



## XEN'DRIK EXPEDITIONS

### **Price of Virtue** **Covenant of Light Faction Scenario #6** **An Adventure for 6<sup>th</sup> Level Characters** **(Scaled for 4<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> Levels of Play)**

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# Adventure Background

The Covenant of Light has had a lot of strange things happen to its members in the last year. Tensions are growing between the faction and its religious allies, its mortal forces and its standing among the leaders of Stormreach. There have been ceremonies, accusations, investigations and journeys through the subterranean depths of Xen'drik. Even the terrors of the jungle have been no strangers to the Covenant; beasts of many different kinds have assailed its Scions, seemingly at every turn.

Though the Covenant of Light has been able to hold its own and its forces are more than willing to endure whatever evil the future brings, the faction's leaders have no desire to sacrifice lives when there are other ways to deal with the rising tide of darkness. Lady Lirashana has many allies on Eberron and many more in the shining realms beyond. From her many resources, she has found what seemed to be the perfect answer to her faction's troubles – Al'ar, a powerful celestial creature called a *quesar*, born and bred to fight villainy in its many forms.

Al'ar was an associate of the same powers the Lady Lirashana served, an independent but still virtuous being of Good with a desire to aid in any way he could. Though he was not bound to the divine like the Lady of Light, his devotion to good and justice was no less strong. Through negotiation and barter, Lady Lirashana managed to secure Al'ar's support for her faction in exchange for her return service at a future date for an equal amount of time. A simple price for an immortal to pay, this bargain received the blessing of the justice archon's patron gods and a compact was made.

Once this new champion was chosen by the Lady of Light, all that remained was to summon it from its celestial realm. Great care was taken to create its calling ritual and set up the site for its casting. Several powerful clerics serving the Covenant of Light volunteered to provide the spell power and toll on their life force to bind the willing servant of Good to Eberron indefinitely. After several weeks of careful preparation, all was in place to bring the Lady's ally into the world.

Unfortunately for the Covenant, there was an additional element present at the ritual. Along with seven priests to guide the powerful magic of the binding, a contingent of guards was arrayed around the summoning circle to deal with anything that might go wrong during its casting. One of these guardians was an infiltrator, a changeling by the name of Shellok, with orders to interrupt the spell through the use of a magical item hidden on his person.

Shellok's cooperation was purchased by agents of the Cabal of Shadows, spies that offered the changeling bard his freedom from prison in exchange for his assistance with their plot against the Covenant of Light. Since the bard was in jail because of members of the Covenant in the first place, he was all too willing to comply.

At the critical moment, just as Al'ar was manifesting within the carefully inlaid summoning circle, Shellok took a *chaos diamond* from a *bag of holding* and threw both items into the diagram. The resulting planar discharge blasted a hole in Radiant Hold's courtyard, killed three of the attending priests, most of the guards and caused something **horrible** to occur to Al'ar. Shellok only escaped the devastating effects of his treachery by means of a *teleport* item on his person, fleeing in shock and dismay at the carnage caused by his actions. He had been told the gem and pouch would only cancel the summoning and prevent the spell from succeeding; he had no idea how disastrously the summoning would fail.

The creature that had been Al'ar lurched out of the ruined diagram and rampaged its way out of Radiant Hold, slaying several more in the wake of its exodus. Howling incoherently, the chaotic monstrosity shambled out of the sundered fortress and into the trackless green wastes of the jungle beyond its walls. Where its summoning circle has been, a rift to the plane of Kythri was left behind.

This portal, uncontrolled and threatening to expand with each passing moment, has occupied the attention of the most powerful spellcasters remaining within the cracked walls of Radiant Hold. Their consensus opinion is that unless the primal matter that emerged from the rift is sent back through it, the gateway will eventually explode open even wider, taking Radiant Hold and an unknown amount of the land surrounding it into the Churning Chaos forever.

# Adventure Synopsis

This adventure begins with the PCs standing outside the primary western buttress of Radiant Hold, gazing upon the ragged hole battered through it from the inside. A very tired looking raptoran commander explains the situation to the PCs, asking that they leave the defense and clean up of Radiant Hold to others while they do what only heroes of their caliber can – hunt down the rampaging beast and return it as quickly as possible. The Covenant would prefer the beast alive but dead will suffice for the purpose of closing the ever-expanding rift to Kythri.

To make this daunting task a little easier, the raptoran gives the PCs a pair of small quartz crystal spheres. These *beads of force* should be effective in containing the creature even if, or more likely when, it becomes violent. The PCs are cautioned to remember that a valuable ally to the cause of Good is somehow trapped inside the chaotic marauder. If they can, the PCs are urged to subdue.

Once the PCs are at the edge of the jungle treeline, they are approached by another raptoran. This avian humanoid asks for them to remain calm and talk with it peacefully for a moment. Shifting to his true form, Shellok admits to being the one responsible for violating the ritual. He pleads ignorance as to the violent results of his interference and tell them he feels terrible about his involvement in so much carnage. Shellok is not a violent man and while he may have caused a huge mess, he is honest in his desire to help fix what he caused.

He tells the PCs, assuming they agree to hear him out, exactly what happened and that he thinks the qesar Al'ar can be saved. He saw the chaos beast forming up close, after all, and he believes that somewhere inside it, the *chaos diamond* still exists. If it can be removed from the creature, it is possible in his opinion that the qesar will be freed from its fleshy prison.

Shellok has something else to trade for his freedom from both the guilt of his actions and, hopefully, retaliation by the Covenant of Light. His payment for this deed came in two parts. The first was his escape from the Stormreach jail. The second is forthcoming; he is supposed to meet with his employers to discuss "working for their side". He wants nothing to do with the people who put him up to this but he thinks the PCs might want a chance to catch the true cause of Al'ar's corruption.

Regardless of the PCs decision, there is a monster to catch. Following the trail is not particularly difficult; it will not take a ranger to track the wake of devastation left behind by the rampaging chaos beast. Their path will take them through a previously unexplored arc of the jungle northeast of Radiant Hold. Unfortunately for the PCs, while the green depths may be unexplored, they are far from uninhabited.

The first thing the PCs come across is a small dark elven watching post, mostly torn apart by the chaos beast as it came through the area. The chaos beast, still vaguely guided by the mind of the qesar, saw the dark elves as a threat and attacked them before losing control to its madness and moving onward. The dark elves are not at all pleased to see Covenant of Light Scions "invade" their post and will likely attack the PCs unless calmer heads and diplomacy can diffuse the situation.

Before the PCs can catch the chaos beast, they will have to deal with the old-growth jungle itself and one other challenge – the ruins that the chaos beast has come across are hostile both to it and them. The beast is under attack when the PCs arrive; five aranea are locked in battle with the chaotic monstrosity. This encounter can go any number of ways; all the combatants involved are injured and distracted. A surprise assault could take them all out but such a tactic might clash (and rightly so) with the morals of most Covenant of Light PCs.

Diplomacy and an alliance against the chaos beast might also work; the aranea are not evil and if they are aided, they will not attack the PCs once the chaos beast is defeated. In fact, the spells and webs of the aranea can be of great use against the aberration, especially if the PCs want to try and remove the *chaos diamond* within it.

Once the chaos beast is dealt with, one way or another, the PCs are left with the task of getting it back to Radiant Hold. If it is in a sphere of force energy from one of the *beads of force*, they can literally roll it back home. If not, they may have to find a more creative solution but opportunities exist for them to succeed. The chaos beast's return will be a great relief to the forces around the Kythri rift; sending it back through will negate the energies holding the portal open and seal it for good.

This ends the adventure unless the PCs were willing to talk with Shellok earlier. He is true to his word and will lead them to his meeting place in Stormreach. There, they can capture a recruiter for the Cabal of Shadows, quite a nice prize for their leaders in the Covenant. The information this evil enchanter can provide to the Covenant of Light will be of great use in the dangerous days to come. Even if the PCs are forced to kill the enchanter rather than capture him, it is still a victory for the Light.

Working with the Covenant favorably also has a positive impact on Shellok, assuming the PCs are fair and reasonable to the reticent shapechanger. If they will allow it, the changeling accompanies them back to Radiant Hold and asks to join the faction out of a desire to make amends for what he did to the summoning ritual. His joining will not be without its difficulties in the future but it does show that some good can come from any situation.

## Troubleshooting

This is a fairly straight forward outdoor adventure with a small amount of site-based exploration and combat. There are few complications and should be easy for you to run without the need for excessive preparation. If there is anything to keep in mind while adjudicating Price of Virtue, it is the feeling of urgency you should impart to the Players during the session. The chaos beast is a threat physically to be sure, but it also

represents a terrible embarrassment to the Covenant of Light should it attack the city or its existence become known outside the faction. As such, the PCs discretion and haste are vital.

There are also numerous opportunities for the PCs to talk with others during the adventure. Be sure that diplomacy and roleplaying are accommodated but make certain the overall theme of action/adventure is maintained. After all, the PCs are on a dangerous quest to capture a powerful monster, tracking it down through miles of hostile jungle. That should set the tone for this scenario and should be your primary concern while running it; keep things exciting!

## Adventure Start

The PCs start this adventure already gathered as the text below suggests. Before play starts, be sure the Players are prepared and their characters are ready. Any in-character conversation or "getting to know each other" discussions can happen after the primary introduction. As soon as the table of Players is ready to begin, drop them into the action immediately by reading or paraphrasing the following.

*The blistering heat of the noon day sun beats down overhead, casting the devastation around you into sharp, shadowed relief. You are standing outside of Radiant Hold within arm's reach of the northwestern buttress on its outer wall. A massive hole, some ten feet or more in diameter, has been battered through it. A trail of rent stone and shattered building timbers leads out of the rent in the fortress, marking the path of whatever caused such terrible damage.*

*With you is a weary looking raptoran with black skin and dark plumage. He seems exhausted, leaning against the violated wall with a heavy sigh as he speaks.*

*"Thank you for coming on such short notice. As you can see, we've suffered something of a breach." Then he snorts, an odd sound from an avian throat such as his. "Actually, we've suffered a worse breach than you know."*

All the PCs to respond, ask a question or offer sympathies as they will but cut them off fairly quickly with the text below. If the Players ask, this is Korvin, a raptoran Scion they may remember from a previous Covenant of Light scenario (Brave Soldiers). If not, he will introduce himself as follows:

*The ebon, feathered humanoid yawns deeply, then looks embarrassed. "Forgive me; it has been a very long morning. I am Korvin, one of Lord Corvalis' aides and a Scion like yourselves. I know you have many questions. Allow me a moment to explain our distress."*

*He steps to the side of the hole for a moment and allows you to see past him into the keep. The trail of wreckage continues through the dormitory past the defensive wall and into the courtyard of the Hold. There, amid strange glowing lines on the ground, dozens of armored guards and sentinel priests surround a shadowy rift in midair. Odd arcs of chaotic energies flare around the ragged portal, disgorging twisted creatures that immediately throw themselves against the haggard defenders.*

*"This morning, the priests of the Hold attempted to summon an ally on the Lady's behest. All was going well until treachery sent the spell out of control and corrupted the entity we were calling. In the chaos that followed, a few of the clerics were slain and many more were wounded. The corrupted creature escaped the Hold, leaving the path of ruin you see here.*

*"We have the portal under control for now but our elders believe the only way to safely close it is to return the beast to whence it came. Lord Corvalis wishes you to track the creature and bring it back before the rift tears its way open even more. No one knows what will happen if that occurs but there's every chance it will destroy the entire fortress and possibly endanger Stormreach itself.*

*"We've fresh horses for you, ones who know the jungle and won't balk at the foul scent of the beast's trail. Please hurry; we are running out of time!"*

Korvin is not exaggerating; he has been told that the portal could be the end of Radiant Hold and that unless the chaos beast it returned through it, very little else can save the fortress and all those within it. He would rather be out tracking the beast himself but Xandrin Corvalis has charged him with a grim task. If the fortress is about to fall, it is his mission to fly to Stormreach and warn them of the disaster.

**Korvin;** male raptorian scout 9; hp 56

**Roleplaying Hook:** "I live to serve the Covenant in every way, wing and word alike. If you feel likewise, we are brothers in the same cause."

The PCs can ask Korvin whatever they wish; the text below shows what he knows and what he can tell them. He does not feel the PCs should waste any more time and his answers are short and quick; this isn't rudeness. It's urgency.

