're respectful and polite. Jeanskar (Pr/♀ half-orc/0-level/Athar/NG), an intelligent, well-spoken, and pleasant (if ugly) basher, relates the faction's public stance on the quarantine of the church.

"We of the Athar have long contended that while people have a right to foolishly waste their time and attention on the so-called powers," she says, her toothy smile never so much as quavering, "they should not be allowed to build places of worship in public areas. Such 'sanctuaries' are a threat and a menace to the individuals living in the community, for the beings called upon at such places are untrustworthy and incompetent in their use of power. These places are the sites of many documented murders, disappearances, and accidents. The Athar, under the direction of our skillful and knowledgeable Factol Terrance, has deigned — at our own expense — to protect the citizenry of Sigil against further horrors at this site until such time as the hazard can be destroyed."

Even if one of the PCs belongs to the Athar, he can't meet with the high-ups — the bloods're just too busy. However, factioneers get the feeling that the Lost are sincere in their extreme fear of the church, but there's no indication as to why.

THE HALL OF SPEAKERS

Like the Shattered Temple, the Signers' headquarters is a potential area of investigation. Unlike that locale, however, the Hall of Speakers brims with people. Signers here all deny any interest in the small church. Most profess ignorance of the entire situation — even if any of the PCs are Signers themselves. See, the faction members the heroes speak with honestly don't know what's going on. It's only Mhavor's secret subgroup within the faction, the Way of the One, that wants into the

church. While all Signers're dedicated to one day using their abilities to revive a dead power, Mhavor's bashers want to focus on the god within the standing stones. They're keeping their plan a secret even from their brethren, so that when the time comes, they can resurrect the deity and seize control of the faction as well.

The PCs have more success if they use the name that they heard from Phol in the Ubiquitous Wayfarer. Upon asking for an elf named Elchis, they're brought to a small records office where she toils. The overworked, raven-haired elf is intelligent, but seemingly confused as to who the PCs are and what they want with her. She won't admit to having anything to do with the church and claims not to understand what the cutters are talking about.

However, Elchis secretly belongs to the Way of the One. Only a *detect lie* spell or similar technique reveals that she does, indeed, know more than she's saying. But if the PCs menace her in any way, she calls for help. Signer security (four 2nd-level fighters) arrives in two rounds, and they unceremoniously dump the characters into the street.

SECRET+ MEETINGS

Canny PCs might tumble to the idea of watching or following Elchis. Each night, she visits Mhavor's case – and so do a lot of other folks. See, his home is where the secret subgroup makes its plans to break into the church. The PCs can learn Mhavor's name either by asking his neighbors (using a cover story or a little garnish) or by eavesdropping. They can even get a description or spot him themselves: Mhavor's an old white-haired man who's missing an eye and walks with a limp.

As soon as she arrives at the meeting, Elchis tells the others about the PCs' questions. They all agree that it's time to dispatch the assassin Gremmith Mi, and the half-elf soon begins stalking the PCs (unless the DM determines that he's been called in before this).

Course, the Way of the One has a lookout who keeps an eye on the outside of the place. If the sentry spots the PCs, she alerts those inside (most of whom flee immediately), and she and five other bruisers (4th-level fighters) attempt to put the spies in the dead-book. They're determined to keep the identities of Mhavor and Elchis secret.

Knowing that they've been marked, the Signers of the Way of the One move to another hidden safehouse, which the PCs can't find. The berks make their next move in Part Two of "Into the Light."

◆ EXPLORING ◆ +THE CHURCH◆

At some point, the PCs will want to explore the church. To do this, however, they need to sneak or fight their way past the Athar guards (3rd-level fighters) around the place.

Arbor Road is a quiet street with little activity. The church sits near the corner, one wall partially demolished. Two guards are visible out front, and the interior of the temple itself looks dark. The lot next to the church on the right has been cleared of whatever once stood there. The building on the left, on the corner of the street, still stands – although it is likewise dark. A small yard surrounds the church, though there are no outbuildings or objects (like markers, statuary, or tombstones) that a body might find in other churchyards.

The two guards at the entrance're supported by a cross-bowman on the roof of the building across the street (a rarely visited storehouse). Also, 20 warriors wait in the building next door to the left. With them is their leader, Ghear the Sighted, an action-oriented, quick-tempered young priest of the Great Unknown. These reserves strive to be ready at all times. Two more guards and a minor wizard (a 4th-level transmuter) patrol Nickle street and watch the buildings behind the church for intruders. The guards rotate duties every 24 hours, with half being relieved every 12 hours. What's more, the Athar have commissioned Riaen of the nearby Ubiquitous Wayfarer to supply the soldiers with meals every six hours.

The Athar high-ups have instructed that the guards may employ deadly force to insure that no one enters the church. This includes Athar members – even the guards haven't set foot in the place.

To examine the church from the outside, the PCs could pose as Athar or accompany Riaen's workers on one of their deliveries. Getting inside probably requires magic or infiltration skills. If they foolishly decide to fight their way in, a Harmonium squad of 15 troops responds within five minutes after combat begins. If the PCs spoke with Barmy Kank, however, they already know about the gap in the back wall.

Inside the old stone church, you can see that all former furnishings or decorations have been stripped away. Likewise, the building lacks interior walls and most of the ceiling. Here and there along the remaining outer wall, you can make out what appear to be large stones of a different mineral and a far greater age than those in the rest of the church. The limited light filtering in reveals strange patterns on these stones – all of which are set into the ground and rise to a height of at least 6 feet – but the markings appear to be natural.

Unfortunately, at this point in the ride, the PCs can't discover anything of importance inside the church. No clues exist to uncover the origin of the place, the real nature of the standing stones, or anything else. The power within the stones isn't activated until the name of the god they once embodied is spoken near them (which will happen in Part Three). A trip to the church at this point only proves that the Athar are very serious about keeping folks out.

THE ATHAR AMBUSH

If the Athar tumble to the fact that the PCs are nosing around the church — or worse yet, that the heroes eluded the guards and actually entered the church — they try to find the bashers and scrag them. The Athar troubleshooters attack, using surprise coupled with good timing. For example, they're likely to strike at the PCs when the group splits up or when their guard is completely down — while they're eating, sleeping, or otherwise occupied.

Unless the PCs've put a number of the Athar in the dead-book or caused considerable problems, the troubleshooters aren't intent on the characters' deaths. Instead, they mean this attack as a warning. The Athar threaten, beat, and humiliate the characters (if possible), but don't try to kill them. They might even kidnap the berks, drag them to a remote spot (like the middle of the Slags in the Hive), and dump them unceremoniously on the ground with a warning to stay out of Athar business — or else. The threat isn't an empty one, either. They won't hesitate to kill the PCs next time.

On the other hand, if the PCs have been mercilessly bloodthirsty in their mission, the troubleshooters attack with blades coated with Type M poison (onset time: 1d4 minutes; strength: 20/5). They strike like assassins from the shadows —

quick, unexpected, and with as little chance for reaction from their victims as possible.

◆ DELIVERING THE CHANT ◆

Eventually, the PCs should return to the agent who hired them. They might not feel that they've got the whole story (and they don't), but at this point, too many things keep them from learning the real dark. Still, they should know that the conflict is definitely centered around the church, that the Athar are fanatic about not letting anyone in due to the supposed danger, and that the Signers interested in the church are just a splinter group of the Sign of One.

As long as the heroes deliver the basic information to their contact in a timely manner, they receive their bonus payment. (Revealing the identities of Mhavor and Elchis ensures the extra jink, as the agent's Signer employers are very interested in knowing which of their fellows have turned stag.)

Obviously, there's more to the story — and to the adventure. However, a fair amount of time passes before the PCs are dragged back into the thick of things. This enables the DM to run other scenarios, including Chapters I through III of "Out of the Darkness."



JCT MCMXCVII

"We simply cannot let this go on," Mhavor said flatly. The small room was dimly lit, and the faces of his co-conspirators were masked in deep shadow. The old man leaned heavily upon his wooden staff, knowing full well that his followers thought him to be old and feeble. He'd soon show them the error of underestimating him.

PART TWO: CROSSED SWORDS

"But what can we do?" Crail asked, an annoying whine creeping inadvertently into his voice. "The Lost have the place surrounded."

"Ah, my young friend, you have so much to learn regarding the Way of the One." Mhavor considered his companion for a moment, then continued. "Don't you understand? We make things happen. We manipulate all things, for all things are the dreams and imaginings of our own minds."

"Yes, of course, but —"

"But nothing," Mhavor interrupted, an edge cutting into his voice. "We make things

happen. We make others do our bidding. We are the center of the multiverse. "We need the Athar around the church to go away. Make it happen."

◆ THE RIDE HEATS UP ◆

Events in this part of the adventure take place some time after the PCs' first experiences with the church, most likely after they've become enmeshed in other matters. Why? Because what happens next is meant to come as a surprise.

See, the rogue Signers from Part One tumbled (one way or another) to the heroes' involvement and decided to use the berks to accomplish their own goals. Now, in Part Two, their actions bring the player characters into the thick of things just as the Athar and the Sign of One hover on the brink of interfaction conflict.

If the DM is using "Out of the Darkness," the PCs probably have just finished with the events in Chapter III. They're back in the Cage and resting up from their adventures on Yggdrasil. They even hear a bit of chant regarding the situation they dealt with in Part One of "Into the Light": The tensions around the nameless church are heating up. The Athar have issued an ultimatum to the Sign of One that if anyone attempts to enter the church, the Signers'll be blamed and pay the music. The Sign of One, in the meantime, has warned Mhavor against further meddling (assuming they learned of his involvement), but they certainly don't tell the Athar that; the faction's internal politics aren't open to the scrutiny of others. Nevertheless, the Sign of One has declared that if any of their members are harmed by the Athar, the Lost will feel the sting of retribution. Things don't look good.

At some point, they PCs're approached by a beautiful, silver-haired, female elf named Daniphe. She's a Xaositect cross-trader in the employ of the Way of the One. Daniphe's also a lycanthrope — a foxwoman — and her disarming beauty *charms* males with a Wisdom score of 13 or less. Even those able to resist (Wisdom 14 or higher) still find her very attractive and are likely to listen to her pleas. Daniphe uses this gift to her full advantage as she plays the hapless damsel in distress.

SIGNERS.
SIGNERS, SIGNERS.
I'M TIRED OF HEARING
ABOUT THE
SODDING SIGNERS.
— GHEAR
THE SIGHED

"Please, you must help me. I've no one else to turn to, and there's no time left. My sister . . . she's a wizard, and she belongs to the Chaosmen. With all the wigwagging about that old church in the Lower Ward, she's decided to do something completely barmy. Chant has it that you've been there or know something about it. You've got to stop her, or at least get those people out of the area."

She claims that her sorcerous, insane sister is preparing to unleash a terrible magical plague upon the area around the church to provoke a faction war and throw the city into chaos. Daniphe seems utterly sincere in her desire to prevent this before it occurs. She says that she doesn't want her sister harmed, but admits that the woman must be stopped.

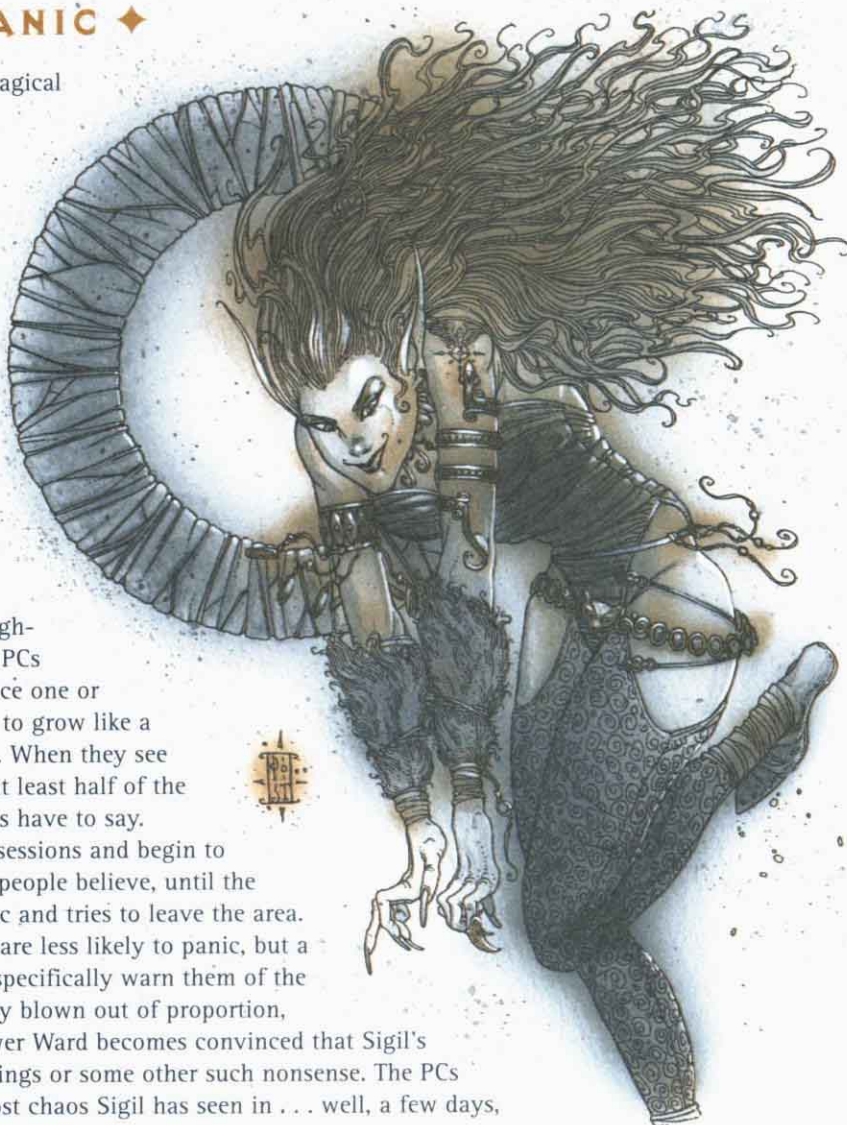
NOTE: For a more straightforward (and less manipulative) way to work the PCs into the adventure, one or more of the heroes' factions requests that they approach the Athar and try to cool things down before a real war begins. Unfortunately, just as the poor sods get involved, the Signers make their move to invade the church, and they all end up trapped in the Ubiquitous Wayfarer (for details, refer to "The Edge of War," later in Part Two).

◆ PLAGUE AND PANIC ◆

Everything Daniphe says is a lie. No magical plague exists. She's been charged with bringing the PCs to the nameless church and having them distract the Athar there.

The characters can respond to the supposed threat in any way they see fit. They might start by sending the local folks packing, which Daniphe thinks is a fine idea. In fact, the more chaos that results from her lies, the better — both for the Way of the One's purposes and her own Xaositect beliefs. Naturally, no one gives much credence to the idea of a magical plague at first. The DM might wish to make reaction rolls for the neighborhood cutters to see if they find the PCs believable. Once the characters convince one or two bashers, though, the chant begins to grow like a snowball rolling down Mount Celestia. When they see their neighbors packing and leaving, at least half of the people in the area believe what the PCs have to say. These folks themselves grab a few possessions and begin to flee. The more this happens, the more people believe, until the entire neighborhood succumbs to panic and tries to leave the area.

Folks at the Ubiquitous Wayfarer are less likely to panic, but a few of them do indeed flee if the PCs specifically warn them of the "magical disease." The screed is quickly blown out of proportion, and soon every leatherhead in the Lower Ward becomes convinced that Sigil's under attack by plague-bearing bladelings or some other such nonsense. The PCs find themselves responsible for the most chaos Sigil has seen in . . . well, a few days, anyway.



And it all transpires exactly as Mhavor and his cronies have planned — which is exactly what Argesh Fiord is counting on.

A+ +HE CHURCH

When the PCs reach the nameless, half-torn-down church, they find the Athar guards on alert. If the heroes have panicked the neighborhood, the guards are more peery than ever but find themselves distracted by the upset people swarming through the streets and by the thought of a magical plague (or whatever chant they've heard).

Ghear the Sighted stops the approaching PCs. (If the priest met with an untimely end in Part One, the DM should substitute a similarly equipped clerical leader.) Ghear refuses to listen to any attempt to convince him of coming calamity. An extremely loyal faction member, he won't abandon his post for anything short of an order from Factol Terrance himself. Some of the other guards might not be quite as extremist, however.

"You're spouting screed," the young priest states flatly — or as flatly as he can. His long black hair hangs down into his face, and he constantly pushes it away. The action betrays a nervousness and tension that make you feel uncomfortable. The priest is obviously on edge, and it probably wouldn't take much to set him off. He says, "Nothing'll make us leave our post here — least of all some leatherheaded chant about an imaginary disease."

During the confrontation with Ghear and the other Athar, Daniphe tries to slip away quietly by hiding among the panicked people in the street or by using her ability to turn into a silver fox (or both). If caught in the act, she reverts to her "vixen" form, a half-canine, half-elven shape with a deadly bite. In this form, she tries to cause even more chaos before escaping. If Daniphe gets away, she won't return, having accomplished her mission.

All of this turmoil serves as a distraction for Mhavor and his rogue Signers, who attempt to infiltrate the church by magically flying some of their number over the wall. A flurry of crossbow bolts from hidden archers across the street sends the Signers scurrying back, however — they weren't aware of the Athar guards on the rooftop.

The jig is up. Ghear rushes forward to see what's happening, shouting for information. The guards call to him: "It's the Signers! We're under attack!" The priest, no fool, immediately tumbles to the invasion attempt and the distraction that allowed it. He assumes that the heroes play a part in the Signers' plan, and he commands his men: "Scrag the infiltrators or put them in the dead-book — I don't care which!"

Unless the PCs feel like fighting the numerous and well-trained Athar guards, they should flee at this point. Discretion is definitely the better part of valor.

FIGHT OR FLIGHT

As ordered, the Athar guards attack the PCs. If the heroes stay and fight, they'll have a big battle on their hands — quite possibly one that they'll lose. The only thing in the characters' favor is the fact that some of the guards are still busy chasing off Mhavor's Signers. Nevertheless, chances are that at least some of the heroes will be scragged by the guards and turned over to the Harmonium. At that point, the DM must determine what becomes of the berks, though they're probably charged with such offenses as "disrupting the public peace," "inciting to riot," "invading a proscribed area," and whatever else the Harmonium can think up. Then it's up to Sigil's court system to decide their fate.

If the PCs try to escape, the guards give chase. But they pursue the characters for only a couple of blocks; the guards won't run too far from the church for fear that this is yet another diversion. Anything the heroes do to throw off pursuit — using spells, peels, or anything else — probably works, and once the characters're out of sight or deemed no longer a threat, the guards return to the church double-time.

◆ THE EDGE OF WAR ◆

Once again the PCs find themselves in a situation where they don't fully understand what's going on. They've been bobbed, that's for certain, but by whom? The Signers? Daniphe? The Athar? The heroes may decide that they've had enough and refuse to have any further involvement with the situation. If the PCs just walk away from it all, they later hear that a large battle took place between the Athar and the Signers (see "Avoiding the Issue," below).

If curiosity gets the better of them, however, or if they return to the scene to find the berks who used them as a distraction to break into the church, read:

A block spireward of the old church, just off of Ironmonger Street, you hear the sounds of combat. Cries of pain, anguish, and fear mix with the thud of arrows striking wood and the clang of steel against steel. Moving closer, you see Athar guardsmen firing crossbows into the windows of a tavern you've become familiar with recently: the Ubiquitous Wayfarer. Two Athar guards — one with severe wounds — flee out of the open front door, which then slams and locks behind them.

A stalemate quickly results, with Mhavor and a band of his Signers trapped inside the tavern and the Athar refusing to give up their quarry. The Defiers don't have enough bashers on hand to storm the place, especially since they know that the Signers have a powerful wizard on their side (Mhavor's spells aren't primarily offensive, but the Athar don't realize that). The Athar forces watching the tavern include 11 warriors, a 4th-level wizard (a transmuter), and Ghear, who tends to his injured comrade.



Eight members of the Way of the One (including Mhavor) hide within the Wayfarer, a few with serious wounds from crossbow bolts. They don't have a priest with them, so their injuries remain untended for the duration

of this situation. Two of the Signer warriors have the lingering effects of Mhavor's

fly spells upon them, although one

of the bashers is seriously injured. What's more, the tavern's crowded with a number of pa-

trons, each an unknown quantity.

Each side remains committed but leery about making the next move. The combatants must weigh their decisions carefully, for what happens next probably determines who wins the day. The PCs could turn the tide by helping either force. Thing is, neither the Athar nor the Signers immediately trust the bashers as allies since they both see the PCs (rightly or wrongly) as foes.

With all that's happened previously and the ultimatums issued by both sides, canny bloods know that this public conflict could lead to an all-out faction war. Even if the PCs have no love for either faction, they must consider the wide-ranging effects such a war would have on the City of Doors.

APPROACHING THE ATHAR

If the PCs decide to confront the Athar, they'd better do so carefully. The Lost are primed for combat, and they won't hesitate to fire on anyone they perceive as a threat. The characters will have a difficult time persuading Ghear and his men that they weren't part of the Signer plot to distract the Athar at the church. If they succeed, however, one of the troubleshooters from Part One arrives and whispers to Ghear that the PCs had been seeking information about the church. This arouses the priest's suspicions again, and he threatens to scrag the heroes for the Harmonium if they don't leave the area immediately.

Even if the PCs still manage to assure the Athar that they're only trying to help, the warriors can't be dissuaded from attacking the Ubiquitous Wayfarer. They have orders to eliminate intruders, particularly members of the Sign of One. The PCs might inform Ghear that the Signers inside the tavern are rogues who've broken away from the Sign of One, but the cleric points out that the Athar ultimatum includes all Signers, rogue or not. Besides, the Athar are fed up with the challenges to their Harmonium-backed authority and intend to make an example of this group.

Alternately, the PCs could try to distract the Athar, or perhaps bob them into thinking that they must return to the church to protect it from a new threat. It's a long shot, but a

successful effort allows the trapped Signers to escape without further conflict.

REACHING THE SIGNERS

To speak with the Signers, the PCs need to move inside the Ubiquitous Wayfarer. However, neither side in the standoff has any interest in letting them in. The Athar fear that the heroes will try to help the Signers, and the Signers assume that everyone outside wants to scrag them.

The PCs may have access to spells or magical items that can facilitate their entrance, which makes that part of their job easy. Barring that, conventional means work just as well. Though the tavern has no back door, a side entrance leads to the kitchen, and a basement door gives access to the wine cellar beneath the place. Refer to the map of the Ubiquitous Wayfarer on page 137.

Both sides watch the kitchen entrance, since it's an obvious egress. The cellar door, however, remains unguarded. Those within the building aren't aware that the door exists, and those outside realize that the cellar doesn't connect to the interior of the tavern. However, sneaky bloods could slip through the cellar door and make their way into the tavern above by breaking or working their way through the wooden portion of the ceiling (the floor of the storeroom). Since no one's guarding the storeroom, this is a great means of sneaking in unnoticed.

Canny PCs may invent other methods. The DM should keep in mind that since the Athar know that some of their foes can magically fly, the Lost watch the roof as closely as possible.

INSIDE THE UBIQUITOUS WAYFARER

It won't come as a surprise that Riaen Blackhome, manager of the Ubiquitous Wayfarer, doesn't twig to the Signers dragging her tavern into their conflict. Bashers entering the establishment observe an encounter between Riaen and Mhavor.

An old man with one eye and a weak leg confronts a stout woman with graying black hair. "Look, this is Sigil," he says. "The name of the place is the Ubiquitous Wayfarer. I can sense the portals here. Tell me the keys and endpoints!"

"Pike it," the woman says. "I'd rather go to the leafless tree than help a bunch of berks like you. Now get out of my tavern."

Phol Nerris, Hulester, Vtyrgi Hammersmitt, Nherid, Barmy Kank, and Wilphesh Gidderskins (all from Part One) can be present in the tavern if the DM wishes. Some may oppose the Signers (like Hulester, in Riaen's defense) or help them (Nherid appreciates the chaos inherent in the trouble they're causing), though most remain neutral.

Mhavor and his Signers are well aware that the PCs are the same berks who poked into their business earlier (in Part

One). Regardless, if the characters approach the Signers by openly declaring their intention to help, Mhavor accepts them as temporary allies. He knows the situation's grim for his followers, and he's not about to turn away offers of aid from any source.

Bloods looking to defuse the tension probably realize that the only way to end the standoff is to remove the source of the conflict. The PCs may seize upon the idea of using a portal to extract the Signers from the tavern and the neighborhood. Unless they have access to a *warp sense* spell, they'll probably have to negotiate with Riaen (and Hulester) for the portal keys. They can attempt to convince her that it's to her advantage to help the bashers who've invaded her tavern, which would end the standoff that's interfering with her business. There's no guarantee, however, that the portals lead to suitable or safe places — and Mhavor won't lead his followers onto the plains of the Abyss or into Limbo's churning soup.

