

PEL015

An epic campaign for the Dying Earth RPG in the tradition of Jack Vance's early Dying Earth Tales.

The Dying Earth isn't all rapier wits and dry humor. Fields of Silver gives somber warriors and potent magicians a chance to show their capabilities. Written for powerful, driven characters in the style of Turjan of Miir, you can solve mysteries, uncover secrets and deal with ancient evils. The adventure takes your characters right across the continent, from Almetry to Erze Damath, taking in a host of wonders along the way. It pitches them against dangerous foes in their quest to put right a misdeed so great that it could shake the very foundations of a mighty city.

With a wealth of descriptive material on the eastern lands in the original stories, the book also functions as a richly detailed sourcebook for the Eastern lands.

Who is responsible for the slaughter of the characters' friends? Who is the mysterious Lady and why does she need their help?

Even armed with a head full of spells and a wicked blade, dare your characters face the scion of an elder demon?

This books requires the Dying Earth RPG and uses material from Turjan's Tome.

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The Dying Earth™

Fields of Silver

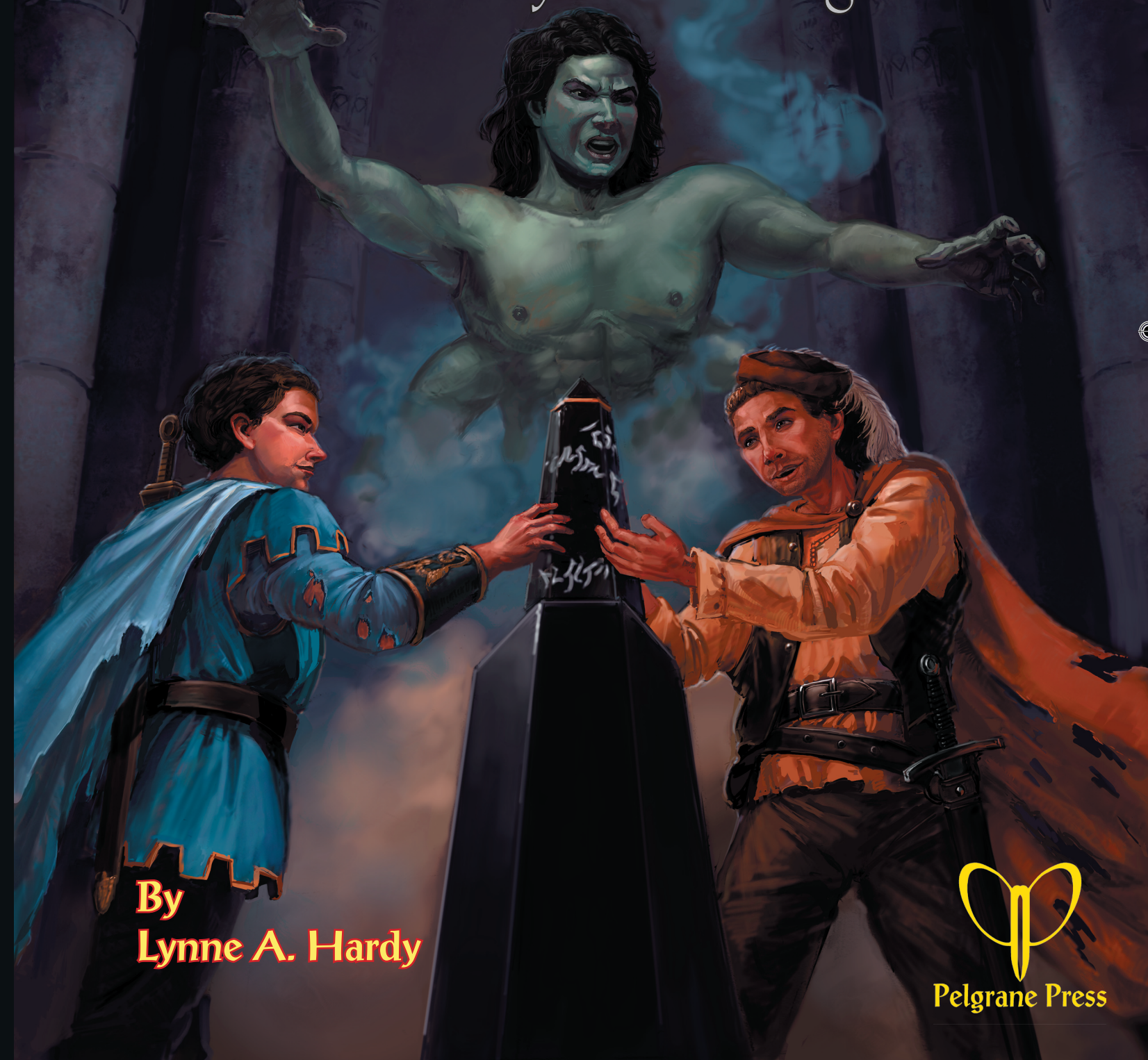
Pelgrane Press

PEL
015

PEL015 **The Dying Earth** Based on the work of Jack Vance

Fields of Silver

Adventures Beyond the Songan Sea



By
Lynne A. Hardy



Pelgrane Press

Based on the Dying Earth book series by Jack Vance

Fields of Silver

Adventures Beyond the Songan Sea

A supplement for the Dying Earth RPG
written by

Lynne A. Hardy

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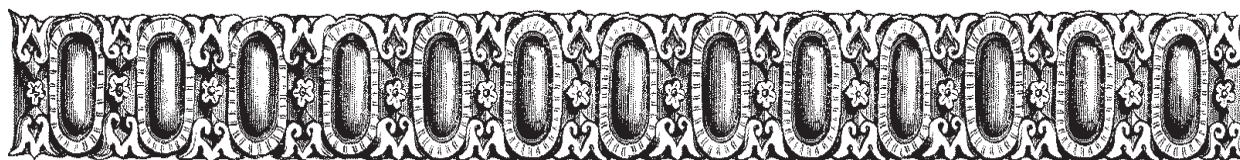
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Chapter One

Introduction

Overview

First, let us congratulate you on your excellent choice of manuscript. Indeed, by good fortune you hold in your hand a book that encompasses both a gazetteer for the discerning Games Master and a rousing adventure for Turjan level characters. Set in the exotic regions beyond the eastern edge of Almeri, in particular the legendary city of Erze Damath, it will allow the exploration of an area not currently covered by our esteemed publisher (an oversight which, in truth, went unnoticed for far too long in this author's humble opinion). Within its pages you will find descriptions of wondrous cities, desolate plains, treacherous deserts, items of surpassing power and glory and the many faces of humanity, all in complete accordance with those instructions set forth in the companion volume, *Turjan's Tome of Beauty and Horror*, to which we would also direct your estimable gaze.

Unfortunately for players of the game, this book must remain closed to you, for we would hate you to spoil the delights of the majestic Erze Damath and its environs by accidentally reading material not meant for eyes that Chun the Unavoidable would be proud of. Rely upon your GM to impart such information as is deemed suitable for creatures of such delicate constitution and the joys of this supplement will indeed be yours to share.

And now, good GM, allow us to inform you of what awaits you in further chapters. Chapter 1 contains an overview of the plot (including a history both dark and terrible) and details important characters that the players are likely to meet upon their quest. These characters will be detailed again in the relevant chapters in which they appear, for ease of use. Chapter 2 describes how best to set the characters upon their way to fabled Erze Damath for both established and newly created parties, as well as detailing important plot points essential to their progress should they decide to deviate from their course. Chapters 3—6 describe important places along the road to the party's goal, including a full description of the locale, the people they are likely to meet there, rumors of other happenings, the main plot and essential plot points (as in Chapter 2). Chapter 7 deals with the thrilling denouement of the quest, as well as those details contained in previous chapters, and considers the implications of the characters' actions. The appendices detail other areas not covered in the main text, should the characters wish to travel further afield on their journey, as well as re-iterating items, creatures and spells of potential use to all concerned.

We recommend that to gain the most from this esteemed tome, you begin your perusal by reading the background information presented in each chapter to familiarise yourself with the areas in which the characters will be travelling and then read through the scenario.

Plot Summary

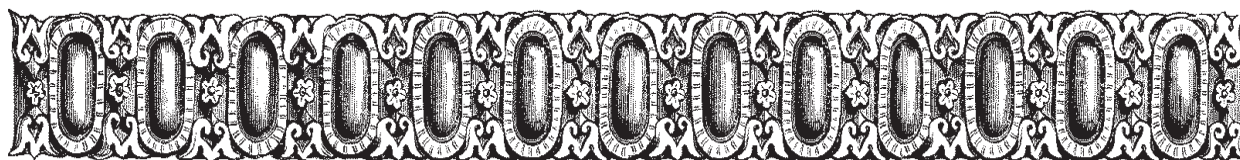
Rumors of a legendary artefact, the Blood of ZoZam, have begun to circulate after the appearance of an adventurer from the deserts of the east. Its exact nature has been hard to discern, particularly as the gentleman in question died during a particularly unseasonable bout of stormy weather not long after his return to more civilised lands. An acquaintance of the characters claims to have discovered not only the nature of the item, but also its location from the poor unfortunate shortly before his death. He wishes to share this information with the characters, but is reluctant to tell them why he needs their aid in particular and not that of any other group of ne'er-do-wells.

The contact arranges to meet with the characters on the shores of the Songan Sea in three weeks' time, giving them a sufficient period in which to prepare for and undertake such an arduous quest. When they arrive at the rendezvous, the contact is nowhere to be found. During the night, fearsome howls and screams are heard carried on the lashing winds and the next day, the shattered remains of the contact are found in a ruined temple. In his bloodied possessions are notes pertaining to his quest and a mysterious prophecy, which direct the characters to the Plain of Obelisks to seek further illumination.

After some tribulation a hidden pillar of ironweed, under the protection of a riven hermit, directs the characters to Erze Damath, the ruinous city on the banks of the Scamander River. Here, they begin to unravel some of the mystery and horror surrounding the Blood of ZoZam and become embroiled in religious strife between the Funambulous Evangels and orthodox Gilfigites. Further research directs them to the deadly Silver Desert and encounters with bandits, giant scorpions, hidden peoples and a shifting castle made of sand. Unfortunately, the characters have attracted the attention of the dreaded Wind Riders and must use their skill and cunning to avoid the horrific demise that befell their compatriot.

Having dealt with the Wind Riders the trail leads the characters into Dastra, former centre of the Dastric Empire and now a ruined shell filled with hidden wonders and terrible dangers, amongst them a secret pool of great significance. Here they must take command of their destinies and recover the Blood of ZoZam, or perish in the attempt.





The Silver Quorum: A Dark Secret

As described in Chapter 5: Erze Damath, Gilfig is believed to be a prophet of the god ZoZam. Oh, if it were only that simple. Gilfig appeared on the Dying Earth millennia ago, summoned as a scion of the monstrous demon ZoZam. Who summoned him is not known and why he was summoned can only be guessed at, but the procedure went awry and the poor lowly avatar was cast adrift into the wilderness without any recollection of his true nature.

Scattered fragments were left to him. He remembered ZoZam as his progenitor and in the course of his wanderings established for himself a rudimentary faith that explained his coming into the world. In the middle of a thunderstorm he came upon a pillar of black stone that for some reason brought to mind his homeland (wherever that might be) and decided to settle there at its base.

The locals were a kindly people recently annexed by a great Empire. His simple beliefs became popular within the Imperial outpost and he gathered about him a chosen few with whom he identified most closely. To them he taught what he could remember and all the while the great city grew about his spire. More came to listen and believe, but something dark stirred at the back of his brain and it puzzled him.

His disciples soon learned to fear these stirrings. During those times they did their best to keep him away from the faithful, afraid of what he was becoming and what would happen to their lives should his transformations become known. They had achieved acceptance in these prosperous lands and were not prepared to lose all they had worked so hard to gain.

And so the disciples decided to imprison the demon-spawn by cunning methods that would hold him but not attract the wrath of his fearsome creator. Gilfig's disappearance was easily explained—he had merely ascended unto Gamamere to prepare the way for his followers, leaving behind mysterious artefacts of unknown power.

But there was a problem. The locals still held faithful to their old religion (due to astute organization Gilfigism had become popular amongst the ruling classes and was not seen as a peasant religion like Sammechism) and began to investigate these claims. How they discovered the truth the disciples never found out, but discover it they did and their high priestess was sent to recover from Dendara, castle of the sands, a sword of pure glimmister with which to slay the demon.

The disciples could not allow this, and so they used their treacherous magics to imprison her in her stronghold and cast her out of time, doomed never to complete her task. Her followers they charged with sedition and blasphemy and those they did not kill, they drove deep into the uninhabitable lands of the desert. And it was decided that to prevent such a thing happening again Gilfig's prison should be secreted away.

But how was this terrible secret to be kept? The original eight disciples had followers of their own who they taught as much of

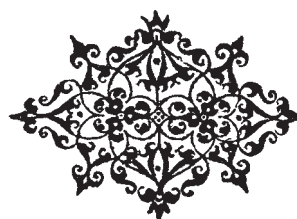
what they knew as could be deemed safe (and absolutely nothing about the true nature of their prophet). Then, by lots, the disciples chose their fates. One was chosen to take the item to this hidden realm and forever be its guardian. Four were to remain hidden within the city, divorced from their faith, their descendants charged with suppressing any details of the things that had occurred.

The Silver Quorum (the four who had remained) caused a key to be fashioned by the greatest silversmith of his age. It alone would permit entry to the Midnight Plain, where the prophet was hidden. To ensure that the uninitiated would not profit from the acquisition of such an item, the Quorum cursed it such that any who held it without the mark of protection were doomed to die at the hands of the remaining three. These unfortunate individuals assumed monstrous guises, spectral hunters to pursue and destroy those who came too close to the truth, tied forever to the annual rise and fall of the river Scamander. And thus was a second miracle accomplished—Gilfig's most faithful, most devout servants were called at last to Gamamere to sit with their master in glorious enlightenment.

But the wandering prisoner was not without power of her own. In time, her people found the shifting castle and at her behest carefully constructed a pillar that contained a warning for the remaining disciples. In the end, the truth will out and their duplicity will be revealed. But those left scoffed at the message when they saw it. They had kept it hidden for all these years, who could challenge them?

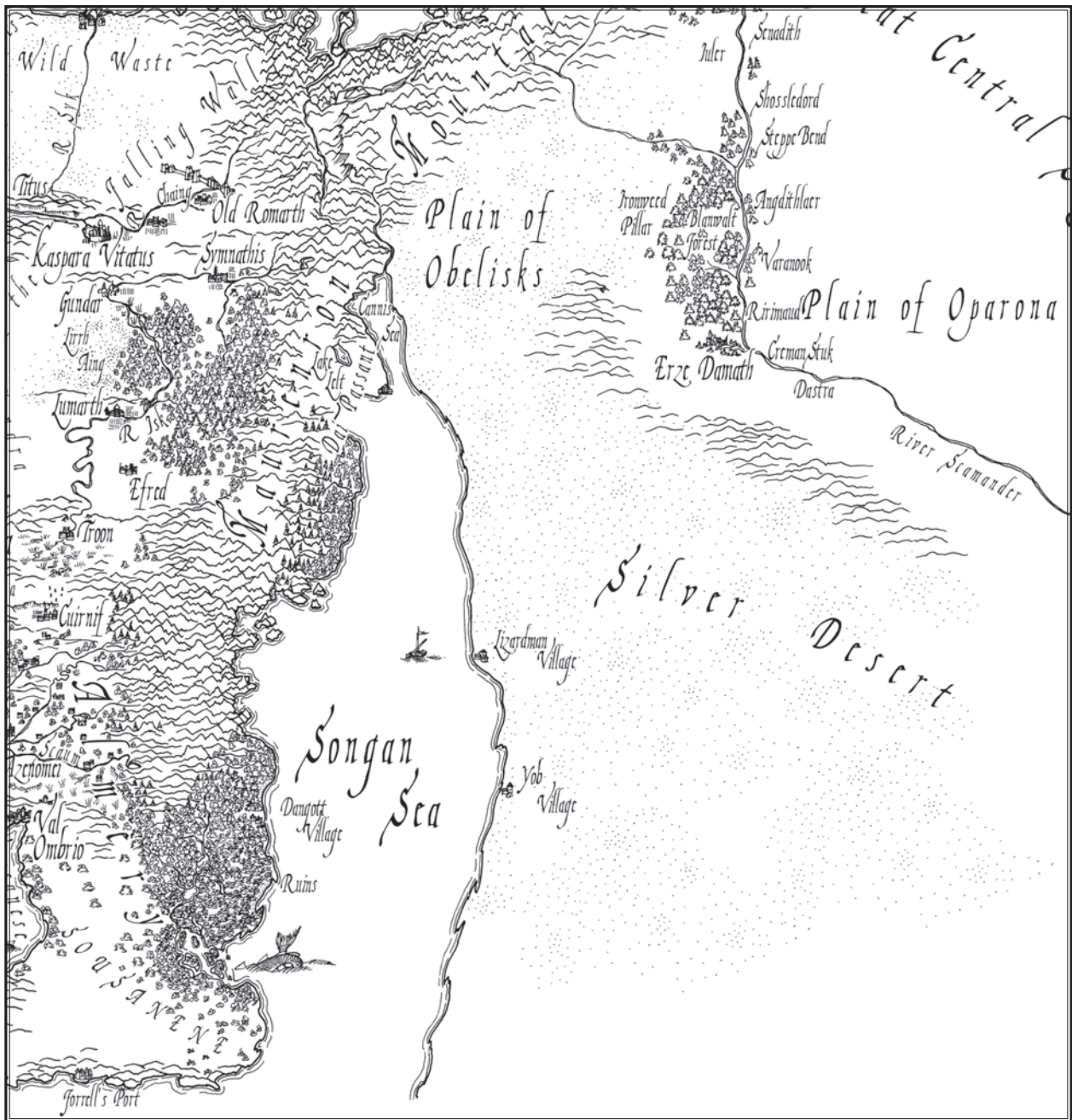
Their arrogance very nearly led the four to disaster, as the followers of another prophet, Huis the Demon-slayer, almost stumbled upon the secret. Although no longer irrevocably intertwined with the Church of Gilfig, it was of little difficulty to them to have these searchers after truth declared dangerous heretics to be expelled from the city and disgraced.