- **Shouldn't we stay here and help with the portal?** *"Every available hand is working to contain the rift. You are our best hope for getting the corrupted creature that caused all this back."*
- **Does the beast need to be brought back alive?** *"The creature is, at some level, a valued ally and friend to the Lady of Light. If you can at all save its life, please do so. But one way or another, its body needs to be back here so we can close this portal before it dooms us all."*
- **Where is the Lady of Light?** *"This portal is bad here but it is apparently even worse in the higher realms, whatever that means. She is apparently dealing with that trouble and the Lord of the Hold is with her along with several other Scions."*
- **Where does the portal lead?** *"I do not know much about such things but one of our wisest priests called the nightmare world beyond that rift Kythri. If that's true, we are all in danger of being consumed by the Churning Chaos itself."*
- **How did the summons get ruined?** *"I am not sure; I was in the Aviary when it happened. The Aviary is my people's other home, a great airship that is often above this very fortress. Right now, we've moved it away along with the wounded from the Hold just in case the rift explodes. All I can tell you is that one of the ritual's guards threw something into the summoning circle and then all Khyber broke loose."*
- **Should we try to find the traitor?** *"The chaotic monster that escaped from ere is your chief concern. That said, if you happen to find the bastard that caused all this, bringing him to justice would certainly not be a bad thing."*
- **How are we supposed to capture a creature that did all this?** *"The priests believe that the longer it is away from Kythri, the weaker it will get. That's both good and bad. Good means you'll have an easier time dealing with it than the Hold did. Bad means that if we wait too long, it might fade away completely. If that happens, we may not be able to close the rift at all."*

Answer other questions as best you can given the background information in the scenario. Keep in mind that Korvin is not in any mood to waste time and the nature of the PCs' mission is an urgent one. Once the PCs are ready to depart, read or paraphrase this last section of text and then move on to Part One, The Long Green Road.

*"Oh, one thing. Capturing the beast will not be easy but perhaps these can help. My people use them during difficult hunts and while they are rare and expensive and I'll want them back if they don't get used, you have far greater need for them right now."*

*Korvin reaches out, holding a small leather pouch, opening it as he does so. Inside, a pair of glimmering grey crystal spheres rest in separate pockets.*

*"These beads will explode on impact, surrounding anything you hit in a globe of magical energy after sending out a powerful shockwave. Be sure you are clear of the target or you'll get smashed pretty hard. Normally, the force globe would last only a short time but these will keep their prey safe and sound for a full day. Also, unlike normal items of this sort, you will be able to move the sphere."*

Korvin has nothing else for the PCs. They have been given their task and he expects them to hurry about it. The PCs are under no obligation other than personal honor and duty to undertake this mission but, given the nature of heroic Covenant of Light PCs, that should be more than enough.

Move to Part One – The Long Green Road when the PCs are ready to proceed.

### **Staying and Fighting**

Some PCs may have a moral or personal objection to leaving the Hold while it is under attack from within. This is perfectly understandable and while Korvin's dialogue should be enough to convince them that the greater good is served by the course of action he laid out, the black-feathered envoy cannot and would not force anyone to do as he asks.

Therefore, it is feasible that some or all of the PCs would rather stay at Radiant Hold and fight the creatures pouring out of the Kythri rift. As the DM, you should discourage this action but not outright forbid them from doing so. The text box below will provide all the details you should need in this event.

## Guardians at the Gate

Refer to the courtyard map in the Appendix for a layout of the battlefield. The courtyard is under constant siege while the rift to Kythri is open; another bizarre creature exit the rift every 1d6 rounds. Only the constant efforts of the armed guard of Radiant Hold and its dedicated priests are keeping the insane tide at bay. While the PCs could be of great use here, their efforts against the rift will only be a holding action and they should be made aware of this if they somehow missed the point with Korvin.

**The Flow of Battle:** The PCs will enter the map as it is presented in the Appendix. 1d6 rounds after their first chance to act, another random beast exits the rift in a random square (as determined by a d12 roll and placing the newcomer in the appropriate numbered square around the rift itself). This new opponent is a random creature from a Summon Monster spell (roll 1d4+3, this is the form of *summon monster* spell used. Then use its chart to determine what appears). Even if the spell could not normally summon a creature because of an inappropriate environment (such as aquatic), it still manifests. If the creature is larger than Medium size, you make choose where to place its base as long as one square it occupies is the one determined randomly.

An example: The PCs enter the battle. You roll a d6 and it comes up 3. Thus, at the beginning of round 4, you roll a d12. Its result is 7 so whatever new monster is going to appear does so in Square 7 on the map. A 1d4+3 roll results in 5 (die roll of 2 + 3); the monster comes from a *summon monster V* spell. Checking that spell's chart, you note 17 monsters.  $1d10 + 1d8 - 1$  will accomplish a random result for these; you roll and get a total of 13. That means a Large fiendish monstrous scorpion appears appears with one of its occupied squares covering Square 7 on the combat map.

*All creatures appearing have a strange, chaotic appearance. They are surrounded in kaleidoscopic mist or their bodies constantly shapeshift slightly. Be sure Players are visually aware that these beasts are drawn from the Churning Chaos itself.*

Additionally, every round that a new creature does not appear, a *chaos hammer* spell (cast at 7<sup>th</sup> level) strikes a random PC within 30 feet of the rift. This occurs at the start of the round before any other actions take place. Chaotic PCs can be chosen as the random target even though they will not be affected by the spell's damaging effect.

While all of this is going on, describe for the PCs the actions going on around them. There are other creatures and other defenders in constant battle; this is a background description and you do not need to roll out combats for the ten or more NPCs continually fighting around the rift. Just create actions on the spot, describing clerics with *spiritual weapon* spells, guards in chain and plate with *blessed* longswords, etc. The PCs should be made to feel like they are in the heart of an epic, endless battle.

There should also be some emphasis on the endless. The gate isn't shrinking, spells and psionics will not affect it and nearly twelve hours after the PCs arrive, it will detonate. This explosion will eradicate everything (PCs included) in a two hundred yard radius around the portal as per the *disintegrate* spell with no save or spell resistance allowed. Radiant Hold will be leveled, a steaming crater forty feet deep where it once stood. Most of the personnel of the fortress will have been evacuated by then but the keep, the PCs and many brave guardians will be less than ashes.

Not a particularly heroic way for the PCs to end their careers as Scions...

Moving on to the next part, the PCs should have a pair of special *beads of force* and as many horses as they need up to the number of PCs in their party. These are light warhorses in every respect, bearing the mark of the Covenant on their saddles and bridles. These horses are not treasure and will be taken back into the Radiant Hold stables at the end of the adventure.

As a note, Korvin has no idea what was specifically being summoned through the ritual. No one still living in the Keep does; the cleric in charge of the rite was the first to die when the circle exploded.

There may be several complications the PCs wish to attend to before moving on, including checking on NPCs in the Hold to see if they are alive. None of the NPCs named in past adventures have been harmed yet, though everyone still at the hold is in danger. Feel free to run conversations with any NPCs if you like; most are either battle-weary, about to be evacuated to Stormreach or are not available because they have gone with Lady Lirashana (Lord Corvalis and Glitch fall into this category).

One NPC of special note in this instance is Bridgette, the little squire girl the PCs might have met in the Covenant of Light adventure *Brave Soldiers*. If she is sought out (or if you wish to have the precocious little redheaded hero worshipper appear in this scenario), she can tell the PCs about the "*strange man who*

*looked like a guard and threw something shiny into the ritual circle. He ran off into the jungle when things got all BOOMY.” She can also mention to friendly PCs that she saw the “shiny thing” go into whatever was coming out of the circle. “I think it might still be in there!”*

## Part One: The Long Green Road

### A Grey Interlude

Before the PCs can set out on their path through the jungle, there is one more person to attend to – Shellok, the cause of all this trouble. He is waiting in the treeline just off the path of destruction and has been hoping to find heroes leaving the keep in an attempt to make amends. Once the PCs ride close enough, he tries to get their attention as follows.

*A tan and grey plumed raptoran waves to you as you pass beneath him on the ragged jungle trail. “A moment, if you would, heroes!” he calls out, starting to climb out of the tree to meet you.*

Savvy PCs might figure out that something is odd just from this description; most raptorans would just glide out of a tall tree. Even if they don’t, it is of little concern since Shellok does not intend to deceive the PCs for very long.

As long as the PCs do not become immediately hostile, Shellok reaches the base of the tree and turns to speak with them again. He is not carrying any weapons and a Sense Motive (DC 10) will easily confirm that nothing about him is hostile. In fact, a Sense Motive (DC 20) will read the changeling’s expression of worry, concern and guilt. Even shapechangers have a hard time hiding their emotions, especially ones as upset as this reticent spy.

*“Please do not be alarmed but I was afraid my true appearance would draw attention. I need to speak with you about all of the trouble here. I,” he hesitates, “I might even be able to help you.”*

*As he speaks, the raptoran’s voice loses its slight screech and takes on a strange, almost neutral tone. No longer high or low, male or female, deep or hollow, it matches what the rest of him slowly becomes. Grey skinned, white haired and gaunt, a changeling now stands before you.*

*“Forgive the deception. My name is Shellok and I caused this mess.”*

Some PCs may remember Shellok as the changeling infiltrator that tried to thwart their first mission for the Covenant of Light. His offer of help is genuine but so is his guilt in the tragedy befalling Radiant Hold. Whether or not they accept his help, Shellok is willing to turn himself in for what happened. He is a spy and a con artist by nature but he is no killer. Seeing so many good people die because of his actions was more than even his flexible morality could bear.

*“I know I’ve done something terrible but I want to make it right if I can. I’ll tell you what happened if you’ll hear me out. Then you can take me in or whatever you think is fair. I didn’t mean to cause so much pain. That’s not what they told me would happen.”*

The PCs can handle this any way they wish; Shellok’s aid is not required for them to complete the scenario (though it will certainly help and will make it vastly more likely that they save Al’ar from his imprisonment within the chaos beast). He will go with them quietly if they just want to haul him in, though he will certainly try to run if they just wish to directly execute him. He is saddened by his part in all this but he is **not** suicidal. If the PCs treat him horribly, he will think nothing of fleeing for now and trying to surrender himself later to someone more reasonable.

If the PCs do wish to talk with Shellok, he will tell them the following. He does not have to say it all verbatim; you are encouraged to paraphrase and make the dialogue more like a conversation than a monologue. Nothing bores players to tears more than sitting quietly through ten minutes of boxed text.

*“I was languishing in a cell in Stormreach because of a... ahem, job gone awry as it were. I wasn’t looking at parole any time soon so when a couple of hooded visitors showed up with an offer for release, I jumped at the chance. Out is always better than in, they say.*

*“The deal was pretty sweet. They’d make the guards look the other way and I could walk outside with them in exchange for doing one bit for them. Of course, if I’d known the job would get pulled here, I might have balked but then again... have you **seen** the inside of a Stormreach cell? Ugh. Not pretty. And the smell! Don’t get me started.*

*"So anyway, all they wanted was for me to impersonate a guard and muck up some big ritual you Lighters were doing. They told me how to do it and that it would just negate the spell. They said nobody would get hurt. And like a total etter-head, I believed them! I am **such** a fish!*

*"Bah, anyhow. They gave me this gem, a big freaking diamond that glowed inside, and told me to throw it into the circle at a certain time. That and the pouch it was in, too. Apparently, it was supposed to cancel the 'axiomatic alignment' of the spell or some such magical nonsense. They never mentioned the big freaking explosion or the fact that people would be getting killed because of me! I swear I'd have gone back to my cell if I'd known!*

*"I was thinking, though. I saw what happened in the circle up close and I think there may be a way to save whatever you all were summoning. The shape that was manifesting was definitely humanoid and when I through the diamond in, it sort of curled up around it. The horrific thing that came out of that circle probably still has the gem inside it. Since the gem caused this, getting the gem out might un-cause it, you know? It's worth a shot anyway.*

*"I know I messed up but I want to set it all right, okay? When you all get back, I'll take you to my meeting spot where I was supposed to get paid for doing this. I think the people that recruited me want me to join their 'group', whatever that means. You come there with me, maybe you can catch them and find out who pulled my strings."*

Shellock genuinely wants to help out but he is also not stupid. The heroes are much bigger and more powerful than he is; he would be a liability if he went with them into the jungle. That said, he'll agree to just about anything else they request. He'll even go into the Hold and fight to keep the portal at bay if they wish; it would only be fair in his eyes.