Without using portals, removing the trapped Signers from the tavern requires clever tricks or quick thinking. A slim possibility exists that the PCs can convince the Signers to surrender peacefully. This avoids any further battle and allows the Sign of One to acknowledge to all concerned that Mhavor and the Way of the One aren't working under the orders of any high-ups. This solution means certain doom for Mhavor and the others, but it saves Sigil from faction war. (The trapped Signers won't make this sacrifice willingly, but smooth-tongued cutters might be able to peel them into it.)

If the PCs don't reach a solution in a reasonable amount of time (DM's discretion), they may end up fighting alongside the Signers against a final Athar assault. Like cornered animals, Mhavor's bashers are desperate and dangerous. While trapped in the tavern, they're prepared to fight to the death.



AVOIDING THE ISSUE

When the Athar first chase the Signers into the Ubiquitous Wayfarer and then surround the place, the PCs might just choose to stay out of everyone's way. If the heroes don't intervene (or if they try but fail to end the stalemate), the Athar launch an attack before those trapped in the tavern can figure out a means of escape. This battle sends a number of bashers on both sides to the dead-book and threatens to spread throughout Sigil as the two factions become implacable enemies.

Tensions in the Cage run extremely high as the Signers and the Athar prepare retaliatory strikes against each other. The Harmonium takes on the job of guarding the church (with much grumbling by the Athar) to help keep the peace. Things look grim.

◆ AFTERMATH ◆

If Mhavor and his followers escape, they discard their plans to enter the nameless church — and they're more than likely apprehended by their fellow Signers for all the trouble they've caused. PCs who helped Mhavor and his bashers flee with a minimum of bloodshed earn the gratitude of the Sign of One and other factions interested in keeping the peace in Sigil. The Athar are none too happy, but they're too concerned with keeping the church safe to hold a grudge. They return to protecting the old place, more peery than ever before and not a little humiliated — especially when the Harmonium insists on "supplementing" the Athar guards with their own.

'Course, if the PCs joined in on one side or the other during an actual fight, they gain definite enemies. Whichever faction they fought against will certainly look for revenge. To make matters worse, if the heroes helped the Signers fight off the Athar, the survivors from Mhavor's group then head into the church — and promptly disappear, just like all the others before them. The PCs shouldn't be present if this happens, since they'll have their own chance to learn the dark of the church in Part Three.

How could he have foreseen those bashers' involvement? He couldn't be expected to know what each and every cutter in the entire Cage was going

to do, could he? How was a body supposed to plan for such things?

Well, Argesh Fiord wasn't about to have all of his schemes ruined on account of some meddlesome plane-walkers. Indeed not.

He knew of several ways to eliminate the wild cards. But the best solution, the most fitting solution, was to have his foes fall into the trap he'd already prepared. It had worked so well in the past.

It was time to reactivate the Doom of the Stones.

PART THREE: MYST+ERIES OF THE ST+ONES

◆ BACK +⊕+ THE CHURCH ◆

The last portion of this ride takes the PCs into the old nameless church so hotly contested by the Athar and the rogue Signers. They finally learn the dark of the place and have the chance to eliminate the source of the conflict once and for all. As shown on the flowchart on the inside back cover, the conclusion to "Into the Light" can take place after Chapter VIII of "Out of the Darkness," or it can be set at any other time after Part Two. At least a little time should have passed since the PCs became actively involved in the conflict around the old church.

Argesh Fiord, having noticed the player characters' involvement in the previous two parts of this adventure, decides to take care of the interlopers once and for all. He needs to confront them directly to set his plan in motion, but he figures it's worth the risk to prevent them from interfering again.

Wherever the PCs happen to be, Argesh finds them and walks toward the group without hesitation.

An older man, receding white hair crowning his head like a laurel, approaches you with a determined stride. He is simply clothed and carries no weapons.

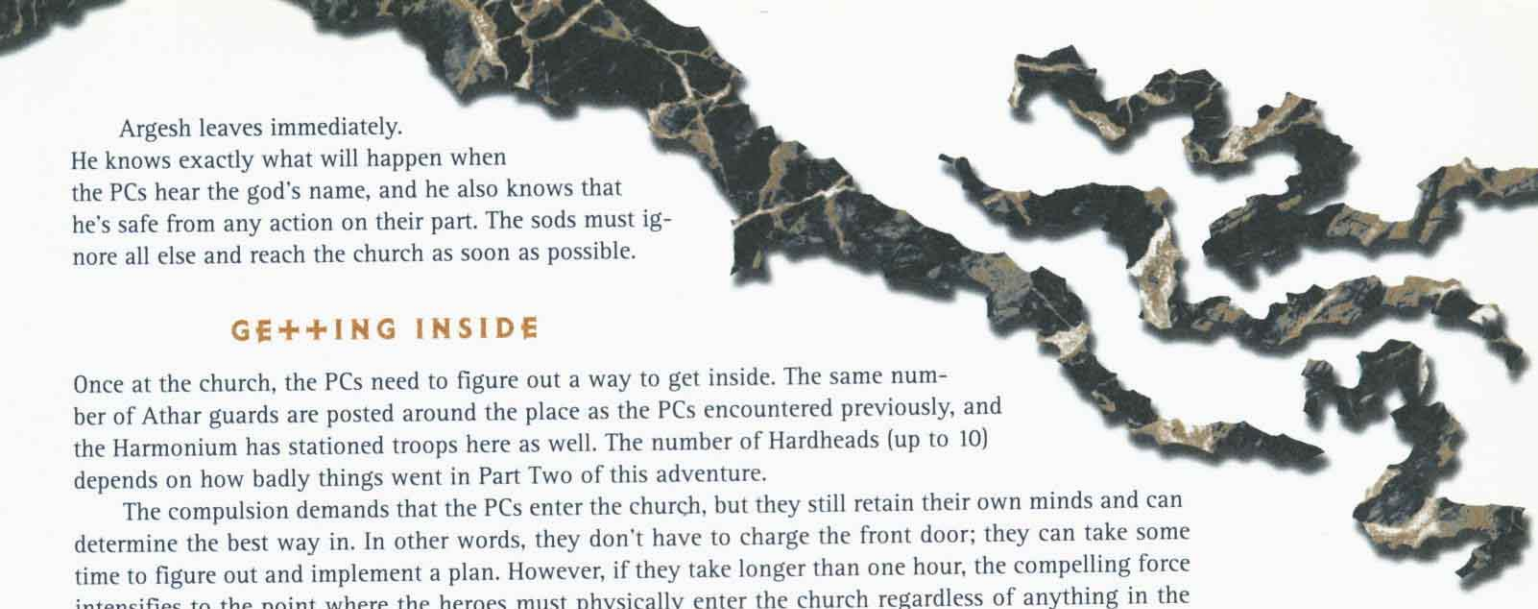
"Hello," he says. "My name is Argesh Fiord. I seek the destruction of the Athar, the Sign of One, and — quite possibly — the entire City of Doors. You stand in my way."

Without a moment's pause, he looks you straight in the eye and says, "Badir." You know this to be a name, yet it sounds strange to your ears — unfamiliar in every way. Somehow, though, simply hearing it brings clarity. You are suddenly certain of what you must do and where you must go. You must travel to the nameless church without delay — although to your mind it is nameless no more. The Temple of Lost Badir calls to you with a force you cannot resist.

Upon hearing the name of the dead god that "resides" within the old church, a *geas* suddenly compels the PCs to proceed there and speak the power's name. No saving throw or magic resistance can prevent them from completing that action — the compulsion is backed by the power of a god (albeit a dead one).

COME,
⊕H LORD,
AND BRING US C⊕⊕L
RESPI+E FROM +HE
HARSH LIGH+ AND
CURSED HEAT
⊕F Y⊕UR FA+HER.

— A BADIRINE PRAYER



Argesh leaves immediately. He knows exactly what will happen when the PCs hear the god's name, and he also knows that he's safe from any action on their part. The sods must ignore all else and reach the church as soon as possible.

GETTING INSIDE

Once at the church, the PCs need to figure out a way to get inside. The same number of Athar guards are posted around the place as the PCs encountered previously, and the Harmonium has stationed troops here as well. The number of Hardheads (up to 10) depends on how badly things went in Part Two of this adventure.

The compulsion demands that the PCs enter the church, but they still retain their own minds and can determine the best way in. In other words, they don't have to charge the front door; they can take some time to figure out and implement a plan. However, if they take longer than one hour, the compelling force intensifies to the point where the heroes must physically enter the church regardless of anything in the way.

◆ THE DOOM OF THE STONES ◆

Once the bashers enter the church, they're compelled to say the name "Badir," just like all of Argesh's other victims (namely, the workmen, the Harmonium investigators, and possibly even Mhavor's Signers). Speaking the god's name triggers the Doom of the Stones. Read:

All around you, everything grows still. You've never experienced such quiet — at least, not in Sigil. A strange mist rises around the standing stones that encircle you, illuminated by a strange yellowish light. The stones seem to change shape, their new forms too indistinct to recognize. One stretches and seems to lunge forward to grab you.

Suddenly, the ruined old church fades away, and you find yourselves in a different place.

The dark of the disappearances and the PCs' forthcoming trials involves the power Badir and his last vestiges of divine might. See, when someone invokes his name within the circle of standing stones — stones carved from Badir's own corpse — the speaker (and anyone else in the circle) is suddenly drawn into a complex dreamworld derived from the god's memories. Each of the five stones contains a fragment of Badir's memories and essence. Though most folks who've entered the memories have been lost forever, the power's remaining fragmentary consciousness wants those who are drawn into the mental dramas to help him return to the Astral. He's hidden his own presence in Sigil as best as he could for centuries. But now that he's been found out, he has no desire to be the source of conflict among the factions, nor does he want his body to become a curiosity or tourist attraction.

Thus, Badir encourages the PCs to enter the memory sequence stored in each of the five stones. Maps for the interior of the church and the memory scenes appear on the poster sheet (when fully unfolded). The DM should note that whatever occurs in Badir's memories is as real as "true" reality for the characters. If any of the PCs die in a scene, they die for real. When (and if) they emerge from each scene, any wounds they've suffered remain, any spells they've cast are gone from their minds, and so on.

ARGESH AND THE STONES

Obviously, Argesh Fiord knows the god's name, so how did he avoid the Doom of the Stones himself? Luck, mostly. As a young adventurer, Argesh discovered the journal of a Nolite priest who'd come to Sigil and realized that the temple was constructed of Badir's petrified flesh. Before the Nolite could return to the Prime Material Plane to tell his fellow priests, he was killed by one of Sigil's many traps for the unwary.

From the journal, Argesh learned that Nol was the name of a sun god worshiped on the Prime. Nol's son Badir, however, was a power of wind and rain, and therefore antithetical to his tyrannical father. Thus, across the Prime, Nol's followers waged war against Badir's followers, thereby denying the wind deity of the worship he needed to sustain his godly status. Eventually, Badir died.

Though Argesh knew Badir's name, he was unaffected by the *geas* that took hold of everyone else who heard it. Fact is, Argesh learned of the *geas* only when he mentioned his discovery to a friend; the berk immediately became glassy-eyed, walked to the old church, entered it, and disappeared, never to be seen again. Argesh realized then that he'd discovered something unique in all of Sigil. He also reasoned that since he'd learned Badir's name from the Nolite's journal, he was somehow protected from the *geas* by a power that Nol must have bequeathed his priests to resist the might of the hated Badir.

Argesh used the name on the workmen who came to demolish the church. Later, hidden by his *cloak of invisibility*, he did the same to the Harmonium investigators. Now it's the PCs' turn.

THE FIRST STONE

As soon as the PCs enter the church and say "Badir," they vanish from the real world and enter the memories of the first stone. Where are they now? The answer lies in fading remembrances from the mind of a dead god.

Before anything else, you hear the voices. Out of the impenetrable darkness, the sound of hundreds of people chanting, praying, and pleading rises into the air. Each indistinct, individual voice joins a chorus of worshipers praying for help, begging for blessings, or giving thanks and praise. The veil of darkness parts and you see heavily robed men and women on their knees in what appears to be a stark temple. You kneel among them in a robe – yes, even a body – that is not your own.

The PCs have assumed personas that belong in this memory. In the past, worshipers of Badir prayed to him in modest stone temples, and the PCs have taken the forms of supplicants of the deity. The damp, cold air is a clue that the temple is deep underground. All of the people present are swarthy humans with wind-blown lines in their faces – a desert folk.

The worshipers face a tall idol of a dark, muscular man with extraordinarily handsome and regal features. The PCs hear (and understand) the prayers of the people to their god Badir, Lord of the Cool Wind and the Rare Blessing of Rain, the Scion of Father Sun Nol.

If the PCs don't begin likewise praising Badir, or if they act suspiciously in any way (such as yelling out, "What in the Lady's name is going on here?"), the other worshipers eye them peerily. If the heroes' strange behavior continues, 10 worshipers draw forth long curved knives and throw the PCs into a back room. These supplicants are surprisingly proficient in combat (as 5th-level fighters). Not all of Badir's worshipers were truly this skilled, but the god's memory isn't always firmly grounded in reality.

Although the player characters now inhabit different bodies, they retain their standard ability scores, skills, spells, and innate abilities. Unfortunately, they have none of their own equipment (including spell components), but only the

same robes and curved knives as the other worshipers. Nor can they leave the temple by any means, including spellcasting. Escape isn't that easy.

The Badirines won't understand if the PCs attempt to explain their strange predicament. Quick-thinking characters might invent a tale to explain why they're acting so strangely to diminish the worshipers' suspicions.

Whether the PCs are tossed into the back room or enter it willingly, there they find two living bashers standing among a number of recently slain corpses whose throats have been cut. Both men are garbed in the same brown robes as everyone else. One has a knife to the other's neck, who pleads: "No, just let me go back to Sigil . . . please don't kill me. . . ." When the heroes appear, he yells: "I'm not supposed to be here! I'm just a sodding workman. They killed all the others! What happened to Arbor Road and the whole sodding Lower Ward?"

This berk is one of the workmen hired by Cruigh Manathas to tear down the old church. He was drawn here just like the PCs were, and he's seen his companions killed, as well as some cutters that showed up after him (the Harmonium investigators). The PCs can attempt to save the captive from his obviously dire fate, but they hear the other Badirines outside the room discussing whether or not to finish the heroes off. They've got to do something quick or they'll all end up as corpses on the temple floor. Even though this is a memory, death here is very real.

At this point, canny PCs should understand that what they're experiencing must come from the mind of Badir. Any realization to that effect, whether the bashers fully grasp what's happening or merely believe that the scene's not real, allows them to see through the memory. As a last resort, the DM may call for Wisdom checks at –2 if players don't role-play or if they fail to make the connection.

Once the heroes reach that understanding, they experience a clarity of perception. A voice in their minds says: "Badir is a gentle, loving god. He does not wish bloodshed committed upon his own." If the PCs relay this message to the worshipers, the Badirines suffer a fit of religious guilt, fall down before the characters, and plead, "Ask the Rainmaker to forgive us! We are sorry for our sins."

With that, the scene fades, and the PCs find themselves returned to the old church (along with the workman, if he still lives). Wounds sustained in the memory are still present, but nothing physical – like the knives – can be brought back. However, a jewel the color of a red desert sunset is set into the forehead of the cutter who first realized the connection between Badir and the memory.

THE SECOND STONE

A tugging sensation pulls the party toward another stone. If the PCs try to leave the church instead, Badir speaks again in their minds: "I can bring an end to all conflicts." Again the characters feel the pull. If they move toward the second stone, the mist rises again, the stones take on indistinct shapes, and the heroes disappear.

Bright, blinding light sears your eyes and your body, but you feel no pain. When the light dims, you again find yourself in a body that is not your own. You stand inside a palatial home — golden decorations and marble pillars fill your vision. A small boy, dark hair tied in a topknot and dark skin dripping with jewelry and body paint, runs down the opulent halls of the palace crying for his mother. Nearby, you stand at the ready, your dark, muscular frames covered in ornate armor, powerful magical weapons in your hands. But are you the child's guardians or his murderers?

This memory arises from Badir's life as a child-god in the palace of his father, the sun god Nol.

The PCs play the roles of palace guards.

Young Badir runs tearfully to the arms of his mother Senarine, a human woman. As before, the heroes are unable to leave the confines of the scene.

The child's cries are overwhelmed by a deafening voice that echoes throughout the palace. "This youth will come to no good. He is a curse upon me, not a blessing. He represents forces that thwart me — the wind, the shade, the rain. These are not the things of Nol! The child must be destroyed!"

Suddenly, the wall opposite the PCs collapses. A bronze dragon that glows like the sun smashes its way through, intent on killing the young godling.

The heroes must make a choice. If they do nothing, the dragon easily slays the boy (which didn't happen in reality) and the memory ends. The characters reappear in the church in Sigil, and the adventure ends for them without resolution.

However, if the cutters try to save young Badir, they must hold off the dragon long enough for the child and his mother to escape. Again, each hero has his own skills and spells, with a few subtle differences:

- ♦ Fighters now wear *banded mail* +2 and carry a *bastard sword* +3 in their hands. Even if they don't normally have the bastard sword proficiency, they do for the duration of this scene.



- ♦ Wizards and priests retain their own spellcasting capabilities but find themselves garbed in heavy robes (*robes of protection* +3) covered with the wind and rain symbols of Badir. In addition, each knows one additional spell. Mages may cast *gust of wind* and priests may cast *fly* once per day, regardless of the characters' actual levels. These extra spells disappear from their memories at the end of the scene.

- ♦ Rogues are now armed with *scimitars* +3 and dressed in *leather armor* +3.

The dragon refrains from using its breath weapon and only attacks those who directly prevent it from reaching Badir – it has no desire to slay anyone but the godling.

If, as before, a PC attempts to see through the veil of memory, he hears Badir's adult voice in his mind:

"What is the sun, without shade in which to rest or a breeze to cool the skin? It is an oppressor. What is the sun, without rain to nourish the earth? It is a destroyer!"

These words, if repeated aloud, accomplish nothing (the same trick never works twice, berk). Unlike the worshipers of the previous memory, the dragon reveres the sun god Nol. In this scene, the PCs must be willing to fight to protect the young god – knowing full well that they're outmatched by the dragon's might and could be killed. The sacrifice allows Badir and his mother to escape the palace.

If the bashers manage to slay the dragon, or if they all perish in the attempt, they appear back in the church in Sigil. The hero who fought most bravely against the dragon now sports a red gem in his brow. Characters who died in the battle find themselves alive again, though they retain half the damage they suffered during the fight.

NOTE: Usually, if a PC dies in a memory sequence, he's dead for real. This scene is an exception.

THE THIRD STONE

As before, the PC feel another pull, this time toward the third stone. But Badir no longer compels them. If they don't wish to proceed further, that's up to them. ('Course, the adventure'll be over. . .)

If the heroes move toward the stone, they find that their surroundings shift again.

From the high ridge upon which you now wait, you see miles of dune-covered terrain. The landscape is blanketed by thousands of troops, banners held high, preparing to cross the narrow gulf between them and clash in violent concert. The well-groomed horses beneath you shift as trumpets and war cries split the air. Again you find yourselves in the armor-clad bodies of warriors of Badir.

In this memory, Badir's followers defend their lands against the hordes of the sun god Nol. Nol still seeks the death of his son and all that he stands for. Thus, Nolites on many prime-material worlds seek the genocidal destruction of all who worship Badir.

The characters now inhabit the forms of soldiers in the Badirine army. Each sits astride a horse. Warriors and rogues wear chain mail armor and are armed with lances, scimitars, and shields. Mages and clerics wear heavy robes, have a full complement of spell components, and are armed with appropriate weapons. The PCs wait and watch with a cavalry unit of 100 men (3rd-level fighters) atop a high ridge.

In the distance, the two armies clash. First the sky above the troops grows dark with hail after hail of arrows. Scores of figures, tiny in the distance, fall under this onslaught. When the charging armies finally meet face to face, however, the real carnage begins. As the characters watch, hundreds die in a horribly bloody battle.

Then the order to attack comes from behind the PCs. Their fellow warriors shout praises to Badir as they spur their mounts down the ridge. If the heroes ride alongside them, each character becomes the target of an enemy archer (THACO 17) upon reaching the bottom of the ridge. After that, they're driven on by the mass of their fellow cavalymen and their mounts – straight into a shield wall of Nolite soldiers (3rd-level fighters).

The enemy stands waiting for your charge. They hide behind shields emblazoned with the image of the burning sun. Their foreheads each bear the mark of a pitiless yellow sun of a cloudless sky at noon, and their eyes gleam with the maniacal hatred stirred up by religious fervor. The look they give you promises death – either yours or theirs.

If the characters refuse to charge into battle, those around them shout: "Cowards! Badir has no place for such as you at his feasting table!" The Badirines then fall upon the PCs for their infidelity to the god.

Seeking clues beyond the curtain of memory at this point achieves nothing. No matter what, the PCs can't sense anything beyond the smell of blood and the sounds of weapons clashing and men dying. Battle is inevitable, whether they fight the enemy or their comrades – this is a war.

Each character should face at least two foes. However, by the time they kill or disable their opponents, they find that the fight has changed completely. The battle lines have shifted with the intensity of the conflict. Smoke and writhing masses of troops disorient the PCs until they're completely cut off from their own forces. In fact, for the moment, they're isolated from the entire battle.

Now clear of distractions, the heroes can attempt to see past the memory images around them. As before, they hear Badir's voice speaking in their minds.

"In war, people die. A god accepts such violence in his name. It is neither good nor evil, but simply the way of things. Yet so much death is unjust and proves nothing. Without the

devotion of my people, cursed Nol shall win the day, and his sun will beat down mercilessly, unquenched by cool winds and healing rain. The fighting must stop; not all need die. There must be something to win when the battle is done — and someone to appreciate the victory."

As before, Badir's words provide a clue to what the PCs should do next. Now that the battle has receded, the characters notice wounded folks lying all around them. The cutters should make an effort to help the wounded Badirine soldiers so that they can live on and continue to serve their power. Curative spells, bandaging, and other methods will lend succor to these poor sods.

At this point, however, 10 Nolite berserkers (5th-level fighters) charge into the area. These savage skirmishers try to kill everyone they see, including the wounded. The PCs should protect the injured and fend off the assailants.

Once the wounded are safe, the heroes return to the old church in Sigil. The character who proved most helpful to the fallen Badirine troops has a red jewel in his forehead, just like his comrades before him.

THE FOURTH STONE

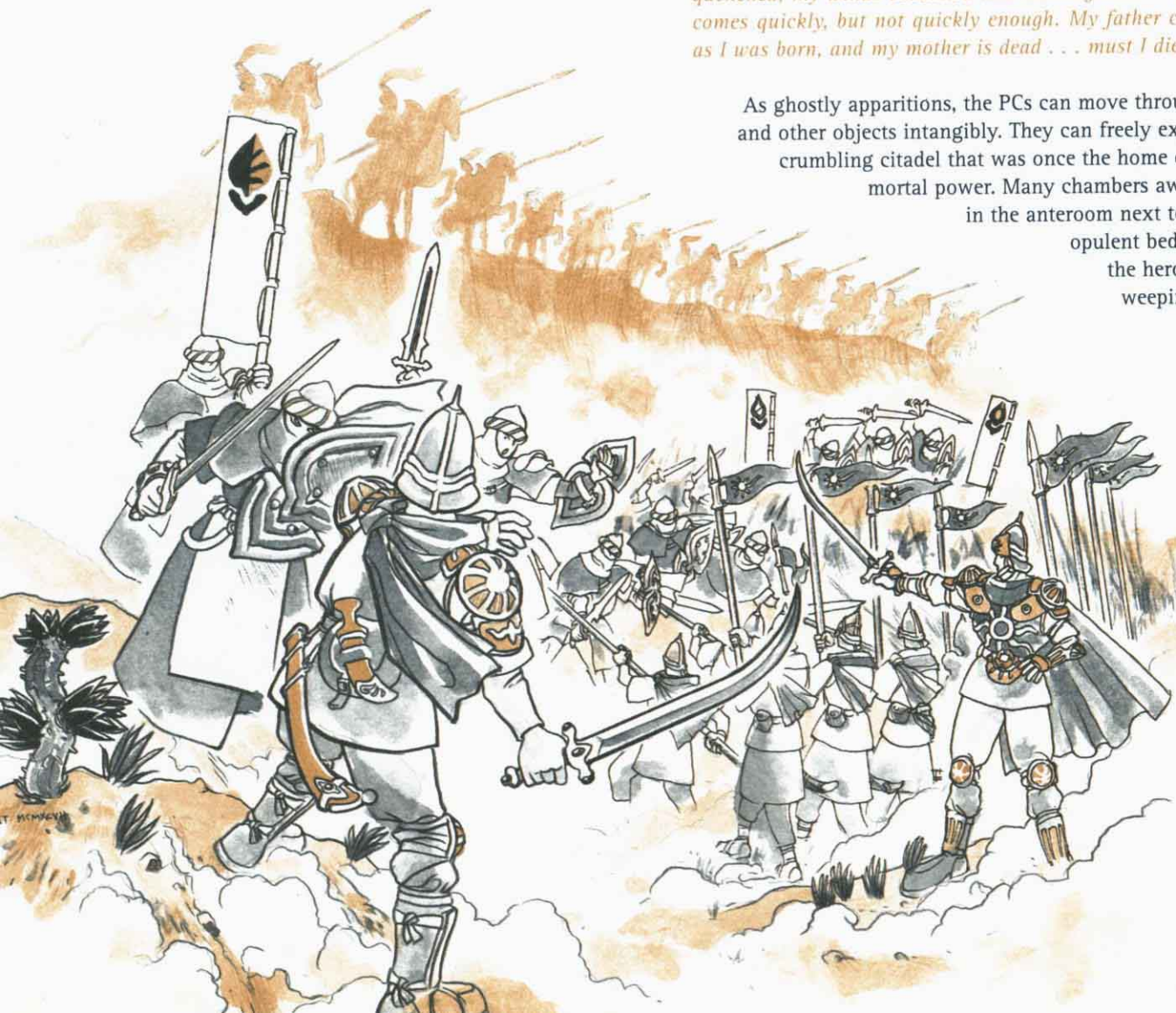
The PCs now feel the pull toward the fourth standing stone, but, as before, they aren't compelled to proceed. If they do, read:

This transition is different from the rest. This time, you have no bodies, and you instinctively know that you're dead. As ghosts, you look upon one who obviously will be dead soon as well. The crumbling palace around you mirrors its sole occupant, a man who withers away before your eyes. Dark hair grows gray and falls out of his head, and his healthy dusk-colored skin shrivels and wrinkles. Never before have you seen anyone who seemed so utterly . . . alone.