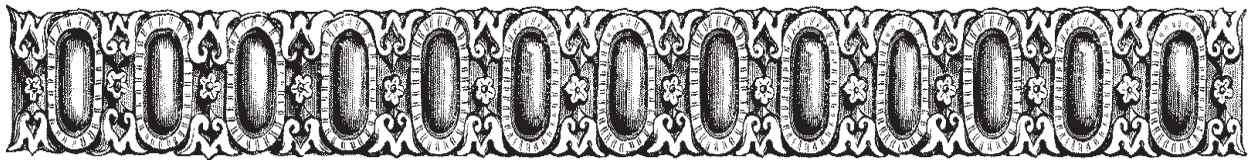
Then all became quiet and the knowledge of their misdeeds fell from memory. They disappeared behind the façade of a secret society, safe from prying eyes. But they are watchful after their near miss, these descendants of the first eight. And although they do not believe that the prophecy will come to pass, they have their plans, their schemes ready and waiting should the travelers from the west ever appear. They cannot risk the uncovering of their crimes but worst of all fear the release of Gilfig. Although the creature that spawned him has long since forgotten his scion, Gilfig himself is unlikely to have forgotten the long ages trapped in the confines of his dark prison...



Introduction

The Region of the Adventure





A Suggested Timeline of Events

Below is a suggested route for the scenario to follow, plus the time it will take for each leg of the journey. These times assume that the characters are on foot or using a slow moving cart/raft. Adjust the times as necessary if they are using more exotic means of transport. These figures do not take into account time spent at a location, merely the time taken to reach each one. Those figures in brackets are for reference should the characters decide to follow their own route. Where timing is critical, further notes are given in the relevant sections.

Azenomei to Osier	5 days
Osier to the Black Lake	2 days
The Black Lake to the Songan Sea	9 days
Crossing the Songan Sea	8 days upwards
Cispene Village to Plain of Obelisks	21 days via shoreline
Plain of Obelisks (southern coast) to Ironweed Pillar	14 days
Ironweed Pillar to Erze Damath	2 days
Erze Damath to Dendara	14 days
Dendara to Dastra	15 days
(Dendara to Ironweed Pillar)	16 days)
(Ironweed Pillar to Cispene direct)	26 days)
(Cispene Village to Dendara)	14 days)
(Erze Damath to Dastra)	4 days by boat, 7 days on foot)

The Adventure Checklist

The Fields of Silver scenario has been created using the guidelines described both in the *Dying Earth Roleplaying Game* (p.130) and *Turjan's Tome* (p. 24).

• Opportunities for Bloodshed

These are numerous and include: an encounter with the vicious Luzzel, the ravaging shades of those killed by the Wind Riders, and crossing swords with not only the Wind Riders but their masters the Silver Quorum and the prophet Gilfig himself.

• Horror

The shredded corpses of the Wind Riders' victims, the use of dead friends to prevent the characters' actions, the imprisonment and slaughter employed to protect the dark secret at the heart of Gilfigism, the maiming of guardians to ensure their obedience.

• Ruined Wonders

The city of Erze Damath, the glimmister mill, the swirling prison Dendara and the ravaged city of Dastra.

• Lost Knowledge

The prophecies of Sammech, the legends and myths in bleached manuscripts forgotten in the archives of the Xalguire Conservatory, the Flower and Sword of Sammech, and of course, the Blood of ZoZam.

• Casual Cruelty

The use and abuse of individuals and religious sects to derail the characters' investigations.

• Weird Magic

Tattoos of silver ink that protect or control, the silver moon charm (key and marker of destruction), the Song Of Life.

• Strange Vistas

The Iron Causeway and the Midnight Plain.





Chapter 2

Getting Started

Dear Relfan, I was greatly relieved to come upon your missive on my morning tray. I did think that you had forgotten your most successful business associate, taking into account all of your recent excitements. I should be delighted to commission a caravan, ostensibly for the collection of curios from the East, as I understand it. It has been a long time since I was last in Erze Damath and I doubt the journey has become any less eventful with time. I shall set forth as soon as the necessary arrangements have been made and shall contact you again forthwith.

Sakonity the Adamantine.

And now, let us begin. We shall not ask if you are seated comfortably as we expect that by now you are perched upon the edge of your seats, giddy with anticipation. We shall prolong your agony no further¹.

What You Need To Use This Supplement

The only two books strictly necessary to make full use of this supplement are the *Dying Earth Roleplaying Game* (DERPG) and *Turjan's Tome* (TT). We would recommend also the *Scaum Valley Gazetteer* (SVG) to enliven the journey to the Songan Sea, but this is only strictly necessary for completists². Two other books may well be of use, but are not essential; these are the *Kaiin Player's Guide* (KPG) and *Demons of the Dying Earth* (DDE). Copies of the *Excellent Prismatic Spray* may also be of some use.

A Note Before Starting

This supplement is intended to provide enjoyment for the players and advancement for their characters and not to force them down one pre-determined route. Use what you like, ignore what you don't so that this material fits the style of your players. You know them far better than we do, so you know what they'll enjoy and what they won't.

Background information on the area the characters are visiting is given first in each chapter. Plot points essential to the continuance of the story are given at the end of the scenario sections with some pertinent questions the players may consider. As long as the players have uncovered the relevant information they can proceed with the story, although how they come by that information is not as important as the information itself. The background details in each chapter can be used to help you give the players extra opportunities to discover the information they need to complete their quest. Rumors of other strange occurrences are also presented so that should they fancy a break in terms of pace there are other conundrums to occupy their minds.

Although the campaign is presented in a linear manner, there is nothing to stop the characters from visiting places out of order,

¹ Unless of course you prefer your agony prolonged. Pelgrane Press aims to satisfy every whim.

² A completist, a person of high intellectual achievement whose means are adequate to allow them to gratify their entirely rational desire to own all Pelgrane Press products

so don't force them to stick to one path. We have presented the most logical route so that they are armed with all the relevant information to progress to the next step, but there is nothing to stop them from barging in woefully unprepared and then having to backtrack to find out what is happening to them. This may require a certain amount of—how shall we phrase it?—*fudging* on the GM's part to keep the characters alive long enough to complete their task.

Throughout the book you will find a series of encounters listed as "Optional". These encounters add depth and provide extra information for the characters but are not crucial to the furtherance of the plot. Whilst we would encourage you to use these encounters the story will not suffer if the characters' actions lead them away from these locations.

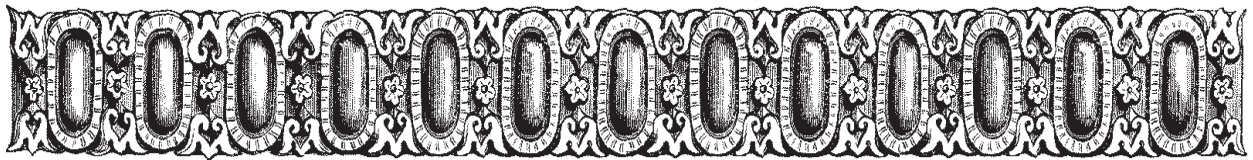
Atmosphere

In a Turjan-level game the Dying Earth is a dark and mysterious place where characters are in control of their destinies and all actions are repaid in kind. Be sure to convey this atmosphere to the players. Don't always describe a situation fully straight away—let information come to the players in dribs and drabs so that they only truly appreciate their predicament when it is too late to weasel out of it. Keep people enigmatic—they have no reason to admit all they know to the characters and have their own reasons for lying or keeping some things to themselves. Suggestions and hints should be used to convince the players that all is not what it seems—odd noises, half-glimpsed faces, strange occurrences that might be coincidence, but then again might not. Choose your words carefully so that locations are described as unearthly and unnerving. Try to evoke a sense of wonder and horror of the world around the players but don't let it get too angst-ridden—this is supposed to be fun, after all!

Established Characters

If you already have a party of characters established and adventuring we suggest that you use this supplement to exploit their contacts and help towards the party attaining their goals (as described on p. 20 of *Turjan's Tome*).

This supplement contains chances to find lost spells and retrieve ancient artefacts and knowledge as well as gaining vengeance on those who have wronged the characters, amongst



other things. In order to help you tailor this supplement to your players' strengths and game requirements, we make several suggestions as to what the Blood of ZoZam may finally be but leave the decision regarding its true powers entirely in your hands. If you have other powers to give to it which will enhance your current campaign you have our blessing to run with it.

New Characters

If the players have yet to roll up characters, this campaign is a good way to bring a party together. During character creation, choosing Tovin (3 points maximum) as a common ally will give the characters a hook into the story and a reason to associate with each other. If this isn't what they want, don't force them into it—Tovin could just as easily be the friend of a mutual acquaintance. If the characters have already been created but haven't adventured yet, use the book as described above, tailoring it to the needs of your group.

New GMs

If you're new to this, the most important thing to remember is that it should be fun for everyone playing, including yourself. Turjan-level characters can be pretty powerful from the word go and sometimes keeping the players under control can be a bit tricky, especially if they've played more than you've GMed.

Fundamentally, it's all about compromise. Don't let the players intimidate you into making a decision you don't like (spell definitions being a prime example) or that doesn't fit with how you see the game. Lay down house rules and stick to your guns. In return, be consistent in your judgements and don't bully them into doing things they don't want to do. With time, you'll get to know your players and how to get them to do what you want without it looking like you're forcing them to do it—all you need is practice (they're quite simple creatures really, bless them).

As long as you appreciate that everyone has a part to play in creating the story and that all you can really do is gently guide them through that story (with the occasional prod), then you'll be fine. Most players will respond to sympathetic GMing and if you do have a problem take the player to one side and have a quiet word with them. It's likely that they didn't realize they were causing any trouble in the first place.

Roleplaying is great fun if done well. The definition of "well" is different for each group and what works for one group may well not work for yours. Always ask for your players' opinions at the end of each session. Did they enjoy it? Was there anything that you could have done (within reason, of course) to make it better? The author, despite many years of experience, still likes to check to make sure that everyone is enjoying themselves and not feeling left out or overly confused¹. It's also a good idea to ask them what they think is happening after each session—that way, if they are missing anything, you can tailor your next installment to cover those areas.

A final tip: know your material well. That doesn't mean learn it by heart (although if you want to, please feel free), but have a good working knowledge of what is happening where (and occasionally when). That way, you'll feel more confident running the game and the players are less likely to ask you something which you can't answer. Of course, if you really don't know the answer, make something up that fits with the rest of the story (just keep a note of it and remember to be consistent). If you are confident and happy, then the players will be too—it's always good to know you are in a safe pair of hands.

Good luck and enjoy yourself.



¹ Her greater experience in these matters is shown by the way she casually caresses the hand of the rack as she asks the question

Getting Started

Act 1: The Stranger From The East

The initial encounters in this act take place in Azenomei (as described in SVG p. 50). There is also a brief description available on p. 147 of the Dying Earth RPG. Whilst it is possible for the game to start anywhere, the presence of the Moon Key (p. 14) means that the characters have a time limit in certain sections of the game. It is in your capable hands to jig the timings to suit, should it prove necessary.

1.1 And So It Begins

Shortly after arriving in town the characters will receive a note from an associate of theirs, a gentleman known locally as Tovin the Accommodator. It is delivered to them by a small child called Auln, who shuffles from foot to foot while they read the note, constantly wiping her nose on the back of her sleeve. If given any message to return, the girl will refuse to leave until she receives a shiny coin or the characters do something to impress her. Like all small children she is not easily impressed.

Auln, Sticky and Belligerent Messenger

That's not much of a trick, mister. Can't you do anything better than that?

About six years of age and constantly grubby, Auln peeps out at the world from behind her shaggy unkempt hair. Terribly serious and conscientious, many of the townsfolk use her to run small errands and deliver little messages. As a result Auln knows much of what goes on in town although she is far too professional to spill the beans. Unless there are sweets involved. Lots of sweets. She is wary of strangers, but fascinated by them.

Persuade (Forthright) 4, Rebuff (Contrary) 4, Attack (Cunning) 4, Defence (Dodge) 6, Health 6, Athletics 8, Concealment 4, Perception 5, Scuttlebutt 8

The details of the note are brief: Tovin has information which he believes is of interest to the characters and asks them to meet him as soon as possible at the Fallen Moon Inn on the Market Square. If they go straight away he will be waiting for them. If they have other more pressing business to attend to and go later he will have left them a note promising to return and requesting that they take a drink at his expense for their inconvenience.

1.1.1 The Fallen Moon Inn

A respectable establishment, the Inn is a quiet refuge from the bustle of the marketplace. Its prices ensure a more genteel clientele than many of the hostels around the square and at this time of day there are only one or two patrons present, although it does get busier in an evening. Tovin has secured a booth at the rear of the tavern and is very pleased to see the characters, whom he

greet effusively. He insists on buying everyone a drink and calls on Olhas the innkeeper to bring over his finest bottle of wine (a very respectable Derna).

Once everyone is seated and has taken a glass of wine, Tovin will begin. He has a pleasant voice and speaks calmly and clearly, although on this occasion there is about a perceptible difference in his tone and his behavior in general. Any characters who know him and have good Perception are likely to spot this. Tovin looks around nervously and there is a barely concealed excitement in his voice, which cracks occasionally as he tells his story.

Tovin's Story

A week or two ago a man arrived in town claiming to have survived the horrors of the Silver Desert in his search for a legendary artefact. He was a local scholar called Edeten, though so changed by the rigors of his trip that few people recognized him. Having sequestered himself away for a day or so to regain his strength and organise his thoughts, he began to tell his friends of his strange quest.

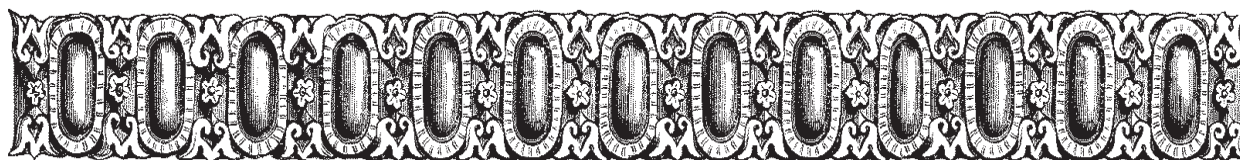
Edeten claimed to have unearthed details of a mysterious relic known as the Blood of ZoZam during his researches into the religious practices of the ancient cities of the east. ZoZam was the creator god of the Gilfigite faith and his blood was believed to be responsible for the creation of mankind. The exact nature of the relic was unclear, but the power promised to the one who found it was not. Intrigued, Edeten set off to uncover more details and journeyed across the Songan Sea to places such as Erze Damath, the mighty but ruinous city on the River Scamander. After much hardship, he believed he had found the key to the recovery of this artefact, but for reasons he refused to make clear had decided to

Tovin, Helpful Associate

I don't know, anyone would think I was trying to play you for a fool or some such nonsense!

An attractive man of medium build, Tovin has a finger in many pies and apparently knows everyone, no matter where he goes. Although he usually moves around quite a bit, he's been in this town for a little while now—he likes the place. He is an affable gent, not given to cruel jests, but his ventures do seem to have a habit of not proceeding quite to plan. Still, fate seems to smile on him and he has survived many scrapes and embarrassments with cheery smile intact. He wears, as always, baggy purple pantaloons, a yellow tunic and a green velvet neckerchief. His blond hair is hidden beneath a purple cap with a bright green feather in it. It is very hard to take offence at Tovin, although he can't take no for an answer, particularly with respect to his current project. He speaks quickly and with the utmost confidence.