Once the PCs have dealt with Shellock (or refused to have anything to do with him), they can begin their adventure in earnest. Move on to the next part of the scenario, Who Watches the Watchers?

## Who Watches the Watchers? (EL 6)

Not far from the fortress headquarters of the Covenant of Light, a small group of dark elves have set up a watchpost in the dense treetops of the nearby jungle. Unfortunately for them, the hostility some of them felt towards the 'invaders' of the Covenant stronghold, the chaos-warped Al'ar was drawn to them and ripped their hidden blind out of the branches.

Though none of the drow elves were killed by the chaos beast, one of their number has been affected by its destabilizing touch and went on a rampage of its won once Al'ar left the area in an insane haze. The corrupted drow was hunted down and brought back by its former comrades, an exhausting process that took just long enough for the returning watchers to enter the remains of their post as the PCs arrive on the shattered scene.

*Following the path of wreckage and trampled undergrowth, your horses enter a small clearing undoubtedly caused by the thrashing subject of your hunt. Downed trees lie in all directions along with shattered wood and coiled, chaotic lengths of woven jungle vines. Some kind of hidden tree fort was here, now torn down and cast asunder by the rampages of your quarry.*

*Just as your mounts enter the southern end of the clearing, another group enters from the north. Four dark elves appear at the edge of the ruined outbuilding, a fifth creature with them bound in vine ropes. It appears to be dark skinned but its features are impossible to make out because of its wildly changing shape. The monstrosity is almost fluid, writhing and gibbering in utter anguish. It might have been a dark elf once but now it is something born of sheer madness.*

*The dark elves see you and swiftly draw weapons, bristling and hostile!*

**Creatures:** These drow don't really wish to fight but they believe the PCs are here to finish what their mad creature started; they begin the encounter with a hostile attitude.

They do not immediately attack, however. They are too wounded and exhausted to want to leap into a combat but will defend themselves if they must. All of the drow here speak the Common tongue; their knowledge of the language was one of the reasons they were chosen by their tribe for this surveillance duty.

**Vaxxar, Carra, Ze'narr, Lassha (4);** mixed male and female drow ranger 3; hp 12 (reduced from 17), 15 (reduced from 20), 16 (reduced from 21), 9 (reduced from 18); *Races of Eberron* page 78 (see below of combat statistics).

**Resh'lek;** chaos beast (former male drow ranger 3); hp 35 (reduced from 45); *Monster Manual* page 33; immobile and helpless during this fight.



**Development:** The PCs have a chance to speak here; the drow do not immediately attack them and will even parley if the PCs do so calmly and without threatening them. This is not considered a rushed diplomacy situation since the weary drow are not at all eager to attack fresh foes when they are so badly battered and exhausted.

Even if they are only improved in attitude to Unfriendly or Indifferent, they will be willing to let the PCs go unmolested. They will also do so automatically if any of the PCs are dark elves; there is a certain kinship even among dark elves that the Xen'drik tribes would consider "misguided". The presence of a dark elf among the PCs will provide a +2 circumstance bonus to any diplomacy checks made during this encounter. If the drow in question is the one making the primary skill check, this bonus increases to +5.

If the dark elves are improved to Friendly or Helpful (which, at a DC 50, is quite unlikely), they will be willing to talk briefly and even admit why they are here. Their tribe has been watching Radiant Hold for nearly six months, trying to decide if their presence here is a threat. With their existence discovered and their tree fort ruined, they will have to return now with their report. Good social interaction here can convince the dark elves to suggest that the Covenant of Light is not a danger to the tribe.

Offering help to the wounded dark elves or the afflicted drow with them is an automatic +5 circumstance bonus to the diplomatic effort. This aid can be as simple as healing spells and first aid or as complex as burning a use of the Blessing of Light to try and help the corrupted scout overcome his Corporeal Instability. (This use would not normally help as there is no saving throw to escape the affliction. In this case, allow the Blessing to allow a reroll of the formerly drow chaos beast's Charisma check. Success returns the drow to normal in a comatose but stable state.) Accomplishing this task automatically improves the attitude of the dark elves to Friendly.

Vaxxar and Lassha are the ostensible leaders of this group and do most of the talking. Vaxxar is deeply suspicious of all non-drow but Lassha might betray a burning curiosity about the Covenant and what it stands for if conversation occurs.

Ultimately, this encounter is what the PCs make of it. If they are openly hostile or attack outright, it will be a battle this is more than likely to end well for them. The drow are injured and in no shape to mount a strong offensive. If the PCs choose to talk instead of fight, they can accomplish what blades will not – a solid foundation for future good relations. If the PCs make an honest effort to try and remain peaceful with the dark elves, do not run this as a combat encounter.

**Tactics:** If peace fails, a battle breaks out. The drow are not adverse to fighting in any way necessary to ensure their survival. They will take to the trees for cover, even abandoning their bound companion if they must do so. The drow fight intelligently, flanking and using terrain to their best advantage. They will not surrender once battle is joined though they will accept a cease fire if the PCs change their minds and want to talk. They will **not** kill downed foes until all the PCs have dropped and will offer the last PC standing the chance to surrender. They do not want to kill the Covenant of Light members if they can help it; they are still not sure the faction is any threat to their tribe and do not want to antagonize them if it can be helped. The present situation notwithstanding, the Covenant have been quiet neighbors.

#### *Excerpted from Races of Eberron -*

**Drow Scout:** Male drow ranger 3; CR 4; Medium humanoid (elf); HD 3d8+3; hp 17; Init +3; Spd 30 ft; AC 17; touch 13, flat-footed 14; Base Atk +3; Grp +5; Atk +6 melee (1d8+2/19–20, masterwork longsword) or +7 ranged (1d8+2/×3, masterwork composite longbow); Full Atk +6 melee (1d8+2/19–20, masterwork longsword) or +7 ranged (1d8+2/×3, masterwork composite longbow) or +5/+5 ranged (1d8+2/×3, masterwork composite longbow); SA favored enemy (giants +2); SQ darkvision 120 ft., drow traits, spell resistance 14, spell-like abilities, wild empathy +3 (–1 magical beasts); AL NE; SV Fort +3, Ref +6, Will +1 (+3 against spells and spell-like abilities); Str 14, Dex 17, Con 11, Int 14, Wis 10, Cha 10.

**Skills and Feats:** Climb +8, Handle Animal +6, Hide +9, Listen +8, Move Silently +9, Spot +8, Search +10, Survival +6; Endurance<sup>B</sup>, Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Rapid Shot<sup>B</sup>, Track<sup>B</sup>.

**Favored Enemy (Ex):** A drow scout gains a +2 bonus on Bluff, Listen, Sense Motive, Spot, and Survival checks when using these skills against giants. He receives the same bonus on weapon damage rolls against giants.

**Drow Traits:** Drow have immunity to magic sleep effects and a +2 racial saving throw bonus against enchantment spells or effects. An elf who merely passes within 5 feet of a secret or concealed door is entitled to a Search check to notice it as if he were actively looking for it.

**Spell-Like Abilities:** 1/day—dancing lights, darkness, faerie fire. Caster level 3rd.

**Wild Empathy (Ex):** This drow scout can improve the attitude of an animal in the same way that a Diplomacy check can improve the attitude of a sentient being. The scout rolls 1d20+3, or 1d20–1 if attempting to influence a magical beast with an Intelligence score of 1 or 2.

**Light Blindness:** Abrupt exposure to bright light (such as sunlight or a daylight spell) blinds drow for 1 round. On subsequent rounds, they are dazzled as long as they remain in the affected area.

**Possessions:** +1 studded leather, masterwork longsword, masterwork composite longbow (+2 Str bonus) with 20 arrows, 1,500 gp.

The dwarf scouts are not in any shape to accompany the PCs, even if their attitude has been improved to Helpful, but they will wish them luck and assure friendly PCs that they will make certain their leaders know the Covenant is in no way a danger to them. It may not seem like much, but diplomatic PCs have staved off a major problem that could have befallen the faction in the not-too-distant future.

Once this encounter is finished, the PCs can continue on their trail through the forest; proceed to Part Two - Sektathah, The Hidden Web. As before, there is no difficulty in tracking the rampaging Al'ar. Its path is clearly visible and has had the added benefit of scattering any wildlife that might have been a threat to the PCs. Its chaotic, unnatural presence has sent everything in its wake to ground; nothing larger than insects will return to this area for at least twenty four hours.

This does not preclude the possibility of something else remarkably unnatural from attacking them at your discretion. There is an optional encounter below that you can run on the PCs way back through this area if time allows and if you feel the Players would appreciate a combat encounter without moral ambiguities or diplomatic solutions.

## Optional Encounter – Cloaked in Darkness (EL 6)

If you intend to run this encounter, do not so until after the PCs return from Part Two. They should have already dealt with Al'ar, one way or another, before this fight occurs. If there hasn't been much combat in this adventure due to diplomacy and good information (such as knowing to remove the jewel inside the chaos beast), it is recommended that this encounter occurs. Otherwise, skip Cloaked in Darkness as there is still one combat remaining in the scenario.

*Passing back through the detritus of the fallen watching post, things seem completely quiet and abandoned. All trace of the dark elves that were here is completely gone. Not even their tracks remain. The jungle is still and silent, a haunting legacy of the chaotic beast that caused all this ruin.*

The dark chaotic aura of the chaos beast as it rampaged through this area has called to aberrations of another kind – cloaklers. The beasts have found hidden ways to come to the surface and are lurking in the trees, just waiting for prey to arrive.

**Foes:** These cloaklers are hungry after their long journey and frustrated that they arrived to the source of their calling and found nothing to feast upon. As such, they will try to ambush the PCs regardless of any shows of strength or combat readiness. They need to feed and no matter how big a challenge the PCs would appear to represent, they attack!

*Leathern shapes descend from the trees, a horrifying wail echoing from their fang-rimmed maws as they unfold over you! In the din of their shrieking, faint words can be made out.*

*"The madness! Feast upon the madness!"*

**Cloakers (2);** hp 39, 40; *Monster Manual* page 36.

### Scaling the Encounter

**4<sup>th</sup>-Level Characters:** Only use one cloakler and do not use any of its howling abilities. It is so hungry, it simply fighting in melee to try and get a meal.

**5<sup>th</sup>-Level Characters:** One cloakler only but it will use all of its abilities intelligently.

**7<sup>th</sup>-Level Characters:** Keep the encounter as is.

**8<sup>th</sup>-Level Characters:** Add a third cloakler (hp 28).

**Tactics:** The cloaklers will attempt to get the drop, literally on the PCs. They remain hidden and silent (assume Hide and Move Silently skill checks of 25 for both of them). If they can get off a surprise round, Cloaker 1 will use its *nausea* Moan ability to affect as many of the PCs as it can while Cloaker 2 drops down to engulf a helpless foe if possible. If the PCs all save against the Moan, Cloaker 2 will generate *dancing images* instead to try and unnerve the PCs before it attacks on the next round.

The cloaklers have been attracted by the chaos of Al'ar's passing and seek out PCs that have come into physical contact with the chaos beast above all other targets.

These creatures cannot be reasoned with and will fight to the death.

Once this encounter ends, the PCs can continue on to Ending the Adventure or, if they have negotiated with Shellok, Part Three – Caught in the Act.

# Part Two: Sektathah, The Hidden Web

While Al'ar's rampage was devastating, it was not terribly fast. The PCs may be several hours behind him but the chaos beast has not made it terribly far into the jungle. On horseback, it will only take them two hours after leaving the dark elves to reach its current location.

Of course, getting there and being able to bring the dangerous entity down are completely different matters. The chaos beast had come across a small ruin in the heart of one of Xen'drik's old growth areas. These dense trees and thick undergrowth hide what used to be a drow outpost before it was abandoned for a safer and more permanent locale elsewhere. What remains now is a fading memory of the dark elves' former slave encampments, a few pieces of old giantish stonework and a dark monolith radiating power as old and vile as the Dragon Below itself.

However, ruins are not always entirely abandoned. While the setting did not suit the drow who once lived here, their vine covered tree houses have been discovered by a small group of wanderers with no home of their own and no allies to protect them. The ruins were perfect for these new settlers and after a considerable amount of rebuilding, the area became a settlement for the aranea – spider shapechangers with intellect and magical ability.