In this memory sequence, the PCs are present as Badir withers and passes into the dead-book. Unfortunately, they can't seem to do anything but watch the death-throes of a god. If they look beyond the shroud of memory, they hear Badir's sorrowful voice in their minds:

"Forsaken. I am lost. To fall from such a lofty height to this abysmal depth in so short a time — it is an ordeal no being should endure. I leave the multiverse, my rains quenched, my winds becalmed into nothingness. . . . The end comes quickly, but not quickly enough. My father cursed me as I was born, and my mother is dead . . . must I die alone?"

As ghostly apparitions, the PCs can move through walls and other objects intangibly. They can freely explore the crumbling citadel that was once the home of an immortal power. Many chambers away, lying in the anteroom next to a once-opulent bedchamber, the heroes find a weeping young woman.



Her name is Yanthis (PI/♀ half-elf/O-level/LN), and she used to be a handmaiden to Renishana, one of Badir's proxies. Young Yanthis is still hopelessly devoted to the power that her mistress served, and even now she feels his death as if it were her own.

Until the ghostly PCs talk to her, she's not even aware of their presence. Not surprisingly, Yanthis is terrified of the ghosts at first, but she does not flee. Once she's calm, the characters can ask her questions. She tells them about herself, if they've got a mind to listen to her rattle her bone-box. She's a planar half-elf who was born on Arborea, where she claims this palace stands now. More importantly, she explains that after millennia of fighting, the forces of the sun god Nol have succeeded in putting most of Badir's worshipers to the sword. Worse, the constant religious wars and threats of violence have discouraged any others who might have followed the power. Without numerous worshipers, Badir is dying as surely as if someone had placed a knife between his ribs.

The power's death has been a slow, painful one. As Badir's followers fell, the energy of their belief winked out like snuffed candles. As whole prime-material worlds were lost to his influence, Badir grew weaker and weaker, and the god now suffers in his last moments of life.

The PCs should realize from Badir's words that he believes all his worshipers slain. If they're sensitive enough to understand the levels of the dying god's pain, they know that even a single mourner is one more than he thought he had. They should attempt to convince Yanthis to go to Badir and be with him in his last moments. This, at least, would offer him some small comfort.

Yanthis is reluctant at first. After all, she's just a lowly mortal, not even a priest — how can she give solace to a god? Nevertheless, if the PCs are successful and Yanthis goes to Badir's side, the dying god smiles through the pain at her love and devotion. It isn't enough to sustain him, but it gives him consolation as he dies.

With this, the PCs return to the old church, once again standing in the center of the ring of stones. The cutter who best convinced Yanthis to help Badir has a red jewel in his forehead.

THE FIFTH STONE

This time, the characters feel a pull toward the fifth standing stone. If they move toward it, they enter a memory scene in which Badir's followers create the stones out of their patron's corpse.

The bleak, empty void that surrounds you with its silvery hue and winding conduits could only be the Astral Plane. A dozen or more other Astral travelers silently float in the void, heading as one toward a common goal.

Ahead of you, the gigantic form of a man made of stone drifts like an empty shell. His rocky, petrified features are unmistakably those of the god Badir — the one you saw die in the crumbling palace.

The planewalkers who approach this god-isle do so with silent reverence. Arriving upon the massive husk, they withdraw tools from their packs with equal respect. Suddenly, the sound of metal against stone rings through the void. Solemnly, reverently, these men and women hack apart the corpse of the god.

Badir isn't just *any* god — he's *their* god. These folks're the last remaining worshipers of the dead deity. They're dressed and armed like those dusky-skinned desert folk encountered in the first stone's memory. Likewise, the PCs find themselves once again in brown robes and armed only with the picks and axes that the other worshipers carry. The Badirines won't answer any questions the heroes might have — fact is, too many questions, and they'll try to silence the PCs for good.

If at any time a character seeks to peer beyond the trappings of the memory, he again hears Badir's voice, though now it seems distant and soft.



"They seek to preserve what was taken from them. Are their actions correct? Who can truly make such a judgment? Good and evil, law and chaos — these things may be defined. Right and wrong, correct and incorrect — whoever may know the truth of them?"

"Which of my choices was wrong? Which decision led to my downfall? I do not know, yet I was once a god. How, then, can I — or anyone — judge these poor souls?"

"Let them do as they will."

This is the strangest of the memory scenes, for the "correct" course of action is to do nothing. By watching, however, the PCs bear witness to the last acts of the god's worshipers. The Badirines slice out huge chunks of their deity's body and begin to carve them. The shaping of the stones occurs unnaturally fast (a flaw in the god's memories), and soon the heroes see the standing stones from the old church finished in front of them.

Still saying nothing, not daring to profane their actions with words, the worshipers silently float the stones toward a waiting portal. After they all pass through the portal, the player characters appear back in the church, standing in the center of the stone circle. One of the PCs (DM's choice) has a red jewel resting in his brow.

THE SIXTH STONE

Before the PCs can do anything, they feel a rumble and a shudder from beneath them. A sixth, previously unseen stone pushes its way up through the center of the floor. Without warning or a chance to resist, the heroes are forced to enter the last of the memory scenes.

Though you know you've once again passed into the god's memories, your surroundings seem to be unchanged. You stand within the old church that's been the source of so much conflict of late. Things feel much the way they did when you left the "real" world, but something about the stones is different.

As in the other memories, the PCs can't leave the boundaries of the scene (the church). The Athar and Harmonium guards outside seem utterly oblivious to the arrival of the sixth stone, and the heroes can't communicate with them in any way. Other than that, the characters seem to be in their own bodies, with their own possessions.

If the PCs attempt to sense the reality behind the memory, they hear Badir's voice in their mind one last time.

"Like all things, a life is a ring — a unity of rings that brings one back where he started. Birth, life, and death are a constant cycle spinning through the ring of existence. No portion of the ring should be avoided or mourned — each is as important and as worthy as the others. Look closely at what was, and you'll see what will be."

Each of the five original standing stones now bears a tiny indentation visible only to someone examining them

closely. These small notches are just the right size to hold the red gems that rest in the characters' foreheads.

Before they can place the gems, however, the bashers're interrupted by the white-haired man who sent them to the church in the first place: Argesh Fiord. He bursts into the building, accompanied by a green slaad mercenary, and the two attack the PCs mercilessly.

Strangely, this isn't a memory. In fact, it hasn't happened yet. It's a kind of future memory — a premonition. In "real" time, Argesh even now makes his way to the old church with a green slaad minder. He wants to make sure that the Doom of the Stones did indeed take care of the PCs; he can then determine the best next step to provoke the faction war. Nevertheless, the memory versions of Argesh and the slaad fight as if they were real.

Once the PCs best their foes, they can place their gems into the standing stones. This act frees Badir from his imprisonment. By placing the gems, the heroes create a mystical resonance among the stones, opening a horizontally oriented portal defined by the remaining walls of the church. The portal leads back to the Astral and the body of Badir.

Golden light shines everywhere. The ground shudders as if in a rumbling earthquake, though there's really no "earth" to quake in Sigil. The entire floor of the church glows like an activated portal, and the stones and the ruins begin to tumble downward into what looks like the Astral Plane. In a sudden shaft of bright illumination, the silhouette of a fine-featured man turns toward you, nods, and walks straight into the portal's light.

As the world literally drops out from beneath the PCs, they, too, begin to fall. However, before they plunge through the portal, they return to reality at the center of the church. But as in the future-memory scene they just played out, the building has vanished. The stones, the ruins, the foundation, everything is gone — almost as if it never existed at all.

Immediately, the guards who were positioned around the church rush onto the ground where the building stood only moments before. Once the Athar tumble to what's actually happened, however, they're extremely pleased. They wanted the stones gone, and now they don't have to expend the effort to do it themselves. The PCs are suddenly heroes in the eyes of the Athar — a position in which they may not be entirely comfortable.

Canny bashers probably won't be surprised to see the real Argesh Fiord arrive with a green slaad bodyguard. However, that doesn't mean the heroes have to fight them again. In fact, Argesh has no intention of sticking around to exchange blows once he knows his plot has failed. He takes one look and leaves the scene as quickly as possible. Besides, even if he and his minder could put the whole lot of guards and heroes into the dead-book, what would that accomplish? Argesh wants revenge on the Athar and the Sign of One. He's not about to waste his time fighting with a handful of berks, no matter how utterly they've just ruined his plans. Instead, Argesh

takes this horrible set-back in stride and flees to begin planning a new scheme for revenge.

◆ RESOLUTIONS ◆

With the temple gone, tensions between the factions begin to smooth over. The Athar reassign their guards and retract their ultimatums toward the Signers. There's nothing to fight over now, right? Likewise, the Signers declare that they have no quarrel with the Athar. (If they haven't done so already, faction high-ups scrag Mhavor and his followers and make them pay the music for the trouble they've caused.) Peace is restored to the City of Doors, at least for the moment.

Argesh Fiord may very well be planning a new scheme, although now — assuming the PCs told someone about his existence and involvement — he's a wanted man. The DM may even want the heroes to learn of his background, so they can understand a little more of what he was after and why. They can tumble to his history by piecing together various bits of information from Athar and Signer sources, or meet a few of the folks who know the dark of Argesh's hatred for the factions.

Folks talk about the disappearing church for a while, but the whole incident quickly passes from their minds — memory's a funny thing. The Athar remember better than most, however, and offer the PCs an advance of 800 gp each if they take on some covert temple-bashing assignments

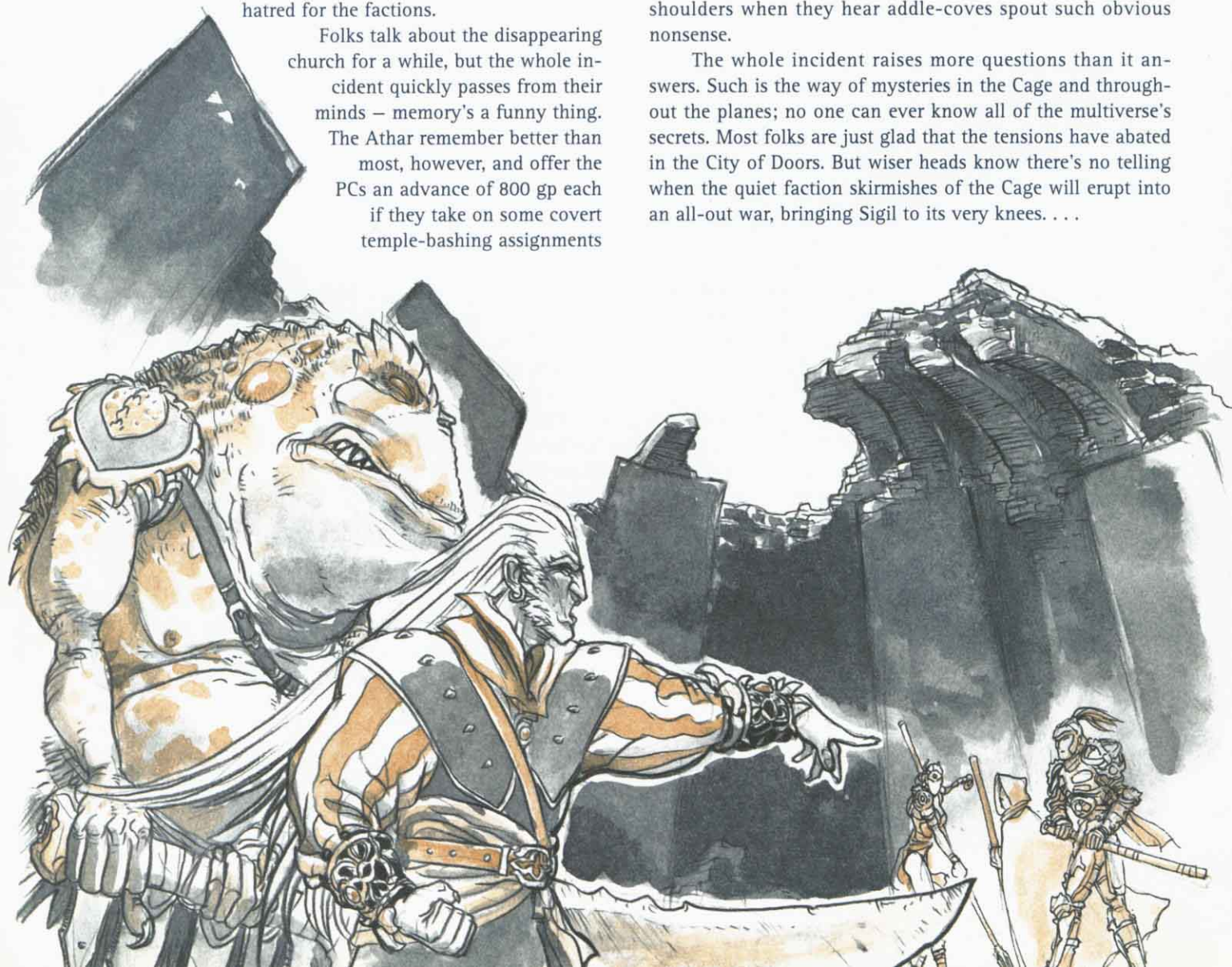
throughout the planes. If the characters are interested, this could be the springboard for other adventures.

LINGERING QUESTIONS

Canny bloods might still wonder about Badir and the old church. It's common chant that the Lady of Pain doesn't allow powers into Sigil, yet part of Badir's consciousness resided in the Cage. (Granted, he was dead, but still. . . .) Was the Lady unaware of him? Did she send the dabus to investigate? Did she care at all? Or is she more limited in her power than folks suspect?

Some berks say that Badir's remains were exempt from the ban because he'd been in Sigil longer than the Lady, implying that there was a time when the City of Doors was not her home. But since no one can put a date on the church's construction, that's impossible to determine. (No one knows when the Lady of Pain showed up either, for that matter.) Others rattle their bone-boxes about spells and potent magic that allow mortals to act without the Lady's knowledge, but most folks just back away slowly and look peerily over their shoulders when they hear addle-coves spout such obvious nonsense.

The whole incident raises more questions than it answers. Such is the way of mysteries in the Cage and throughout the planes; no one can ever know all of the multiverse's secrets. Most folks are just glad that the tensions have abated in the City of Doors. But wiser heads know there's no telling when the quiet faction skirmishes of the Cage will erupt into an all-out war, bringing Sigil to its very knees. . . .



APPENDIX



VISAGE

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Any
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any
DIET:	None
INTELLIGENCE:	High (13-14)
TREASURE:	Nil
ALIGNMENT:	Chaotic evil
<hr/>	
NO. APPEARING:	1d4
ARMOR CLASS:	0
MOVEMENT:	Fl 15 (A)
HIT DICE:	6
THACO:	15
NO. OF ATTACKS:	2
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1d8/1d8 (claw/claw)
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Lucidity control, domination
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Hit only by +1 or better weapons, immune to holy water
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	25%
SIZE:	M (6' tall)
MORALE:	Elite (13-14)
XP VALUE:	4,000

What is real? Ask any two berks, especially those from different factions, and a body's likely to get two completely different answers. Find a cutter that's faced a visage, though, and the answer might be a little strange.

See, a visage is a creature of deception. It assaults perceptions, steals identities, and crushes wills. Nightmarish fiends of insidious power, visages are — thankfully — extremely rare. Fact is, they're found only in the service of the deity now known as Tenebrous. Visages are undead tanar'ri, former servants of Tenebrous brought back by the evil god's influence over all things undead.

Visages can assume other shapes (as explained below), but in their natural form, they appear as wispy, translucent spirits with frightening white masks where their heads should be. They have no legs, but instead float or fly through the air at will. Despite their noncorporeal appearance, visages are solid. They can't pass through walls or objects, though they can fit through tiny spaces too small for a human of equal size.

Visages communicate through speech. Most know the common tongue, as it helps them move surreptitiously through society, and they pick up any languages spoken by those whose essences they steal (as explained below).

COMBAT: A body could say that in battle, a visage strikes with its razor-sharp claws. That's a true statement, but it's also dangerously misleading — the claws are the least of a sod's worries. Visages warp minds in ways that no other creatures really can. Sure, plenty of berks create illusions (the baatezu're experts at it), but a visage can twist a body's mind, making him think

what it wants him to think and experience what it wants him to experience. The undead fiend uses a number of tricks to force a false perception of reality on its victim.

First and foremost, a visage wields a strange power that graybeards call *lucidity control*. The fiend can reach into the mind of anyone it sees and change how he perceives the world around him. The visage totally controls the victim's senses, but it usually does so in subtle ways so the sod won't realize that he's being manipulated. As long as the victim is unaware of the visage's assault, he receives no saving throw against the effect. However, if he tumbles to the fact that something's playing with his mind, he can attempt a saving throw versus spell. Success indicates that the victim perceives things as they truly are, but he must continue to make successful saving throws each round or fall back into the false reality created by the visage.

To make it less likely that a sod'll realize his perceptions are being orchestrated, the undead fiends often mix real experiences with false ones. For example, a visage might artificially exaggerate perceived distances, make real objects appear to fall or move at inopportune times, change the way a building seems to be laid out, and so on.

The thing to remember is that a visage loves to cause confusion and fear. Sure, it could shut off a berk's senses entirely, but it'd much rather do something disorienting and strange. Then, when a victim can no longer trust his own eyes and ears, the fiend rakes with its claws or simply manipulates the sod toward a horrible end (maneuvering him into a pit, stirring up another creature to attack him, and so on).

Unfortunately, a visage has other ways of assaulting minds, as well. Once per day, it can dominate a single target (as per the 5th-level wizard spell *domination*), making him do and say whatever it likes. This requires a fair bit of concentration on the fiend's part, though, so it can't use its domination and lucidity-control powers at the same time. But if two or more visages attack the same party, one often alters their perceptions while the other dominates a victim to make the false reality seem more valid.

Finally, a visage can assume a victim's very identity. See, when a visage kills someone, it can take on not only the cutter's form but also part of his essence. It almost perfectly imitates his voice, affectations, skills, and the like. Sure, the visage misses subtle mannerisms and quirks that a very close friend might notice, but the imitation can lend more weight to whatever false perceptions it tries to force on others. A visage in someone else's form can still use its lucidity-control and domination powers.

Truth is, by taking a body's form and essence, the fiend can also cheat him out of another chance at life — and even his final reward. See, with his spirit gone, the victim can't be raised or resurrected, and he can't become a petitioner. That can be undone, but only if the visage is killed within one day of stealing the essence. If the fiend's still on the same plane as the victim, even better — the sod's chance for a successful res-

urrection is doubled. But if the fiend voluntarily casts off the spirit (say, to take on another person's form), or if it holds onto the essence for longer than one day, the spirit withers away. The victim can't return to life, and he won't become a petitioner. He's just gone.

Like many types of undead, visages are immune to *sleep*, *charm*, *hold*, magical *fear*, poison, paralyzation, and cold-based attacks. They can be struck only by magical weapons of +1 or better enchantment, and holy water does them no harm. They can be turned by clerics and paladins, but only on the "special" row. Visages have no connection to the Ethereal Plane.

HABITAT/SOCIETY: The only society these creatures have is one dedicated to serving the will of Tenebrous. Without him, they have no existence. Visages seem far too chaotic to have ranks; they treat each other as equals, taking orders only from their deity. Fact is, a visage has never been known to attack another of its kind, or display any feelings of rivalry or contempt for its brethren. That's not to say, however, that the undead fiends show loyalty to their own kind. On the contrary: Visages care nothing for one another's welfare. If it's time to flee a battle, a visage won't hesitate to turn stag on its fellows and give the situation the laugh.

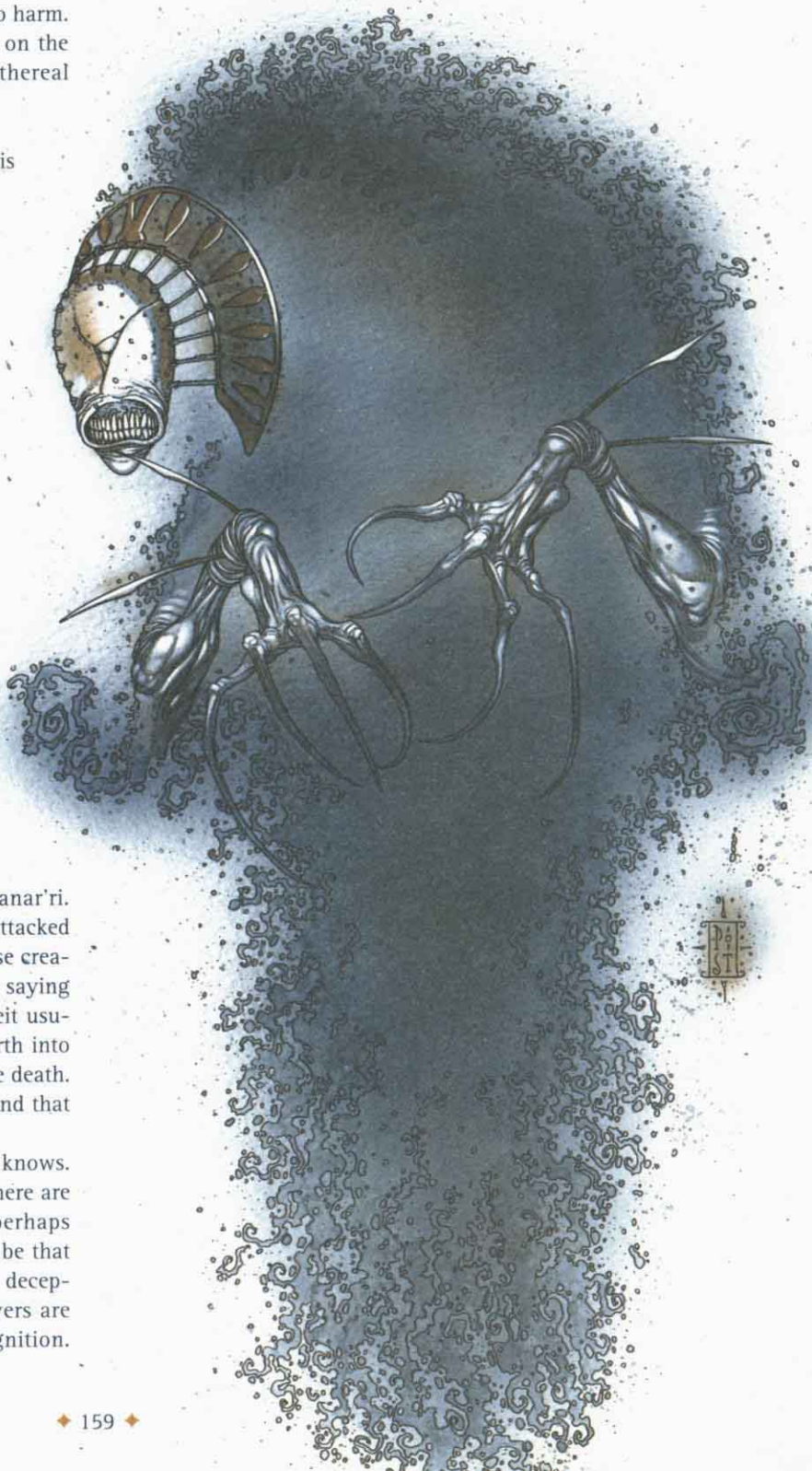
Visages can lurk anywhere in the multiverse, though the only habitat not alien to these twisted fiends is the Negative Energy Plane. However, chant says the only place they're found there is in a fortress called Tcian Sumere, now rumored to be lost and adrift somewhere in the black void. But unlike other undead, visages have no special link to the Negative Energy Plane. Fact is, they have no real link to anything in the cosmos except Tenebrous.