Persuade (Charming) 15, Rebuff (Penetrating) 15, Attack (Caution) 12, Defence (Sure-footedness) 14, Magic (Curious) 4, Health 12, Appraisal 8, Athletics 10, Driving 4, Etiquette 5, Perception 12, Quick Fingers 15, Scuttlebutt 8, Stewardship 5, Wealth 3



give up on the quest and return home. If pressed, he would merely repeat “I am not the one for whom the door opens, they have yet to come”.

Not long after his return home, he grew remarkably afraid and watched everyone and everything with a barely concealed terror. He became a virtual recluse, only talking to a few trusted individuals, Tovin included. Around the same time the weather became increasingly bad, with howling gales and torrential rain. During the worst storm in living memory the town was thrashed by screaming winds and lightning split the sky from end to end. The entire town battened down the hatches and waited for the battering to cease.

The morning after the storm, Edeten failed to turn up for a breakfast engagement with his few remaining friends. Upon investigation, it was found that he had vanished, his front door open to the storm and his workroom badly damaged by the wind and rain. Although there were signs of footprints close to the door, no sense could be made of them.

Tovin was one of the last people to see Edeten alive. He had arrived quite unexpectedly at Tovin’s home the night before he vanished. Edeten had grasped Tovin by the shirtfront and hissed, “They are come. They will soon be here. Take them to these shores if you have ever valued my friendship”. It is believed he must have later run away into the storm, never to be seen again. When he had examined the papers, Tovin was surprised to discover good likenesses of the characters and a map, with a small building on the Songan coast circled in red ink.

All thoughts of these events were driven from his head as he mourned the sad disappearance of Edeten and was concerned with the patching and mending of his own home after the weather calmed down. It was only when he received word that the characters were back in town that he remembered his missing friend’s odd request. Now the characters are here he sees it as his duty to his lost friend to carry out his final request and get the characters to the building marked on the map. He believes that, somehow, it is their fate to discover this amazing artefact that Edeten failed to find.

Tovin proposes that he should journey first to this mysterious location to see if he can find any clues as to why the place was so important to Edeten and that they should join him there in about three weeks time. He is due to leave today, but isn’t equipped to take the characters with him. He believes the journey will take him roughly two weeks to complete, give or take a day or so, if the weather holds. If the characters take a few days to equip themselves and find the necessary portage, he will see them at the rendezvous a few days after he arrives there himself. He shows them glimpses of their pictures to back up his story (oddly, they are more like rubbings than actual drawings), but claims not to have the map on him as he has sent it to be copied. He will have the copy delivered to them as soon as it is ready.

What To Do?

The players have a number of options here. Most important is whether they are interested in

GM’s Note:

Not all of the above information is strictly true; this is the version of the story that Tovin wishes to be known. The truth is slightly different in several important respects:

Tovin was only a casual business acquaintance of Edeten, not a close friend.

Edeten never gave any such message to Tovin. Tovin had called to see Edeten on business and seen the characters’ pictures in Edeten’s workbook. When Edeten went missing, Tovin quickly and casually liberated those few pages before the local constabulary locked up the house.

Tovin believes that Edeten was on to something big and wants it for himself. He is only telling the characters because having read some of Edeten’s notes, he’s somewhat shaken by their sudden yet predicted appearance and can’t help himself.

If all thought of the quest had gone out of his head until the characters arrived, why has he got a fully equipped caravan ready to head out today?

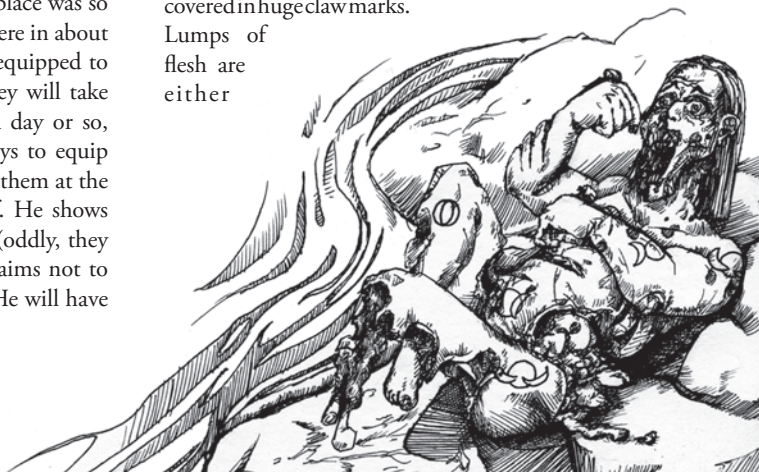
Tovin’s proposal. Their pictures in the workbook of a man they’ve never met or even heard of should be enough to intrigue them, but may not be enough to convince them that this wild goose-chase is worth their time and effort. The thought of discovering some lost and powerful artefact may well be more appealing. Regardless of their decision, Tovin will leave town today immediately after he has seen the characters, no matter how late that is.

1.1.2 The Body In The River

A couple of days after Tovin has left (and before the characters do so, whether they are interested in the quest or not), there is a fierce commotion down by the waterside. If the characters investigate they will find a team of men dragging a body from the river. The child who brought them the message from Tovin is there, but on seeing the characters, she runs away.

The body is in a terrible state and not just from being in the water for a few days. It has been savaged and is covered in huge claw marks.

Lumps of
flesh are
either



Getting Started

The Rumors

- The last person seen talking to Edeten on the night he disappeared was Tovin but this was at Edeten's workrooms not Tovin's house.
- Tovin had been badgering Edeten of late, and the victim had taken to avoiding him.
- There were no footprints down by the water's edge other than those of Edeten and the people who found his body. Oddly, Edeten's footprints only start a few feet away from the riverbank.
- The tattoos were fresh and look like Edeten had been attempting to tattoo himself shortly before he died.
- The tattoos are in silver ink.
- Items have been stolen from Edeten's workrooms—the window at the back has been forced open and someone has been inside.
- The storms ended the night Edeten died.

missing or hang in tatters from the bones. What remains of the face is twisted in a rictus of fear and madness. Those characters with poor Wherewithal scores feel their breakfasts coming back to haunt them. Those with good Perception are likely to notice that, on the flesh that remains intact, some form of crude tattooing is visible. An Illustrious success will suggest that these markings are relatively fresh. It won't take long before someone identifies the body as Edeten.

Questions

The townsfolk are all shocked at the discovery of Edeten's body as many were clinging to the hope that he had merely been disoriented by the storm and run off into the nearby woods to take shelter. Sadly, though, it seems that he met his end that night. Rumors quickly start to spread about how he may have died, despite his injuries, some suspect foul play rather than an attack by a wild beast; particularly because of where the body was

Amre, Local Law-man

If you wouldn't mind, just a few things to clear up.

Amre is stick thin and twitchy, with a straggly beard and a squint that makes him anything but an imposing authority figure. He is absolutely horrified by the injuries done to poor, mad Edeten and now he has a bunch of strangers to deal with who were the last people to see his probable murderer alive and whom he instinctively mistrusts. This has not put him in a good mood and he is snappy and belligerent. This only marginally affects his ability to sniff out a liar at twenty paces.

Persuade (Forthright) 14, Rebuff (Penetrating) 15, Attack (Caution) 15, Defence (Parry) 15, Magic (Studious) 3, Health 14, Athletics 15, Etiquette 10, Pedantry 13, Perception 15, Scuttlebutt 10, Wherewithal 7.

found—how many wild beasts drag their victims into water?. The question on everyone's lips is who would want Edeten dead and, more importantly, why? Everyone has their own pet theory, but a few odd occurrences are coming to light.

As Tovin has conveniently disappeared, the local constables will be keen to interview the last people he was seen talking to: the characters.

Masnia, Distraught Betrothed

Please, I cannot bear to talk about it. Leave me be.

A youngish woman, who would be attractive if not for her tear-stained face, Masnia can barely speak about Edeten. They had been betrothed before he took it into his head to go adventuring. After his return their relationship cooled, but they remained on good terms, Masnia believing that he just needed to settle back into his old ways again before things carried on as before. Edeten suddenly broke off the engagement the day before he vanished, telling her "It is too late". Fasdon has barely left her side since the news, fearful of what she may do.

All Masnia will ask of the characters is that they return to her the final gift she gave to Edeten when it became clear that he would not turn from his mad quest. It is a simple thing, a traveler's gewgaw that she refers to as Vozurd's Pin of Expedient Transit. It is an enamelled brooch, approximately two inches in diameter, which is decorated with a miniature map of the Dying Earth.

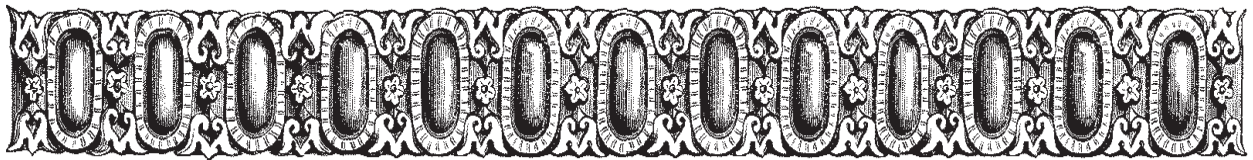
Persuade (Eloquent) 10, Rebuff (Pure-hearted) 12, Defence (Dodge) 10, Magic (Insightful) 1, Health 12, Athletics 8, Perception 10, Seduction 8, Stewardship 6, Wealth 4, Wherewithal 5

Fasdon, Worker of Iron

Of course I'm angry. Just let me get my hands on whatever did this and you'll see how angry.

A big man, as are most in his profession, Fasdon had known Edeten since they were children. His low voice is filled with great sorrow. He was as bemused as everyone else after his friend's return from a trip to Kaiin with a new manuscript suddenly sparked him to get all manner of wild notions about travelling to the east. He is as annoyed at Edeten for getting himself killed as he is at the murderer, convinced that Edeten knew more about his impending death than he was letting on. As for the manuscript, he knows little of it, but thinks it had a grey leather cover with some form of embossed pattern on it.

Persuade (Forthright) 9, Rebuff (Pure-hearted) 12, Attack (Strength) 14, Defence (Parry) 14, Magic (Forceful) 2, Health 12, Appraisal 6, Athletics 10, Craftsmanship (metalwork) 10, Perception 6, Scuttlebutt 4, Stewardship 5, Wealth 3, Wherewithal 8



The Interview

Anbre will not attempt to arrest the characters unless provoked to do so, but he will ask about their connection to Tovin, what Tovin was discussing with them before he left and will enquire as to his current whereabouts.

Anbre will be polite and deferential up to a point (as he would rather avoid antagonizing such obviously well-to-do personages) but will be persistent in his efforts to discover the nature of their involvement in the current situation. Small groups of constables have also been sent out in several directions to try to trace Tovin's movements.

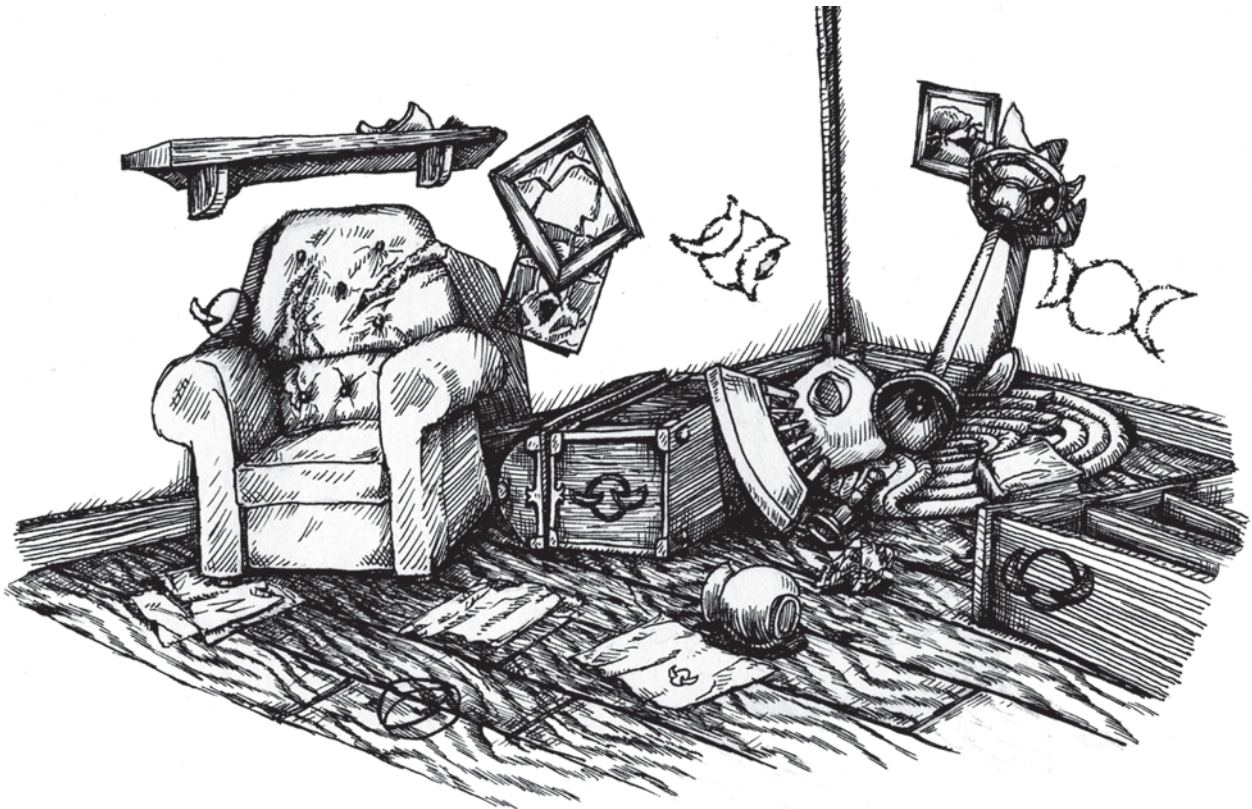
If the characters are charming, helpful and ask the right questions (or just resort to the use of enchantments), he will agree to let them see both Edeten's body and his workrooms. Examination of the body will reveal little that they do not already know: something large, powerful and most probably clawed mauled Edeten to death and then dumped him in the water. The tattoos have been badly damaged both by his injuries and the attentions of a variety of aquatic creatures, but Perceptive characters or those with a particular interest in botany may recognize one of the symbols as a six-petalled flower of some sort. Truly Perceptive characters (Illustrious success only) will notice that Edeten is missing one finger from his left hand.

Anbre can shed little light on Edeten's recent actions other than what everyone else here knows: he was a quiet, scholarly man who suddenly got it into his head to go travelling a few months back and when he returned he was changed somehow fundamentally and never spoke a word of sense again until the day he died. Only his fiancée Masnia and his friend Fasdon the Blacksmith know any more.

1.1.3 The Workroom

This modest, single-storey building with four rooms has been empty and inactive since the night of Edeten's disappearance. The characters are able to confirm the information they have already been given; there are signs of some form of trampling near the door but the use of Tracking reveals no additional clues as the marks are indistinct due to the heavy rain that night (an Illustrious success does suggest that horses may have been here). Spells such as Read Shadows of Time and Shabar's Ambiental Attunement (TT pp. 102,103) produce confusing, swirling images of mounted creatures, screams and unearthly howls. And blood, lots of blood, although none is visible upon the ground.

Those with high Perception or Quick Fingers can see that the rear window has been skillfully forced from the outside. If they are at the house with Anbre's blessing they have the key to get in. If not, it is a simple lock and shouldn't take anyone with a decent Quick Fingers score or in possession of the First Felicitous Progression (TT p. 90) any great length of time to open.



The workroom is in an appalling state.

Getting Started

Inside, the workroom is in an appalling state. The storm has indeed caused a great deal of damage to the house, but that is as nothing compared to the bizarre and disturbing graffiti that cover the walls, ceilings and floors of every room. Even the bench in the workroom proper has been scarred and gouged with a series of repeated symbols. Some of the symbols are colored and appear to be in a silver ink reminiscent of that on Edeten's body, a yellow pigment, and what looks uncomfortably like blood. Others are just drawn in charcoal. There are also numbers scribbled on every surface (see below).

Amongst the broken jars and upturned furniture of the workroom, lie the remains of a single book.

The Flower Manuscript

A soft grey erb-skin, richly embossed with silver and the image of a lily (which just happens to have six petals and is reminiscent of the tattoos on Edeten, for those who are paying attention with either their Pedantry or their Perception) covers this manuscript. What at first appears to be a beautiful folio has in fact been terribly defaced. The silver clasps have been pried from the cover and discarded on the floor and only fragments of the pages remain inside. Pages have been hurriedly ripped from the book rather than carefully removed.