It was into this small colony that Al'ar found his way, drawn by the energies of a tall Khyber dragonshard to the west of the aranea's homes. The aranea left their sheltered houses to investigate the intruder and were immediately attacked. The resulting battle continues to rage as the PCs arrive, though before they reach Al'ar, they will likely encounter the aranea's wounded and possibly gain valuable information for the battle ahead.

## The Aranea Colony of Sektathah

(Bear in mind that despite the numbering of the areas below, the PCs are likely following the trail of Al'ar and as such will enter the colony from the southeastern corner of Area 6: Field of Madness.)

### 1. The Khyber Needle (EL -)

*This small clearing is fenced in webbing three feet high, dense enough to require clearing to enter. At its heart, a dark purple crystal juts eight feet into the air. The massive shard is veined with pulsing black lines, writhing within its facets like something alive.*

*A heavy air of malevolence fills the area, an oppressive weight to the air itself...*

This is a non-combat encounter; despite the presence of the obviously tainted crystal, there are no threats to the PCs in this area. Of course, they do not necessarily know that and may avoid this place entirely or spend time trying to deal with a danger that does not actually exist.

Although there is nothing here to combat, there is a very real and present evil in the form of the Khyber Needle. The aranea do not know what this thing is; it was here when they arrived and they only tolerate remaining close to it because the wild beasts of the jungle dislike it immensely and leave the entire area alone. Thus, while they detest the dark monolith, they see its utility and have not made any effort to investigate it or try to remove it from their colony.

If PCs wish to detect the needle, it radiates both strong necromantic magic and a strong evil aura. Neither effect is overwhelming. It is not a living or even sentient creature as far as anyone will be able to determine and it does not react in any way to the PCs.

In the context of this adventure, the Khyber Needle is a vile curiosity and nothing more.

### 1. Web Wall (EL 3)

*The ground here is a pale grey in color. There are hundreds of small strands woven through the undergrowth, a veil of silver among the waves of green. Strange nodules of grey shadow hang from the branches overhead and from the dense foliage all around.*

These areas are traps laid by the aranea to deal with intruders in a non-lethal manner. When they catch prey animals and edible beasts, they cut them free after poisoning them into a stupor and haul them into their tree houses for later consumption. Other threats are dealt with while they are still immobilized.

These traps are not hard to spot but they are difficult to recognize as dangerous until one is set off or identified and neutralized. Once the PCs either fall victim to a web wall trap or succeed in the Sreach check to see one for the hazard it represents, they can automatically move through other web wall areas without setting them off. The trap is considered to be located at the number for the encounter area.

### Web Trap

CR 3; spell; spell trigger; 20 ft. radius spread; no reset; spell effect (web, 3rd-level wizard, DC 13 Reflex save negates); Search DC 25; Disable Device DC 25.

### 3. The Embattled Clearing (EL 7)

*The sounds of combat fill this area, a wide clearing borders by thick tree cover on all sides. A battle is raging near a stand of jungle oaks on the eastern side of the thicket. Several creatures surround a horrifically mutated and shifting form.*

*Some look human while others appear to be large spiders with strangely humanoid heads but all are locked in battle with the creature you have come all this way to find!*

This encounter is where the PCs can finally catch up to Al'ar and deal with it, provided they can get past the aranea or work with them in some fashion. The combatants are completely occupied with each other, allowing the PCs all the preparation time they wish to make their move, whatever that turns out to be. Until the PCs feel comfortable acting, simply assume the aranea and the chaos beast are caught in a stalemate with neither side able to defeat the other.

That said, if the PCs do nothing, the chaos beast will eventually win through sheer size and toughness. Its attacks may not inflict much damage but it has a huge number of hit points compared to the aranea's relatively fragile forms. One aranea will drop every three rounds if the PCs do nothing; the chaos beast emerges victorious with 30 hit points remaining after 15 rounds.

**Foe:** The PCs' only real enemy here is Al'ar itself, the qesar turned chaos beast. It has no mind for strategy and cannot distinguish friend from foe or communicate in any way. It cannot be reasoned with, is Hostile in attitude towards all living things and will have to be defeated in some way to be stopped.

**Al'ar;** chaos beast (former male qesar); hp 52; *Monster Manual* page 33. See Al'ar's special notes in the Appendix for information on its special form of Corporeal Instability.

*This mass of ragged flesh, surging muscle and bizarre bones is an undulating mass of never-stable shape and insane form. Teeth and claw appear and vanish in a single beat of its monstrous hearts, limbs form and wither instantly. When it has mouths, they wail and chatter incoherently. Only two things seem constant about the vile, glowing beast.*

*It is in terrible pain and seized with a burning, destructive rage!*

**Creatures:** The aranea are trying to defend their homes from the vicious intruder that has torn it way through most of their settlement. They do not wish to fight the PCs and will even be allies if the PCs show a desire to stop the marauding aberration. They begin at Indifferent and will automatically become Friendly if the PCs attack the chaos beast without first threatening or harming them. Any damage intentionally done to an aranea by a PC will immediately cause all five to become Hostile.

**Sykk, Taia, Veh, Nakaa, Lurr;** mixed male and female aranea; hp 19, 19, 20, 22, 25; *Monster Manual* page 15. All have a short sword, a short bow and 20 arrows for use in humanoid or hybrid form.

*The humanoids fighting against the chaotic beast in their midst are strange in their own way. Clad only in animal skins and wielding what appear to be antique weapons, the figures have sections of chitin growing out of their mottled skin and long, impossibly agile limbs.*

*As they fight, some of the humanoids transform into human-sized spiders with humped backs and bright, intelligent eyes. Their mandibles part as they bite and slash at their foe.*

*Shapechangers fighting a shapeless nightmare, neither side willing to give quarter or surrender.*

**Development:** This can be a straight forward battle between the PCs and the chaos beast or, if they know about the *chaos diamond* inside it, the combat might become a bit more complicated. The chaos beast does not use any tactics; it just flails at opponents until there is nothing in its line of sight. If left to its own devices, it would destroy everything in its path and head towards the Khyber Needle. The only reason it is here at all is because the aranea in area 6 caught its attention and it has been chasing them.

The aranea are willing to help in the combat if they are befriended; they can provide combat support through the use of ranged weapons and webbing if at all possible. They have learned the hard way the risk of being close to the chaos beast.

Keep in mind that Blessing of the Light is a useful defense against the Chaos Beast's Corporeal Instability and will automatically ward it off if possible. See Al'ar in the appendix for more details.

### Reaching into the Abyss

If the PCs are aware of the possibility, they may wish to try and get the *chaos diamond* inside Al'ar out of its corrupted body. If they come up with some clever plan for doing so, allow it to work (possibly requiring an appropriate attack roll, saving throw or skill check as you deem necessary). Otherwise, the only way to get the jewel out of Al'ar is to reach in and grab it.

This will require that a PC grapple Al'ar first; feel free to suggest this if a PC seems determined to try and get the *chaos diamond*. Once a PC can inflict unarmed damage in a grapple with Al'ar, he or she can instead opt to "reach inside". This is an attack roll against an AC of 20 and has a 50% miss chance unless the PC can somehow see through solid organic matter. Success allows the PC to withdraw the *chaos diamond* and liberate Al'ar from his horrific transformation. The attack can be repeated as often as the PC qualifies to do so.

If Al'ar is freed in this manner (or through some other clever scheme), proceed to Divine Rebirth at the end of this section.

Using the *beads of force* provided by Korvin is another way to defeat Al'ar but by the nature of the act, doing so will likely prevent the PCs from freeing Al'ar. Of course, if the PCs do not know it is possible to free the quesar from its corruption there is no reason for them not to try this tactic. Be sure the PCs received Korvin's warning about the *beads of force* generating a blast wave; this could go poorly if they use the item while there are aranea around Al'ar.

Once the beast is dealt with and the battle ended, the aranea approach the PCs as long as they are still friendly. They do not have much to offer beyond their thanks but they make their village open to their saviors if the PCs wish to stay. The PCs will not likely be able to take the aranea up on their kind offer but it is open for as long as the aranea live in this place.

*A spidery humanoid with compound eyes, small mandibles in the corners of his mouth and a wave of black hair spilling down over his slightly chitinous shoulders approaches you slowly, hands open in peace.*

*"You have our thanks, strangers. I am Sykk-ta, the elder of this place, and I am in your debt. This monster crashed through the jungle and attacked us unprovoked. Without your aid, we might have been overwhelmed. You have saved us.*

*"How can I repay your kindness?"*

The aranea will converse with the PCs and shelter if they need to recover from their wounds. The five aranea here are the only combatants left in the tribe aside from the sentry at area 6. They have been fighting to guard their homes up in the nearby trees. Two dozen young aranea and three more females are hidden in them, unwilling to come out until the chaos beast has been taken far away from the Hidden Web.

In any case, as long as the PCs treat the aranea with any level of kindness, they have earned the gratitude of the Hidden Web (and the story object of the same name).

### 4. Statue of Corruption (EL 3)

*At one time, the statue beside this small widening of the natural jungle trail might have been breathtaking. Now, centuries of erosion and the ravages of Xen'drik have taken their toll. Barely identifiable limbs reach towards the sky, their hands long since lost to the elements.*

As Al'ar ravaged through this part of Sektathah, some of his chaotic energies flared and faded, seeping into the resonant crystals inside this statue. The power has given the edifice a brief, magical sentience, animating it and driving it insane at the same time.

It lurches to life if any living creature comes within five feet of it, attacking without pause or reason. Only shattering the statue will end its assault; it will otherwise chase the creature responsible for its "awakening" until its life fades one hour from the time the PCs encounter it.

*The barren, rain-pitted face of the statue suddenly warps into a vague visage of rage and its jagged stumps descend in a vicious, scything blow. The wrathful cry of rock grinding against rock inside its chest shrieks throughout the clearing as it breaks away from its pedestal and attacks!*

**Foe:** There is no reason or logic within the ancient statue. It is an inadvertent offspring of the chaos beast and embodies its senseless rage.

**Statue of Corruption;** medium animated object; hp 40; *Monster Manual* page 13; this statue has a hardness of 5 because of its weakened stone construction and benefits from fast healing 5. If it is brought to 0 hit points or less, it will explode for 2d4 piercing damage in a 10 foot radius, Reflex save (DC 15) for half.

### Scaling the Encounter

This encounter is purely for the purpose of showing the PCs the kind of madness caused by their quarry's mere presence. It is not intended to be a combat challenge. As such, the scene does not scale.

**Development:** The raw chaos surrounding the statue can infect the PCs with a terrible sickness. Any successful melee slam attack from the statue forces the being struck to make a DC 14 Fortitude saving throw. Failure results in the PC contracting slimy doom (as per the disease of the same name in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*). The disease incubates in one hour and will inflict its damage every four hours thereafter. Between contraction and incubation, the diseased PC begins to leak a strange, multicolored glowing ooze from his or her pores even as the disease rampages within.

Keep in mind that the PCs will be cured and restored for free once they reach Radiant Hold and that the trip back takes less than four hours. This effect is more for dramatic effect than an actual hazard.

### 5. Entangling Path (EL 3)

*The foliage in this path of destruction is different from the rest you've encountered. Instead of being trampled flat, large sections of plant life seem entirely unharmed. In fact, the grasses and vines are waving in a breeze that does not seem to exist, writhing and lashing of their own volition!*

The chaos beast's energies have started to leak from its body, leaving behind bizarre effects as it passes through the settlement. In this 20' long corridor of verdant jungle, the undergrowth has become possessed of a strange form of life, acting in every respect like a permanent *entangle* spell covering the entire area.

While this would normally just be an inconvenient impediment to the PCs, there is a danger lurking in the foliage. Some of the plants here are thorny vines, capable of sheering through flesh, bone and even armor as they coil madly. PCs take 1d4 points of damage for every 5 feet they move through this corridor, 2d4 if they are being forced to move at half speed or immobilized in a square. A PC only suffers damage from a square once even if it remains there for longer than one round.

Evading this "trap" is as easy as not moving through the corridor at all. Passage through the jungle to either side of the trail may only be possible at 5 feet per round but no damage is suffered while doing so.

Just like the Statue of Corruption, this area's alien life force will lapse in an hour and the plants will become normal vegetation once more.