ECOLOGY: Despite having been created by a former Abyssal lord, the visages have no place among the tanar'ri. They're recognized immediately by other fiends and attacked on sight. Lower-planar inhabitants fear and loathe these creatures more than they do most other things — and that's saying a lot. See, most tanar'ri return to life when slain, albeit usually in a lesser form. But a visage is denied both rebirth into another shape and the eternal oblivion of a fiend's true death. The berks're slaves of the magic that spawned them, and that strikes fear in the dark hearts of the tanar'ri.

How many visages did Tenebrous create? No one knows. But if the tanar'ri are so familiar with them, perhaps there are other means of spawning the undead fiends. And perhaps they've been around longer than folks think. Could it be that certain aspects of the multiverse are nothing but huge deceptions put forth by visages? Maybe entire Abyssal layers are hidden from discovery or camouflaged beyond recognition.

Perhaps the fiends' influence is even more widespread. And perhaps it's all just barmy talk.

Then again, if everyone believes in a false reality, doesn't it become true? In the end, isn't a body left with the question: What is real?



OUT OF THE DARKNESS

CHAPTER I: CIRCEAN EMBERS

KHAASTA (10 in Sigil, 68+ in Naphraks): AC 2 (bronze plate); MV 9; HD 3+3; hp 16 each; THACO 17; #AT 2; Dmg 1d6/1d8+1 (bite/battle axe + Str bonus); SZ M (6' tall); ML steady (12); Int very (11); AL CN; XP 175 each.

Notes: When mounted on giant lizard, khaasta gains +1 to hit foes on foot but loses ability to attack foes with bite.

TOILMASTER (khaasta chieftain): AC 2 (bronze plate); MV 9; HD 6+6; hp 43; THACO 15; #AT 2; Dmg 1d6/1d10+3 (bite/two-handed sword + Str bonus); SZ M (7' tall); ML elite (14); Int very (12); AL CN; XP 650.

Special Equipment: thief of charms (rod drains beauty from targets; see Chapter I for details; 10 charges left); silver Arcadian dovehawk feather (gate key).

Notes: When mounted on giant lizard, toilmaster gains +1 to hit foes on foot but loses ability to attack foes with bite.

GIANT LIZARD (10 on Outlands, 41 in Naphraks): AC 5; MV 15; HD 3+1; hp 14 each; THACO 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8; SA double damage on attack roll of 20; SZ H (15' long); ML average (10); Int non (0); AL N; XP 175 each.

BLVASTIN (BEHOLDER): AC 0 (body), 2 (eyestalks), 7 (eyes); MV Fl 3 (B); HD 45-75 hp; hp 48; THACO 11; #AT 1; Dmg 2d4 (bite); SA eye powers; SD antimagic ray; SZ M (4' diameter); ML fanatic (18); Int exceptional (16); AL LE; XP 14,000.

SA—10 eyestalks produce following effects: *charm person*, *charm monster*, *sleep* (1 target), *telekinesis* (250 lbs), *flesh to stone* (30-yard range), *disintegrate* (20-yard range), *fear* (as wand), *slow* (1 target), *cause serious wounds* (50-yard range), *death* (1 target, 40-yard range).

SD—central eye produces antimagic ray (140-yard range, 90-degree arc in front of Blvastin).

Personality: no-nonsense, businesslike, intolerant of non-beholders.

TALISMIN REDBOAR, Pl/♀ half-elf/F7,M6,T7/NE: AC 3 (bracers, Dex bonus); MV 12; hp 41; THACO 14; #AT 3/2 (broad sword) or 2 (short bow); Dmg 2d4 (broad sword) or 1d6 (short bow); SA x3 backstab; SD infravision 60', 30% resistance to *sleep* and *charm*; SZ M (5'4" tall); ML steady (12); XP 3,000.

S 13, D 17, C 16, I 14, W 12, Ch 8.

Personality: curious, self-centered, greedy.

Special Equipment: bracers of defense (AC 6), boots of striding and springing, fiend globe (a one-use magical item that, when broken, summons a random fiend of minor status — in this case, a bar-igura — to serve the user for one hour), 12 doses of Type D poison (injected, 1d2 minutes, 30/2d6) for her blade or arrows.

Spells (4/2/2): 1st—*change self*, *color spray*, *magic missile*, *shield*; 2nd—*forget*, *invisibility*; 3rd—*delude*, *lightning bolt*.

Thief Abilities: PP 65, OL 50, F/RT 40, MS 65, HS 55, DN 30, CW 90, RL 35.

GIANT IGUANA (2): AC 6; MV 12; HD 6+2; hp 28, 27; THACO 15; #AT 1; Dmg 2d4 (bite); SA swallow foe whole; SZ L (7' and 8' long); ML average (9); Int animal (1); AL N; XP 420 each.

Notes: On an attack roll of 19 or 20, iguana swallows a small-sized foe whole (1/week). Unless he escapes, victim dies in a number of rounds equal to 1/3 of his Constitution score. From within, blunt weapons cause no damage to iguana, and stabbing or slashing attacks cause 1 point of damage each. (Because these giant iguanas are smaller than standard specimens, they can't swallow man-sized foes whole.)

HAAC(!)NSS, THE BANDIT-KING (KHAASTA): AC 2 (bronze plate); MV 9; HD 8; hp 50; THACO 13 (12 with halberd); #AT 2; Dmg 1d6/1d10+4 (bite/halberd + Str bonus); SZ L (8' tall); ML champion (16); Int very (12); AL CN; XP 975.

Personality: imperious, possessive.

Special Equipment: thief of charms (see entry above for toilmaster); halberd +2 (forged on the Prime; +1 in Naphraks).

THE WISE ONE (KHAASTA SHAMAN): AC 5; MV 6; HD 2; hp 10; THACO 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (bite); SW blind; SZ M (5'6" tall); ML elite (13); Int very (12) AL N; XP 175.

Notes: The Wise One casts spells as a 5th-level cleric.

SW—because of his blindness, the Wise One suffers a penalty to his attack roll, reducing it to 20.

Personality: crafty, irascible.

Spells (5/4): 1st—*bless*, *cure light wounds* (x2), *curse*, *entangle*; 2nd—*charm person or mammal*, *heat metal*, *hold person*, *silence* 15' radius.

CHAPTER II: CRUX

VERIDIS MOV, Pl/♂ human/T4,F9/LE: AC -1 (bracers, ring, Dex bonus); MV 12; hp 64; THACO 12 (11 with Str, 9 with two-handed sword +2); #AT 3/2; Dmg 1d10+3 (two-handed sword +2 + Str bonus); SA x2 backstab; SZ M (5'10" tall); ML fearless (20); XP 5,000.

Notes: Veridis is a dual-classed character who began as a thief and now advances as a fighter.

S 17, D 18, C 15, I 18, W 16, Ch 17.

Personality: assured, shrewd, cunning, subtly manipulative and often protective (if not actually compassionate) of the people of Crux.

Special Equipment: invisible two-handed sword +2 (forged on Astral; full strength on Yggdrasil), bracers of defense (AC 4), ring of protection +2 (forged in Sigil; +1 on Yggdrasil).

Thief Abilities: PP 20, OL 10, F/RT 10, MS 83, HS 82, DN 45, CW 90, RL 38.

MARLUS VAN, Pl/♀ human/P9(Yggdrasil)/NG: AC 6 (shield, Dex bonus); MV 12; hp 49; THACO 16 (14 with wooden cudgel +2); #AT 1; Dmg 1d6+2 (wooden cudgel +2); SZ M (5'8" tall); ML elite (14); XP 2,000.

Notes: Marlus is a druid (of a sort), with a +2 save bonus vs. fire and electrical attacks and the ability to shapechange (2/day) into an animal indigenous to Yggdrasil (bird, beetle, boar, etc.), but no other special druid powers.

S 9, D 16, C 12, I 10, W 17, Ch 12.

Personality: friendly, devoted to Yggdrasil.



Special Equipment: wooden cudgel +2, wooden shield +2 (both created on Yggdrasil).

Spells (6/6/4/2/1): 1st—command (×2), cure light wounds, entangle, sanctuary, shillelagh; 2nd—barkskin, enthrall, heat metal, hold person, silence 15' radius, warp wood; 3rd—dispel magic, plant growth, protection from fire, spike growth; 4th—cure serious wounds, plant door; 5th—pass plant.

RATATOSK (5+): AC 6; MV 9, Fl 15 (D), Cl 12; HD 2; hp 8 each; THACO 19; #AT 2; Dmg 1d4/1d4 (claw/claw); SA swoop, taunt; SD dodge; SZ S (4' tall); ML unsteady (6); Int low (6); AL CG; XP 175 each.

SA—swoop from above and inflict double damage; insults taunt (as the spell) foes of low Intelligence or greater who fail to save vs. spell.

SD—when airborne, a ratatosk can dodge a missile that would normally hit by rolling its current hit points or less on 1d20.

GLITTEREYE (RATATOSK PRIEST): AC 6; MV 9, Fl 15 (D), Cl 12; HD 3; hp 19; THACO 19; #AT 2 or 1; Dmg 1d4/1d4 (claw/claw) or 1d6 (wooden cudgel); SA swoop, taunt; SD dodge; SZ M (5' tall); ML average (10); Int average (10); AL CG; XP 650.

Notes: As a priest of Yggdrasil, Glittereye casts spells as a 6th-level priest.

SA, SD—see stats for ratatosk, above.

Personality: morose, depressed, and peery.

Spells (3/3/2): 1st—cure light wounds, detect evil, shillelagh; 2nd—heat metal, trip, warp wood; 3rd—protection from fire, summon insects.

PENTADRONE (MODRON): AC 3; MV 18; HD 5+5; hp 29; THACO 15; #AT 5; Dmg 1d4+4(×5); SA paralysis gas; SD struck only by +1 or better weapons, double human senses, infravision 180', immunities, save bonus; SZ M (5' tall); ML fearless (20); Int very (12); AL LN; XP 2,000.

SA—once every five turns (but no more than five times per day), pentadrone can emit a stream of gas 2 feet in diameter and 5 feet in length; any creature caught in gas must save vs. paralysis or be immobilized for five rounds. Alternately, pentadrone can use gas to levitate (as the spell).

SD—immune to illusions, magic that affects the mind or emotions, and attacks that draw upon the Positive or Negative Energy Planes (including life-draining); suffers damage from cold, fire, and acid attacks with a -2 modifier per die; gains +1 bonus to saves vs. cold, fire, and acid attacks.

Personality: logical, inquisitive.

CHAPTER III: MASKS

VISAGE: AC 0; MV Fl 15 (A); HD 6; hp 40; THACO 15; #AT 2; Dmg 1d8/1d8 (claw/claw); SA lucidity control, domination, identity theft; SD struck only by +1 or better weapons, immunities, turning; MR 25%; SZ M (6' tall); ML elite (14); Int high (14); AL CE; XP 2,000.

Notes: These stats can be used throughout the remainder of the adventure, as the PCs will face visages on several occasions.

SA—manipulate foe's perception of reality (target can save vs. spell to negate false reality for one round, but only if he realizes that he's being manipulated); dominate a single target (as the domination spell) once per day; assume identity of slain foe.

SD—immune to holy water, poison, paralyzation, cold, sleep, charm, hold, and fear; turned as a "special" type of undead.

MINION OF SET (3): AC -2; MV 12; HD 6; hp 45, 39, 32; THACO 15 (13 with *khopesh sword* +2); #AT 3/2 (in natural form) or 3 (in scorpion form); Dmg 2d4+2 (*khopesh sword* +2) or 1d10/1d10/1d4 (pincer/pincer/stinger); SA poison sting; SD immunity, save; MR 10%; SZ M (6'6" tall); ML fearless (20); Int high (14); AL LE; XP 1,400 each.

Notes: Minion can shapechange into giant scorpion in less than one round; AC remains the same.

SA—victims struck by scorpion's stinger must save vs. poison or die; those who succeed still suffer 2d4 points of damage.

SD—immune to magic that creates fear or doubt; saves as a 10th-level fighter while in either form.

Special Equipment: *khopesh sword* +2 (forged on Baator).

GIANT BORING BEETLE (8): AC 3; MV 6; HD 5; hp 23 each; THACO 15; #AT 1; Dmg 5d4 (mandibles); SZ L (9' long); ML elite (14); Int animal (1); AL N; XP 175 each.

CRUX WATCHMAN, Pl/♂ human/F5/NG,CG (3+): AC 4 (chain mail, shield); MV 12; hp 22 each; THACO 16; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8 (long sword); SZ M (6' tall); ML elite (14); Int average (10); XP 175 each.

Notes: Only three watchmen attack the PCs during the ambush at High Point (the others are really visages), though the party may encounter more than three while exploring Crux.

CHAPTER IV: MESSAGE FROM THANA+OS

LOVELOST (WRAITH) (100+): AC 4; MV 12, Fl 24 (B); HD 5+3; hp 24 each; THACO 15; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (chilling touch); SA level drain; SD weapon immunity, attack immunity, hit point recovery; SW sunlight, holy water, *raise dead*; SZ M (6' tall); ML champion (15); Int very (12); AL LE; XP 2,000 each.

Notes: Although hundreds of the Lovelost inhabit Ranaia, they attack the PCs one at a time to toy with the heroes.

SA—a successful attack drains one experience level from a victim; those drained completely of levels become half-strength wraiths.

SD—struck only by +1 or better weapons; silver weapons inflict half damage; immune to poison, paralyzation, cold, sleep, charm, hold, and death; recovers one lost hit point every eight hours.

SW—direct sunlight renders a wraith powerless; holy water inflicts 2d4 points of damage; *raise dead* destroys a wraith that fails to save vs. spell.

RISH-SHISISTRIS-SHAS (MIST MEPHIT): AC 7; MV 12, Fl 24 (B); HD 3+2; hp 15; THACO 17; #AT 2; Dmg 1/1 (claw/claw); SA breathe mist; SD *wall of fog*, *gaseous form*, *gate*; SW strong winds; SZ M (5' tall); ML average (10); Int average (10); AL N; XP 420.

SA—every other round (max of 3/hour), can breathe cloud of mist that envelops one victim (save vs. poison or suffer 1d4 points of choking damage and be blinded for 1d4 rounds).

SD—create a *wall of fog* as a 3rd-level wizard (1/day); assume *gaseous form* (1/day); *gate* 1d2 ice or mist mephits (1/hour, 25% chance).

SW—powerful winds (including *gust of wind*) cause mephits to flee.

GIANT EAGLE (1–10): AC 7; MV 3, Fl 48 (D); HD 4; hp 20 each; THACO 17; #AT 3; Dmg 1d6/1d6/2d6 (claw/claw/beak); SA dive; SD never surprised; SZ L (10' tall); ML elite (13); Int average (10); AL N; XP 420 each.

SA—when diving more than 50 feet, eagle gains +4 to attack roll and inflicts double damage with claws.

CHAPTER V: THE BOTTOM OF THE MULTIVERSE

GHOUL (10 per guard post): AC 6; MV 9; HD 2; hp 16 each; THACO 19; #AT 3; Dmg 1d3/1d3/1d6 (claw/claw/bite); SA paralysis, become spectre; SD immune to *sleep* and *charm*; SW *protection from evil* keeps ghoul at bay; SZ M (6' tall); ML steady (12); Int low (5); AL CE; XP 175 each.

Notes: Victims slain by ghouls in Tcian Sumere are eaten and thus do not become ghouls themselves.

SA—victim touched by ghoul must save vs. paralyzation or remain immobile for 1d6+2 rounds; if a group of 10 ghouls is slain, their spirits merge to form a spectre.

SPECTRE (1–6): AC 2; MV 15, Fl 30 (B); HD 7+3; hp 36 each; THACO 13; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8 (chilling touch); SA level drain; SD weapon and attack immunity; SW sunlight, holy water, *raise dead*; SZ M (6' tall); ML champion (15); Int high (13); AL CE; XP 3,000 each.

Notes: One spectre forms from each pack of 10 ghouls slain. Other than their alignments, they are standard spectres.

SA—a successful attack drains two experience levels from a victim; those drained completely of levels become full-strength spectres.

SD—struck only by +1 or better weapons; immune to poison, paralyzation, cold, *sleep*, *charm*, and *hold*.

SW—sunlight renders spectre powerless; holy water inflicts 2d4 points of damage; *raise dead* destroys a spectre that fails to save vs. spell.

XEG-YI: AC 0; MV 6; HD 7; hp 34; THACO 13; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6+6 (draining touch); SA corrosion, explosion; SD struck only by +1 or better weapons, spell immunity; SW *shield* spell repels attack; MR 15%; SZ M (4' diameter); ML steady (12); Int high (14); AL N; XP 7,000.

Notes: A circle of protection, a *mace of disruption*, or a *rod of cancellation* provides protection from xeg-yi's attacks; the *rod* and *mace* are immune to its corrosive touch.

SA—every other round, xeg-yi can discharge a bolt of energy (10-foot range) that inflicts 1d6+6 points of damage upon living foes and corrodes nonliving materials that fail to save vs. electricity; when slain, xeg-yi explodes with negative energy (10-foot-radius burst), causing 2d6+12 points of damage to foes and corroding materials that fail to save.

SD—immune to all spells except *disintegrate*, *magic missile*, and heat-based attacks.

FLESH GOLEM: AC 9; MV 8; HD 9; hp 40; THACO 11; #AT 2; Dmg 2d8/2d8 (fist/fist); SD struck only by +1 or better weapons, spell immunity; SW fire, cold; SZ L (7'6" tall); ML fearless (20); Int semi (3); AL N; XP 2,000.

SD—immune to all spells except fire- and cold-based attacks (see below); electrical attacks restore to golem 1 hit point per die of damage normally caused.

SW—fire- and cold-based spells slow golem for 2d6 rounds.

KESTOD, Pr/♂ drow vampire/HD 8+3/CE: AC 1; MV 12, Fl 18 (C); hp 33; THACO 11; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6+4 (fist); SA gaze, life drain, summon aid, *gaseous form*, *shape change*, *spider climb*, drow spells; SD weapon and attack immunity, regeneration, gaseous at 0 hp, save bonus; SW garlic, mirrors, holy symbols, holy water, sunlight, running water, stake, bright light; MR 70%; SZ M (5'10" tall); ML champion (16); Int exceptional (16); XP 10,000.

SA—gaze acts as *charm person* (–2 to saving throw); successful touch attack drains two experience levels from victim; summon 10d10 bats or rats, which arrive in 2d6 rounds; assume *gaseous form* at will; *shape change* into large bat; *spider climb* at will; can use any of the following spells (1/day): *dancing lights*, *darkness* 15' radius, *detect magic*, *faerie fire*, *know alignment*, and *levitate*.

SD—struck only by +1 or better weapons; immune to poison, paralysis, *sleep*, *hold*, and *charm*; half damage from cold and electricity; regenerates 3 hp/round; if reduced to 0 hp, assumes *gaseous form* and flees to coffin to regenerate body in eight hours; +2 bonus to saves vs. magical attack.

SW—repelled by garlic, mirrors, and holy symbols; suffers 1d6+1 points of damage if struck by holy water or holy symbol; killed by sunlight (one round), running water (three rounds), or a stake through the heart; –2 to attack rolls in bright light.

Personality: loyal to Kiaransalee.

GLYPHIMHOR (CURSED BALOR SPIRIT): AC 0; MV 12; HD 10; hp 56; THACO 11; #AT 1; Dmg 0; SA *suggestion*, *ray of enfeeblement*, *fear* (by touch); SD struck only by +1 or better weapons; MR 30%; SZ L (7' tall); ML fanatic (17); Int genius (18); AL CE; XP 7,000.

Notes: Glyphimhor has been greatly reduced in power and lacks most balor abilities.

Personality: crafty, greedy.

TRI-FLOWER FROND: AC 9; MV 0; HD 2+8; hp 20; THACO 17; #AT 1; Dmg 0; SA shoots 2d4 tendrils (3'-range) that induce coma and inflict damage; SZ M (5' tall); ML average (10); Int non (0); AL N; XP 420.

SA—victim struck by tendril must save vs. poison or fall into coma lasting 1d4 hours; tendril drips enzyme on coma victim, inflicting 2d4 points of damage per round (damage stops if enzyme is washed off with water); tendril drains fluid from coma victim, inflicting 1d6 points of damage per round.

BIOLOGICAL CONSTRUCT: AC 6; MV 9; HD 8+8; hp 58; THACO as controller +3 (Str bonus); #AT 1; Dmg 2d6 (fist) or by weapon +6; SD half damage from heat and cold attacks; SZ L (8' tall); ML as controller; AL as controller; XP 1,400.

Notes: The construct has need for food, air, and sleep, just as a human does. Mind-influencing spells affect both controller and construct, as mind is shared. Construct stats and abilities do not increase as controller increases in level.

S 18/00, D 6, C 16, I as controller, W as controller, Ch as controller –6.



CHAPTER VI: THE VAULT OF THE DROW

Because the PCs have so much freedom in this chapter, the DM can introduce encounters with drow or monsters as needed. Thus, the stats for many of the foes below don't specify the number encountered.

TYPICAL DROW WARRIOR, Pr/♂ drow/F3/CE: AC 2 (*chain mail +1, shield +1*); MV 12; hp 15; THACO 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6+1 (*short sword +1*); SA can use *dancing lights, darkness 15' radius*, and *faerie fire* each once per day; SD infravision 120', surprise, save bonus; SW -2 to attacks in bright light; MR 56%; SZ M (5' tall); ML elite (14); Int high (14); XP 975.

SD—surprised only on a roll of 1 on 1d10; +2 to saves vs. magical attack.

Special Equipment: *chain mail +1, shield (buckler) +1, short sword +1* (all forged on the Prime).

TYPICAL DROW PRIESTESS, Pr/♀ drow/P4(Lolth)/CE: AC 0 (*chain mail +2, shield +2*); MV 12; hp 18; THACO 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6+3 (*mace +2*); SA can use *clairvoyance, dancing lights, darkness 15' radius, detect lie, detect magic, dispel magic, faerie fire, know alignment, levitate*, and *suggestion* each once per day; SD infravision 120', surprise, save bonus; SW -2 to attacks in bright light; MR 58%; SZ M (5' tall); ML elite (14); Int high (14); XP 1,400.

SD—surprised only on a roll of 1 on 1d10; +2 to saves vs. magical attack.

Special Equipment: *chain mail +2, shield (buckler) +2, mace +2* (all forged on the Prime).

Spells (3/2): 1st—*cause light wounds, command, cure light wounds*; 2nd—*heat metal, hold person*.

GIANT SPIDER: AC 4; MV 3, Wb 12; HD 4+4; hp 23; THACO 15; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8 (bite); SA poison; SZ L (9' diameter); ML elite (13); Int low (6); AL CE; XP 650.

SA—spider injects Type F poison through bite; victim must save vs. poison or die immediately.

BUGBEAR (500): AC 5; MV 9; HD 3+1; hp 15 each; THACO 17 (15 with morning star); #AT 1; Dmg 2d4 (claws) or 2d4+2 (morning star); SA -3 to opponents' surprise rolls; SD infravision 60'; SZ L (7' tall); ML steady (12); Int average (8); AL CE; XP 120 each.

Notes: The bugbears gain +2 to attack and damage rolls with their morning stars because the weapons (though nonmagical) are especially large and heavy. What's more, Gannish, the bugbear leader, has 6 Hit Dice and wears *gauntlets of ogre power*.

The general bugbear stats may also be useful later, if the DM decides that the PCs encounter more of the creatures on Pandemonium.

TROGLODYTE: AC 5; MV 12; HD 2; hp 8; THACO 19; #AT 3 or 1; Dmg 1d2/1d2/1d4+1 (claw/claw/bite) or 2d4 (broad sword or morning star); SA noxious oil; SD infravision 90'; SZ M (6' tall); ML steady (11); Int low (6); AL CE; XP 120.

SA—when angered or in melee, troglodyte secretes an oil so noxious that victims who fail to save vs. poison lose 1d6 points of Strength for 10 rounds (due to revulsion).

ILLITHID (MIND FLAYER): AC 5; MV 12; HD 8+4; hp 40; THACO 11; #AT 4; Dmg 2/2/2/2 (tentacle×4); SA mind blast, tentacles, spells; SD infravision; MR 90%; SZ M (6' tall); ML champion (15); Int genius (18); AL LE; XP 9,000.

SA—mind blast (projected in a cone 60 feet long, 5 feet wide at start, 20 feet wide at end) stuns victims for 3d4 rounds if they fail to save vs. wand; successful tentacle attack indicates that tentacle grips victim's head (bend bars roll to remove), and if all four tentacles do so at same time, the victim dies one round thereafter; can use the following spells (1/round) as a 7th-level mage: *astral projection, charm monster, charm person, ESP, levitate, plane shift*, and *suggestion* (-4 to any saves vs. these spells).