The only other thing of interest about this tattered item is the engraving of a fanciful castle on the inside cover and a faded inscription, which reads: "ZoZam, Blood of: Lost artefact of the Gilfigite faith. Purportedly given to his disciples by Gilfig himself before his miraculous ascension to Gamamere. An obsidian bottle containing the blood of the creator god captured by his scion in the instant after his inception, its powers are unknown. Last recorded existence just prior to the Scourging of the Heretics, who allegedly stole the item and destroyed it." (Later analysis will show that the handwriting is not Edeten's).

Edeten's Notebook

If the characters undertake a thorough search of the workroom, they will uncover another book of a more modest nature than the Flower Manuscript. Hidden behind a dresser where someone exiting the premises via the window may well have thrown it there is a black workbook, badly stained and barely legible. It is Edeten's notebook. A few pages have been torn from part way through the notes, but otherwise it appears to be intact.

The Symbols

There are 6 symbols on the walls and floors.

Symbol 1:



Symbol 2:



Symbol 3:



Symbol 4:



Symbol 5:



Symbol 6:



The Numbers

Wherever there are symbols, there are stick-like numbers:

HTI (6), HTHTI (12), HTHTHTI (18),
HTHTHTHTI (24)

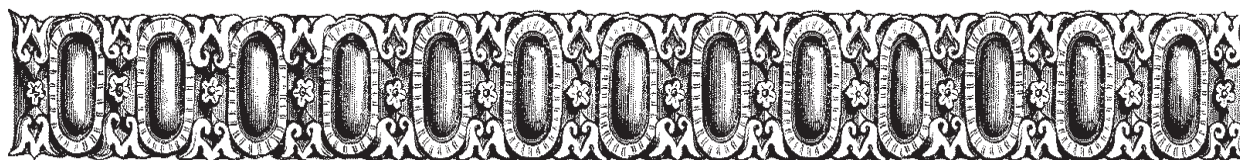
A Prosaic success or greater on a Perception or Pedantry roll identifies that 6 is associated with symbol 2, 12 with symbol 3, 18 with symbol 4 and 24 with symbol 5. There is only one example of a 30 and that is the last entry in the notebook, next to symbol 6.

The Moon Key

From the moment anyone picks this token up, it sets in motion the amulet's mechanism. Slowly and silently, over a period of six days, the amulet's crescents will move to the position shown in symbol 2. Six days later they will have moved to the position in symbol 3 and so on. From the moment at which the crescents encompass the gold disc (symbol 5), the amulet darkens until it is blood red (day 30, symbol 6) and the holder begins to have terrible nightmares. These centre on being hunted down across a starlit, infinite plain by shadowy beings on nightmarish steeds and slobbering beasts of enormous size. The weather also becomes increasingly stormy during the last six days (centred on the person in possession of the amulet). Once the amulet has fully darkened the Wind Riders (see p. 88 for further details) will come forth to despatch their victim and anyone else who gets in the way.

Giving the amulet to someone else does not work as it always returns to the hand of the person who activated it until the cycle is complete. No spells currently extant appear to be able to dispel the enchantment.

The full significance of the amulet is explained on p. 71.



It will require considerable time to read fully because of the water damage, but there are several things that can be gleaned quickly from its pages.

Several months ago, Edeten came into possession of the Flower Manuscript, as he called it, from an unknown source in Kaiin. He mentions several people, ...lfig, Sa... and Hui... (all rain damaged and incomplete). A month later he decided to journey to the locations described in the manuscript. The details of his journeys are mostly missing, but at the back of the book there are notes concerning "D" and the key. There are some brief notes about his journey back and then the drawings begin. After a certain point, there are only the drawings (now marked off with slashes; see box) and ramblings about protecting himself by her grace followed by lots of drawings of lilies. The spell Treviolus' Emblematical Restorative (TT p. 105) can be used to decipher the manuscript, at which point the names become clear (Gilfig, Sammech and Huis).

Further study of Edeten's notes (this requires several days undisturbed work) reveals a growing inability to articulate his thoughts and an obsession with a perceived betrayal, ruins where he found something (the notes are very vague about precisely what, although he believed it was some sort of key) and the fact that someone or something was coming for him. He believed that marking his body would protect him (although by this point the writing is barely legible, a result of shaking hands rather than damage and as such cannot be magically restored) and that he must beware of the full moon.

Very little of the remaining ramblings makes any kind of sense. One quote, though, is very clear: "Why has she done this to me? Am I nothing more than a pawn in their power games? All I asked was to serve her and it shall be my undoing. I am not the one, they are yet to come. She will save me—she must save me from this fate. She must save me."

No matter how hard they search Edeten's house, there is no sign of the trinket that Masnia described to them.

There is little else that the characters can do here to uncover any further information regarding Edeten's death. Should they ask Fasdon or Masnia about the Flower Manuscript, the only information they can give is that Edeten claimed that the book came from a collection found in the ruins of an abandoned manse (location now lost). It had been floating around a variety of booksellers for decades and was considered a cautionary tale to frighten children rather than a scholarly treatise of any sort (concentrating as it did on a vanishing castle with a princess trapped inside). Edeten believed he had discovered something far more than a fairy story and was determined to establish his scholarly reputation by proving that the events in the book were true and not just myths.

As to the notebook and the names, the symbols mean little to anyone else who looks at it. The name of Gilfig is known and someone (a contact with a good Pedantry score perhaps) may recognise the name of Huis as a Prime Adept of another eastern faith (see Chapter 5 for further details). The characters may have contacts elsewhere they wish to question, but bear in mind that

Tovin is carrying the Moon Key now and will be dead when his thirty days is up.

1.1.4 Other Avenues

In case the characters still have questions, or plan to root around until all avenues of investigation are exhausted, we present further diversions for their entertainment.

It was Ralsro who sold Vozurd's Pin to Masnia. He can confirm the sale and also describe the pin's properties (p. 37). He doesn't get them often but there's usually a market for them if he does. He was very sorry to hear about Edeten, who had been an occasional customer over the years.

Ralsro, Peddler of Fripperies

Might I interest you in this fine example of the craftsman's art?

A resident stallholder at the marketplace in Azenomei, Ralsro is getting on a bit. His grey hair is slicked back from his chubby face, which bears one or two minor scars from the wilder days of his youth when he used to collect his merchandise himself; these days he leaves it to younger and fitter adventurers. His stubby hands are covered with rings (several enchanted) and his clothing is kempt though not the height of fashion. He deals mostly in minor enchanted items, rare and exotic herbs and various writing materials.

Persuasion (Eloquent) 13, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 15, Attack (Caution) 8, Defence (Intuition) 12, Magic (Daring) 8, Health 10, Appraisal 11, Craftsmanship (Jewelry) 7, Gambling 8, Pedantry 7, Perception 11, Quick Fingers 9, Scuttlebutt 6, Stewardship 8, Wealth 5.

Tovin's Warehouse

Down on the riverside, this relatively small, two storey warehouse is home to both Tovin and his business. At the rear it backs on to a small private jetty Tovin uses to take delivery of water-born cargo. Downstairs is the storeroom and office, upstairs are Tovin's private rooms.

Should the characters visit after Edeten's body has been discovered there will be a constable watching the front door. The characters will be able to gain access through the loading bay doors round the back if they are sufficiently quiet about it. Inside, much of Tovin's mundane stock is still in place. Naturally enough his cart is missing; as are sufficient provisions for a long trip, should the characters check the neatly written logbooks in the office. There are also records pertaining to Edeten's trip to the east with a full list of everything Tovin supplied. Records which deal with his more specialist services to the magic-using fraternity are kept hidden beneath a floorboard in his private rooms. They are very discreet, with no customer listed by name, only by initials with the items which he has procured for them equally well disguised. Characters will be able to recognise any of their own transactions with Tovin but not those of anyone else.

Getting Started

Characters wishing to outfit themselves for the trip east could always help themselves from the warehouse, although getting the material out of the warehouse without notice could prove tricky. If they wish to use more law-abiding methods there are several outfitters in town who can provide the goods they need.

1.2 The Journey to the East

With their enquiries concluded (which hopefully should have taken about a week), there is still the journey to the rendezvous to make. True to his word, Tovin did have a copy of the map made for the characters. Auln will deliver the map to the characters before they leave town, no matter what their destination actually is. She seems very frightened of them now and quite literally throws the map at them and runs away. If they seek to question her about her behavior, she will scream at the top of her lungs until any adult in the vicinity comes to her rescue. She will then run away again. No amount of bribery or pretty tricks will convince her to stay where the characters are now and she will only shout, "Go away!" at them. She was friends with Edeten and he told her that these people were coming and now she believes that all the strange and horrible things that have happened are their fault. She only gave them the map because Tovin gave her big, bright coins to do it and she'd promised otherwise she really wouldn't have gone near them again.

If the characters have decided to pursue the mystery initiated by Tovin there are two ways in which the journey can be handled: the cinematic and the detailed. Choose the one you think that your players will enjoy the most, but remember that in keeping with the tone of the original Dying Earth stories, travel is often given the briefest of nods unless it is integral to the plot. If you are in possession of the Scaum Valley Gazetteer, then the detailed path will pose little problem for you. Otherwise we suggest cinematic travel, with brief descriptions of places of import only. Some details are provided below to aid you in this.

The journey to the east is quite a long one and should take at least two weeks unless the characters are in possession of transportation magic, such as Thasdrubal's Laganetic Transfer (DERPG p. 110; although the map Tovin has supplied is not detailed enough for use with this spell) or Call to the Violent Cloud (DERPG p. 111). The best way from Azenomei is to travel either on or alongside the Scaum to the forests of eastern Almeri (using SVG if you have it as a guide and to provide side quests to keep the journey interesting). Yimbolo's Mysterious Propulsion (TT p. 108) is an excellent way to tackle such a journey and carts and rafts are easily available along the river. The characters may well run into one of the parties sent out by Anbre to locate Tovin whilst travelling—they haven't managed to find him yet and may well be on their way home empty-handed. As per usual, Tovin's luck appears to be holding.

Those journeying by river must decamp at Osier due to the rapids and use portage there to transfer their boats upstream or continue the journey on foot. The river ends in the Black Lake (SVG p. 145). From there travelers can follow logging trails through the foothills and into the forests that lead to the shores

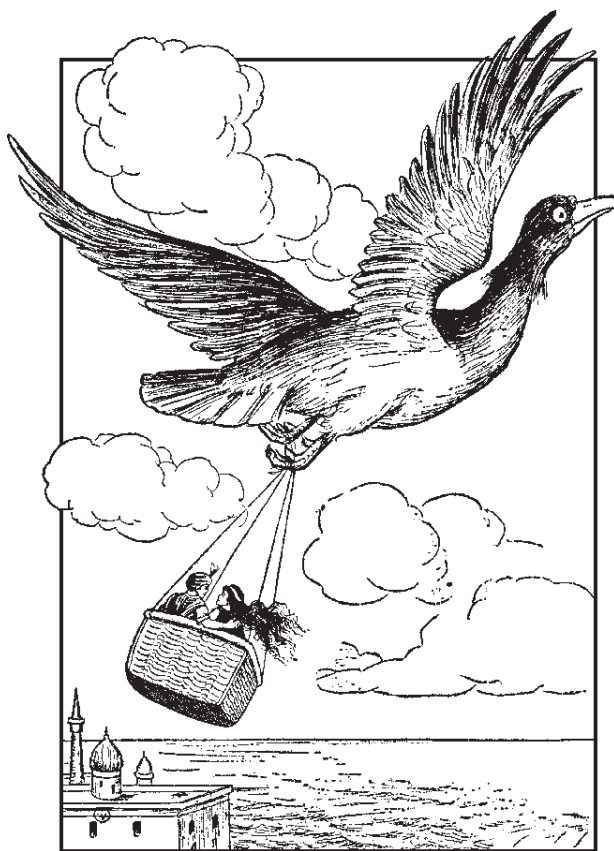
of the Songan Sea. It should take approximately a week to reach the edge of the eastern forest from Azenomei and just over another week to reach the sea (see the suggested timeline in the Introduction, p. 7).

Transportational Magic

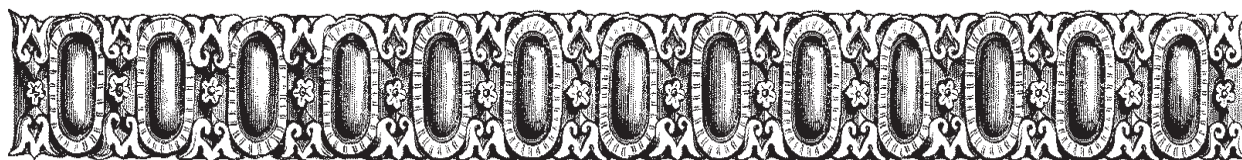
At any point in the game those players with transportation spells may wish to make use of them. In many ways, this makes journey times irrelevant (of greater importance later in the story than now) but shouldn't pose a problem to the GM in terms of plot.

Certain spells, such as Relocalisation and Thasdrubal's Laganetic Transfer, can be used only under very strict circumstances. In the case of the Laganetic Transfer, the caster must either have visited the location, currently be able to see it, have a detailed map or own something from that location. At this point in the game (unless they manage to get a detailed map, which will be very difficult considering their immediate destination) it is unlikely that the characters can transport themselves to the ruined building marked on their map. If, of course, in their previous careers they have been near the area in question then there is no reason why they can't use the spell to jump ahead a bit.

Other spells, such as Call to the Violent Cloud, have no such restrictions. There is no reason why the characters can't use this



Players may find any variety of innovative ways to travel in comfort—or at least at speed.



spell to travel to the location marked on their map, now or at any other time in the game. In this particular case it just means that they'll be sitting around for three weeks waiting for Tovin to arrive. This gives you as the GM plenty of time to get them into all sorts of trouble with the Dangott worshippers and anything else you care to throw at them.

If the characters look as if they are going to miss important information because of the use of transportation magic, you have two options: either don't let it work or find some other way for them to discover the clues. In the first option, you'll have to have to be able to justify why it doesn't work (in the case of the Ironweed Pillar it could be the innate magical nature of the glade interfering with the spell; in the case of Dendara, it's probably a bit difficult to travel to somewhere that isn't actually there yet). Players may feel cheated if you don't have a good reason as to why their cool spell failed. If you are going to use this approach be consistent in your reasoning and then the players can't object too much.

In the second option, use the background information to your advantage. There are lots of people detailed in the source material sections that could well have the clues the players need. There is also no harm in back-tracking through the game—the players can return to any of the locations they wish (with the exception of Dendara) at any time in the game if they feel they have missed something.

In terms of critical timing, nothing can stop Tovin's death. We recommend that if the characters do arrive at the Fane before him, his encounter with the Wind Riders takes place elsewhere (keep them as shadowy figures of menace for the time being). If the characters catch up with Tovin he can always wander off when the time comes. Farnuisa will modify her behavior if the characters are present, but if she meets them she doesn't need a picture of them to cast her foul magics (p. 103). Even if the characters are moving quickly using magic after they have acquired the Moon Key, the Wind Riders will be waiting for them in the desert whether or not their time is up (p. 88).

The best advice we can give you about transportation magic is: don't panic. Many players forget they have it (if they have it at all; one group of playtesters took the option to pick their spells at random during character creation and all three failed to get any spell of this nature). If they don't forget, it isn't a barrier to good story telling. They may miss little bits here and there, but nothing that should spoil the game.

1.2.1 The Eastern Forest

If any of the characters have taken Zاراides the Sage (TT p. 135) as an acquaintance this will give them a chance to exploit that relationship, for the route they are travelling takes them close to his manse Prillovan. He will be happy to see any worthy scholars and could be of assistance

to the characters in their quest, if they behave themselves.

Whilst travelling at the fringes of the great forest below the Maurenron Mountains a massive daobado tree can be seen. Within its branches sits a building of great complexity. This is the manse of Zاراides. Entry is gained from a set of stairs carved into a ground-sweeping branch. Nearby a curious building rests atop a cleared hillock. On this day, Zاراides is trimming the smaller branches of his tree so that they do not obscure the view across the forest to the odd little building which is his observatory. Loud chimes ring out as the characters approach and the air become thick and difficult to move through due to Zاراides' own protective ward based on a variation of the Obstructive Ether (TT p. 96). Once he has caught sight of the characters Zاراides waves his hand and walking becomes much easier. He welcomes them and is particularly effusive if they are already known to him. He is a gracious host and offers refreshment on his veranda before they get down to business.