### 6. Field of Mercy (EL -, 6 if combat occurs)

*Webbing, overturned trees and signs of battle cover this wide clearing in the jungle. There are splintered tree limbs everywhere and a huge shattered trunk dominates its southern edge. Dark shadows seem to move under the canopy of bent and broken branches, glittering eyes that watch your every move.*

The aranea had several tree houses here, all of which have been lost to the chaos beast when it tore through the area. Now this clearing is home to those hiding from the rampaging monster and the place where the spider shapechangers are keeping their injured. There are twenty aranea here in total, only one of whom is in any condition to fight intruders.

Ghesh, the aranea's sentry, remains hidden with his people under the fallen tree trunk until it looks like the PCs are going to come within ten feet of their shelter. Then he comes out of concealment and threatens them as follows.

*A broad chested human man with a harness of woven webs and a hap-hazard suit of leather armor moves out of the shadows around the tree trunk. In one hand, he bears a vicious looking spear, the other held in a magical gesture. Lights glimmer around his fingers as he speaks in an oddly inflected tongue.*

*"No harm comes to my people. Leave or die!"*

**Creatures:** Ghesh is a savvy combatant with all the advantages of his race and the strength of a warrior's conviction as well. If he must fight the PCs, he will take his toll on them even if he is outmatched. He would rather frighten them off or convince them to leave; he has a lot of fellow aranea to watch over and cannot afford to fall needlessly in battle. Ghesh begins this encounter Unfriendly but can be swayed by kind treatment and/or diplomacy.

**Ghesh;** male aranea fighter 2; hp 45; *Monster Manual* page 15; see Combat Statistics

**The Young and the Wounded (19);** mixed male and female arenea; hp 1d6 each (reduced from 10, 11, 14, 14, 15, 16, 16, 16, 17, 17, 17, 18, 19, 20, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25); *Monster Manual* page 15; these are non-combatants. While they will flee from combat if they can, none of them are in any condition to fight.

**Tactics:** If Ghesh is forced to fight the PCs, he will do so intelligently, trying to draw them away from the tree trunk and into the jungle where concealment will hamper them much worse than it does him. He makes good use of his Blind Fight feat and web abilities to immobilize the PCs and hamper them as much as he can. He does not think that he can defeat them all but he is determined to sell his life dearly if he must.

If the PCs offer Ghesh and his people any kindness such as first aid, healing, food and water or just basic sympathy, he will become much less harsh. Still suspicious, he insists on watch the PCs in everything they do while they are near his people. Three of the wounded are inflicted with the chaos beast's Corporeal Instability and are in danger of becoming beasts themselves. In the interests of heroics and quick play, assume that any granted use of Blessing of the Light will cure an afflicted aranea.

Once the PCs earn his trust, Ghesh can tell them quite a bit about what happened here and even provide them with another way to learn about the *chaos diamond* inside Al'ar. Use your discretion when offering this information from Ghesh; if the PCs have made a concerted effort to be fair and peaceful, reward them with what Ghesh can tell them. This is especially important if the PCs have missed Shellok's tale for whatever reason and have not spoken with Bridgette (which is entirely likely).

*"You have been kind and so I will be kind. I do not speak to outsiders but you are not like others. I will speak to you.*

*"This was all caused by a great beast of flesh and madness. I have never seen anything like it before and I pray I will never see its kind again. It came out of the jungle and smashed out tree aside like it was a dry reed. Most of the injured here were hurt when they fell.*

*"It moved off through that path ahead of us, lured by the arrows of our bravest elders. I stayed behind to guard the wounded. If you seek the insane thing, head that direction but be careful. I saw the foul beast do something in that stretch of trees that I do not understand. I shook like it was about to burst apart and colored lights swarmed around it like angry hornets. They went into the ground and now the plants there do not feel right. I have not been free to see what happened.*

*"Also, I saw something strange when it struck down our tree. Part of the trunk fell on the creature and squashed it nearly flat. The thing just pooled back together and continued to attack us but for a moment, I spied something inside it. It looked like a clear stone filled with wild lights, cut and flat like a crystal."*

Ghesh has little else to offer and while he is grateful, he is also responsible for the safety of the wounded. He must remain here but he wishes the PCs luck in their coming battle. If he survives and the PCs befriended him, they qualify for the "Gratitude of the Hidden Web" story object even if none of the elders in area 3 live through their battle with Al'ar.

Be sure to run this part of the encounter area to the PCs' satisfaction. There are injured aranea adults and children here, helpless and in dire need of attention. This is the kind of situation that often appeals to the heart and soul of heroic roleplay. Don't be afraid to create momentary NPCs among the aranea to interact with the PCs and thank them for their kindness. Virtue is its own reward, but grateful children looking up at PCs with unconditional love in their eyes is just a wonderful thing... even if their eyes are sort of buggy.

## Divine Rebirth

The greatest good the PCs can accomplish in this scenario is to free Al'ar from his corruption by the *chaos diamond*. Doing this saves a powerful ally of the Covenant of Light from a terrible fate and earns them the eternal gratitude of a celestial creature with friends in very high places. In addition, it rescues an innocent being from an undeserved and ignoble death – the kind of act truly worthy of real heroes!

When the *chaos diamond* comes out of the chaos beast, read or paraphrase the following text:

*The moment the clear, pulsating gem comes out of the beast's undulating body, it is instantly suffused with a bright, blinding radiance. Moments after its exposure to the air, the diamond erupts into millions of harmless mote of light, flaring outwards and upwards into the sky!*

*The chaotic creature heaves once, spewing ichor from the jewel's wound. Writhing in obvious pain, it shudders and screams, tremors ripping through its entire body. The sudden wounds, almost impossibly deep, are as dark as a void within. The aberration lets forth a final, ululating cry of utter, unimaginable pain before collapsing to the ground in a dissolving mass of moldering, quiescent flesh.*

The chaos beast lies still and seems dead for a full round. Allow the PCs to reach as they will but once the round is over, the following occurs.

*Another shudder moves through the slain creature, opening a wound across its back running the entire length of its body. The decaying muscles and bones erode in a flurry of chaotic rot, spiraling in the air as a cyclone of corruption around a glowing, humanoid figure.*

*The light from the strange, oddly beautiful man burns through the decay, reducing it to ashes in a brilliance as cool and pure as an infinite nighttime sky.*

*Still hovering, the glimmering man opens his eyes of pure light and gazes down at you with an expression of peace and boundless relief. His voice echoes like a whisper, passionate but distant, vibrant yet strangely removed from this world.*

*"Blessed be you, friends. You have freed me from the prison of my own violated flesh. By your removing that jewel of chaos, I am reborn.*

*"I am Al'ar. What are your names so that I might greet my saviors properly?"*

There are no words to describe Al'ar's relief. He feared the end of his immortal existence in that chaotic shell and could feel his mind disappearing beneath the constant onslaught of sheer, unending pain. By saving him at such terrible risk to themselves, the PCs have performed a true act of heroism and self-sacrifice. The qesar will never forget their selfless act of courage and even though he will only be on Eberon for a matter of moments before he dissolves and returns to his celestial home, Al'ar will express his gratitude through a act of pure positive magic (a *mass heal* that also cures anyone within range of Corporeal Instability) and the following words.

*"I cannot stay, Even now, my homeland pulls me from your world. I hope to see you again soon, my friends. I will inform Bright Lady Lirashana of your bravery and kindness. When I return to this place, I hope we will have time to speak once more.*

*"Collect the ashes of my prison and carry them home with you. I think you will find they suffice quite well to end the threat of Kythri's touch.*

*"Farewell!"*

And with that, the qesar fades from sight and is gone. If the PCs do as he bid, they find the ashes cool to the touch but completely harmless.

This scene grants the PCs the story object "Bright Blessings".

## Concluding the Hidden Web

The PCs have, by now, either freed Al'ar, slain him in his chaos beast form, or captured him in some way (probably in a *bead of force* effect). They must return swiftly to Radiant Hold in order to forestall the destruction of their home by the Kythri rift. This is handled in the Ending the Adventure section of the scenario and comprises the conclusion of Price of Virtue.

If the PCs has spoken to Shellok (or alternatively have deduced that they need to intercept the true masterminds of this adventure because you have provided outhter clues for them to follow), they may also want to seek out the ones responsible for all this trouble. In that case, move on to the next part of the scenario, Part Three – Caught in the Act.



## Part Three – Caught in the Act

This part of the adventure is technically optional. You may run it for the players if they have spoken to Shellok and agreed to follow him to his rendezvous with the Cabal of Shadows recruiter. Alternatively, you might wish to include this scene another way, depending on your style of play or what seems to fit the Players and their desires. If there is at least 30 minutes of time remaining in the allotted play slot, consider introducing this scene in some other fashion if the PCs have not bargained with Shellok.

Suggestions include Korvin telling the PCs upon their return to Radiant Hold that another Scion has discovered the impersonator who ruined the ritual. This culprit (Shellok) is imprisoned in Radiant Hold and wants to make a deal. The PCs will be allowed to talk to the prisoner and see what he knows. From there, the rest should be easy for you to ad lib as needed.

You might also have the PCs notice a hidden figure in the treeline as they return to Radiant Hold. Following this figure leads them to the rendezvous point because the figure is Vramosh's shadow ally returning to report the PCs' success. This allows the PCs to ambush Vramosh without ever needing to interact with Shellok at all.

Simply use your own judgment and create a play experience that suits everyone at the table. For sake of convenience, this scene is written from the assumption that the PCs are following Shellok as per their arrangement in Part One. Do not feel constrained to use this setup.

### Meeting of the Minds

True to his word, Shellok is waiting for the PCs just outside Radiant Hold. Korvin is with him, keeping an eye on the spy. Both have been fighting the creatures from the rift and have the wounds to prove it.

*The approach to Radiant Hold is completely clear. Gone is the traffic that usually rides this trail; no caravans, guard outriders or fellow Scions slow your progress this day.*

*The reason why is plainly apparent as you near the fortress; the courtyard is filled with activity. Even though the portcullis is down and a magical wall of energy shimmers brightly in front of it, dozens of figures can be made out through the glow. They surround a darkly luminous tear in space, locked in combat with several bizarre shapes. Swords, spells and the roil of chaos are everywhere inside Radiant Hold.*

*Standing just outside the front gate, two humanoids spot your approach and wave. One is a black feathered man with a double bladed scimitar across his back. The other is grey skinned, clad in pale heavy leathers and bandaged in several places. Both look hurt and weary, resting against the stone of the gatehouse as they await your arrival.*

Korvin and Shellok have been fighting since the PCs left several hours ago. Shellok came to Radiant Hold after talking with the PCs and turned himself in (unless the PCs' actions would have dictated otherwise. Be sure to paraphrase the above to account for anything the PCs may have influenced differently). Rather than imprison the changeling, Korvin chose to take him at his word and allowed Shellok to prove his good intentions by helping with the fortress' defense.

Once they see the PCs, both of them straighten up and wait for them to approach. In case the PCs offer healing or comfort, Korvin is down 40 hit points and Shellok is down 14. Any healing will be accepted gratefully but neither asks for anything. The PCs have already done far more than their fair share during this time of crisis; neither Korvin nor Shellok wish to impose on them any further.

If it is obvious the PCs have been successful (such as them pulling or towing a giant ball of force energy), be sure to modify the text below.

*Korvin nods to you as you approach. His eyes show how weary he is, his body revealing the violence he has undergone in your absence. One arm is held painfully at his side, most of its feathers either burned away or matted in dried blood.*

*"For Light's sake, I pray you've had better luck than us. The portal is expanding. I do not know how much longer it can be contained."*

Assuming the PCs have returned with either a body, a live beast or ashes, run the Closing the Breach scene in Ending the Adventure below. Once that is accomplished, come back to this text and continue with this scene assuming there is at least 30 minutes left in the scenario time slot. Capturing the true mastermind behind this plot will require at least that much time to run properly.

*Shellok looks hesitant but steps forward to face you all. "A deal's a deal. If you are ready, I'll take you to where they asked me to meet up once the ugly was done. I wasn't going to go back if you didn't return. I mean, I'm stupid but I'm not **that** stupid."*

In case they consult with Korvin on this course of action, he endorses their efforts. He thinks they should be careful but he has seen the genuine wish to repent in Shellok's actions since the PCs left on their adventure. In the time he has been observing Shellok, he has seen the bard selflessly use all of his magic healing others and supporting the castle's defense. In his opinion, the changeling's offer to take them to his contacts is legitimate.