GITHYANKI WARRIOR, Pl/♂ githyanki/F4/CE: AC 3 (banded mail, shield); MV 12; hp 24; THACO 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8 (long sword); SA *plane shift* at will; SZ M (6' tall); ML steady (12); Int exceptional (15); XP 270.

Notes: Many githyanki have psionics.

DISPLACER BEAST: AC 4; MV 15; HD 6; hp 28; THACO 15; #AT 2; Dmg 2d4/2d4 (tentacle×2); SA claws and teeth; SD displacement, save; SZ L (10' long); ML elite (14); Int semi (4); AL LE; XP 975.

SA—if near death, displacer beast attacks with six claws (Dmg: 1d3 each) and bite (Dmg: 1d8).

SD—beast appears to be 3 feet from its actual location, imposing -2 penalty on opponents' attack rolls (real location revealed only by *true seeing*); saves as 12th-level fighter, adding +2 to rolls.

NIGHTMARE: AC -4; MV 15, Fl 36 (C); HD 6+6; hp 33; THACO 15; #AT 3; Dmg 2d4+2/2d4+2/2d4 (hoof/hoof/bite); SA front hooves ignite combustibles; SD noxious cloud; SZ L (6' tall at shoulder); ML elite (13); Int very (11); AL NE; XP 2,000.

SD—emits cloud of noxious vapor that blinds and chokes victims within 10 feet; those who fail to save vs. paralyzation suffer -2 on attack and damage rolls.

EREHE, Pr/♂ drow/F4,M10/CE: AC 0 (bracers, Dex bonus); MV 12; hp 40; THACO 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6+3 (*short sword +3*); SA can use *dancing lights, darkness 15' radius, detect magic, faerie fire, know alignment*, and *levitate* each once per day; SD infravision 120', surprise, save bonus; SW -2 to attacks in bright light; MR 70%; SZ M (5'2" tall); ML elite (14); XP 5,000.

SD—surprised only on a roll of 1 on 1d10; +2 to saves vs. magical attack.

S 14, D 18, C 15, I 17, W 10, Ch 13.

Personality: megalomaniacal, treacherous.

Special Equipment: *bracers of defense (AC 4), short sword +3* (forged on the Prime), *wand of viscid globs* (once per round, can fire a 5-foot-diameter glob of gummy material up to 60 feet; target must save vs. wand to dodge or become stuck until glob is destroyed by *dispel magic* or alcohol; 12 charges).

Spells (4/4/3/2/2): 1st—*charm person, detect magic, magic missile, ventriloquism*; 2nd—*blindness, ESP, invisibility, web*; 3rd—*fly, lightning bolt, slow*; 4th—*dimension door, wall of fire*; 5th—*telekinesis, wall of force*.

VERDAETH, Pr/♀ drow/P10(Kiaransalee)/CE: AC -8 (*chain mail +4, shield +4, Dex bonus*); MV 12; hp 42; THACO 14; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6+5 (*mace +4*); SA can use *clairvoyance, dancing lights, darkness 15' radius, detect lie, detect magic, dispel magic, faerie fire, know alignment, levitate, and suggestion* each once per day; SD infravision 120', surprise, save bonus; SW -2 to attacks in bright light; MR 70%; SZ M (5'3" tall); ML champion (16); XP 5,000.

S 13, D 18, C 13, I 12, W 18, Ch 16.

Personality: paranoid, devoted to Erehe.

Special Equipment: *chain mail +4, shield (buckler) +4, mace +4* (all forged on the Prime), *fire elemental gem* (functions as a *brazier of commanding fire elementals*, except that the elemental can be summoned from any existing fire source, and no fire elementals will attack the bearer of this item if it is held out forcefully).

Spells (6/6/4/4/2): 1st—*cause light wounds, command* (×2), *cure light wounds, detect magic, sanctuary*; 2nd—*heat metal, hold person* (×2), *know alignment, resist fire, silence 15' radius*; 3rd—*continual darkness, cause blindness or deafness, glyph of warding, cause paralysis*; 4th—*cure serious wounds, detect lie, protection from lightning, tongues*; 5th—*flame strike, true seeing*.

YOCHLOL, PROXY OF LOLTH: AC 10 (true form), 4 (spider), or 3 (drow with plate mail); MV 12, Wb 6 as spider; HD 6+6; hp 50; THACO 15 (true form), 15 (spider), or 13 (drow + Str bonus); #AT 8 (true form), 1 (spider), or 1 (drow); Dmg 1d4+4 ×8 (true form: tentacles), 1d8 (spider: bite), or 1d6+4 (drow: short sword + Str bonus); SA poison, spells, psionics; SD weapon and attack immunities; SW magical winds; MR 50%; SZ M (6' tall); ML champion (16); Int high (14); AL CE; XP 11,000.

Notes: Yochlol's natural form is that of a roperlike mass, though it can assume the form of a drow female, a giant spider, or a *stinking cloud*. While in cloud form, the yochlol cannot make physical or spell-like attacks, but can use its psionic powers.

SA—spider's bite immediately kills victim who fails to save vs. poison; solid forms have the spell-like powers *charm person, darkness 15' radius, infravision, spider climb, stone shape, teleport without error*, and *web* (all 1/round, at will).

SD—cloud form harmed only by *magic missiles* or magical cold or fire; solid forms struck only by cold iron, silver, or +2 or better weapons; solid forms immune to nonmagical fire, gas, poison, and electricity; solid forms suffer half damage from cold and magical fire.

SW—*gust of wind* inflicts 6d6 points of damage to cloud form; *wind walk* slays cloud form instantly.

Psionics summary: Lvl 6; Dis/Sci/Dev 1/3/10; Attack/Defense MT,II,EW/All; Score 14; PSPs 90.

Psionic powers: Telepathic sciences: domination, mindlink, probe; telepathic devotions: attraction, contact, ESP, invisibility, phobia amplification, psychic impersonation.

CHAPTER VII: THE RUINS OF PELION

MANHAYTH, Pl/♂ aasimar/R9/CG: AC 4 (*leather +3, Dex bonus*); MV 12; hp 56; THACO 12 (11 with Str bonus); #AT 3/2; Dmg 1d10+1 (two-handed sword + Str bonus) or 1d6+1 (spear + Str bonus); SA fighting/hunting lycanthropes; SD infravision 60', +1 on surprise rolls, half damage from fire and cold, +2 to saves vs. *charm, fear, emotion, or domination*; MR 10%; SZ M (6'4" tall); ML fanatic (17); XP 3,000.

SA—gains +4 to attack rolls when fighting lycanthropes; 25% chance to detect lycanthropes by smell alone.

S 17, D 15, C 14, I 12, W 15, Ch 13.

Personality: obsessed, gruff.

Special Equipment: *leather armor +3* (forged on Arborea), *boots of speed*.

Spells (2): 1st—*animal friendship, locate animals or plants*.

Thief Abilities: MS 70%, HS 56%.

GHOST (at least 3 per PC): AC 4; MV 15; HD 4; hp 16 each; THACO 17; #AT 3; Dmg 1d4/1d4/1d8 (claw/claw/bite); SA paralysis, stench; SD immune to *sleep* and *charm*; SW cold iron weapons inflict double damage; SZ M (5' tall); ML elite (13); Int very (12); AL CE; XP 650 each.

SA—victim touched by ghost must save vs. paralyzation or become immobile for 1d6+4 rounds; anyone within 10 feet of ghost's debilitating stench must save vs. poison or suffer -2 to attack rolls.

HEYDRIL, Pl/♂ human/T8/NE: AC 4 (*cloak +3, Dex bonus*); MV 12; hp 25; THACO 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6+1 (*short sword +2*); SA ×3 backstab; SZ M (5'10" tall); ML elite (13); XP 2,000.

S 11, D 17, C 12, I 15, W 10, Ch 8.

Personality: self-serving, untrustworthy.

Special Equipment: *short sword +2* (forged on the Outlands; +1 on Arborea), *cloak of protection +3* (created on Arborea), *ring of regeneration*, the Orb of Kadu-Ra.

Thief Abilities: PP 45, OL 55, F/RT 55, MS 60, HS 65, DN 35, CW 60, RL 20.

ALABASTER ELF WARRIOR, Pl/♂,♀ alabaster elf/F7/CN (3 or 20): AC 3 (*chain mail, shield, Dex bonus*); MV 12; hp 42 each; THACO 14, (12 with sword, 13 with bow); #AT 2; Dmg 1d8+2 (long sword) or 1d6 (long bow); SA +2 to attack rolls with bow if within 30'; SD 90% resistant to *sleep* and *charm*; SZ M (6' tall); ML champion (16); Int average (10); XP 975 each.

Notes: These deaf elves are treated as specialists in long swords and long bows, granting them attack and damage bonuses.

Special Equipment: one of every six warriors has either a *long sword +1* or a *long bow +1* (forged on Arborea).

CRYSTAL OOZE: AC 8; MV 1, Sw 3; HD 8; hp 52; THACO 13; #AT 1; Dmg 4d4; SA poison, corrosion; SD weapon resistance, immune to acid, cold, and heat; SZ L (15' long); ML elite (14); Int low (7); AL NE; XP 2,000.

Notes: The crystal ooze was a standard specimen until the vile essence of the pool changed its Hit Dice, size, Intelligence, and alignment.

SA—victim of attack must save vs. poison or become paralyzed for 5d4 rounds, during which time ooze tries to consume him



(a victim reduced to -20 hp is totally consumed); touch corrodes wood and cloth.

SD—weapons inflict only 1 point of damage per strike; wooden weapons that strike the ooze must save vs. acid or dissolve.

THE WRAITHWORM: AC 3; MV 9; HD 10+6; hp 58; THACO 11; #AT 1; Dmg 1d12 (bite); SA level drain, poison, gaze; SD attack immunity, wraithform; SW turning; MR 40%; SZ G (35' long); ML elite (14); Int low (5); AL N; XP 10,000.

Notes: This is the original wraithworm, from which all others were created; it's much more powerful than the normal specimen.

SA—bite drains two experience levels from victim (save vs. spell to negate); bite transmits poison that inflicts 3d4 points of damage every hour for 1d6 hours, during which time the victim's attack rolls, saving throws, and AC suffer a -4 penalty (save vs. poison at -2 to negate both the damage and the penalty); any creature of 6 or fewer Hit Dice that meets the wraithworm's gaze is paralyzed for 2d4 rounds (save vs. spell to avoid).

SD—immune to cold or negative energy attacks; can assume *wraithform* (as the spell) at will, in which state it's struck only by +1 or better weapons but can't make physical or gaze attacks.

SW—a priest's successful turning attempt vs. a ghost renders the wraithworm motionless for 1d3 rounds.

EVRETH, Px/♂ ?/F8,M8/CG: AC 6 (Dex bonus); MV 12; hp 69; THACO 13 (11 with any object as a weapon); #AT 3/2; Dmg 1d6+4 (any object + Str bonus); SA can use any object as a weapon; SD immune to mind-affecting magic; MR 30%; SZ M (6'1" tall); ML fanatic (18); XP 2,000.

Notes: Evreth's race is unknown.

S 18/79, D 18, C 16, I 18, W 13, Ch 7.

Personality: condescending, arrogant.

Spells (4/3/3/2): 1st—*armor, burning hands, hold portal, shield*; 2nd—*blur, detect invisibility, Melf's acid arrow*; 3rd—*blink, flame arrow, hold person*; 4th—*fear, stoneskin*.

TCHUNIM, Px/♂ ?/F7/CG: AC 10; MV 12; hp 57; THACO 14 (11 with any object as a weapon); #AT 3/2; Dmg 1d6+6 (any object + Str bonus); SA can use any object as a weapon; SD immune to mind-affecting magic; MR 30%; SZ M (5'4" tall); ML fearless (19); XP 1,400.

Notes: Tchunim's race is unknown.

S 18/00, D 12, C 16, I 13, W 17, Ch 14.

Personality: friendly, helpful, curious.

CHAPTER VIII: DEEPEST PANDEMONIUM

PIRREG, Pl/♂ human/F9/N: AC 1 (plate mail, shield); MV 9 (moderately encumbered); hp 67; THACO 12 (11 with sword, 10 with Str bonus); #AT 3/2; Dmg 2d4+4 (*broad sword* + Str bonus); SZ M (6'2" tall); ML elite (14); XP 3,000.

Notes: A former paladin, Pirreg has lost all paladin abilities and much Wisdom and Charisma as a result of his madness.

S 18/31, D 12, C 16, I 14, W 7, Ch 8.

Personality: paranoid, deluded.

Special Equipment: *plate mail* +2, *broad sword* +2 (both forged on the Outlands; +1 on Pandemonium), *ring of fire resistance*, *rope of entanglement*.

ANTHA, Pl/♀ bariaur/P8(Tyr)/N: AC 3 (plate mail); MV 9 (moderately encumbered); hp 34; THACO 16 (15 with mace); #AT 1; Dmg 1d6+2 (*mace*); SD +2 to surprise rolls, +3 to save vs. spell; SZ M (5'4" tall); ML average (10); XP 1,400.

Notes: Due to her harrowing experiences on Pandemonium, Antha's lost her priest abilities, including spellcasting.

S 11, D 12, C 10, I 15, W 16, Ch 13.

Personality: frightened, desperate.

Special Equipment: *mace* +3 (forged on Mount Celestia; +1 on Pandemonium), *wand of negation* (4 charges).

CARDULE, Pl/♂ human/M8/NE: AC 7 (Dex bonus); MV 12; hp 23; THACO 18 (15 with staff); #AT 1; Dmg 1d6+3 (*staff of striking*); SA staff; SZ M (5'11" tall); ML elite (14); XP 2,000.

SA—when striking with staff, Cardule can use two charges to inflict 1d6+6 points of damage, or three charges to inflict 1d6+9.

S 10, D 17, C 12, I 16, W 10, Ch 9.

Personality: angry, distrustful.

Special Equipment: *staff of striking* (15 charges), *wand of polymorphing* (24 charges), *potion of extra-healing*.

Spells (4/3/3/2): 1st—*armor, burning hands, magic missile, shield*; 2nd—*detect invisibility, ESP, web*; 3rd—*dispel magic, fireball, lightning bolt*; 4th—*shout, stoneskin*.

GAK (TROLL): AC 4; MV 12; HD 6+6; hp 40; THACO 13; #AT 3 or 1; Dmg 1d4+4/1d4+4/1d8+4 (claw/claw/bite) or 1d10+8 (two-handed sword + Str bonus); SA severed limbs; SD infravision 90', regeneration; SW fire and acid cause permanent damage; SZ L (9' tall); ML elite (14); Int low (6); AL CE; XP 1,400.

SA—severed body parts continue to fight, attempting to rejoin with largest intact portion of body once combat has ended.

SD—starting three rounds after damage is incurred (even if reduced to 0 hp), troll regenerates 3 hp/round until healed.

BAARAVDA (ORMYRR): AC 5; MV 11, Sw 15; HD 7+7; hp 46; THACO 13 (10 with spear, 11 with sword); #AT 5; Dmg 1d4+1 (×4)/2d4 (claw×4/bite) or 1d6+3/1d8+2/1d8/1d6/2d4 (*spear* +3/*long sword*/*long sword*/*short sword*/*bite*); SA hurl rocks, constriction; SD +4 to save vs. poison; SZ H (25' long, 10' tall); ML elite (14); Int very (11); AL LN; XP 1,400.

SA—hurl rocks up to 40 feet, inflicting 2d6 points of damage each.

SA—if same victim is struck twice in one round, victim must make Str and Dex checks; if both are failed, victim is constricted starting next round, suffering 2d6 points of damage per round, -1 to attack rolls, and -2 to damage rolls (Str check to break free).

Personality: paranoid, greedy.

Special Equipment: *spear* +3 (forged on Pandemonium), *long sword* +3 (forged on the Outlands; +2 on Pandemonium).

REAVE (3): AC 1 (plate mail, two shields); MV 9; HD 2+4; hp 15 each; THACO 19; #AT 2 or 1; Dmg 1d8+2/1d8+2 (*long sword* + Str bonus) or 1d6+2 (*thrown spear* + Str bonus); SD +1 to surprise rolls, fade to Astral Plane; SZ M (7' tall); ML steady (12); Int average (9); AL LE; XP 175 each.

Notes: A reave's ability to become astral and return 1d6 rounds later works only from the topmost layer of an Outer Plane; thus, the reaves can't fade while in Phlegethon.

INGRESS (36+): AC 9; MV 12; HD 1; hp 4 each; THACO 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d2 (claw); SZ M (4' tall); ML average (8); Int low (5); AL CN; XP 15 each.

INGRESS MOTHER: AC 10; MV 1; HD 8; hp 40; THACO 13; #AT 0; Dmg 0; SZ G (30' across); ML fearless (19); Int average (8); AL CN; XP 650.

QUAH-NAMOG, Pr/♂ half-ogre/P12(Orcus-Tenebrous)/NE: AC -1 (*banded mail, shield*); MV 9 (moderately encumbered); hp 59; THACO 14 (11 with *gauntlets*, 9 with *flail*); #AT 1; Dmg 1d6+9 (*flail, gauntlets*); SD infravision 60'; SW -2 to hit dwarves, -4 to hit gnomes; SZ M (7' tall); ML fanatic (18); XP 4,000.

Notes: Quah-Namog is astrally projecting himself onto Pandemonium, which means that he carries only magical equipment (nonmagical items can't be projected). But because he's several planes away from his deity, the priest functions at a reduced spellcasting level during this encounter. The spell list given below assumes that Tenebrous is on the Negative Energy Plane. Since three planes (the Ethereal, the Prime, and the Astral) separate him from Quah-Namog, the priest loses three spellcasting levels and functions as a 9th-level caster. However, if the DM wants to make Quah-Namog stronger, he can rule that Tenebrous is closer to Pandemonium, meaning that the priest's spellcasting level increases.

S 14 (18/00), D 11, C 16, I 13, W 17, Ch 7.

Personality: devoted, desperate.

Special Equipment: *flail* +4 (forged on the Prime; +2 on Pandemonium), *banded mail* +3 (forged on the Prime; +1 on Pandemonium), *shield* +5 (forged on the Prime; +3 on Pandemonium), *gauntlets of ogre power*.

Spells (6/6/4/2/1): 1st—*cause fear, cause light wounds, command, cure light wounds, detect good, protection from good*; 2nd—*heat metal, hold person* (×2), *produce flame, silence 15' radius, warp wood*; 3rd—*animate dead, dispel magic, locate object, prayer*; 4th—*cure serious wounds, free action*; 5th—*cure critical wounds*.

CHAPTER IX: THE DEAD-BOOK OF THE GODS

SKELETONS (3d8+): AC 7; MV 12; HD 1; hp 8 each; THACO 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (short sword); SD magical immunities, half damage from edged or piercing weapons; SW holy water inflicts 2d4 points of damage; SZ M (6' tall); ML fearless (20); Int non (0); AL N; XP 65 each.

SD—immune to *fear, sleep, charm, hold*, and cold attacks.

VARRANGOIN, LESSER—TYPE II (1 per pc): AC 0; MV 3, Fl 18 (C); HD 5+5; hp 30 each; THACO 15; #AT 3; Dmg 1d4/1d4/1d6 (claw/claw/bite); SA breathe fire; SD struck only by silver or magical weapons, immunities; SW magical light; MR 25%; SZ M (4' tall); ML fanatic (18); Int very (12); AL CE; XP 2,000 each.

Notes: Each varrangoin controls 50 normal bats (see below).

SA—three times per day, can breathe a cloud of fire (10-yard diameter, 30-yard range) that inflicts 5d6 points of damage.

SD—immune to fire-based spells; half damage from acid attacks; allowed a save vs. breath weapons for half damage.

SW—*light* or *continual light* inflicts 2 points of damage per caster level and imposes -2 on attack rolls and saving throws; *sunray* or a burst from a *wand of illumination* inflicts 6d6 points of damage (no save).

BAT (50 per PC): AC 8 (when swarming) or 4 (under ideal flying conditions); MV 1, Fl 24 (B); HD 2 hp each; THACO 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1; SA hinder combat and spells; SZ T (1' long); ML unreliable (4); Int animal (1); AL N; XP 15 each.

SA—when swarming, bats hinder foe's ability to fight (-2 to attack rolls) and cast spells (Wisdom check required).

QUAH-NAMOG, Pr/♂ half-ogre/P12(Orcus-Tenebrous)/NE: Use the stats given above, with these changes: AC -3; THACO 8 (with *flail*); Dmg 1d6+10 (with *gauntlets* and *flail*). The changes reflect the fact that Quah-Namog's shield, armor, and weapon each gain one plus in the Astral, being closer to their plane of creation.

Notes: Quah-Namog is not astrally projecting in this encounter; he's physically present in the Astral. Because he's literally sitting on top of his deity's head, he functions at full spellcasting strength.

Spells (8/7/6/3/2/2): 1st—*cause fear, cause light wounds, command, cure light wounds* (×2), *detect good, protection from good, sanctuary*; 2nd—*heat metal, hold person* (×2), *produce flame, silence 15' radius, spiritual hammer, warp wood*; 3rd—*animate dead, cause paralysis, dispel magic, locate object, prayer, protection from fire*; 4th—*cure serious wounds, free action, spell immunity*; 5th—*cure critical wounds, dispel good*; 6th—*blade barrier, word of recall*.

INTO THE LIGHT

PART ONE: INITIAL FORAYS

Because the PCs have the freedom to investigate as they please, the stats below aren't presented in the order in which the heroes meet the characters. Instead, the stats are grouped according to general allegiance.

THE ATHAR

ATHAR TROUBLESHOOTERS, Pl/var human/F5/Athar/N (5): AC 8 (leather); MV 12; hp 28 each; THACO 16; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (short sword, club, or spear); SA poison; SZ M (5'6" tall); ML elite (14); Int average (11); XP 175 each.

Special Equipment: Type M poison on blades (contact, 1d4 minutes, 20/5).

GHEAR THE SIGHTED, Pl/♂ human/C7/Athar/LN: AC 3 (plate mail); MV 9; hp 32; THACO 16; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6+1 (*flail*); SZ M (6' tall); ML fearless (19); XP 975.

S 14, D 10, C 15, I 12, W 15, Ch 9.

Personality: loyal, committed.

Special Equipment: *brooch of shielding* (absorbs 26 points of magic missile damage).

Spells (5/4/2/1): 1st—bless, command, cure light wounds (×2), detect evil; 2nd—aid, hold person, spiritual hammer, wyvern watch; 3rd—glyph of warding, protection from fire; 4th—cure serious wounds.

ATHAR GUARDS AT CHURCH, Pl/var var/F3/Athar/N: AC 4 (chain mail, shield); MV 12; hp 18 each; THACO 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (spear) or 1d4+1 (light crossbow); SZ M (5' tall); ML champion (15); Int average (10); XP 120 each.

Notes: Two guards watch the front entrance of the church, two guards patrol Nickle Street (behind the church), 20 warriors wait in the building next door, and one crossbowman waits on a roof across the street.

ATHAR WIZARD AT CHURCH, Pl/♀ human/Tra4/Athar/NG: AC 8 (ring of protection +1, Dex bonus); MV 12; hp 9; THACO 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (staff); SZ M (5'6" tall); ML champion (16); XP 650.

S 12, D 15, C 13, I 16, W 13, Ch 14.

Personality: brash, headstrong.

Special Equipment: ring of protection +1 (forged in Sigil).

Spells (4/3): 1st—burning hands, color spray, shocking grasp, spider climb; 2nd—irritation, levitate, pyrotechnics.

HARMONIUM TROOPS AT CHURCH, Pl/var var/F5/Harmonium/LN (15): AC 3 (banded mail, shield); MV 12; hp 32 each; THACO 16; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6+1 (footman's mace); SZ M (6' tall); ML fanatic (17); Int average (8); XP 175 each.

Notes: If the PCs try to fight their way into the church, the Harmonium troops arrive quickly to help the Athar defend the place—that's what seems most likely to keep the peace.

THE WAY OF THE ONE

ELCHIS, Pr/♀ elf/F6/Sign of One/N: AC 5 (chain mail); MV 12; hp 34; THACO 15 (13 with sword); #AT 1; Dmg 2d4+1 (broad sword +1); SD infravision 60', 90% resistant to sleep and charm; SZ M (5'7" tall); ML elite (14); XP 650.

Notes: Elchis is loyal to the Way of the One subgroup of the Signers.

S 15, D 14, C 16, I 13, W 12, Ch 10.

Personality: sneaky, vindictive.

Special Equipment: broad sword +1 (forged on the Outlands).

GREMMITH MI, Pl/♂ half-elf/M8/Fated/LE: AC 10; MV 12; hp 20; THACO 18 (17 with blowgun +1); #AT 0 (2 with blowgun +1); Dmg 2 (blowgun dart); SA darts tipped with poison; SD infravision 60', 30% resistant to sleep and charm; SZ M (5'2" tall); ML average (9); XP 2,000.

Notes: Gremmith currently works for the Way of the One subgroup of the Signers.

S 8, D 10, C 7, I 18, W 13, Ch 7.

Personality: cowardly, selfish.