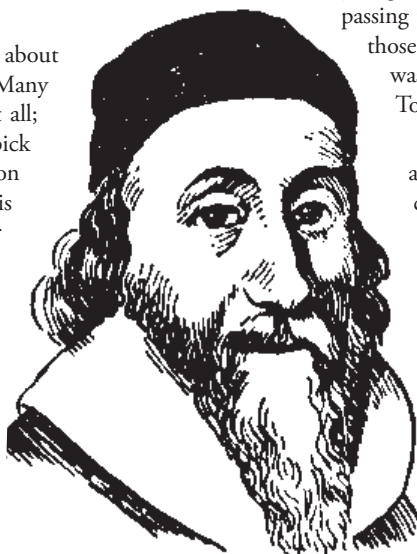
If the characters have the Flower Manuscript, he will immediately identify the flower on the cover as a Starsand Lily, a plant now believed to be extinct. It flourished in the area now known as the Silver Desert millennia ago and was used in the production of fine pigments and dyes. He has never seen one and only knows of it through his researches. He produces a book that has a detailed drawing of the flower. The flower head is approximately hand sized and the six petals are a fine, almost luminous white traced with silver veins. The stamen are midnight blue with silver pollen sacs and the foliage is also midnight blue. It is a very unusual flower, blossoming only at night. Legend has it that the glow of the moon caused the flowers to open and when the moon fell the flowers withered and died.

Zاراides is not an expert on religions of the east. He's heard of Gilfig, as remnants of the faith do exist in the west (SVG p. 37), but the other names mean little to him. Although he is intrigued by the symbols in Edeten's notebook he is at a loss as to what they might represent. He doesn't remember any travelers passing this way over the last month or so, except for those that deliberately sought him out and Edeten was not one of those. He doesn't recall seeing Tovin either.

Zاراides' home is open to the characters as a place to rest until they feel the need to continue on their journey. He will warn them of the Luzzel (TT p. 130) before they leave and give details as to the locations of some of their hideaways, although he does not know them all.

The Rat-folk

If the characters are travelling on foot then they are in danger of ambush by the Luzzel. Otherwise the creatures will use more cunning means to trap their foe. For example, whilst following the trail from Prillovan further into the forest, they hear cries of distress coming from the



Zاراides the Sage

Getting Started

undergrowth. Those with high Perception may spot this as a trap, but only if they have been to see Zارايدس and have been warned about the Luzzel.

Investigating the cries leads the characters to a small cave, its entrance obscured behind large bushes. The plaintive cries come from within. A female voice begs for help and asks someone to please come in and carry her out, as she has broken her ankle after a fall in the dark and cannot move.

Should anyone use Stealth or concealing magics to enter, they can just make out a recumbent figure close to the back of the cave. A successful Perception roll may even indicate the presence of shadowy figures (Illustrious success only due to the poor light levels). Anyone who enters the cave openly is rapidly attacked by a dozen armed rat-people (use the statistics given on p. 131 of Turjan's Tome). They are armed with tridents and will attempt to drag any victims into their tunnels. They can be cowed by sudden bursts of bright light (such as Drumphilio's Adequate Illuminator, TT p. 88) and displays of excessive force.

Fighting within the confines of the cave is difficult due to the low ceiling and the lack of sufficient daylight (penalty of 1 to all attack and defence rolls; on a Quotidian failure there is a 50% chance that the character will hit a comrade). Once half of their number have been dispatched, the Luzzel will withdraw back into their tunnels, leaving the woman behind.

Should anyone be captured: the Luzzel will take prisoners (using the restraint rules on DERPG p. 49) if they can sufficiently gang up on a person (minimum of four Luzzel to one character). The restrained character will then be dragged into a labyrinthine series of tunnels and boltholes and unceremoniously dumped into a holding cell, having been disarmed. Spells such as Phandaal's Inside Out and Over (DERPG p. 108) have been successfully used before against such imprisonment, but strength, violent magics and promises of great rewards could also be used to secure freedom.

Pozarl, Local Girl

I'm so sorry, but they made me say it. They were going to eat me, what else could I do?

Small, dirty, battered and bruised, this young woman has been royally abused by her captors. Her square face is stained with tears and dirt and her dark hair is matted to her scalp with dried blood. She is understandably reticent to deal with her rescuers (to tell the truth, she's also a little concussed), but provided that the characters mean her no harm and didn't cause her injury whilst fending off the Luzzel she will ask them to escort her to her village. If they did cause her any harm during the fight she will run off into the forest unless they can convince her that it was an accident. The characters can try to follow her if they wish.

Persuade (Charming) 8, Rebuff (Wary) 9, Attack (Speed) 8, Defence (Dodge) 10, Health 10, Athletics 12, Perception 9, Wherewithal 5

1.2.2 Optional Encounter: Woodkiln Village

A small gathering of huts, Woodkiln is home to an enclave of charcoal burners about half a day's walk from the Luzzel cave. The thatched buildings are corralled behind a thick thorn hedge in a wide artificial clearing. The mounds for firing the wood dot the open ground outside the hedge and continue into the trees. The area is wreathed in thick blue wood-smoke.

The residents had given up hope of ever seeing Pozarl again and are very grateful to the characters, although they have little to offer as a reward save refreshment and charcoal. If questioned they recall seeing a cart being driven by a man with a green cap on the logger's road five miles south of the village about a week ago. If questioned about Edeten, they also remember rescuing a rather dishevelled man matching the description they've been given from a Luzzel ambush party a month or more previously. He had refused aid, despite being hurt, and had run off mumbling, "They're coming, they're coming". He dropped something, which the villagers are happy to fetch for inspection.

Edeten's Token

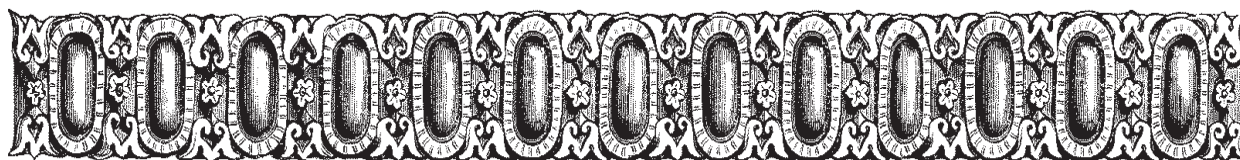
In his haste to leave the area Edeten dropped a small pouch made from an incredibly fine material like nothing the characters have ever seen (its actually cloth-of-silver, described on p. 93). Inside the pouch, protected in a parchment packet, is a dried and folded flower. If they have visited Zارايدس, then they recognise it instantly—it is a Starsand Lily. Those with knowledge of these things (botany, for example) will realize that this flower is relatively fresh and hasn't yet fully finished the desiccation process. Where on earth did Edeten get an extinct flower from?

The villagers will happily set the characters on the path to the logger's road. As far as they know the road stops at the logging camp, although other trails do lead on to the sea. They recall that there used to be a small dock somewhere along the coastline that the loggers used to bring in supplies before the road was finished, so perhaps that road is still there.

1.2.3 The Logging Camp

A couple of days further east of Woodkiln Village lies a large stockade, with twenty-foot high walls of stripped tree trunks and an impressive surrounding ditch. The road leads directly to the massive double gateway, which is guarded by four burly men.

The gatemen can tell the characters little other than that they did see a couple of people, one matching Tovin's description, amble past on a cart about a week ago (depending on how fast the travelers are going; it is assumed that the characters are travelling on a slow moving cart full of supplies or by foot. Adjust times according to their mode of transport; nevertheless, Tovin is always ahead of them). They directed him down the overgrown remains of the shipment road used when the camp was under construction which seems to fetch up on the coast not far from the location marked on his map. They have no idea who the other person was, but she looked out of place in an odd sort of way. Still, as the characters know, Tovin could charm the birds out of the trees and it wasn't unusual for him to find himself a companion on long trips.



Hendin, Jakarak, Buncis and Vuquar, Gatemen

Please state your business or else be gone.

Not skilled in the finer points of etiquette, these four bruisers have been employed by the logging company to make sure that nothing gets in the gates that shouldn't. It's a boring job with only the occasional assault by ravaging half-men, and the four can usually be found playing cards at a table they have erected next to the gate. Vuquar, the tallest of the group, is the head gateman and is the most eloquent of the four. He also has fewer scars and finer clothes (a result of his better fighting and card playing skills).

Vuquar: Persuade (Glib) 10, Rebuff (Penetrating) 12, Attack (Cunning) 15, Defence (Misdirection) 15, Health 12, Athletics 12, Gambling 9, Living Rough 9, Perception 10, Stealth 7, Tracking 9, Wherewithal 7

Hendin, Jakarak and Buncis: Persuade (Intimidating) 8, Rebuff (Contrary) 9, Attack (Strength) 13, Defence (Parry) 12, Health 10, Athletics 11, Gambling 4, Living Rough 9, Wherewithal 6

Inside the logging camp (should they wish to see it), there are clusters of offices and huts, enclosures for dray beasts and massive machines powered both by beasts and the small river that runs through the centre of the camp. Logs from immense trees are being sawn into smaller lengths before being loaded on to huge wagons drawn by anything up to twelve beasts, which then transport the logs along the road to Val Ombrio. The characters will more than likely have been passed by such wagons on their way here as well as by the other drays dragging the logs in to the compound from the surrounding forests.

Rumors

The Luzzel are getting bolder and seem to be more organized. Some of the forest inhabitants have seen them wielding a strange amulet that seems to drain the will of those they turn it upon. How did they get hold of this artefact and what other secrets might their lairs contain?

Zaraides is convinced that strange things are happening in the night sky. His telescope is losing stars, almost as if they are winking out of existence, only to reappear again a few nights later. Is he going mad, or is someone playing tricks on him. He's made a few enemies in his time—is someone trying to get him to make a fool of himself? Can the characters help their friend (if he is such) and determine the nature of the odd missing stars?

Deep in the forest there stands a statue of a hunched and hideous man-thing. The local foresters avoid the area after nightfall when they claim the thing springs to life and stalks the forest. Each evening, a terrible wail of anguish is heard in the area of the statue's glade. What is the creature, if it is a creature, and why does it howl so? What does it seek on its nightly wanderings?

Essential Plot Points

- A man claiming to have uncovered the secret behind some powerful artefact has been killed in mysterious and bloody circumstances.
- An acquaintance of the characters is a major suspect in his death and has apparently stolen papers belonging to the dead man.
- The murder suspect wants the characters to meet him at a ruin on the shores of the Songan Sea in order to fulfil a promise to the dead man (or so he claims).
- The dead man, someone the characters have never heard of before, had accurate likenesses of them in his workbook.
- Someone has gone to great lengths to remove the contents of the book Edeten was studying.
- The symbols and numbers in Edeten's notebook were very important to him, but why?
- The flower on the damaged manuscript's cover is an extinct flower from the Silver Desert region, an area the dead man claims to have just returned from.
- The dead man had attempted to tattoo himself with silver ink just before his death. Why, and why were the designs similar to the flower on the book's cover?



Chapter 3

The Songan Sea

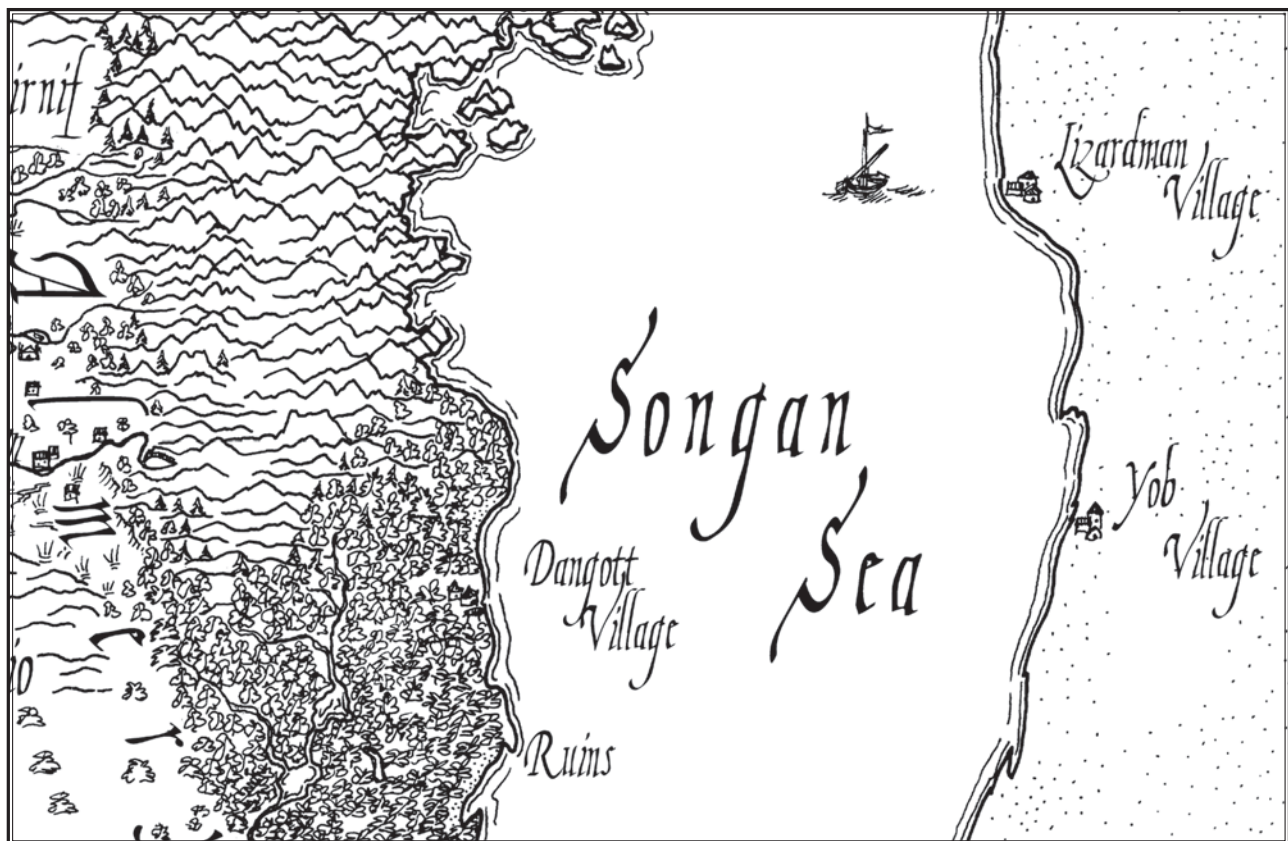
By my nose, this is barely a sea at all. Why you insisted I should visit this marshy mire on my travels, I will never know, unless you had the express intention that I be eaten alive by all manner of insidious burrowing things. Granted, there are peculiarities of interest along the coastline, although everything here is topsy-turvy and nothing can be taken at face value. Still, I hardly think them worth the expense of Kager's finest insect and parasite repellent, which we have used by the veritable pail full. I do hope you persuaded him to offer you a generous discount considering the quantities involved. Dearest Relfan, please tell me what it is that I have done to offend you so that I may apologise wholeheartedly, and thus you may direct me on to more pleasant climes.

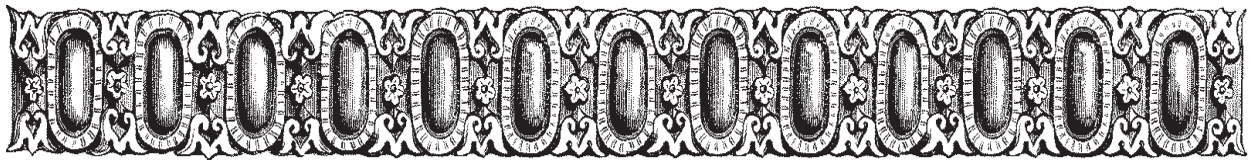
Sakonity the Adamantine

The Songan Sea

This inland sea is an offshoot of the Ocean of Slow Tides, its shores lined by marshes and lost villages and the rumored lost fane of Gilfig. It is bordered to the west by the Maurenron Mountains and the southern forests of Almerly and to the east by the Silver Desert. The waters are black, shimmering and possessed of a strangely metallic smell and sheen, almost as if oil had been poured upon the brackish, leaden sea. The margins hum with insect life and other creeping things but once upon the water there is an unearthly quiet, broken only by winds that

suddenly rise from the east, carrying the heat of the desert upon them. It takes approximately eight days to cross the sea from east to west, longer in the opposite direction as you are sailing into the prevailing winds. Marine life is mostly confined to the sun-warmed shallows, as the central regions of the sea are too dark to permit much to survive there. A variety of fish and molluscs permit the continuance of scattered settlements and the mud from the shoreline is revered in Kaiin as greatly beneficial to the skin of those mature ladies of society.