## Combat Statistics

SHELLOK, IMPERSONATOR CR 4  
 Changeling bard 4  
 N Medium humanoid (shapechanger)  
 Init +1; Senses Listen +5, Spot +5  
 Languages Common, Dwarven, Elven, Halfling, Riedran  
 [rule]  
 AC 16, touch 16, flat-footed 14  
 hp 20 (4 HD)  
 Fort +3, Ref +6, Will +5; +2 against charm and fear effects  
 [rule]  
 Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)  
 Melee mwk rapier +6 (1d6/18-20 x2)  
 Base Atk +3; Grp +3  
 Special Actions bardic music 2/day (inspire courage +1, fascinate 1 creature, countersong), inspire competence  
 Combat Gear: *bracers of armor* +4  
 Bard Spells Known (CL 2<sup>nd</sup>):  
   2<sup>nd</sup> (1/day)- *alter self*, *invisibility*  
   1st (3/day)-*charm person* (DC 16), *comprehend languages*, *cure light wounds*  
   0 (3/day)-*daze* (DC 14), *flare* (DC 14), *ghost sound* (DC 14), *message*, *prestidigitation*  
 (During Part Three of this adventure, Shellok likely has no spells available. He has probably used them all aiding in Radiant Hold's defense against the Kythri rift.)  
 [rule]  
 Abilities Str 10, Dex 15, Con 12, Int 14, Wis 12, Cha 18  
 SQ bardic knowledge, minor shape change (acts as *disguise self*, requires full round action)  
 Feats Spell Focus (enchantment), Weapon Finesse  
 Skills Appraise +4, Bluff +10, Concentration +4, Diplomacy +7, Disguise +5 (+7 acting, +16 when using minor change shape, +18 acting), Gather Information +11, Intimidate +8, Knowledge (local) +5, Knowledge (royalty and nobility) + 5, Listen +5, Profession (actor) +6, Sense Motive +7, Spot +5, Tumbling +5, Use Magic Device +6  
 Possessions simple clothes, masterwork dagger, masterwork rapier  
 (Name note: Most changelings have a monosyllabic name. Shellok is a compound name formed by Shellok, whose real name is Shel, as a way of remembering his dead sister Okk.)

**Roleplaying Hook:** *"Really, this isn't personal. People just do what they are best at, right?"*

The PCs have the opportunity here to get any healing they may require for free, including spells like *restoration*, *remove disease* or any other divine healing spell if 4<sup>th</sup> level or lower. If any of the PCs have contracted slimy doom, they will be cured of the disease and restored to full from its effects. Grateful priests in Radiant Hold provide the casting service free of charge for them – the heroes of the hour.

Once they are ready to proceed, continue on below.

### **Onward to Stormreach**

Shellock's rendezvous is in an interesting part of the city – more properly, it is outside the city in a small tent community of giants known as the Rusheme. The Rusheme, willing to trade with humans and other travelers, have made a part of their dwelling area available for private meetings and gatherings. What the setting lacks in amenities, it makes up for in the special kind of security only being surrounded by a few dozen giants can provide.

*Near the walls of Stormreach, the clearing ahead is visible for quite some distance away. Filled with tents ranging in size from massive to miniscule, the corded-off area is some sort of transient settlement populated by figures as varied as the cloth domiciles themselves.*

*Many are giants, moving peacefully among the smaller beings, while others are clad in the armor of city guardsman or the fine attire of merchants and nobles. Within the heart of the tent community, a bazaar or tables, linen-walled booths and open backs wagons dominated the center of the clearing. The sounds of auctions, the din of shoppers and the clatter of hired mercenaries keeping the peace carries on the cool evening wind.*

Shellock guides the PCs around the spectacle of the Tents of Rusheme to an area on the opposite from the city. He has been instructed how to get into the private area of the community and does so unless the PCs wish him to do otherwise. He knows how this place works, though, and asks the PCs to trust him to guide them to the tent.

*"I know these folk. They keep the little tents you see up ahead safe from... 'unwanted attention'. It may seem odd but we can trust them not to interfere with us as long as we don't cause trouble out here. Just remember their rule. 'What happens in one of these tents is your business. What happens outside them is ours.'"*

*"That means that we can do anything we please in the tent where I'm taking you but if anything gets out, it gets away. The giants will attack anyone fighting out in the open and they aren't exactly known for their subtlety... or mercy."*

Shellock has a password he's been told to give to one of the giants handling the private meeting circle. He does so as per the next section of text. If you wish to involve the PCs more in this process, have him give the password phrase ("*brimstone rising*") to them and let them interact with the giant mentioned below.

*Shellock approaches one of the giants, a brutish looking figure nearly ten feet tall with sections of heavy hide stitched into serviceable armor covering most of his body. He hefts a large metal-banded cudgel onto his shoulder as the changeling draws near.*

*Whatever it is that your guide says, it seems enough to put the guard somewhat at ease. He lowers the shod club, using it to point towards a tent thirty feet away before resting on it once more.*

**Creatures:** There are four giants here, with four more an easy shouting distance away. While the PCs might be able of handling these guards themselves, the apparent reinforcements should not make the prospect of fighting them an attractive one. Though a battle with these massive folk is not likely, they are included here for completeness' sake only. *Do not* bring them into conflict with the PCs unless the latter group's actions demand a confrontation.

**Morrak, Tannur, Mogah, Orash, Tangak;** mixed male and female hill giants; hp 100, 101, 102, 105, 110; *Monster Manual* page 123. *These are NOT intended to be a combat encounter!*

Once the PCs know which tent they should approach, the plan for ambushing Shellock's contact is entirely up to them. They have arrived ten minutes before the recruiter does, giving them ample time to scout the tent and decide how they wish to proceed. Shellock got them here but he is no tactician; he defers any decision making to them.

That said, he is also willing to play any part they wish of him. He will stick around and even make contact with the recruiter, though he would rather not get involved in any combat if he can help it. He has been fighting for hours and even if he is healed to full, his body aches and his sense of self-preservation is at an all time high. He'll be the PCs' patsy but he'd rather not help them actually do battle. He would be the first to admit he is a liar, not a fighter.

### **The Billowing Arena**

*The accommodations for this meeting are very sparse. The tent is roughly thirty feet wide and no more than ten feet tall at its center where a stout ashwood pole keeps the ceiling raised. The walls are sailcloth, heavy*

*treated linen that catches the coastal wind and makes the entire construction seem to pulse in all direction. Similar buildings are all around you, casting moving shadows on every wall.*

*A solidly made table encircles the main support pole and four simple stools surround it. A dozen or so empty crates have been stacked haphazardly along the northern side of the tent. Beyond that, there is nothing else within.*

This is where the final (optional) battle of the scenario takes place and for once, it is in a time, place and manner of the PCs' choosing. They can do anything within their power to set up this combat as long as they can accomplish it with their resources in a time frame of ten minutes. Shellok knows when he was told to be here and the clock tower of Stormreach is visible from the Tents of Rusheme; this gives the PCs the advantage of knowing exactly how long they should have to prepare.

As a note, the crates are made from oak planks, are completely empty and are three feet in all dimensions. They were used at one time for wine bottle storage and as such have cross-bracing but no real contents aside from some loose, dry straw. If restacked, they would provide excellent cover and places for PCs to remain concealed.

Once the PCs are ready and in their places (which will vary depending on their wishes and capabilities), proceed to the encounter below.

### **A Vile Arrival**

Be sure to vary this scene if the PCs are utilizing unorthodox tactics or do not wish to be hiding in the tent awaiting the recruiter. The description below assumes the PCs will be do something like stacking the crates to make cover and hiding behind them to ambush the recruiter but they are in **no way** constrained to doing this. The encounter should be set to use the PCs' tactics as a baseline; they should be allowed to dictate the terms of this combat as long as their plan is logical and within their capabilities.

As a note, the giants will not interfere in any way with this encounter unless the battle moves outside the tent. They only attack if the action spills out into the clearing of the Tents of Rusheme map (as given in the appendix). If this occurs, the giants will strike to subdue until they are attacked back with lethal force by the PCs. All bets are off if that occurs; the giants have no patience or compassion for anyone foolish enough to threaten them.

*The tent flap darkens suddenly, a deep shadow passing over it and blotting out all light. The darkness seems to seep over the fabric, slipping into the tent without opening the flap or disturbing it in any way. A wave of deepest penumbra, the shadow moves slowly to the side and crawls up the wall to create a strange silhouette of a humanoid creature with claws and angular limbs.*

*Shortly thereafter, the flap is untied and a dusky skinned man with piercing red eyes enters. His long, tattered coat covers a suit of unnaturally black leather armor trimmed in thick, black pearl colored scales. His hand rests curled around the grey-wrapped grip of a duskwood staff as he casts about the tent.*

*"Mister Shellok? Are you here? I truly dislike having to wait."*

This is Vramosh and his shadow ally. They begin the encounter in the squares noted on the combat map for this scene (located in the appendix). Though Vramosh is normally a very calculating and careful man, he has made one of the classic mistakes of an evil man – arrogance. He is so convinced that Shellok is utterly less than a threat that he is underestimating the changeling. Thus, he has taken very few precautions.

As a warlock in the Cabal of Shadows, he is not without his resources and will still be a considerable challenge for the PCs to overcome. On this encounter however the PCs wish it to begin, keeping in mind that Vramosh and his shadow are skilled combatants and will fight as a team whenever possible.

**Foes:** Vramosh is a very well trained warlock, nearly on par with the PCs themselves in terms of skill and level. Together with his shadow, Sssissvah, he should certainly be capable of defending himself admirably. If the PCs are going to bring him down, they will have to work in concert and use all the skills at their disposal. If this encounter seems difficult for the PCs to handle, remember that it is meant to be the climax of the scenario.

Make the PCs work for this victory and do not be afraid to drop one or more of them in combat. While Shellok is not truly willing to fight on their behalf, he is more than happy to drag unconscious or dying PCs out of battle and stabilize them with the Heal skill or any magical healing items they might be carrying.

**Vramosh;** male human warlock 5; hp 32; See Combat Statistics

**Sssissvah;** shadow; hp 25; *Monster Manual* page 221.

### Combat Statistics

Vramosh, Cabal of Shadows Warlock CR 5

Human Warlock 5

NE Medium humanoid (human)

**Init** +2; **Senses** Listen +2, Search +1, Spot +2

**Languages** Common, Abyssal

**AC** 14, touch 12, flat-footed 12

**hp** 32 (5 HD)

**Resist** Damage reduction 1/cold iron

**Fort** +4(+6 from invocation), **Ref** +4, **Will** +7

**Speed** 30 ft. (6 squares)

**Melee** +9 quarterstaff (1d6+3)

**Or**

**Ranged Touch** +6 eldritch blast (3d6)

**Base Atk** +4; **Grp** +4

**Warlock Invocations Known** *sickening blast* (target must make Will save, DC 14, or be *sickened* for one minute in addition to 2d6 damage), *dark one's own luck* (gains +2 luck bonus to one category of saves, lasts 24 hours, currently affecting Fortitude saves), *entropic warding* (acts as *entropic shield* and prevents subject from being tracked), *eldritch strike* (next melee attack discharges an eldritch blast into the target with no ranged attack roll needed).

**Special Actions** *Detect magic* at will, deceive item (take 10 on Use Magic Device checks)

**Abilities** Str 16, Dex 15, Con 14, Int 12, Wis 14, Cha 14

**SQ:** None

**Feats** Precise Shot, Spell Penetration, Weapon Focus (quarterstaff)

**Skills** Concentration +8, Intimidate +8, Knowledge (arcana) +4, Spellcraft +4, Use Magic Device +10

**Gear** Duskwood quarterstaff, dark grey linen robes, leather armor.

**Roleplaying Hook:** "Shadows take you, fools! None can stand against the power of darkness!"

**Tactics:** Whenever possible, Vramosh and his shadow will try to flank the same foe and use melee attacks (the former enhances his with *eldritch strike* invocations as often as he can) to bring enemies down. *Sickening blasts* and *eldritch blasts* will make a nice compliment to Sssissvah's melee ability if a given PC looks too dangerous to engage; Vramosh's Precise Shot feat allows the warlock to attack at range while his ally engages targets without losing any accuracy.