Special Equipment: blowgun +1 (forged in Sigil), ring of shocking grasp, Type C poison (injected, 1d4+1 minutes, 25/2d4).

Spells (4/3/3/2): 1st—armor, charm person, magic missile, sleep; 2nd—blur, invisibility, Melf's acid arrow; 3rd—delude, fireball, wraithform; 4th—dimension door, phantasmal killer.

SIGNER BRUISER, Pl/var var/F4/Sign of One/N (5): AC 7 (leather, shield); MV 12; hp 24 each; THACO 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8 (long sword or battle axe); SZ M (6' tall); ML champion (16); Int average (10); XP 120 each.

OTHER FACTIONS

LARI CHANT-FINDER, Pl/♀ githzerai/T5/Doomguard/N: AC 7 (Dex bonus); MV 12; hp 17; THACO 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 (dagger); SA ×3 backstab; SD infravision 60'; SZ M (5'8" tall); MR 35%; ML steady (12); XP 650.

S 11, D 17, C 12, I 16, W 12, Ch 13.

Personality: personable, talkative.

Special Equipment: gem of insight.

Thief Abilities: PP 40, OL 50, F/RT 40, MS 50, HS 45, DN 30, CW 70, RL 45.

MALWEIS, Pl/♂ human/Pal7/Fraternity of Order/LG: AC 2 (plate mail, shield); MV 9; hp 51; THACO 14 (11 with sword and Str); #AT 3/2; Dmg 1d8+3 (long sword +2 + Str bonus); SD detect evil, save bonus, immunity, cure disease, healing, aura of protection, turn undead; SZ M (6'4" tall); ML fanatic (18); XP 4,000.

SD—detect evil within 60 feet (takes one round); +2 to all saving throws; immune to disease; cure disease twice per week; heal 14 hp (for himself or another) once per day; 10-foot-radius aura of protection causes evil creatures to attack at -1; turn undead as 5th-level cleric.

S 17, D 10, C 15, I 12, W 13, Ch 17.

Personality: noble, straightforward.

Special Equipment: long sword +2 (forged on the Outlands), ring of truth, potion of hill giant strength.

IVTH NANRIGHT, Pl/♂ air genasi/P6(Yan-C-Bin)/NE: AC 5 (chain mail); MV 12; hp 25; THACO 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (short sword); SA levitate once per day, poison on blade; SD +1 to saves vs. air magic; SZ M (5'6" tall); ML elite (13); XP 2,000.

Notes: Ivth can create a cool breeze at will.

S 12, D 11, C 9, I 17, W 16, Ch 8.

Personality: despicable.

Special Equipment: wand of magic missiles (24 charges), potion of invisibility, Type M poison (contact, 1d4 minutes, 20/5).

Spells (5/5/2): 1st—bless, cause light wounds, command, cure light wounds, detect magic; 2nd—augury, charm person or mammal, hold person, know alignment, silence 15' radius; 3rd—cause paralysis, dispel magic.

BARGHEST (4): AC 2; MV 15; HD 6+6; hp 30 each; THACO 15; #AT 2; Dmg 2d4+6/2d4+6 (claw/claw); SA spell-like powers, wolf form; SD struck only by +1 or better weapons; MR 30%; SZ M (5' tall); ML champion (15); Int high (13); AL LE; XP 2,000 each.

Notes: The barghests serve as Ivth's bodyguards.

SA—can use the following spell-like powers once per round at will: levitate, misdirection, project image, and shape change (into wolf form); can use the following spell-like powers once per day at will: charm (person or monster), dimension door, and emotion; in wolf form, has MV 30, is 75% unlikely to be noticed when motionless (-2 to opponents' surprise rolls), and can pass without trace.

CRANIUM RAT (38): AC 6; MV 15; HD 1; hp 3 each; THACO 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 (bite); SA when 35 are together, can cast one 1st-level wizard spell per day; SD communal Hit Dice, saves, immunity; SZ T (6" long); ML unsteady (7); Int 1-7 (fluctuates); AL NE; XP 65 each.

Notes: These rats constantly spread out and come together while they gather information for Ivth, so their Intelligence and abilities are always in flux. They're loyal to Ivth and report everything they see to him.

SD—when calculating damage from area-affecting spells, treat Hit Dice of pack as a pool (ignore individual hp of each rat); rats save as a creature of as many Hit Dice as pack's current Intelligence; immune to *sleep* when 25 or more rats are together.

PART TWO: CROSSED SWORDS

DANIPHE, Pl/♀ foxwoman/HD 8+1/Xaositect/CE: AC 2, 4, or 6; MV 24, 18, or 12; hp 50; THACO 13 (12 with sword); #AT 1; Dmg 1d2 (fox bite), 2d6 (vixen bite) or 1d8 (long sword); SA lycanthropy (vixen), *charms* males of 13 or less Wisdom (elf); SD struck only by silver or +1 or better weapons, infravision 60', *pass without trace* (fox), 90% resistant to *sleep* and *charm* (elf); SZ S (3' long) or M (5' tall); ML elite (13); Int exceptional (16); XP 2,000.

Notes: Daniphe can assume three different forms: fox, vixen (a hybrid of fox and elf), and female elf. Variable stats above are given in the following order: fox, vixen, elf.

SA—human or elf females bitten by vixen for half or more of their hit points become foxwomen within three days unless a priest of 12th+ level casts *cure disease* and *remove curse* on victim.

ATHAR GUARDS AT CHURCH: Use the statistics given above, with the 20 guards from next door split into seven crossbowmen on the roof across the street and 13 around the church.

MHAVOR, Pl/♂ human/Enc10/Sign of One/NE: AC 10; MV 6; hp 36; THACO 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (staff); SZ M (5'10" tall); ML elite (14); XP 3,000.

Notes: Mhavor, leader of the Way of the One subgroup of the Signers, is old and weak, and walks only by means of his staff.

S 5, D 7, C 8, I 17, W 15, Ch 14.

Personality: harsh, focused.

Special Equipment: *potion of clairvoyance*, *potion of healing*, *robe of useful items*, *wand of negation* (10 charges).

Spells (5/5/4/3/3): 1st—*charm person*, *burning hands*, *dancing lights*, *hold portal*, *hypnotism*; 2nd—*detect invisibility*, *ESP*, *Melf's acid arrow*, *ray of enfeeblement*, *scare*; 3rd—*dispel magic*, *fly* (×2), *suggestion*; 4th—*fire shield*, *fumble*, *stoneskin*; 5th—*domination*, *fabricate*, *feeblemind*.

PART THREE: MYSTERIES OF THE STONES

WORSHIPER (first stone), Pr/var human/F5/N (10): AC 10; MV 12; hp 25; THACO 16; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 (curved knife); SZ M (6' tall); ML fanatic (19); Int average (10); XP 175 each.

BRONZE DRAGON, ADULT (second stone): AC -4; MV 9, Fl 30 (C), Sw 12; HD 20; hp 98; THACO 2; #AT 3; Dmg 1d8+6/1d8+6/4d6+6 (claw/claw/bite); SA spell-like abilities; SD immune to lightning; MR 25%; SZ G (63' long); ML fanatic (17); Int exceptional (16); AL LN; XP 15,000.

Notes: Because the dragon won't use its lightning or repulsion breath weapons in its master's palace, those attacks aren't described in the stats.

SA—spell-like abilities: *water breathing* and *speak with animals* at will; *create food and water*, *polymorph self*, and *ESP* three times per day; *wall of fog* once per day.

Spells (2/1): 1st—*charm person*, *magic missile*; 2nd—*detect evil*.

SOLDIER (third stone), Pr/var human/F3/N: AC 6 (studded leather, shield); MV 12; hp 16; THACO 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (spear, short sword, or long bow); SZ M (6' tall); ML steady (12); Int average (10); XP 120 each.

Notes: Use these stats for soldiers on both sides of the battle.

NOLITE BERSERKER (third stone), Pr/var human/F5/NE: AC 4 (banded mail); MV 12; hp 45; THACO 16; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8 (scimitar); SZ M (5'6" tall); ML fearless (20); Int average (9); XP 175 each.

ARGESH FIORD, Pl/♂ human/F8/LE (and memory version from sixth stone): AC 7 (*bracers*, Dex bonus); MV 12; hp 30; THACO 13; #AT 3/2; Dmg 1d6+1 (fist with *mace-ring*); SZ M (5'11" tall); ML elite (13); XP 975.

S 14, D 15, C 12, I 18, W 17, Ch 13.

Personality: scheming, vengeful.

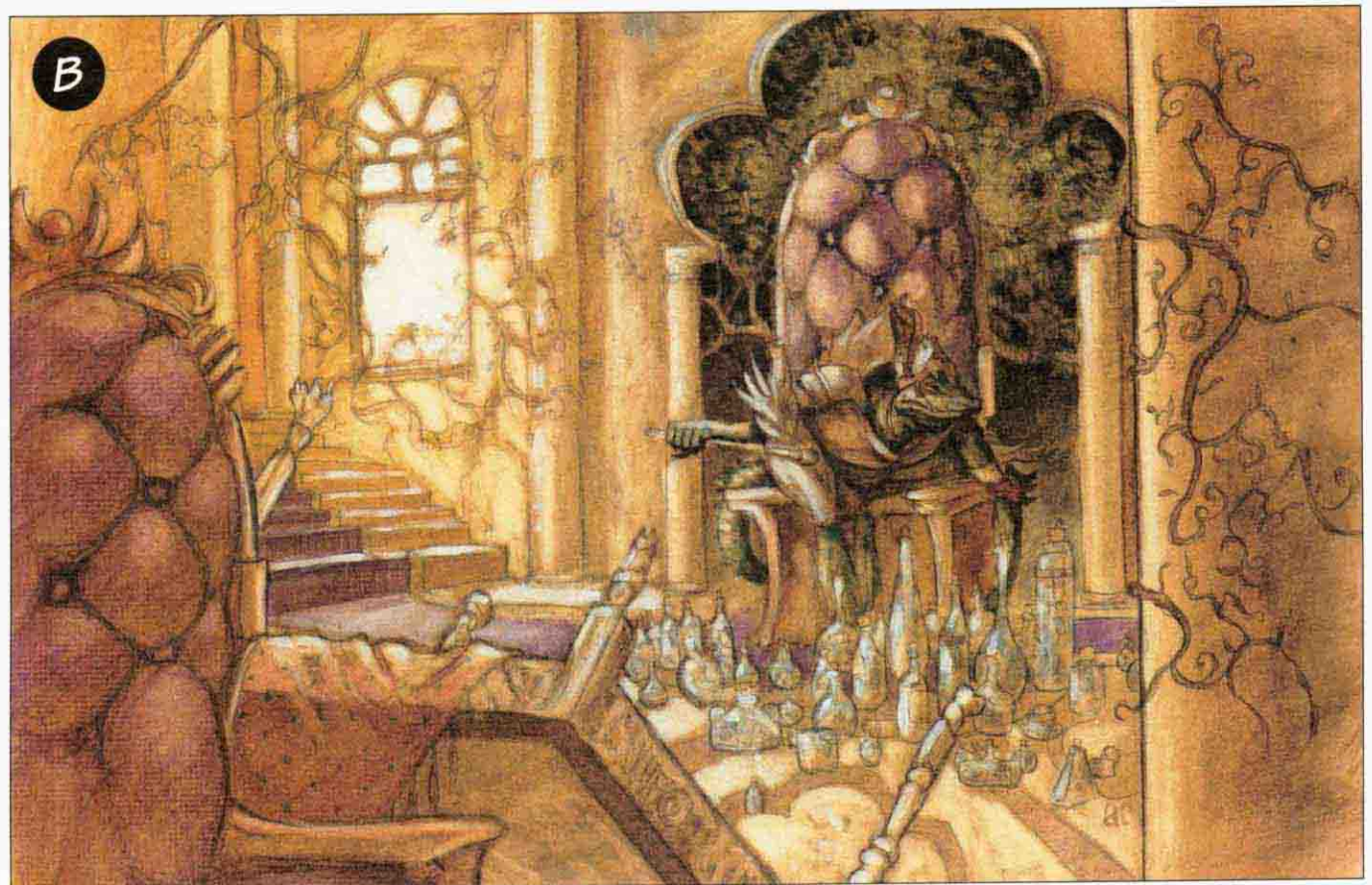
Special Equipment: *mace-ring* (ring that enables fist to cause damage as a mace), *bracers of defense* (AC 8), *ring of human influence*, *cloak of invisibility*.

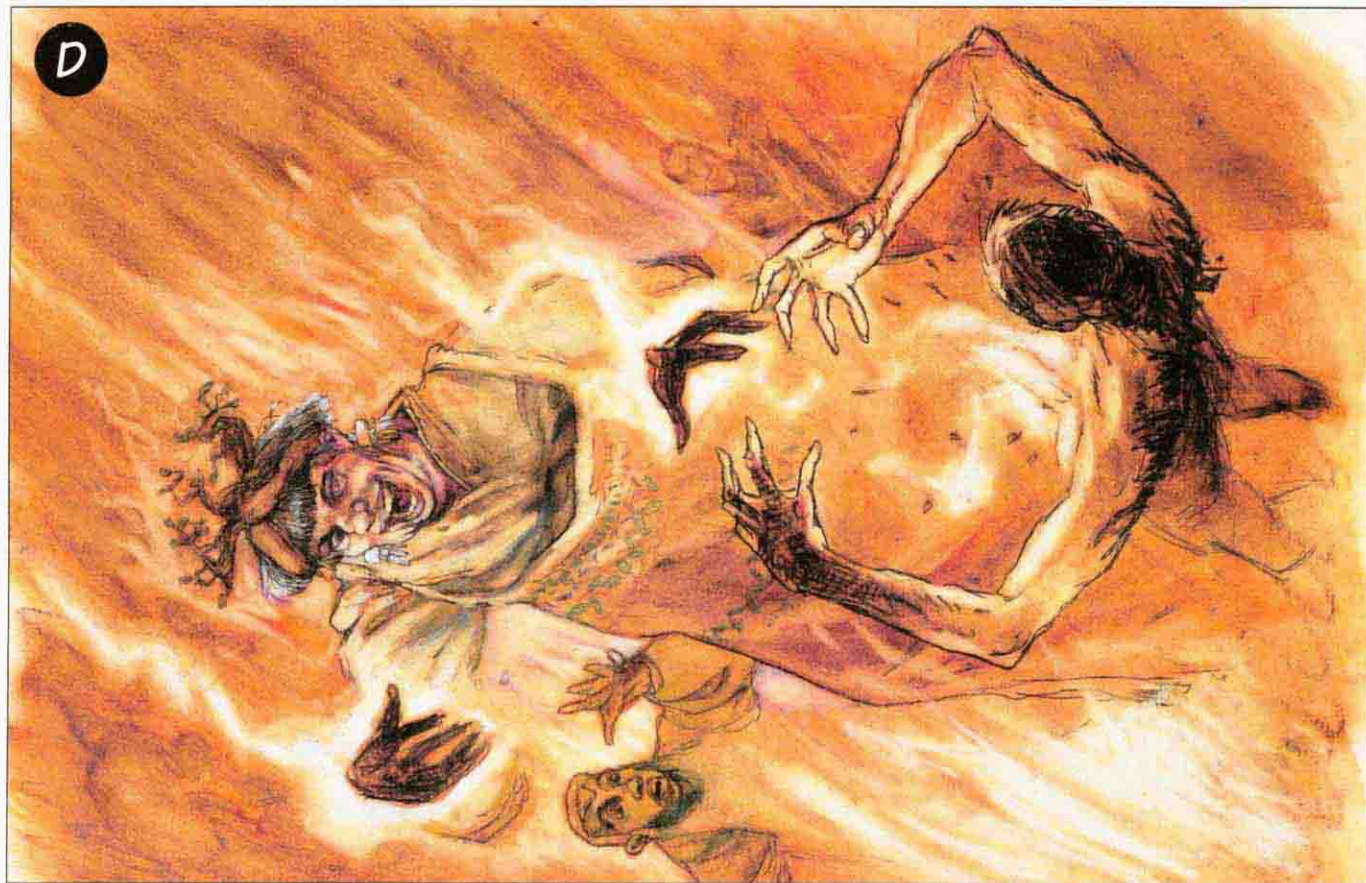
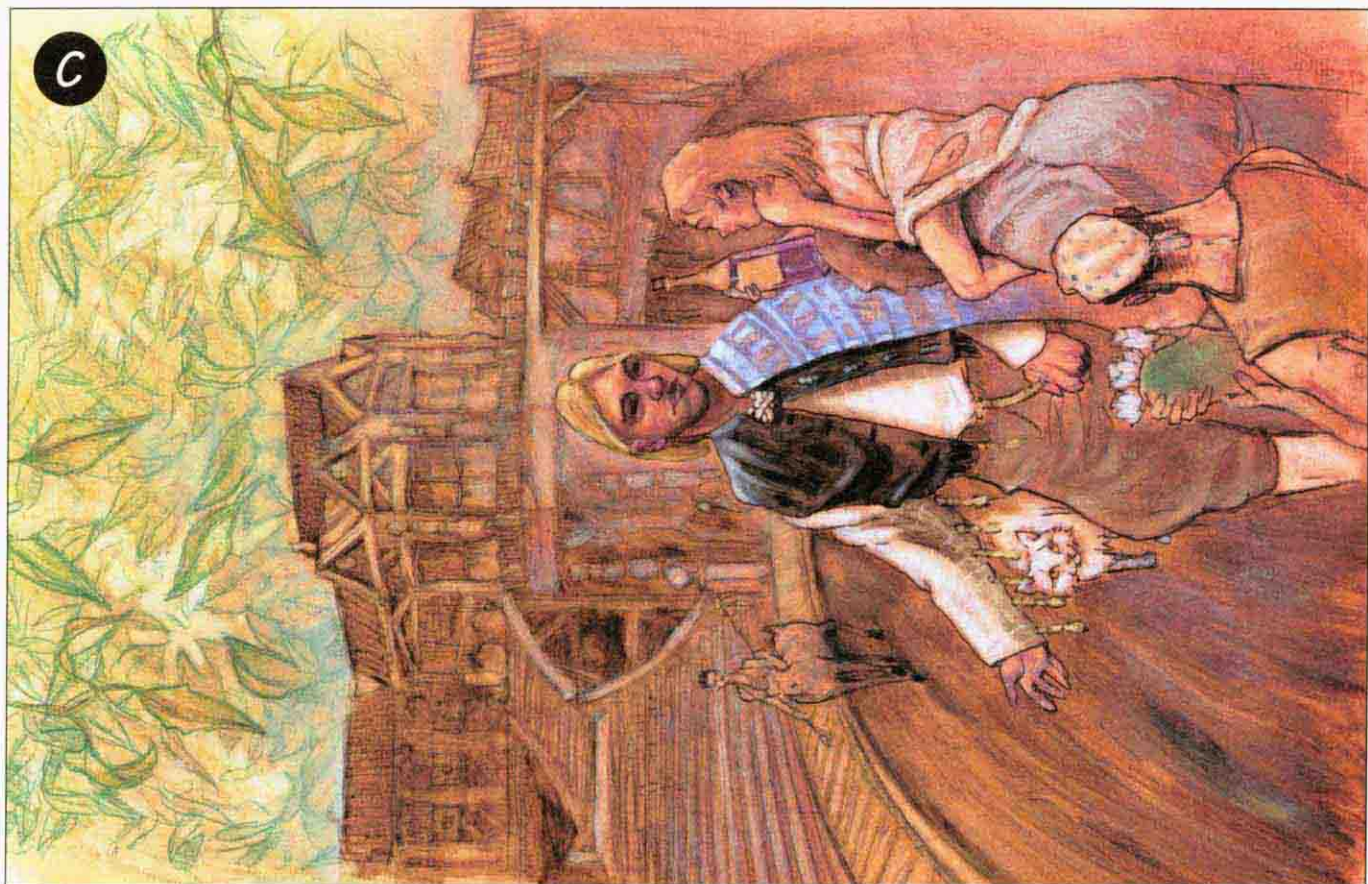
GREEN SLAAD (and memory version from sixth stone): AC 0; MV 9; HD 9+5; hp 63; THACO 11; #AT 3; Dmg 1d6+2/1d6+2/2d8 (claw/claw/bite); SA spell-like abilities, *gate*; SD struck only by +1 or better weapons; MR 50%; SZ L (7'6" tall); ML elite (14); Int average (9); AL CN; XP 11,000.

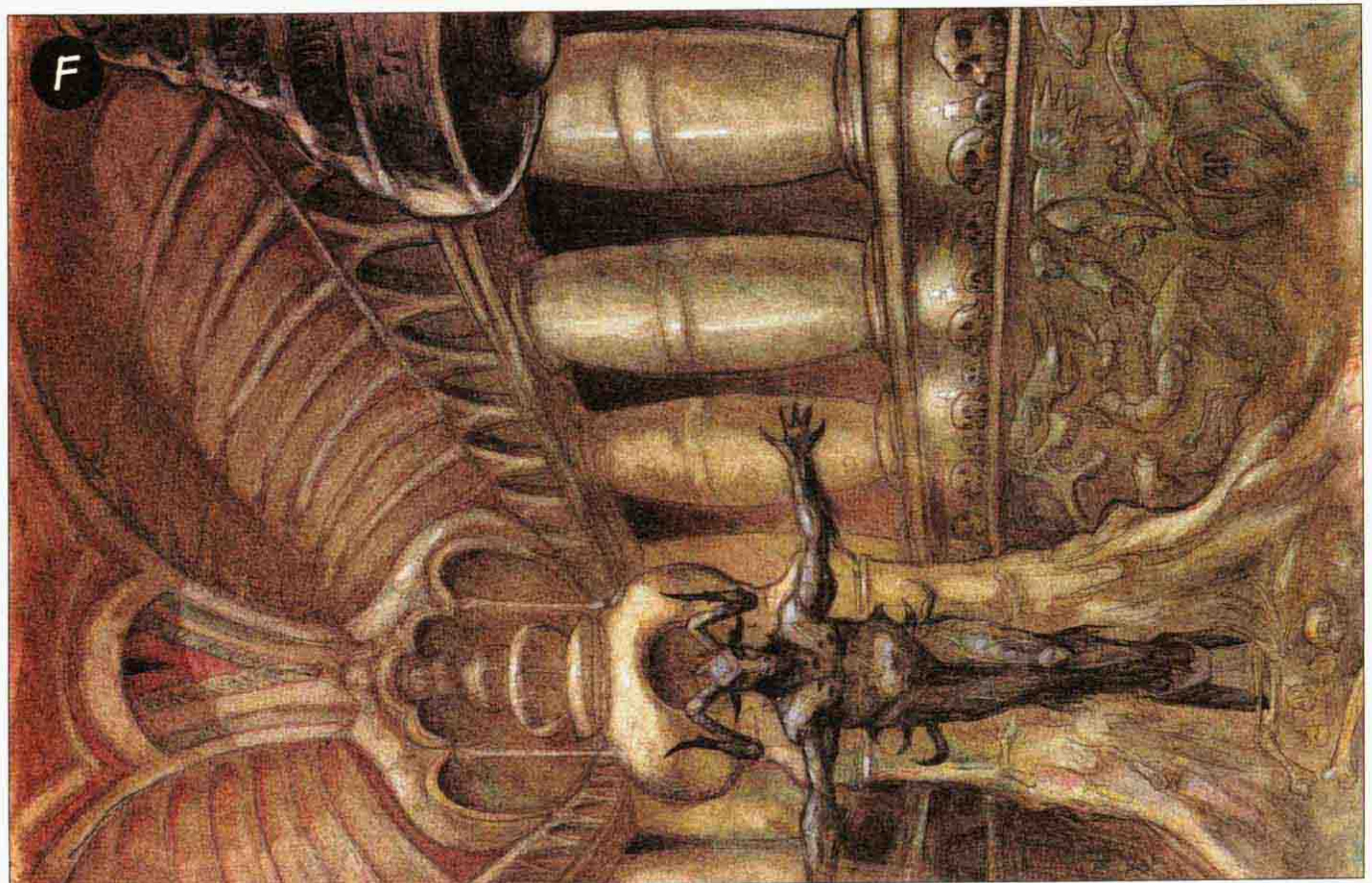
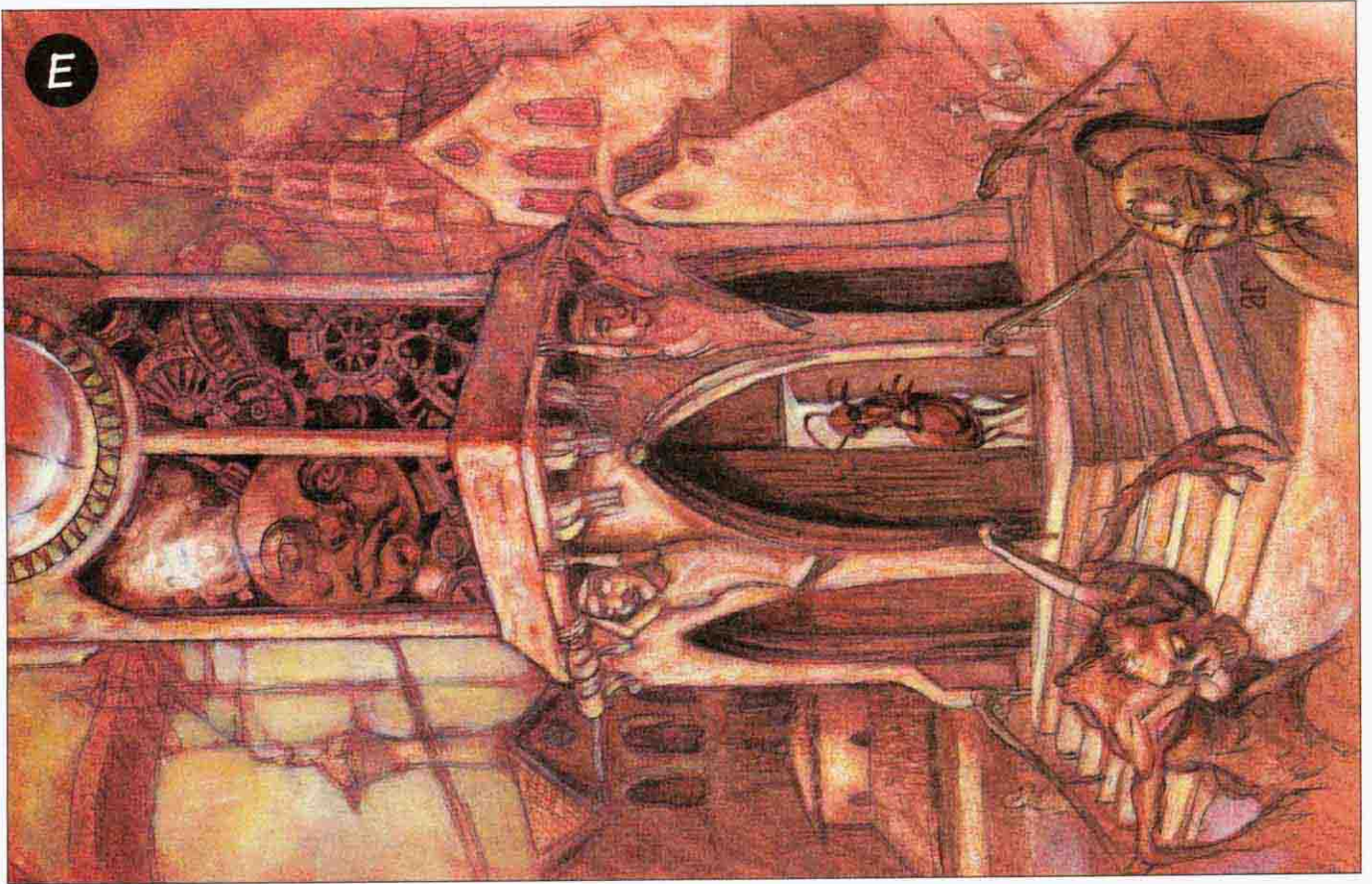
Notes: Only in the (flawed) memory-combat can the slaad *gate* in other slaadi, because no one can *gate* in or out of Sigil.