Dangott Village

The village of Dangott stands on the western shore of the Sea and is named for its patron deity (see also the *Compendium of Universal Knowledge*, p. 54). The people here are golden-haired and graceful, with voices of such musical beauty that enraptures even the most tone-deaf ear. The children are bonny and bouncing, the adults free from those illnesses that should by rights plague people living so close to marshy hinterlands while the few domestic animals are strong and lusty. The diet here consists of fruits and berries gathered from the nearby forests, game, fish and domestic beast.

Unfortunately, the golden appearance of the Dangott inhabitants belies their cruel and prejudicial nature. All those who pass through Dangott land are in severe danger from the strict religious doctrine practiced by the local peoples, which dictates that outsiders are heretics, sent by their god as food for the sacred apes of Dangott. These golden creatures are believed to be avatars of the monstrous ape god and are kept in a sturdy enclosure at the centre of the village. A palisaded arena in front of the enclosure is used for the ritual offering of heretics to the god. When heretics are scarce, the apes are fed soporific berries to keep them sufficiently docile and in order to avoid any unfortunate

Dangott Worshipper

You have been chosen as an offering to Dangott and therefore should be grateful of the honour. Why, then, do you struggle so?

The men and women of Dangott village and associated nearby villages are tall and lithe, with hairless bodies except for that which grows on their heads. Their lustrous golden curls are a blessing from Dangott and are worn free and wild in honour of their animalistic deity. Simple dress made from fine woven reeds is all that covers their bodies.

Persuasion (Forthright) 10, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 10, Attack (Speed) 12, Defence (Sure-footedness) 13, Health 15, Athletics 11, Craftsmanship 5, Perception 12, Seduction 8, Tracking 9, Wherewithal 7

Dangott Priest

Be still that I may anoint you with the sacred mud. It would never do to present you unprepared.

The priests of the village are the titular rulers of this region of coastline and maintain the society with an iron will and the mandate of Dangott. Unlike the other inhabitants of Dangott village they dress in robes of yellow linen, dyed with the pollen of certain sacred plants from the forest. The mud along this part of the coast is a rich red ochre, used by the priests to anoint their bodies and the bodies of sacrificial victims. They also trim their hair to a length similar to that of the sacred apes.

Persuasion (Intimidating) 14, Rebuff (Penetrating) 14, Attack (Cunning) 9, Defence (Dodge) 10, Magic (Forceful) 8, Health 12, Athletics 7, Etiquette 6, Pedantry 7, Perception 12, Stewardship 10, Wherewithal 9



Unfortunately, the golden appearance of the Dangott inhabitants belies their cruel and prejudicial nature.

The Songan Sea

incidents. The villagers find it incomprehensible that anyone would wish to avoid the honour of being sacrificed to such a great deity and react swiftly and violently towards any who attempt to escape. Their favoured weapons in this regard are weighted nets and harpoons.

Sacrifice

Any heretics who are caught are taken before the priests for summary judgement. They are stripped and anointed with mud before being manhandled into the arena in the centre of the village. A great wail rises from the gathered onlookers, which is answered by hollering and squealing from the shadowy enclosure behind the arena. When the howling reaches fever pitch the gates of the enclosure are opened by a remote mechanism and four sacred apes rush into the arena to rend any unfortunates in their path limb from limb. Needless to say, the floor of the arena is heavily stained by a variety of bodily fluids. When the sacrifice is complete, the apes are tempted back into the enclosure with their favorite berries and any remains are removed by the priests once the enclosure gates are safely secured. These remains are usually dumped on the forest edges, being considered unworthy if the apes do not deign to eat them.

Yob Village

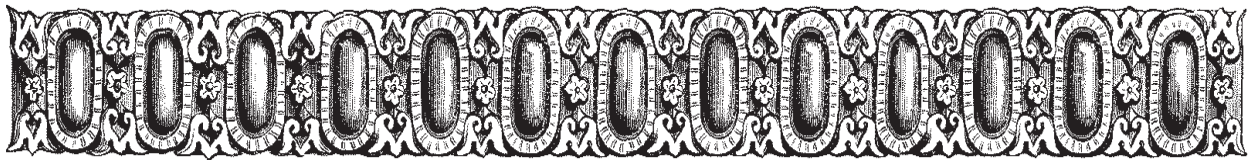
On the other side of the Songan Sea, directly opposite the Village of Dangott, is a village inhabited by worshippers of the fish god Yob. This village of sturdy blackstone dwellings sits atop a headland overlooking a sheltered bay where their fishing fleet is kept at anchor. Nearby is a pleasant woodland of tamarisk and larch, where wild honey can be gathered. Care must be taken to avoid the sand weevil (see Appendix), a creophagous creature that likes to nest in hair, where its myriad offspring can feast upon the scalps of the unwary.

Unlike their shining neighbors across the Songan Sea, the inhabitants of this village (and several other, smaller, enclaves along the coast to the south) are of a fearsome aspect. Their round, clay-colored faces are surrounded by shocks of spiky black hair with matching tufts of coarse bristles on their shoulders. Their voices are loud, harsh and growling and huge teeth protrude from both jaws.

Fortunately their loathsome appearance is one caused by circumstance and not reflected in their outlook or behavior—they are a kindly people who believe in hospitality and generosity to strangers. As Yob gives to them the bounty of the sea, so they share their bounty with others.



Fortunately their loathsome appearance is one caused by circumstance and not reflected in their outlook or behavior



The Ritual Feast

The sharing of a rich savory stew is a favoured rite amongst the Yob worshippers when they are entertaining guests to whom they believe they can or have been of particular aid. The stew is nourishing and filling, and makes full use of ingredients gathered from the local environment. Its main content is, though, somewhat unorthodox to the less well-traveled denizens of the Dying Earth.

Yob Worshipper

Can you not speak up? Please forgive me, but I cannot hear you!

Despite their grotesque appearance, the villagers are kindly. They shout because they suffer from a mild congenital deafness. Enunciation is made difficult by their teeth, which are ideal for tearing the tough but sweet flesh of their favorite catch, the Blue Bladefish. Their hairstyles are ideal protection from the sand weevil, which dislikes coarse hair and the unguent the villagers swear by (a thick paste made from seaweed¹), which enhances the natural color and spikiness of the villagers' own hair.

Persuasion (Intimidating) 11, Rebuff (Pure-hearted) 13, Attack (Strength) 12, Defence (Parry) 12, Health 14, Athletics 8, Craftsmanship 4, Perception 9, Seamanship 8, Tracking 7, Wherewithal 8

Yob Elder

It is good to see you, fellow. Come, make conversation and tell us how we may best aid you on your travels.

The villages of the Yob worshippers are managed, rather than ruled, by an elected elder whom the inhabitants deem to be the wisest among them. Often they will have been the best fishermen in their youth, respected for their ability to judge the movements of the shoals of fish by which the villagers survive.

The elder has the largest and best-appointed hut in the village and nominally the choice of the finest fish from the daily catch, although it would be frowned upon should they actually exercise that particular privilege (due to the general attitude of the Yob worshippers, the matter has rarely come up). Should the incumbent wish to relinquish their post in favour of a younger candidate, they are permitted to do so with no recriminations and a feast to thank them for their guidance in the past.

Persuasion (Intimidating) 13, Rebuff (Pure-hearted) 14, Attack (Caution) 10, Defence (Intuition) 12, Magic (Curious) 8, Health 10, Appraisal 9, Athletics 6, Etiquette 6, Perception 14, Scuttlebutt 8, Seamanship 10, Stewardship 8, Wherewithal 9

¹ This unguent can be purchased in Kaiin, where it costs 400 terces for a three minim pot. This is enough to cure constipation or druxy.

Preparation of the stew is an event for the whole village and one of which they are especially proud. A large ceremonial cauldron is kept expressly for the purpose of making the stew and is erected on a tripod over a huge bonfire in the clearing in front of the elder's hut. A special block and cleaver are also required for the ritual and during the preparation of the feast each villager chops off one finger and throws it into the pot. Any visitors are expected to do the same and it is a grave insult not to do so. Indeed, this is the only way in which to provoke the Yob worshippers to violence of any sort and results in the offending individuals being cast into the sea from the headland on which the village stands.

The preparation of the stew is believed to represent the mutual dependence and common heritage of those gathered before the cauldron. The Yob worshippers also believe it helps them attain spiritual unity with all other creatures, a defining tenet of their belief.

One particular peculiarity of their diet has saved the Yob worshippers from suffering a deficit of digits, a problem that would undoubtedly plague the generous folk and ruin their skill at fishing. The flesh of the Blue Bladefish of which they are so fond is full of a restorative oil that induces the regrowth of such severed appendages. Growth is slow but inexorable, taking on average a month to regrow a centimeter of finger. The villagers believe that Yob is showing them great favour for their previous kindness by restoring their fingers, thus enabling them to share them time and again with their friends and acquaintances.

Blue Bladefish Oil

5pts per minim

SUMMARY

The oil extracted from the flesh of the Blue Bladefish induces the regrowth of severed appendages.

DESCRIPTION

The oil is pressed from fillets of freshly caught fish, and purified by slow straining and skimming. A long and time consuming process, twenty fish produce on minim of oil, and one minim of oil will allow the patient to regrow up to twelve inches of new limb in less than a day. Note that lost teeth are replaced first, so the process can be a somewhat painful especially as the patient must eat enthusiastically while the process is underway to ensure the body has the resources to replace the lost flesh. Hearty meals containing lots of cooked meats washed down with strong ales are to be recommended.

The oil also speeds recovery from cuts and similar wounds.

PURPORTED LOCATION

It is occasionally made to order by the Yob worshipping villagers along the Songan Sea.

The Songan Sea

The Ghost City

Of particular danger to the unwary traveler is a city of great beauty but deadly intent that appears on calm nights about a four days walk north of the Yob village. Many have perished here, entranced by its lights and music and the joyous revels of its inhabitants. Often a spectral barge, packed with silken cushions and musicians and propelled by a cornflower blue sail, will follow travelers along the shore, the better to entrap their souls in the never ending pageant of a dead age.

The first thing that most people notice about the city is the sound of music wafting across the gentle ripples of the Sea. The tunes are old and stately, full of a seditious energy and vitality that is most arresting. The music is predominantly played upon the horn and lute, although occasionally voices are raised in accompaniment. The melodies change every night and reflect the activities of the revellers, or perhaps more accurately, drives them on in their celebrations.

The most striking thing about the city itself are the delicate towers, which rise to giddy heights above the colorful streets. White, floating lights drift up and down the towers, bathing them in a glow that should be harsh, but is strangely entrancing. On some nights fireworks light up the sky, flooding the city with waves of sparkling color and sound and captivating the eye with the subtlety of their display.

The Ghost City in Game Terms

On first seeing the dread apparition, the character must resist a Wherewithal roll, or they will attempt to swim to either the barge or the city. Should they fail, refer to the Drowning rules in the main rulebook (p. 54-55). Should they succeed in reaching either of the phantom entities, they vanish and the character is left alone in the dark, dangerous water and must now attempt the safe return to shore.

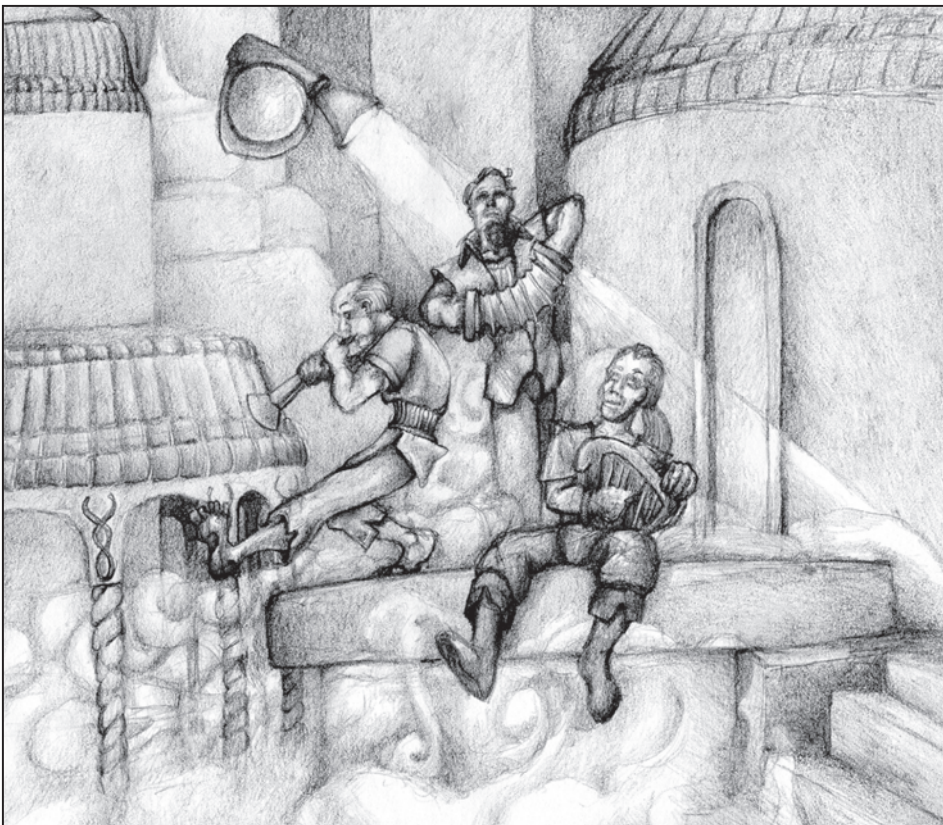
Another Wherewithal roll is required after the city has vanished. If they succeed then they will realise the danger they are in if they remain in the area and should now be willing to beat a hasty retreat. If they fail they stay put, desperate to catch one more glimpse of the city's decadent wonders, and will have to face the same challenge again that evening.

The revellers also captivate, dressed in shining garments of strange and voluminous design, masked on some nights, on other nights in plain view. The colors they wear are bright and intense despite their apparently insubstantial nature. Their voices are never clear, but the sound of the crowd is unmistakably joyous.

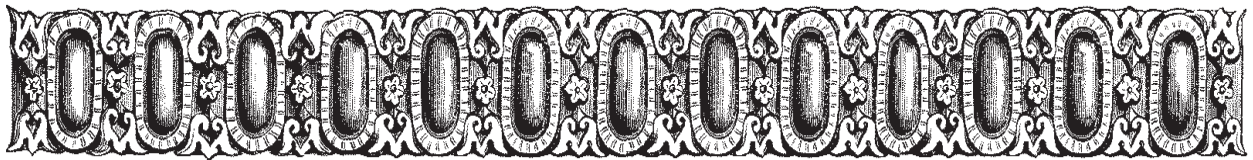
The origins of the city are unknown, although from the style of dress and music it may be from a time before the Songan Sea completely flooded the area, a time of decadence and elaborate pleasure gardens suddenly destroyed when the sea broke through in crushing torrents.

Whatever its origins, the city has caused the death of most of those who have seen it. When the city is visible a great wonder swells within the observer drawing them inexorably towards it and leading them to try to wade out to the city. This has led to many drownings as the Songan Sea is both cold and treacherous.

A few hours before sunrise the city disappears from view. Those who have observed it are engulfed by a painful and heart-rending sorrow, leaving them exhausted and unwilling to leave the area. This area of shoreline and its shallows are littered with the remains of those who could not break the spell and perished, lost in dreams of faded glory. Many useful items could be hidden amongst the bones and reeds, provided the characters are not averse to a little corpse robbing.



The music is predominantly played upon the horn and lute.



Lizard Village

Two days north of the Ghost City lies a village of crude reed huts, the home of a small enclave of Lizard Men. The huts are gathered in a rough circle bordered by a low, clumsily woven fence. The surrounding area is marshy and thick with insect life, one of the reasons the Lizard-folk chose to settle here (that and its relative distance from any habitations of man). There are several other similar enclaves in this area although this is one of the larger settlements, comprising eleven families in all. None of the settlements welcome visitors and are openly hostile to intruders.

Balch the Invader

When Cugel visited here in his "search" for the lost Fane of Gilfig, a fellow pilgrim called Balch decided to install himself as ruler of this village, along with ten other pilgrims. They killed the males, filed the women's teeth and dressed them in reeds.

Should your characters come across the village after these events, they will find a very sorry state of affairs. The surviving pilgrims have descended into virtual bestialism, dressed in rags, eating raw fish and mumbling incoherently. The women, whose teeth are not so well filed these days, have had more than a little to do with the pilgrim's madness, having poisoned them with the venom from a variety of marsh insects. They are waiting for the usurpers to become too weak to defend themselves against young males from the outlying villages, who even now are readying themselves to take back their territory.

Lizard Person

Go away, tailless. You are not wanted here.