Vramosh is not afraid to run and will do so as his first opportunity if his shadow is slain. This gives you the perfect opportunity to provide the PCs with an interesting end to the encounter if they are having problems dealing with the powerful warlock. Have him dash outside, turn as he's running and fire off an *eldritch blast* that misses the PCs but comes dangerously close to one of the giants. What happens next can be as messy or entertaining as you desire. Crunch.

### Scaling the Encounter

**4<sup>th</sup>-Level Characters:** Vramosh has already had a rough day, having come here after dealing with a jealous rival's treachery. He is at 20 hit points and his shadow is at 10. He also spends the entire first round of actions "stunned" that a weasel like Shellok could betray him; neither he or Sssissvah takes any actions the first round they qualify to do so.

**5<sup>th</sup>-Level Characters:** As above but Vramosh and his shadow ally do not waste a round.

**7<sup>th</sup>-Level Characters:** Vramosh also has a "pet" – Gloam, a shadow mastiff (hp 30, page 222).

**8<sup>th</sup>-Level Characters:** The previous addition applies but is increased to two shadow mastiffs – Gloam and Gloom (both at 33 hp; *Monster Manual* page 222)

**Development:** Once captured, Vramosh is not likely in any shape to talk for a while. If the PCs revive him, roleplay the vile warlock as totally uncooperative and unafraid of their "miserable attempts at

intimidation". Even if the PCs are extremely good as intimidating Vramosh, he will try to stay silent and bide his time. He does not think the Covenant of Light is ruthless enough to make someone like him talk.

Once the PCs turn Vramosh over to their faction, he will find out the hard way just how wrong he is.

Allow the PCs to question Vramosh all they like, however. They have earned the right to that much after all the effort they've gone to this long day. He cannot really tell them much other than to betray the location of a safehouse where he sometimes goes to meet with other members of the Cabal and the name of his true superior ("The Voice of the Storm"). He has never personally met the Voice of the Storm but he knows the evil being is pleased with how many new recruits he has brought in since joining the Cabal.

Let the PCs roleplay through this scene as much as they want after they bring the warlock down but keep in mind the scenario time limit. If you are approaching the end of the time slot, proceed as quickly as you can to Ending the Adventure.

## Ending the Adventure

The PCs have done a great thing; their efforts have saved Radiant Hold. Run the following scene for them, paraphrasing the action as you wish to accommodate for the PCs actions. What follows is just a suggested scene to provide you with the visuals you will need to give the Players the conclusion they've earned.

*"One last push! Drive them back! Give us room!"*

*Korvin marches with you down the center of the defensive ring around the ragged rift. The guardsmen and clerics redouble their efforts, assailing the maddened creatures of Kythri as beasts beyond description pour forth from the depths of the Churning Chaos. Steel and faith cut you a swath, leaving a single broken, bloodstained corridor of approach.*

*The raptoran points his glimmering blade at the howling black portal. "Throw it in! We can't hold back the tide much longer!"*

What happens next depends entirely on how the PCs brought Al'ar back to Radiant Hold. If he is alive (*bead of force*) or not, pushing him through the portal should not be difficult. If any of the PCs object to the thought of throwing the beast through without trying to free the being of light within it, feel free to allow Covenant of Light priests to perform a *break enchantment* (or whatever else seems cinematic and appropriate) on their behalf. Essentially, if the PCs even *try* to free Al'ar, allow them to do so.

If the chaos beast is dead or ashes, it will be even easier to throw through the gate. No attack roll is needed; the action is automatically successful. If a considerable amount of time is left in the slot, feel free to run a few rounds of "Guardians at the Gate" as recommended earlier. The Players may appreciate an exciting battle to reach the portal, after all.

Once the chaos beast is back through the rift, one way or another, read or paraphrase:

*The midnight rift in the air over Radiant Hold's courtyard surges violently, its edges unraveling into screaming motes of pure darkness. Deep within the gateway, the shadows explode into a rushing cascade of impossibly shifting colors and agonizingly bright light.*

*All across the battlefield, the creatures of Kythri writhe and join the choir of pain. Shrieking incoherently, they also break up into motes of light and dark, eruptions of insanity before fading away forever. Only the echoes of their dying wails remain behind, disappearing as the rift's afterimage fades into nothing more than an exhausting memory.*

The PCs have earned the right to be treated like heroes. The guards and priests in the courtyard cheer them, Korvin hails them as saviors and many owe them their very lives. They deserve to bask in the adulation of their peers; give them that recognition by roleplaying the grateful reactions of the defenders all around them.

If Shellok is with the PCs or has helped them to this point, he approaches them and asks if they would be willing to sponsor him into the faction. He has learned by their actions and would like to try to live up to their example. He has a lot of atoning to do; helping the people he's harmed would go a long way towards that absolution.

Once this is over, the long arduous task of repairing the damage to Radiant Hold and overcoming the terrible losses inflicted by the chaotic horde in their midst will occur the Covenant of Light for a long time to come. But for now, the PCs have earned some much needed rest...

*Here ends Price of Virtue.*

# Adventure Questions

1. Which best describes the apparent attitude of the PCs toward their mission during the scenario?
  - a) Very professional and diplomatic.
  - b) Mixed reactions; some PCs were focused and controlled while others were less so.
  - c) Poor reactions; the PCs did not really seem to care about the tragic conditions of the mission or the seriousness of their objective.
  - d) Appalling. There was no apparent personal motivation aside from their membership in the Covenant of Light for them to even go on this mission.
2. Did the PCs constantly monitor their surroundings during the mission for clues and leads?
  - a) Yes, if there was a map under a rock, they would have found it.
  - b) Yes, they didn't always search but more often than not they made sure to leave nothing of use behind them.
  - c) No, they did not seem interested to looking for clues or leads.
3. Did the PCs defeat the drow watch camp encounter in some way?
  - a) Completely and diplomatically. The drow were negotiated with and allowed to leave in peace.
  - b) Yes, but the PCs had to slay or combat the drow. No lasting peace was accomplished.
  - c) The PCs were defeated or had to flee from the dark elven scouts.
4. How did the PCs handle themselves during their journey through the Hidden Web?
  - a) They treated the aranea with compassion and understanding; the PCs never harmed the spider folk or made amends if they did so.
  - b) The party attacked the aranea but did not do so with overt violence. Unfortunately, they did not spare any resources or attention to helping them either.
  - c) The denizens of the Hidden Web do not want the PCs dead. Beyond that, they are certainly not welcome back.
  - d) If there was any way to harm, anger or antagonize the spider folk, the PCs accomplished it.
5. What was Al'ar's fate?
  - a) He survived and was saved by the PCs' removing the *chaos diamond* in his corrupt body.
  - b) Al'ar was captured and lost to the rift of Kythri.
  - c) The qesar was slain and his body sacrificed to close the errant portal.
  - d) The PCs were defeated by the chaos beast.
6. Did the PCs manage to capture or defeat Vramosh?
  - a) They captured the warlock; his information is now in the hands of the Covenant of Light.
  - b) The PCs slew the warlock; he will not be a threat to their faction again.
  - c) Either through defeat or by some other failure, the PCs did not capture or slay Vramosh.
  - d) The PCs did not know about the Cabal of Shadows recruiter and never encountered him.
7. How would you rate the group's roleplaying?
  - a) Fantastic. Everyone had interesting and engaging characters that interacted with the adventure in very fun ways.
  - b) Good. Most everyone had interesting and engaging characters that interacted with the adventure in very fun ways.
  - c) Okay. There was some roleplaying.
  - d) None. They treated the adventure as a set of objectives. There was no roleplaying.

*"Gratitude of the Hidden Web"*

*You have saved the lives of several aranea, strange spidery humanoid shapechangers living in a concealed village near Radiant Hold. This life debt is one the inhabitants of Sektathah take very seriously and will be paid in full some day.*

*The following rules item are now unlocked for PCs with this story object.*

**Prestige Class:** *Arachnomancer (Underdark, page 28), unlocking this prestige class with this story object negates the class requirement of an evil alignment. The scarification ritual is also applied to the PC's back instead of his or her face.*

*"Bright Blessing"*

*By rescuing Al'ar, a qesar in league with the Covenant of Light, from a terrible fate, you have gained a friend for life and allies in very high places. This may not seem to have any benefit now but someday, when you most need it, Al'ar will return your kindness.*

*As a free action, you may choose to benefit from a heal spell cast on your behalf by an 18<sup>th</sup> level divine spellcaster. This can take place anywhere on Eberron and does not require any action or words on your part. It can even occur while you are asleep, helpless, dying or unable to act freely. This benefit can only occur once.*



# Appendix: Important NPC

## QUESAR

**Medium Construct (Extraplanar)**  
**Hit Dice:** 8d10+10 (54 hp)  
**Initiative:** +7  
**Speed:** 60 ft.  
**Armor Class:** 20 (+3 Dex, +7 deflection), touch 20, flat-footed 17  
**Base Attack/Grapple:** +6/+6  
**Attack:** Slam +7 melee (1d6 plus 1d6 energy/19-20)  
**Full Attack:** 2 slams +7 melee (1d6 plus 1d6 energy/19-20)  
**Space/Reach:** 5 ft./5 ft.  
**Special Attacks:** Blinding radiance, consuming brilliance, searing burst  
**Special Qualities:** Construct traits, damage reduction 10/adamantine, energy halo, fast healing 5, immunity to electricity and fire, spell resistance 18  
**Saves:** Fort +2, Ref +5, Will +2  
**Abilities:** Str 11, Dex 16, Con —, Int 9, Wis 10, Cha 11  
**Skills:** Spot +11  
**Feats:** Improved Critical (slam), Improved Initiative, Weapon Focus (slam)  
**Environment:** Blessed Fields of Elysium  
**Organization:** Solitary or band (2-6)  
**Challenge Rating:** 7  
**Treasure:** None  
**Alignment:** Always neutral good  
**Advancement:** 9-24 HD (Medium)  
**Level Adjustment:** +9

*This gaunt humanoid creature has blue skin and tall white hair. A slender torso joins two graceful arms, powerful legs, and a noble head. This form is obscured, however, by the incredible amounts of radiant energy emanating from the creature.*

Like a star brought to ground, a quesar shines with blinding light that sears through evil creatures. Quesars are constructs crafted by angels, originally intended to serve as guardians over celestial treasures. In their benevolence, the angels gave their creations minds and free will, and the quesars refused to serve as slaves. Now they are independent—an isolated society of artificial life who still serve as mighty allies to the forces of good.

Quesars stand 6 feet tall and weight 160 pounds. They speak Celestial.

**Combat**  
A quesar's most dangerous weapon is the energy that suffuses its frame. Though they never use weapons, quesars can disrupt flesh and bone with a simple touch, and their energy halo is a powerful manifestation of their terrifying might.

**Blinding Radiance (Su):** At will, a quesar can increase the brightness of its energy halo so that it radiates brilliant light to a radius of 120 feet (and shadowy illumination to 240 feet). Any

creature within this radius must make a DC 14 Fortitude save or be blinded for 1d10 rounds. The save DC is Charisma-based. Creatures with light sensitivity take double the normal penalties in this brilliant light.


**Consuming Brilliance (Su):** Three times per day, a quesar can create an instantaneous burst of energy so intense that it reduces all creatures and objects within 15 feet to a trace of fine dust, dealing 22d6 points of damage, as the *disintegrate* spell. A successful DC 14 Fortitude save means the creature resists disintegration, instead taking 5d6 points of damage. The save DC is based on Charisma.

**Searing Burst (Su):** After a quesar has had blinding radiance active for at least 1 round, it can increase its intensity still more, creating an instantaneous burst of searing energy similar in effect to a *sunburst* spell. All creatures within 30 feet of the quesar take 6d6 points of damage (Reflex save DC 14 for half). A quesar can use a searing burst 6 times per day. The save DC is based on Charisma.

**Construct Traits:** A quesar has immunity to poison, magic sleep effects, paralysis, stunning, disease, death effects, necromancy effects, mind-affecting effects (charms, compulsions, phantasms, patterns, and morale effects), and any effect that requires a Fortitude save unless it also works on objects or is harmless. It is not subject to critical hits, subdual damage, ability damage, ability drain, fatigue, exhaustion, or energy drain. Cannot heal damage, but can be repaired. Darkvision 60 ft. and low-light vision.