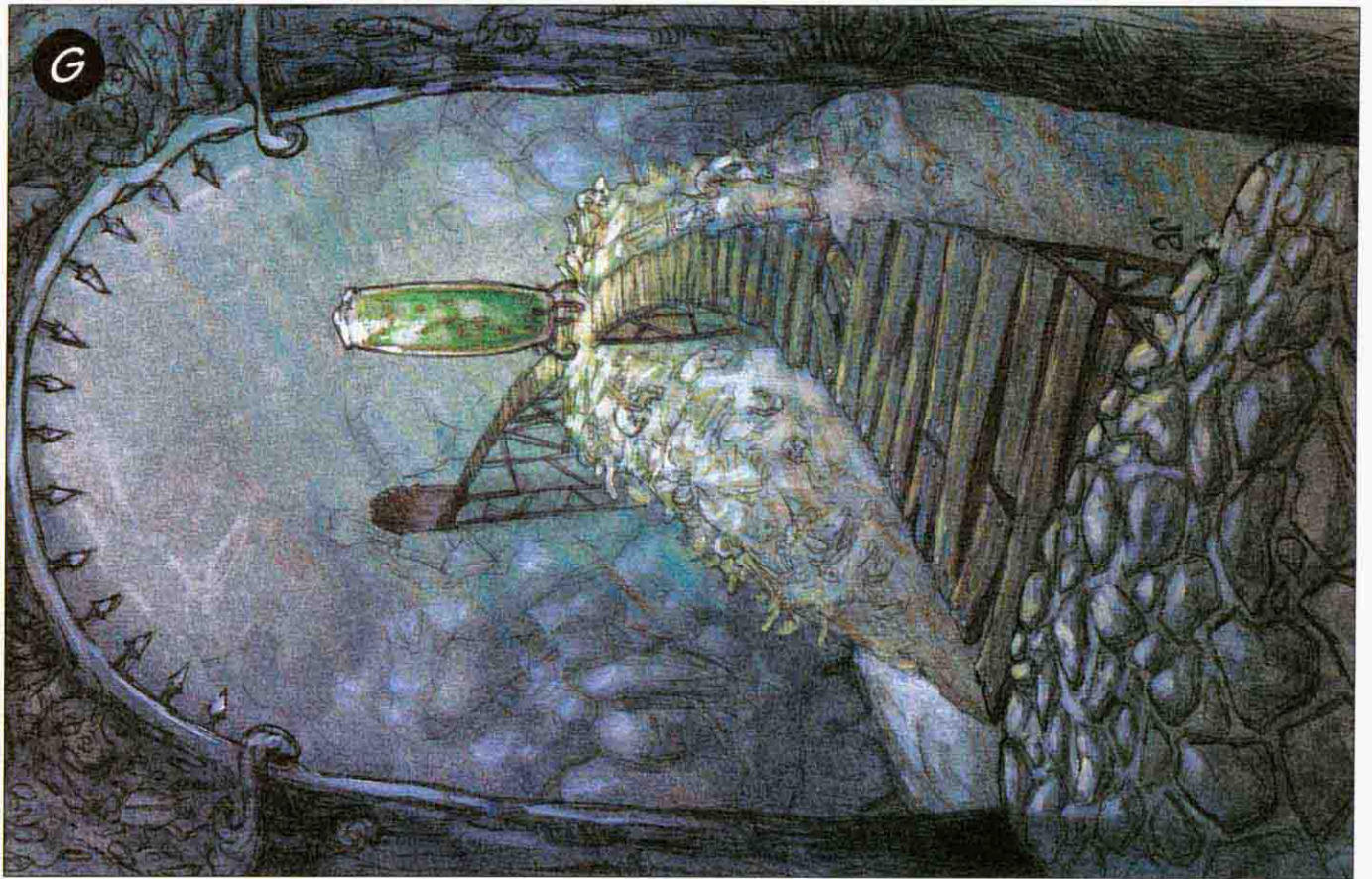
SA—can use the following once per round at will: *polymorph* (into a human), *darkness* 15' radius, *detect invisibility*, *detect magic*, *ESP*, *fear*, *locate object*, *produce flame*, *telekinesis*; can use *delayed blast fireball* once per day; *gate* 1d6 red, 1d4 blue, 1d2 green, or 1 gray slaad (2/day, 50% chance).



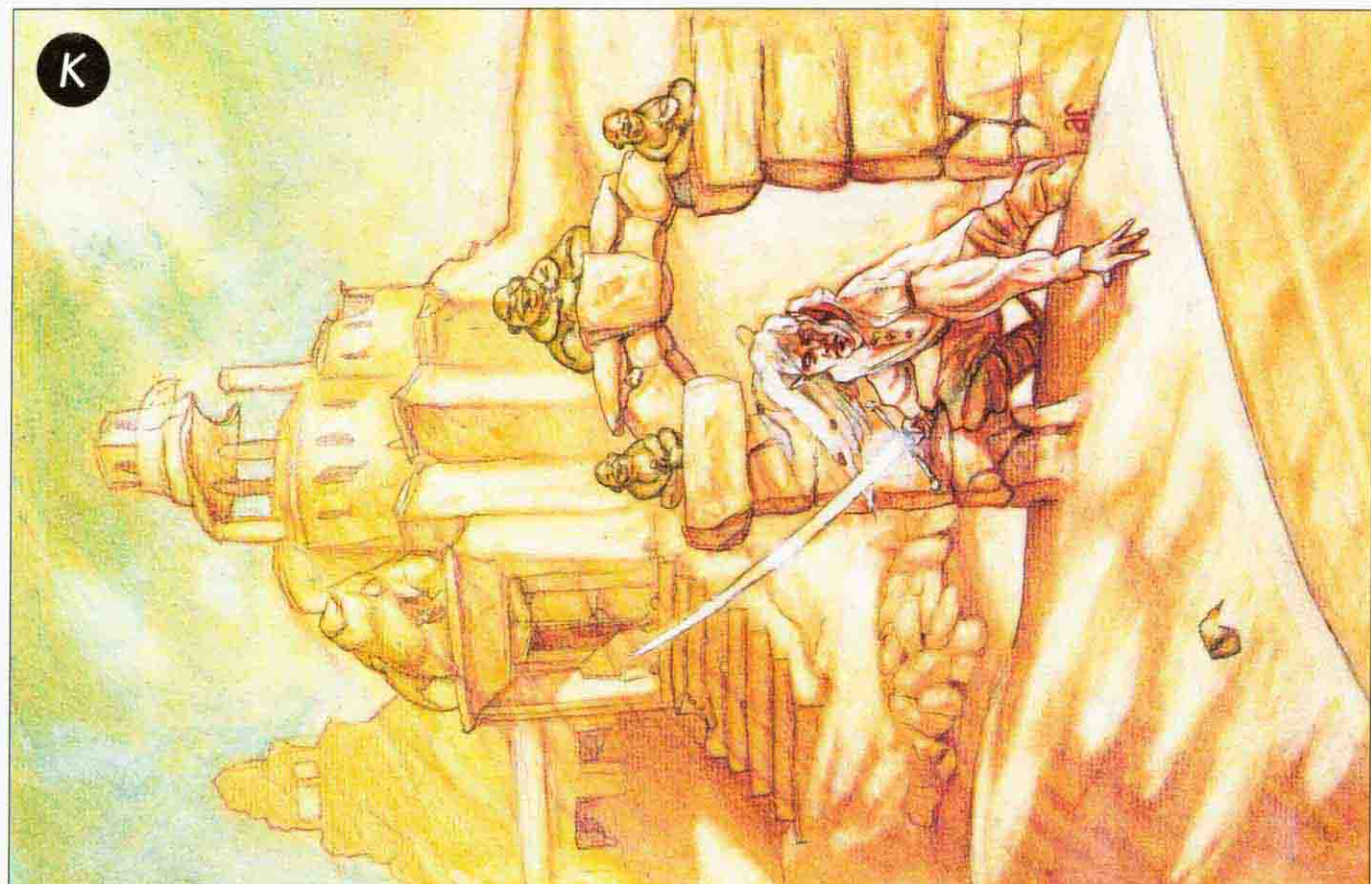


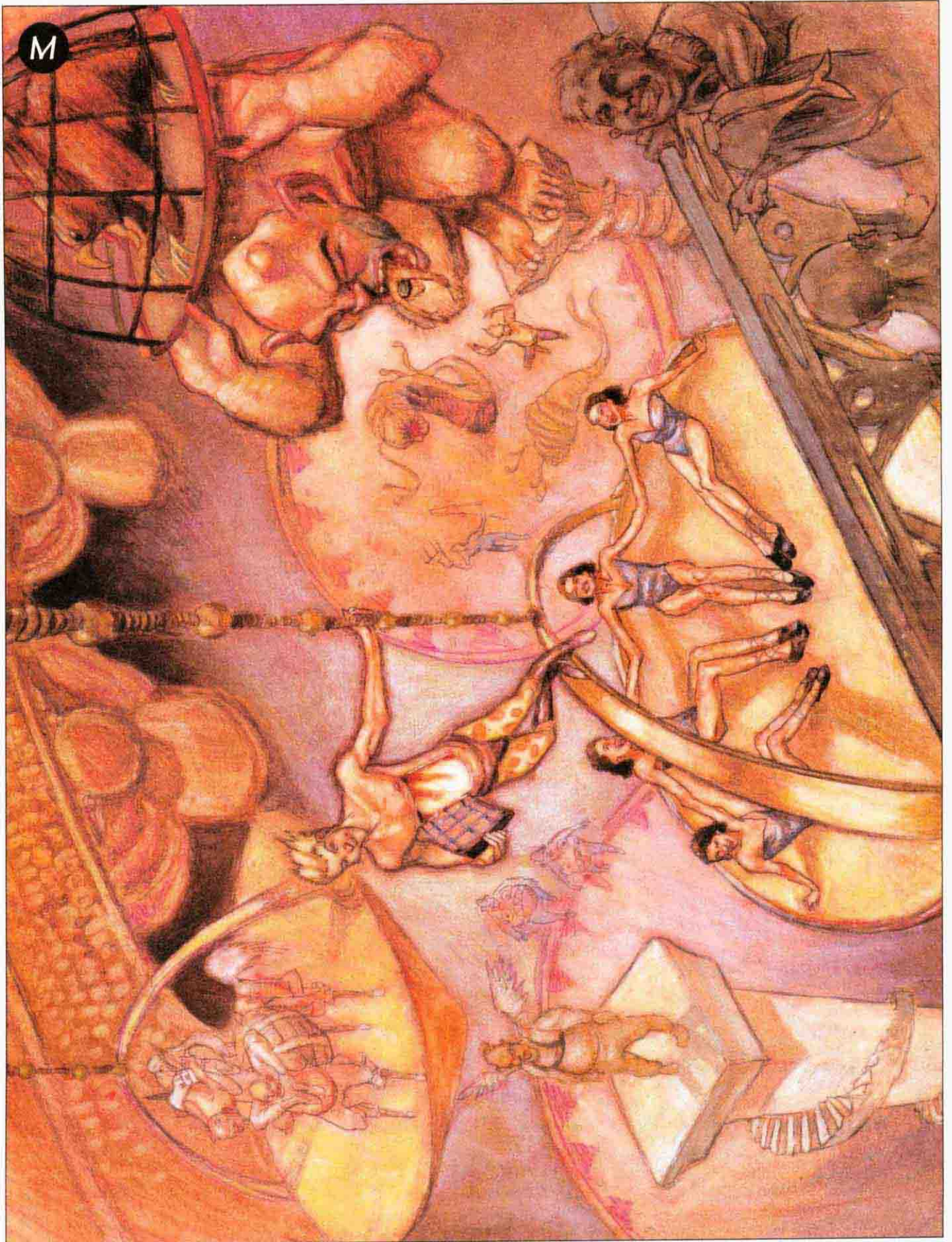


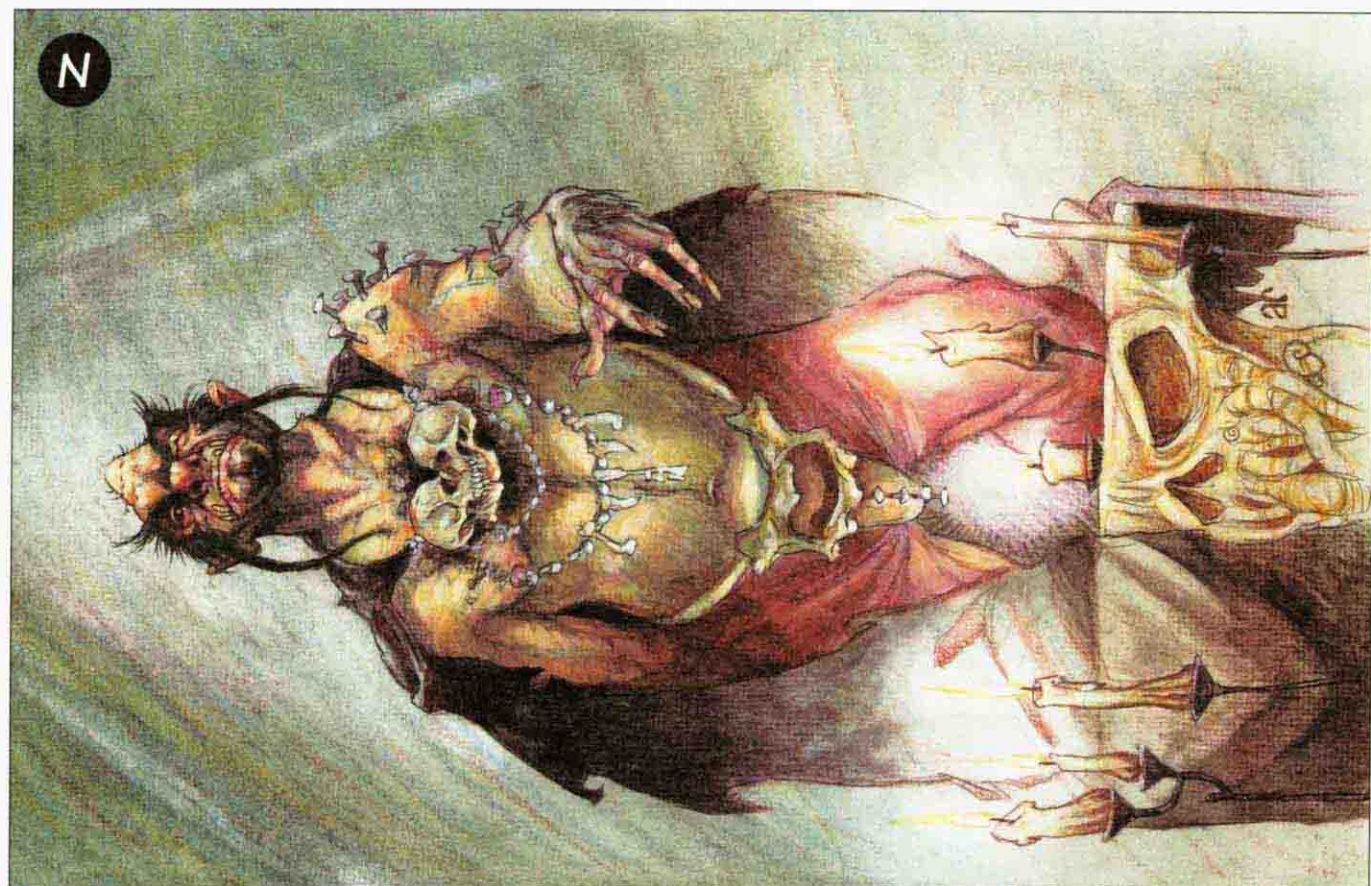


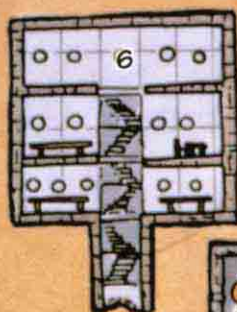
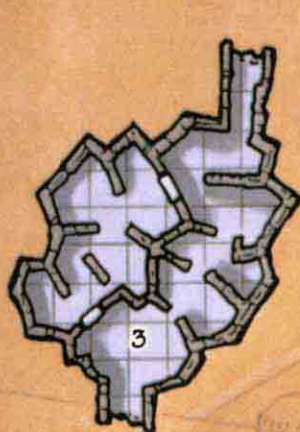




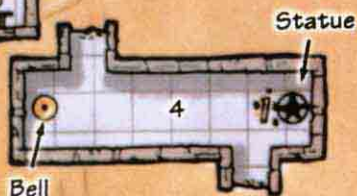






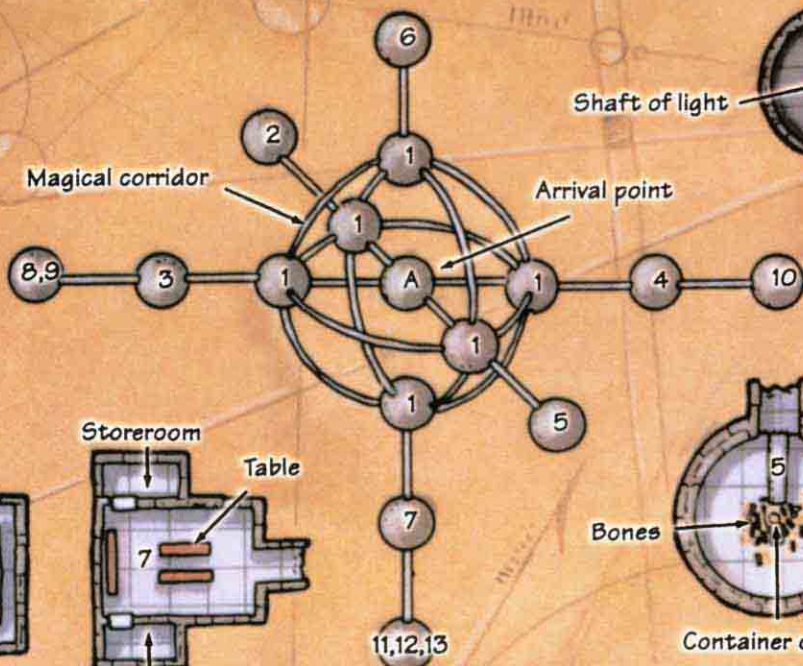


Side view

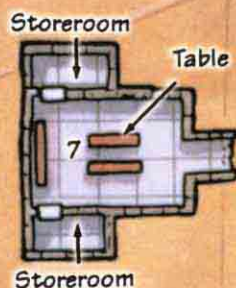
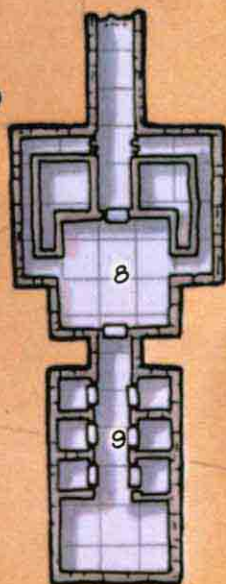