Short, stocky and heavily muscled, Lizard People have no love for humans (except in some villages where they do love them with a nice samphire sauce). They are agile but not particularly fast moving as sure-footedness is superior to speed in the sucking, grasping marshes surrounding their villages. Their skins are mottled green and closely match the colors of the reeds in which they hunt. They wear no clothes as these tend to be more of a hindrance than anything else. To help with balance, all Lizard People have a thick blue tail, the color being more pronounced in older more virile males. Female tails are usually a uniform mid-blue, whereas adolescents' tails are virtually flesh colored, with only a pale hint of the color to come.

Their teeth are sharp and pointed to deal with their diet of raw fish and large invertebrates caught in the shallows and the marshes. When fishing some villagers prefer to use their claws, others a crude spear. Stone weapons are common, metal is not. Until the sun has had time to warm the Lizard Folk they are sluggish and easy to outwit. They dislike fire, although they will use it in the winter months to warm themselves otherwise hunting would become impossible.

Persuasion (Intimidating) 11, Rebuff (Wary) 12, Attack (Strength) 13, Defence (Sure-footedness) 13, Health 12, Athletics 11, Concealment 7, Living Rough 9, Perception 11, Stealth 9, Tracking 10, Wherewithal 6



The home of a small enclave of Lizard Men

The Songan Sea

Act 2: The Lost Fane of Gilfig

Having been set upon the road to the sea by the guards at the logging camp, the characters can now continue their journey to the place marked on the mysterious map given to them by Tovin. But what is this place and more to the point, can Tovin be trusted? And why is the weather so bad?

The Lost Fane of Gilfig

Despite the fact that Cugel the Clever invented a lost fane as a means to con his fellow pilgrims into one last journey (*Tales of the Dying Earth* p. 247), there is indeed such a place, but on the opposite shore of the Songan Sea to the one professed by Cugel. An ancient and long abandoned site of worship it is still, technically speaking, consecrated ground holy to Gilfigites and would be of great interest to the faithful of Erze Damath, some of whom are looking to re-establish a toe-hold on foreign shores

2.1 The Western Shore

2.1.1 The Decayed Docks

After a few more days trekking along a heavily overgrown road (if the players grow fractious, we suggest sending them a few deodand or hoon to play with; two per character should be a sufficient distraction) the road leads down to the water and a series of abandoned jetties and buildings that have all but been reclaimed by the forest and the sea. The weather has gradually been getting worse and even under the shelter of the trees, a hot choking wind seems to be blowing in from the east. Coupled with the increasing rainstorms, the conditions are rapidly deteriorating.

There are signs that someone has indeed been at the port recently. A successful use of Tracking or other means of detection, such as Shabar's Ambienttal Attunement (TT p. 120) should bring this information to light, as should the discarded remnants of food and the ashes from a campfire. Indeed, careful searching of the area (and a successful Perception roll) will lead to the discovery of a note stuck to remains of a doorpost close to the water's edge.

The Note

Scrawled in a familiar hand is a note from Tovin. It reads:

Got here with only a few minor scrapes, although I thought I'd had it with those rat things! Trust you didn't have too many problems? Of course you didn't! Silly question. This weather is terrible—it's keeping me awake at night (amongst other things). Not far now—I believe the building on our map is just a day or so north of here. See you soon. Tovin.

By the time they have found this note, it is getting dark and it is too late to safely try and follow Tovin's tracks. During the night, the storms reach a crescendo. Lightning rends the sky and the thunder is so loud and booming that it rattles the characters' teeth in their skulls. There is little shelter at the port, so unless the characters are in possession of such magics as either Phandaal's

Critique of the Chill (DERPG p. 108) or Phandaal's Sheltering Radiance (TT p. 100), they will spend a miserable night here. There are other noises on the wind, far less pleasant than the thunder, and these too will keep the characters awake. The night is filled with screeches and roars and terrible crashing sounds, as if something monstrous was charging through the forests to the north. In the early hours of the morning, after one particularly blood-curling scream, the storm suddenly stops and all becomes calm; the wind drops and the rain abates. By morning the forests are steaming but well on the way to being dry.

After a little searching (successful Tracking rolls or other such skills greatly aid this endeavour), the characters find a battered trail that leads off from the port towards the north. It would appear that despite the closeness of the vegetation, Tovin has decided to push on with his cart for the ruins.

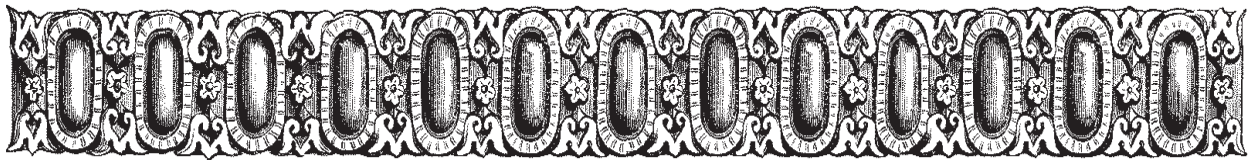
2.1.2 The Ruin

After another day of thrashing through the trees the characters stumble upon the remains of a small building, set on a low headland overlooking the Songan Sea. The ruin is overgrown with creepers and small trees sprout from the tops of its shattered walls. A cursory investigation reveals that only the northern wall, in which the door is set, remains fully intact. The other walls are in varying states of decay, though all still stand to at least ten feet in height. The ornate doorway is undamaged, although the door itself has long since vanished.

Above the arch carvings are obscured by the vines. Clearing away the vegetation reveals the inscription, "Let thy devotion be as a kindness to thy brethren, let thy honesty be as clear and pure as his holy light". The characters have seen this somewhere before. A successful Pedantry roll identifies it as a quotation in Edeten's workbook under the words "Gilfig's Fane".

There is no sign of Tovin, but his cart is lying upturned in the trees beyond the edge of the clearing. It has been smashed to pieces although much of the contents remains intact, if a little muddy. There are a few footprints around the area, but no clear hint as to what has happened here, the ground being sodden with rain and heavily churned. Several trees appear to have been uprooted in the high winds, although a successful Perception roll (prosaic or above) identifies strange marks on the trunks akin to the claw marks found on Edeten's body.

Through the doorway the stormy light bathes the interior of the building in a bloody glow. At the southern end, partially buried under the rubble from the fallen wall, lies an altar of dark red marble. Symbols are carved into its surface, the most frequent being that of a scythe. Draped across the altar are the tattered remains of a body. A trail of blood and gore has been splashed across the floor and splattered up the remaining stonework. A successful Wherewithal roll is required to prevent the characters



fleeing the scene in horror.

A successful Perception/Tracking roll will identify the occasional human footprint and the presence of a paw print in one congealing pool of blood. Hoof prints are also present (although how anyone got a horse through the doorway is unclear and the walls are too high for it to have jumped). Use of Pasko's Deducible Placenta (TT p. 97) here is possible, but difficult due to the less than ideal circumstances and will yield interesting, if unpleasant results. Most of the footprints are Tovin's (leading to the spell's failure). Use on the paw- or hoof-prints leads to an amorphous bubbling mass that shakes and quivers in a distinctly visceral manner. It is unquestionable (and unquestionably vile). One of

the footprints belongs to Tovin's mystery companion (determine randomly; on a six the character has by luck discovered the odd one out). In this case, the simulacrum can provide the sort of information described in the spell's description (for details, see p. 103).

Examination of the remains identifies them as Tovin's; gruesomely his head is missing, but the clothes are most definitely his and the build and coloring of the cadaver is also correct. He does not appear to have been dead for very long. From the position of the body and the damage done to his fingernails, it looks like he was attempting to claw his way through the south wall when he died.

Scattered about the room, some heavily soaked in gore, lie pieces of paper. Closer inspection reveals them to be the missing pages from Edeten's notebook. There, obscured by bloody trickles, are the characters' images. But there are other pages too, ones that they have not seen before. As with Edeten's notebook, the water damage is extensive and has been exacerbated by the additional presence of Tovin's bodily fluids. There are no other pages, suggesting that Tovin was either not responsible for the damage done to the Flower Manuscript, or someone has removed those pages from the area.

There is little that can be done for Tovin other than to give

The Missing Pages

As well as the pictures of all but one of the characters (which, on closer inspection, are indeed brass rubbings rather than sketches), there are notes concerning a marker of some sort that Edeten believes reveal the true nature of the Blood of ZoZam. He mentions the word prophecy on several occasions and there is a detailed description of the arrival in Azenomei of a group of people who closely match the characters. There is a drawing of a spire with odd creatures cavorting about its base with the words "Ironweed Pillar" marked next to it. There is also the map, but it has far more detail than the one Tovin gave to them. It shows a rough outline of the Songan Sea and an area dotted with strange marks on its eastern edge. The words "Plain of Obelisks" can just be discerned. There is a forest of some sort, a city on a river and a blank area with the words, "She is lost to me" written in tiny letters next to a crude drawing of a building. Successful Pedantry rolls for those with an interest in geography will quickly identify the city as Erze Damath and the blank area as the Silver Desert.

One tract is particularly clear. It reads:

"He is quite mad, and although I sometimes begin to question my own sanity, I doubt that I have descended quite as far as he. He is little help in my work here and is so often more of a hindrance. Oft times I wonder if that is quite as innocent as it seems. Ah, how my mind plays tricks beneath these dark eves (although I wish my nose would; oh that he would change his unguent!). No matter, I must discover what is written here. Is it truly the Prophecy of the Lady of the Sword and Flower? I have to know if the book spoke true. Without its direction, I am lost as to her meaning."

On a later page is another quote:

"Bless her for her kind gift, for I have great need of it now. Speed is of the essence so that I will be ready for their coming."

In combination with the rest of the notebook, it appears that Edeten journeyed first to the Silver Desert, then on to some city ("D"), then on to the Plain of Obelisks. There he found something that convinced him to return home as fast as possible. Shortly after his return, he descended into bitter madness, constantly blaming a woman for his betrayal.

Vozurd's Pin of Expedient Transit

5 points, charged (10).

Although not a rare item, these pins are much sought after by travelers. Not as much use in and emergency as, say, an amulet enchanted with the spell Relocalisation (DERPG p. 112), this item nevertheless speeds journey times immeasurably. Activation of the device (the phrase "More haste, more speed", kindly engraved on the back of the brooch) allows the wearer to cover a distance equivalent to one week's travel (approximately) in the space of a day. Continuous use is not recommended—after three days constant use the wearer begins to feel exhausted and disoriented; after more than 6 days constant use they will be confused and need to rest completely for at least a whole day.

This particular example has only three charges remaining (Edeten used seven to accomplish his journey from the Pillar to his home).



The Songan Sea

him a decent burial. When the body is moved something falls from his breast pocket. The item is identical to Masnia's description of Vozurd's Pin.

Further searches of the area reveal that the heavy trampling is only present in the clearing—none of the trails into the area have seen large numbers of creatures racing along them. An older cart is beginning to disappear under the forest vegetation not far from the clearing—it most likely belonged to Edeten himself. There is also a path that leads down from the promontory to a secluded beach, where there are signs of Tovin's footprints (and his alone) in the wet sand. The remains of a boat are littered about the beach. There is precious little for the characters to do here now, other than take stock and cross the Songan Sea to the Plain of Obelisks.

2.2 Across the Waves

There are no major ports along this branch of the Songan Sea, which is separate and distinct from that branch, also known as Caruffa Bay, on which Val Ombrio stands¹ (SVG p. 88). Those who wish to sail on it must either build their own means of transport (it isn't as if the raw materials are difficult to come by here), barter with any locals to obtain a suitable craft (a potentially hazardous option depending on which shore you find yourself), or engage a captain and crew from Val Ombrio or from the Sousanese coast including such places as Forrell's Port (detailed in *The Excellent Prismatic Spray* 4&5).

Those of a more scholarly persuasion may wish to use their own esoteric skills to accomplish passage through such means as the Jade Fish (TT p. 44) or Yimbolo's Mysterious Propulsion (TT p. 108). Indeed, with the more detailed map now in their possession, Thasdrubal's Laganetic Transfer (DERPG p. 110) becomes a much more attractive prospect. Use of the enchantment Haghur's Extemporized Whirlaway (TT p. 111) is not recommended unless the enchanted item is a boat or the characters are also in possession of either sun-apples (SVG p. 98) or an item such as the Heliosdactum (TT p. 43; splash-landings are such a sorry and a soggy affair). Whilst a route march along the Sea's shores is entirely possible given sufficient time and expense, the trip is unnecessarily arduous and ultimately foolish in the extreme. (If the characters are really struggling, we suggest that you allow them to find Edeten's collapsible boat hidden in the trees just off the beach. It will be a tight squeeze depending on how many of them there are and the amount of provisions they can take will be limited, but this option does prevent the game from stalling unnecessarily).

Depending on the characters' chosen destination, the time required for the journey across the Songan Sea will be variable. If sailing, striking straight across from the fane is the shortest route but not necessarily the quickest due to the prevailing headwinds. Those with excellent Seamanship skills can aim for the shore alongside the Plain of Obelisks, which takes longer but is simpler

¹ Cartographers, who have raised Pedantry to the level of a high art, bicker among themselves as to whether Val Ombrio sits on a branch of the Songan Sea or the Melantine Gulf. More reasoned disputants recognise the validity of each position and adopt no firm position.

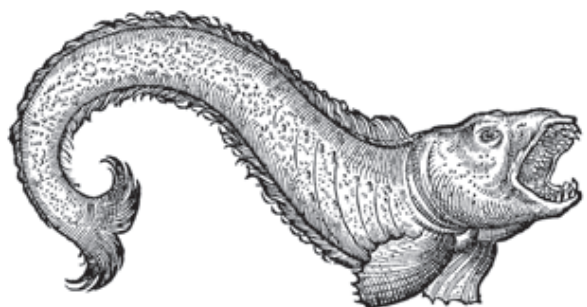
both in terms of avoiding a long trek on the other side and in taking advantage of the winds. Magical means of locomotion are by far the quickest. Whatever the chosen route or means of transport the trip takes as long as is dramatically necessary for it to do so. For now, they have all the time in the world.

2.2.1 The Dark Waters

Reibeike

Large black animals resembling a cross between a shark and a whale, only a few of these creatures still survive in the cold waters of the dark sea. They hunt the shallower waters of the sea by night when the smaller fish are sluggish and easier to catch. No one knows where they go during the day. They avoid boats, having learnt long ago that they meant trouble, but can be provoked to attack if they are under direct threat. The creatures are usually solitary, coming together only rarely to breed. The fishermen on the Ocean of Slow Tides claim that they are the lost souls of the drowned and as such are a bad omen, although they rarely venture so far south these days.

Attack (Strength) 20, Defence (Parry) 19, Magic (innate) 4, Health 16, Wherewithal 12

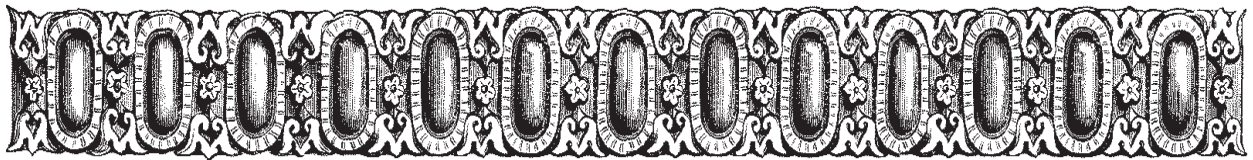


If the characters decide to travel across the water rather than over it they are very likely to catch sight of the creatures known as reibeike. It is recommended that only glimpses of large shapes moving through the water be mentioned, rather than a head on encounter. If they are flying over it, only immense shadows can be seen gliding beneath the water at night.

2.3 The Eastern Shore

2.3.1 Optional Encounter: Cispene Village

Directly opposite the fane on the eastern shores of the Songan Sea lies Cispene, a small fishing village of Yob worshippers. As described in the background section above, the villagers look fierce but are actually friendly and helpful. Arriving on the beach at or near the village the characters will be welcomed (the warmth of that greeting depends entirely upon the actions of the characters) and will be escorted to the Elder.



If questioned about any visitors that they might have had recently, Inoma answers that yes, a stranger came by a few months ago now on his way into the Silver Desert. They had tried to dissuade him, but he had insisted that he must go and find some woman or other in order to gain the truth. He was otherwise very rational and well presented, but the villagers insisted on giving him all the aid they could and had a celebratory feast to make sure he had at least one good meal in him before he started his dangerous

Inoma, Cispene Elder

Welcome, welcome! Please, join me by the fire. My joints are a bit creaky today.

Inoma is a short, repulsive female whose beaming grin does little to cheer those who see it. Still, like all her people, she cannot wait to be of service to those in need. Her hair is very elaborately coiffured with excessive amounts of seaweed unguent, which smells a bit in the warmth of the fire.