**Energy Halo (Su):** At all times, a quesar is surrounded by a radiant glow that sheds bright light in a radius of 20 feet and shadowy illumination to 40 feet.

**Fast Healing (Ex):** A quesar regains lost hit points at the rate of 5 per round as long as it is in daylight (including spells such as *daylight* and *celestial brilliance*, but not its own energy halo). It continues regaining hit points even when destroyed, as long as it remains in daylight. Fast healing does not allow the quesar to regrow or reattach lost body parts.



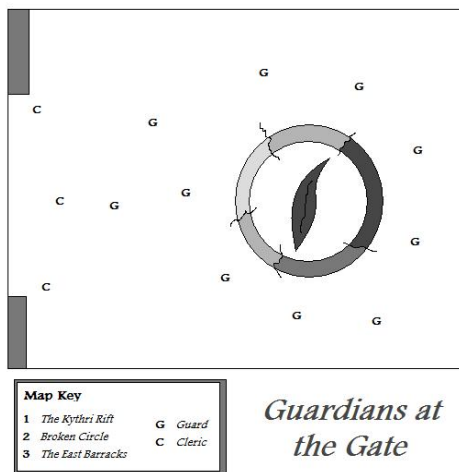
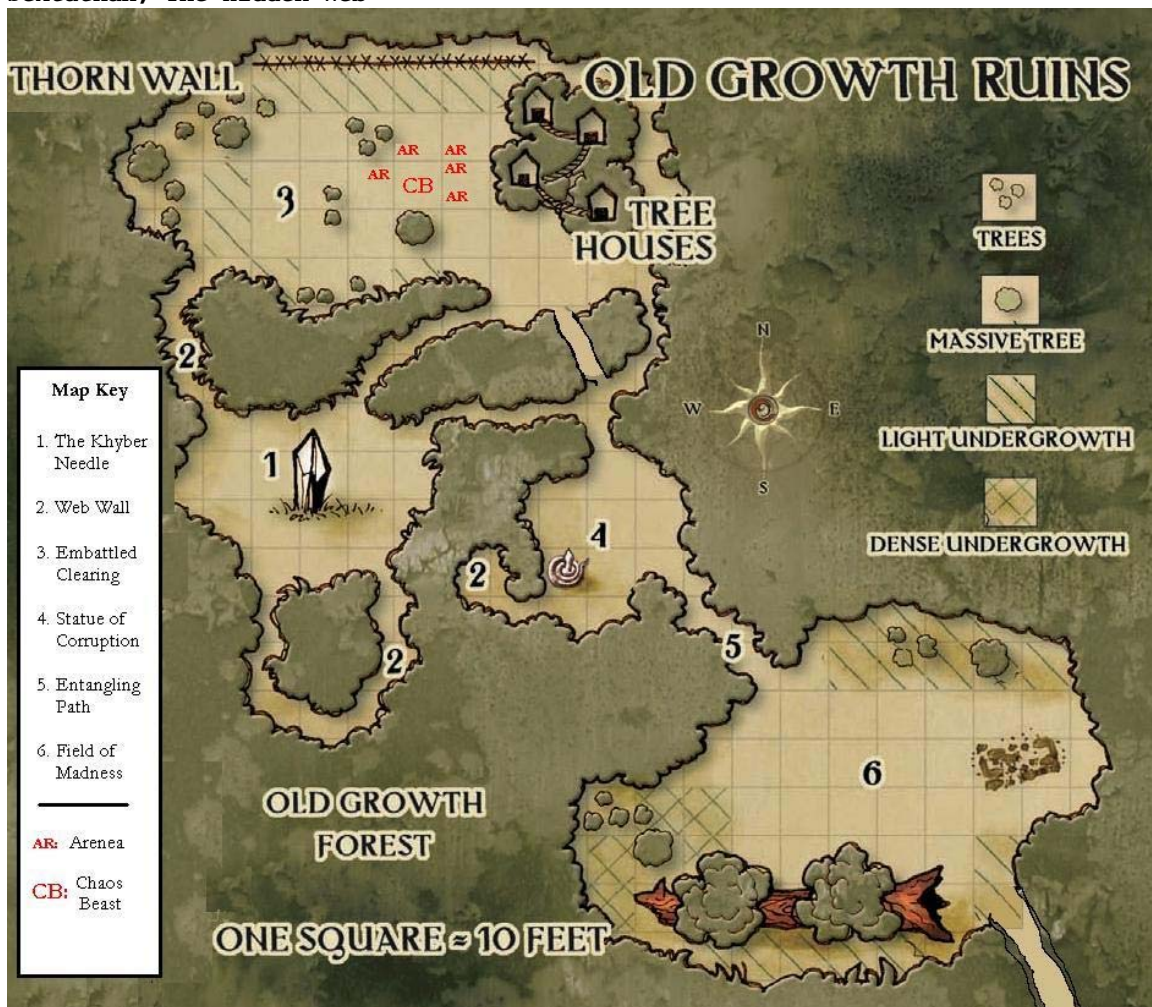
Al'ar is a powerful ally of Lirashana, the Lady of Light. His service in the name of the Sovereign Host on hundreds of occasions has earned him a special place in the hierarchies of the higher powers and the good will of the Lady herself. When she asked him to accept incarnation on the mortal plane to serve her faction for a time, he was happy to comply.

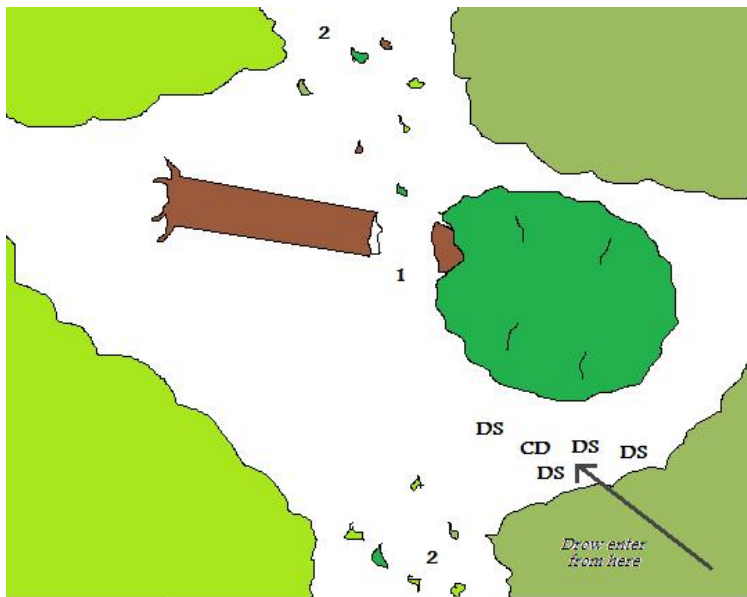
**Roleplaying Hook:** "I suggest you consider your actions carefully. It would sadden me to annihilate you."

**Special Note:** Because the Covenant of Light's special blessing ability is drawn from the same powers that fuel Al'ar's very being, his corruption into a chaos beast possesses a special vulnerability to the Blessing of Light. If PCs attempt to use the Blessing of Light to overcome Al'ar's Corporeal Instability touch, it will purge the condition. This works even if the victim has become a chaos beast but only if the transformation occurred within the last 24 hours.

# Appendix: Maps

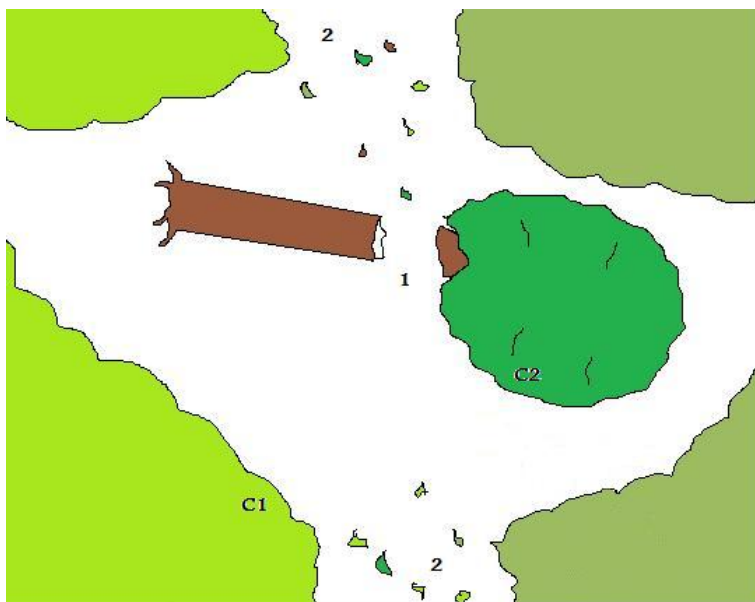
Sektathah, The Hidden Web





Map Key	
CD	Corrupt Drow
DS	Drow Scout
1	Downed Tree Blind
2	Path of the Chaos Beast

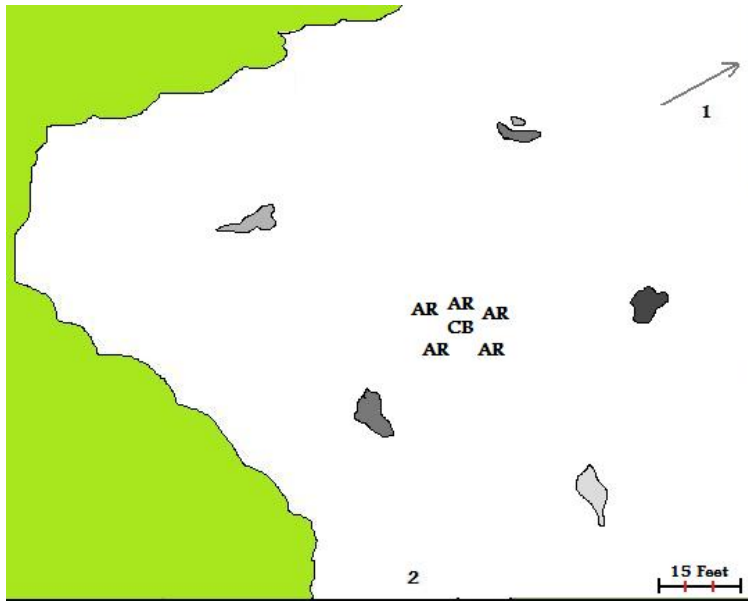
## Who Watches the Watchers



Map Key	
C1	Cloaker 1
C2	Cloaker 2
1	Downed Tree Blind
2	Path of the Chaos Beast

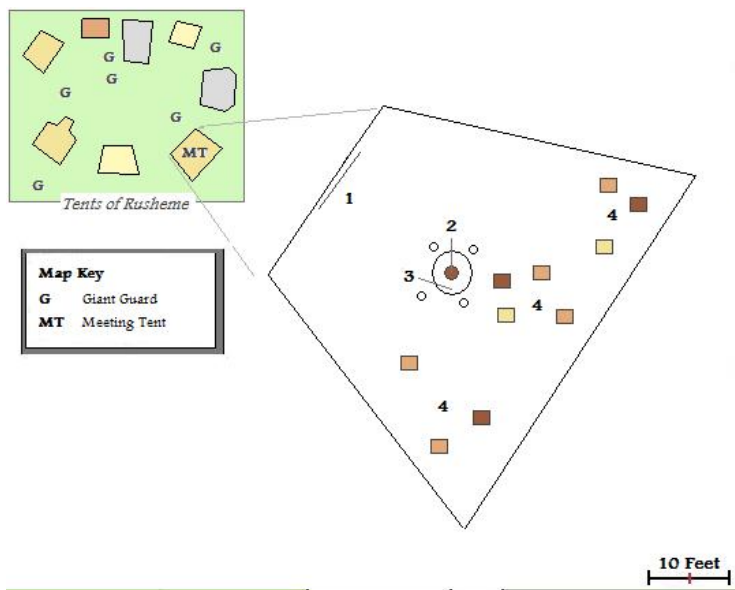
## Cloaked in Darkness





Map Key	
CB	Chaos Beast (Al'ar)
AR	Aranea Defenders
1	To The Treehouses
2	PCs Likely Entrance

## *The Embattled Clearing*



Map Key	
G	Giant Guard
MT	Meeting Tent

Map Key	
1	Tent Flap
2	Central Pole
3	Table and Stools
4	Scattered Crates

## *Caught in the Act*