Statue

Bell



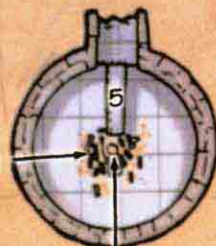
Shaft of light



Storeroom

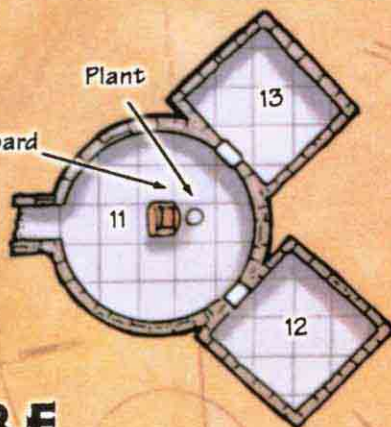
Table

Storeroom



Bones

Container of goo



Plant

Chessboard

TCIAN SUMERE

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CRUX

<<width of one square>> 50 feet

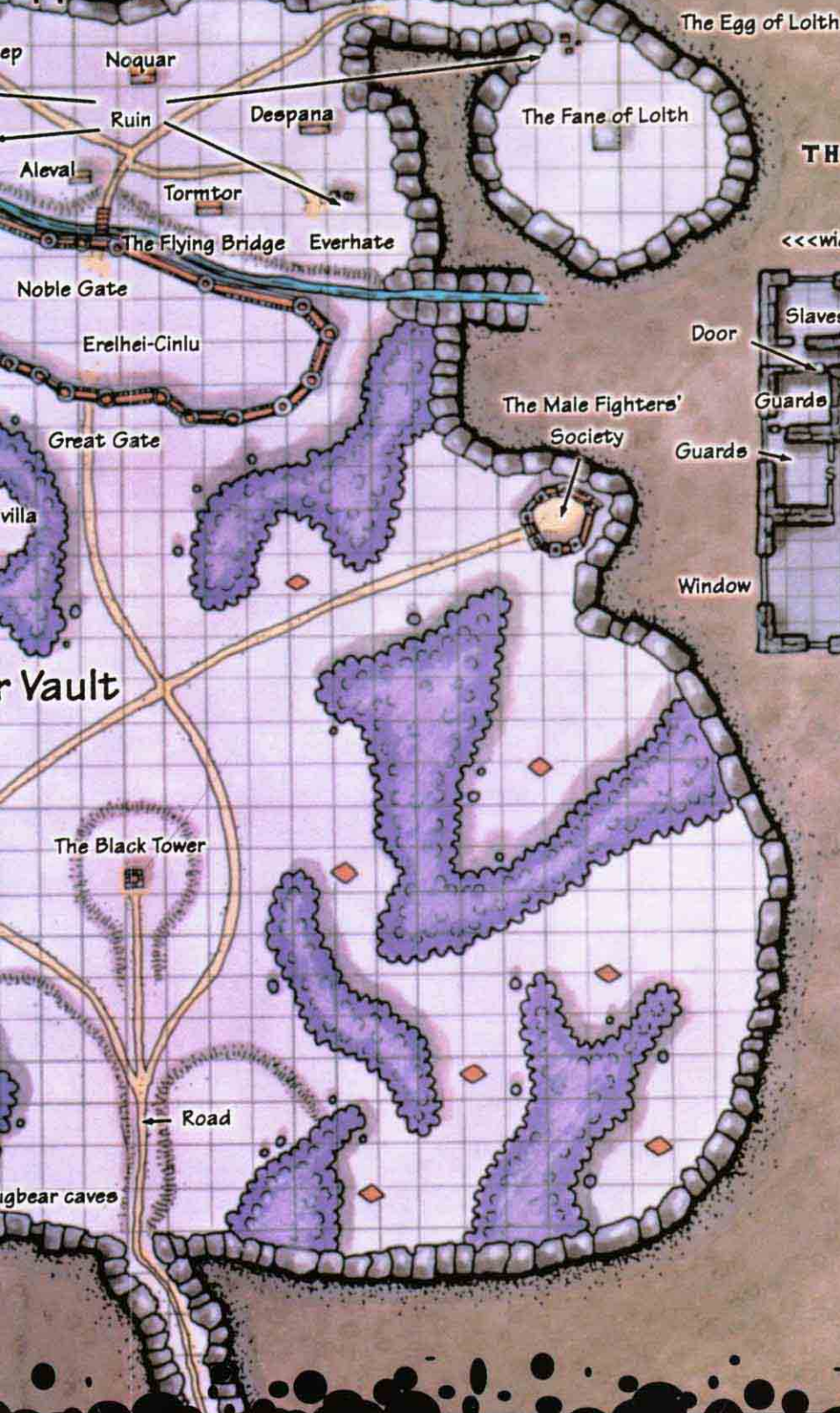




THE VAULT ⊕ THE DROW

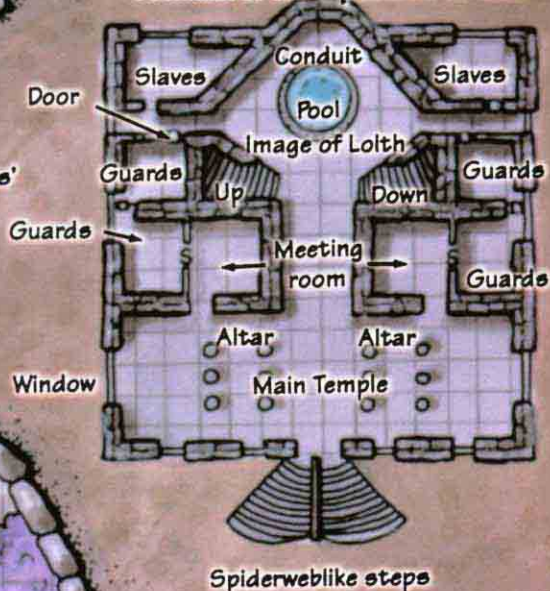
<<<width of one square>>> 1000 feet

Upper Vault



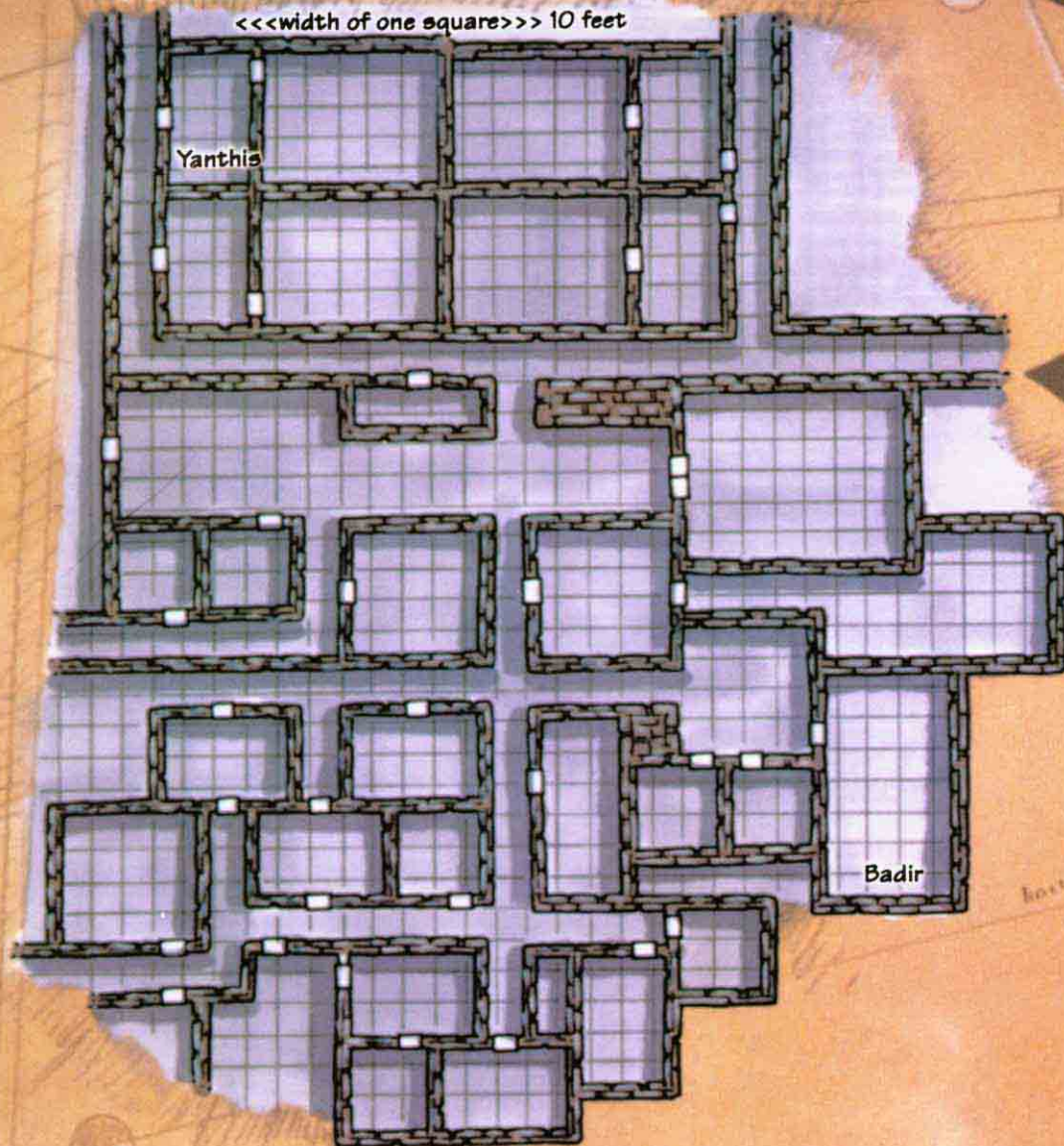
THE FANE OF LOTH (MAIN LEVEL)

<<<width of one square>>> 10 feet



ANOTHER PALACE

<<<width of one square>>> 10 feet



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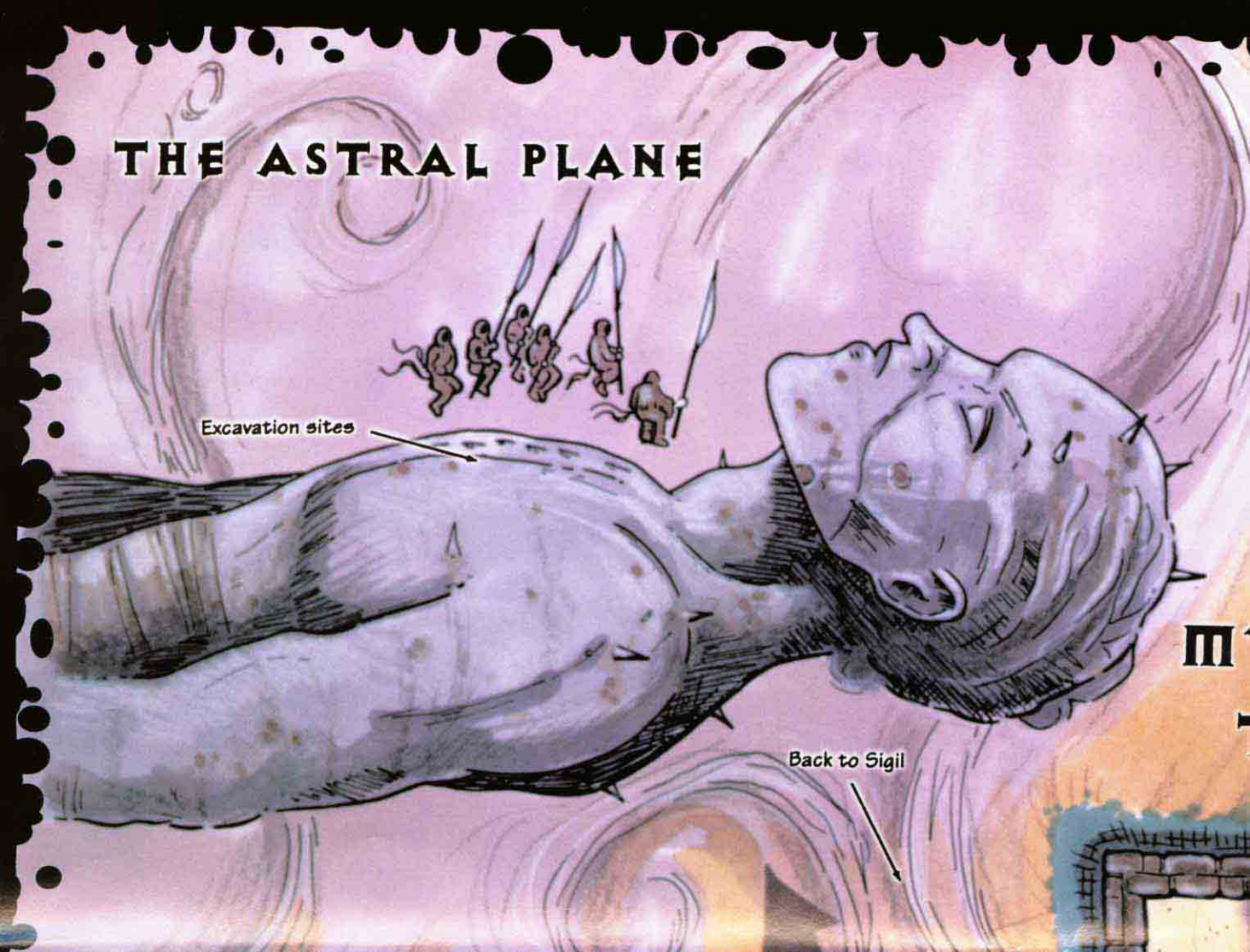
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THE ASTRAL PLANE

Excavation sites

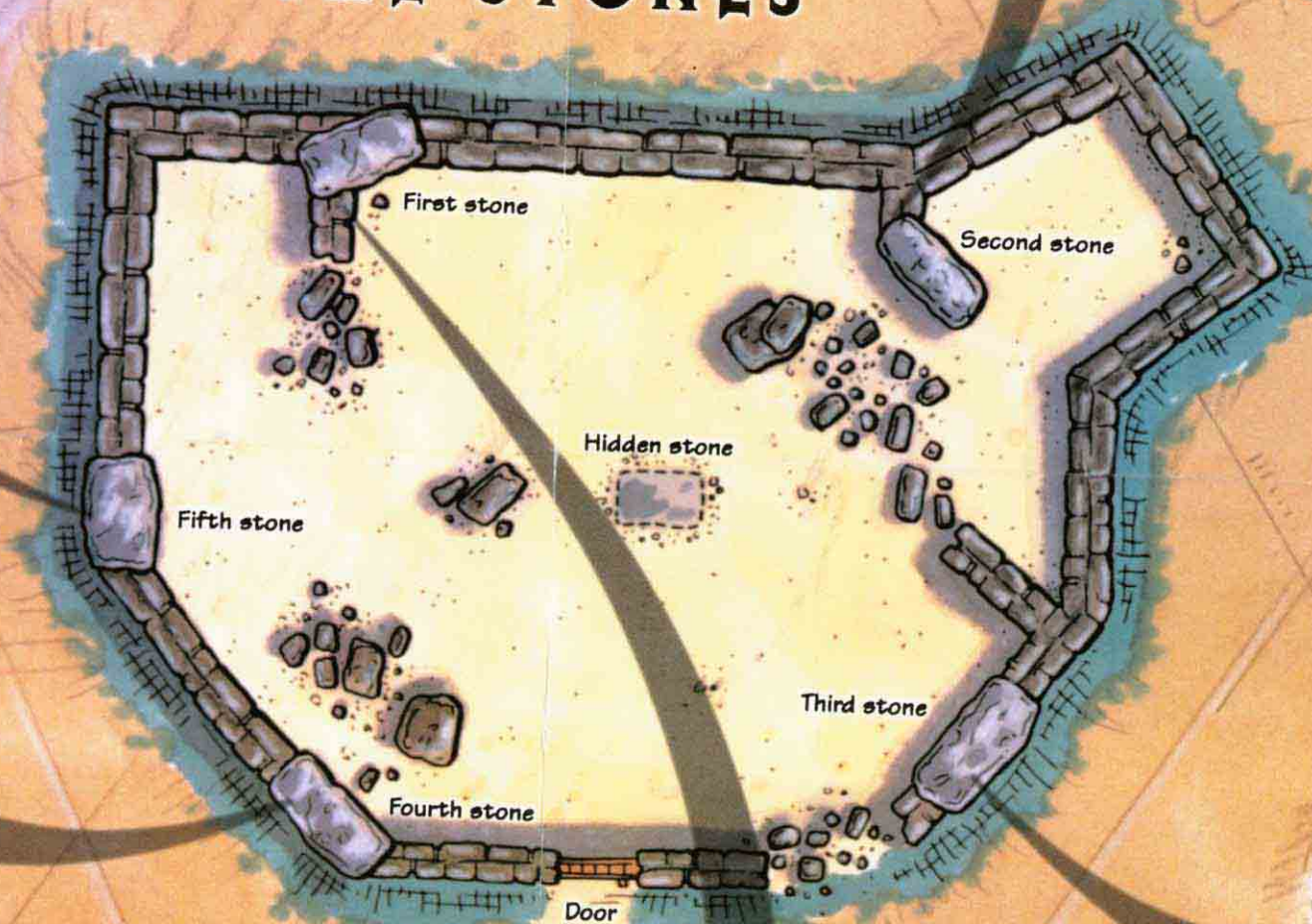
Back to Sigil

III



MYSTERIES OF THE STONES

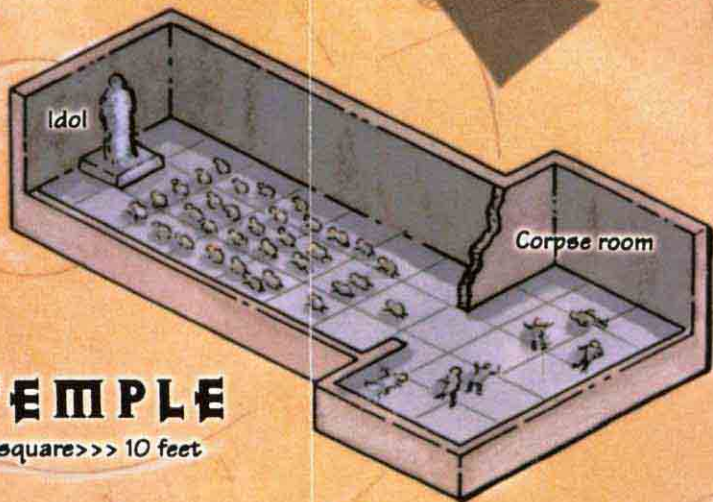
Back to Sigil



THE OLD CHURCH

Idol

THE OLD CHURCH

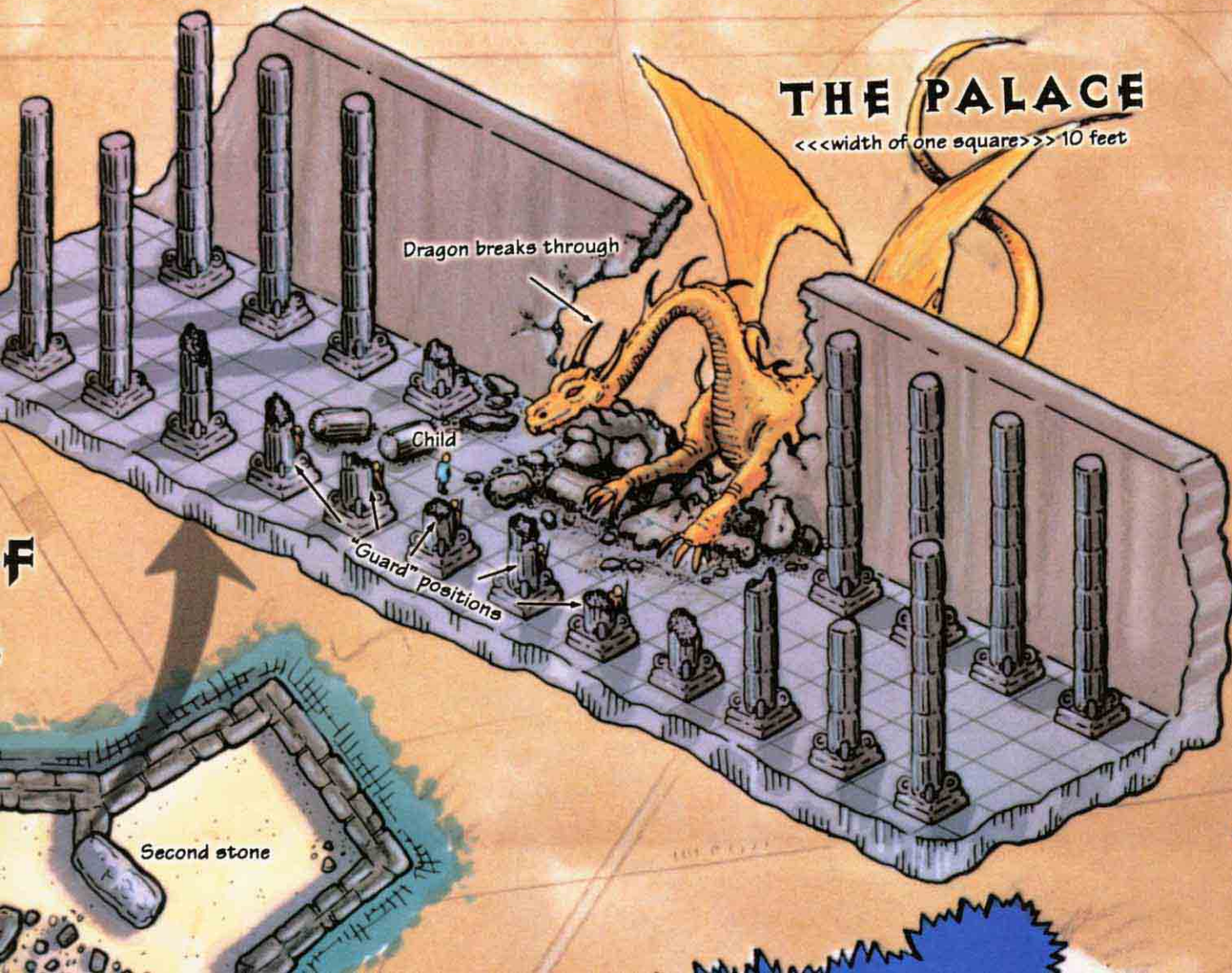


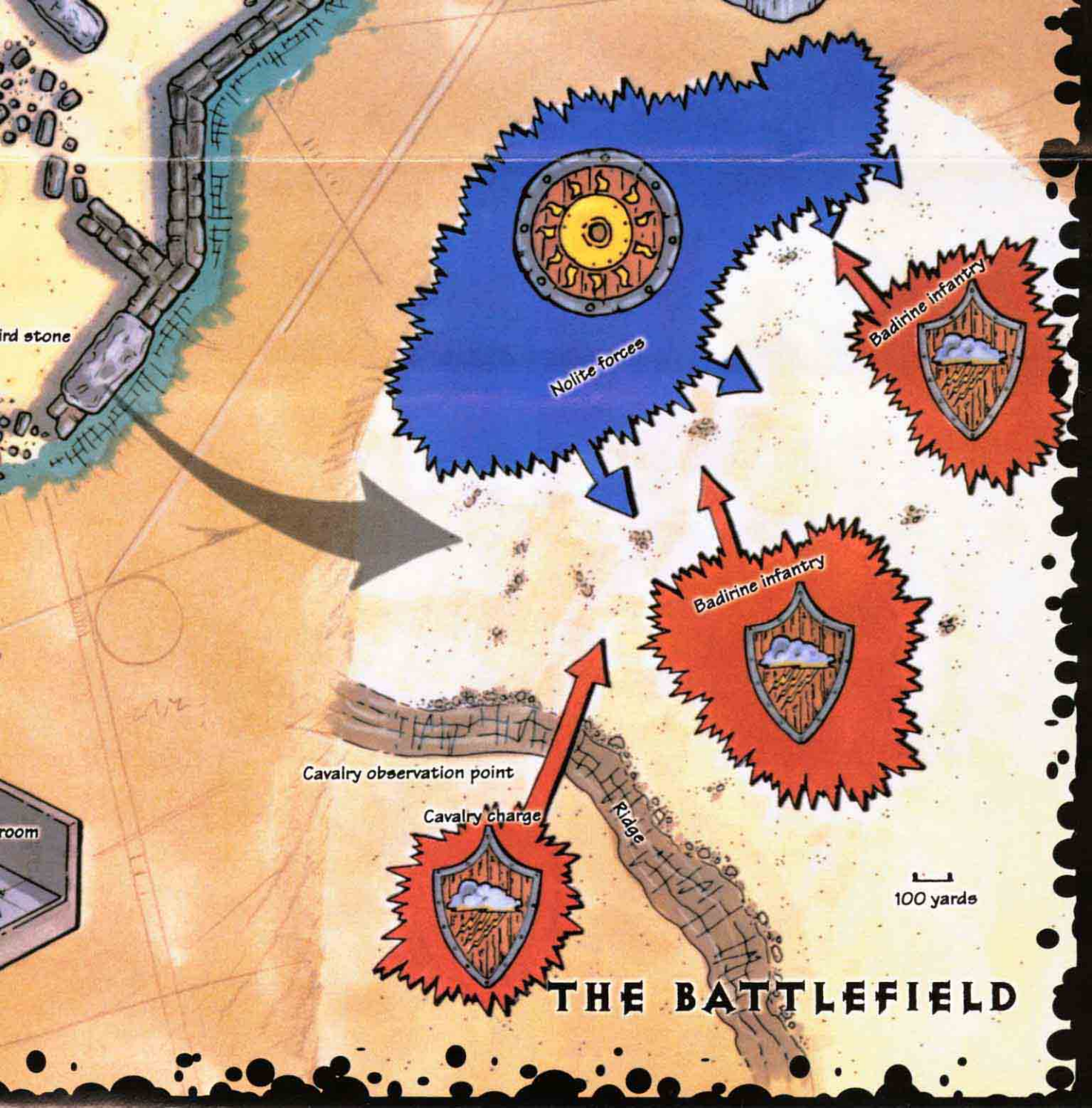
THE TEMPLE

<<<width of one square>>> 10 feet

THE PALACE

<<<width of one square>>> 10 feet





Bird stone

room

Cavalry observation point

Cavalry charge

Ridge

Nolite forces

Badirine infantry

Badirine infantry

100 yards

THE BATTLEFIELD

Chapter I
Circean Embers



Chapter II
Crux



Chapter III
Masks



Chapter IV
Message from Thanatos



Chapter V
The Bottom of the Multiverse



Chapter VI
The Vault of the Drow



Chapter VII
The Ruins of Pelion



Chapter VIII
Deepest Pandemonium



Chapter IX
The Dead - Book of the Gods

Part One
Initial Forays



Part Two
Crossed Swords



Part Three
Mysteries of
the Stones



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FOR 4 + 6 CHARACTERS OF 6TH + 9TH LEVELS

DEAD GODS

by Monte Cook

**THINK KILLING A GOD'S TUGH, BERK?
TRY BRINGING ONE BACK.**

Silently, ponderously, they float through the Astral Plane, mammoth isles of rock adrift in an endless sea of silver. Once they were gods. Now they're little more than debris, petrified husks of fading belief and forgotten prayer. Yet for many, their memories linger, their dreams live on – and for some, those dreams are terrifying nightmares of vengeance, and conquest, and death.

Dead Gods is a 176-page adventure book featuring two scenarios that can be played separately or linked together. In the first, the heroes are drawn into an epic quest to uncover the secrets behind the return of an infamous AD&D® villain long thought dead. In the second, the city of Sigil threatens to explode in a faction war for control of an old church and a mysterious force lurking within it. *Dead Gods* also features a MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® entry for a brand-new fiend, full-color illustrations to bring scenes alive for players, and a poster sheet of maps for the Dungeon Master.

Dead Gods builds on story elements first explored in the PLANESCAPE® adventure anthology *The Great Modron March*, though that product is not required to use this one.

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