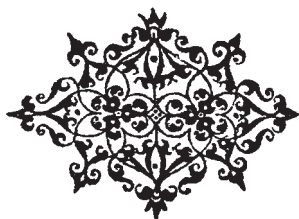
Persuasion (Intimidating) 13, Rebuff (Pure-hearted) 14, Attack (Caution) 10, Defence (Intuition) 12, Magic (Curious) 8, Health 10, Appraisal 9, Athletics 6, Etiquette 6, Perception 14, Scuttlebutt 8, Seamanship 10, Stewardship 8, Wherewithal 9

journey (Perceptive characters will notice on an Prosaic success or better that the Elder and her people are all missing the best part of a finger). He came back again a while after that looking absolutely exhausted, but he only stayed long enough to claim back his boat and would accept no further help. Inoma will be intrigued as to why the characters wish to know this and will listen patiently to their answers, should they wish to divulge such information.

The Feast: There is no real reason for the Yob worshippers to hold a feast for the characters unless they have arrived completely unprepared for the trek along the seashore. If they did indeed fail to scavenge what was left of Tovin's supplies (or even bring sufficient of their own), then the villagers will outfit them very well for the journey north and will then hold the feast as described previously. We leave it to you to elaborate on the culinary delights the characters are about to enjoy...

2.3.2 The Northern Trek

If the characters have gone straight to the Plain of Obelisks, then move on to the relevant section in Chapter 4. We suggest that as before, travel along the eastern shore of the Songan Sea should



be as long as dramatically appropriate, and include brief interludes

with the main village of Yob worshippers, the Ghost City and the Lizard Men. If the characters have decided to venture straight into the Silver Desert, do not attempt to stop them. For what they are likely to encounter there, see Chapter 6 (not forgetting to take into account all the details they have missed).

Rumors

The sacred apes of the Dangott worshippers have somehow got loose and have high-tailed it into the surrounding forests. In the aftermath of their escape, the villagers have decided that outsiders are perhaps more useful than they had previously thought and are offering a reward for the recapture of the sacred beasts. What they'll do to the strangers once they have the beasts back is anyone's guess.

A consortium of cosmeticians from Kaiin wish to fully exploit the marvellous qualities of Songan Sea mud and require scouts with a knowledge of the area (well, its not as if they're going to know if you don't have prior knowledge) to locate the richest source of the mud they like to call "Radiant Loam". Unfortunately, it's the same mud that the Dangott priests use, so it looks as if a visit to the apes might be on the cards for anyone going on this expedition.

Phyri, a Kaiin scholar known for his interest in obscure anthropology, has long wondered just what the Yob worshippers see in Blue Bladefish, because to everyone else's pallet it tastes bitter and unappetising even after the most skilful preparation and seasoning. He requires assistants to spend time with the Yob people to observe their habits and to take field notes on any peculiar practices they may have. The work may even count as credit towards courses at the Scholasticarium if carried out competently.

Lizard people have been seen on the Western shores of the Songan Sea, an area they are not naturally known to frequent. How have they got here and is there any truth in the Rumors that they have suddenly acquired boat building skills? More to the point, why are they apparently migrating westwards, erecting strange reed monuments as they go?

Essential Plot Points

- Tovin has been brutally slain in what appears to be an all too familiar manner.
- His death seems to have occurred at the height of last night's storm.
- Tovin not only stole the pages from Edeten's notebook, he also stole his charm. Worse, he lied to the characters.
- The missing pages of the notebook suggest that Edeten visited the Plain of Obelisks looking for information about what he'd found in the unnamed city.
- Whatever Edeten was searching for, he seems to have found it on the Ironweed Pillar (even though that information seems to have driven him mad)



Chapter 4

The Plain of Obelisks

I tell you, Relfan, that never have I seen such a wilderness as this. The plains are barren, wind-scrubbed levels, with only the hardest of grasses clinging to a fragile life. Even the mountains are more hospitable than this blasted savannah, as at least there we were afforded some shelter. Still, there is ample to engage the eye, for these stele after which the place is named are numerous and stretch further than the eye can see in many cases. I must restrain my imagination, for at times they appear almost to be the giant markers of some ancient track-way, marching inexorably on to the desert and the sea.

Sakonity the Adamantine

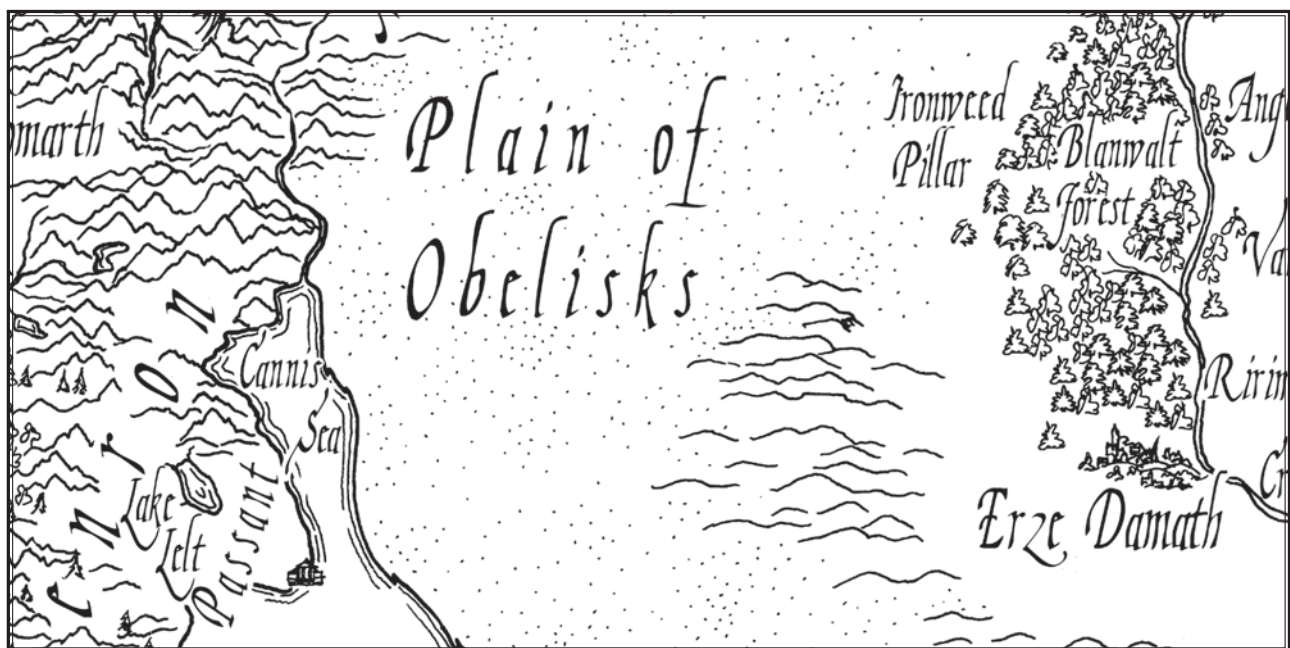
The Plain of Obelisks

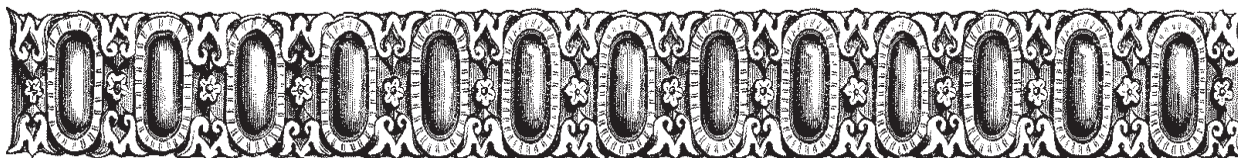
Sometimes referred to as the Desert of Obelisks, the plain is located to the south of the mountain range that links the Maurenron Mountains to the Mountains of Magnatz. It is bordered on its eastern edge by the River Scamander and the Blanwalt Forest, to the west by the Songan Sea and to the south by the Silver Desert. It is listed in the *Compendium of Universal Knowledge* (p. 58) and is the location of the Ceramic Obelisk described on page 136 of *Turjan's Tome*.

In general, little is known about this area, a barren land of open plains that seeps into low hills and desert at its most southerly margin. The major points of interest in the region are the obelisks themselves, massive spires of stone that reach up to one hundred feet in height. Great avenues run across the plains in straight lines, often for miles at a time, only to suddenly break off and begin anew elsewhere.

The obelisks themselves vary in age, size and construction. Many are of hard, grey granite that has been brought down from the mountains and fashioned into octagonal pillars. These consist of eight, sixteen or twenty-four individual blocks, and are generally carved so that the column tapers towards its zenith. The obelisks appear to be among the oldest stele on the plain, although exact age is practically impossible to determine. A second style of column has a girth that matches its height. Traces of pigment are often found on those stones protected from the scouring wind. These columns seem to be restricted to an area close to the Blanwalt Forest and could represent boundary markers of immense proportion, although there is evidence of past use as shrines.

The majority of the obelisks are carved from a darker, softer stone not found locally and probably brought from lands far to the east, near the fabled city of Vir Vassilis. There are essentially two types of carved pillar: the patterned and the scripted. The





A Sample Caravan

Although the Plains themselves are uninhabited, people are often found here, either as part of the column reading expeditions or as part of trade caravans. Caravans are rare, however, and are largely comprised of pilgrims or traders making their way to the Temple of the Just God (see the *Compendium of Universal Knowledge*, p. 227).

Ceras, Uncertain Pilgrim

And so I shall be judged, according to my worth. Which is good, let me assure you.

Small, non-descript and balding (though by no means old) Ceras has a quiet air of pleasant resignation about him. He has undertaken this pilgrimage because it is character building, rather than because of any real interest in his destination. This is perhaps not the wisest course of action considering he is heading for the Temple of the Just God. No pilgrim in his right mind would actually summon the god though; most just go as close as they dare to the half submerged edifice, so they can say that they've been.

Persuasion (Charming) 9, Rebuff (Pure-hearted) 10, Attack (Caution) 9, Defence (Dodge) 9, Magic (Studious) 2, Health 10, Athletics 7, Etiquette 8, Living Rough 2, Pedantry 6, Perception 8, Riding 4, Wealth 3, Wherewithal 5

Jotary, Very Certain Pilgrim

I have led a pure and simple life, yet still have I been wronged. Yet all will be well as soon as we reach the Temple.

Unlike Ceras, Jotary is undertaking this pilgrimage because he wants to, and exhibits a simmering passion that makes him uncomfortable to be near. Corpulent and with an unhealthy mottled pallor, he is dressed in coarse black robes and walks barefoot. His lank brown hair is patchy and unkempt and his hat has seen better days. He loudly tells anyone who will listen that he was spurned by a former suitor for his steadfast devotion to austerity and cleanliness (to the exclusion of all else, in particular, her) and was cursed to his current appearance of sloth and indulgent living. He journeys to the Temple with the precise intention of invoking the Just God, who he believes will return him to his former demeanor¹.

Persuasion (Intimidating) 8, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 10, Attack (Cunning) 9, Defence (Misdirection) 10, Health 10, Athletics 4, Etiquette 5, Pedantry 8, Perception 4, Wealth 4, Wherewithal 6

Anondo, Caravan Leader

Well, it's not a great living, but it is a good living, all things considered.

Lean, tanned and shaven headed, Anondo is an affable character and never lets her often woefully unprepared clientele get her down. One of triplets, she and her identical sisters

¹ After a hour or more in his company, characters will find themselves devoutly concurring with him in this.

run the Red Pilgrim Service. She has been plying the pilgrim route from Erze Damath to the towns on the Scamander and further afield for twenty years and is known for her firm but courteous handling of even the most irascible zealot. She owns three covered wagons with sleeping berths for four in each, but often has only enough demand for one or two. She also owns a haulage wagon for trinkets and gewgaws at fair time. Her own private wagon is painted a fiery red and covered with sun motifs. It is drawn by an odd yellow creature called Liemo which she obtained from Saffer the Stockman. She dresses practically, though as a native of Erze Damath tends to bright colors. She has a weakness for shell necklaces and has an extensive collection about her neck and up her arms, such that she rattles when she walks.

Persuasion (Charming) 10, Rebuff (Penetrating) 12, Attack (Finesse) 10, Defence (Intuition) 12, Magic (Curious) 6, Health 12, Athletics 10, Driving 11, Etiquette 8, Living Rough 9, Perception 12, Physician 6, Riding 7, Stewardship 4, Wherewithal 8

Naicia, Chef

It's better than anything else you'll find around here and certainly less than you'd pay for it in town. Now, do you want it or not?

Another of the triplets, Naicia is also pleasant and competent, but with a shameless sense of humour that makes her sisters blush. The other triplet, Onama, maintains their base of operations in Erze Damath. Naicia owns and runs the food wagon that travels with Anondo's caravan, charging pilgrims reasonable prices for meals along the way. Her copper colored hair is long and plaited to keep it out of the cooking pot and she is a very good cook, although her sauces do have a tendency to match the color of her clothes². Complaining about the quality of her food is a sure way of starving on the trail, as she will refuse to serve her critics unless Syen intervenes. Rumor has it that she and Syen are romantically entwined, although there is no outward sign of it. Interestingly, Liemo will only tolerate Naicia if Anondo is present.

Persuasion (Forthright) 9, Rebuff (Contrary) 9, Attack (Speed) 10, Defence (Parry) 11, Health 12, Athletics 8, Driving 9, Etiquette 3, Living Rough 9, Perception 8, Stewardship 4, Wherewithal 8

Liemo, Odd Hybrid

Fnnnnrrrrccckkk.

A descendant of the Follinense hybrids, Liemo is an intelligent and capricious creature with a habit of spitting at everyone within range, except Anondo who he worships and serves faithfully. Covered in a striking yellow down like a large malevolent chick, he has six legs and moves at a high-speed shuffle, his beaked face constantly scanning the horizon for signs of trouble. Anondo has trained him to say a few simple

² A particularly distressing tendency in the Scamander valley. We refer the reader to Makarapass, *Recipes to Tantalize the Abused Palette* for further information

The Plain of Obelisks

A Sample Caravan - cont.

words so that he can inform her of any danger and when he wants to be fed.

Persuasion (Obfuscatory) 2, Rebuff (Contrary) 3, Attack (Speed) 14, Defence (Dodge) 15, Magic (innate) 4, Health 13, Athletics 12, Perception 12, Wherewithal 10

Syen, Guard

Most of the time, I'm guarding them from themselves, if you follow my meaning.

A practical man with simple tastes and ostensibly nothing better to do, Syen looks like he was carved from rock in a similar manner to the pillars on the Plain. Squat and nearly as wide as he is tall, he has always made his living as a guard. Fortunately, due to his bulk and grim visage (which belie his gentle nature) he has rarely had to resort to violence to quell trouble. Most people give up before they start.

Persuasion (Intimidating) 8, Rebuff (Pure-hearted) 9, Attack (Strength) 15, Defence (Intuition) 14, Magic (Studious) 4, Health 14, Athletics 10, Driving 6, Living Rough 9, Perception 10, Stealth 8, Tracking 9, Wherewithal 10

A Sample Expedition

The average expedition on the Plain of Obelisks consists of at least one scholarly type, their assistants, a head porter and a gaggle of anything up to two dozen underlings, depending on the size and grandeur of the investigation. In general, a tent village will be erected next to the site of interest, consisting of a central tent for the expedition leader (usually full of research material), a finds tent, a cook tent, a large tent for the underlings and a corral for pack animals. Guards are occasionally seen, but only at larger encampments.

Thiool the Petrologist

Well, of course, this is a very fine example of the later middle Delineated period. Any fool can see that.

An elderly woman with steel grey hair and a weather beaten face, Thiool is a respected member of the Xalguire Conservatory in Erze Damath. Her formidable intellect is matched only by her equally formidable temper. She does not suffer fools gladly and has little time for those not engaged in the study of the Obelisks. Unlike other women from Erze Damath she does not dress in rich colors, preferring to adopt the habit of a man (except for the breeches, an unseemly thought in a woman her age), which she finds more practical when journeying the plains. Her one grudging concession to fashion is a large, somewhat tatty orange feather stuffed firmly into her iron bun.

Persuasion (Forthright) 14, Rebuff (Contrary) 12, Attack (Ferocity) 8, Defence (Vexation) 9, Magic (Studious) 14, Appraisal 6, Etiquette 6, Living Rough 5, Pedantry (Obelisks) 12, Perception 8, Stewardship 6, Wealth 4, Wherewithal 4

Nepheline, Recorder and General Assistant

No, I said put it in the third box from the left with the label clearly facing upwards.

In charge of taking notes for Thiool and coordinating her research, Nepheline is a large man with an air of quiet contemplation or harassed suffering, depending on Thiool's mood and the behavior of the expedition porters. Organized in the extreme, he dresses meticulously, even in the barren

surroundings of the plains as if at any moment he could be whisked away to an important society ball. When working with finds, he does consent to wear an apron (invariably spotless), just in case.

Persuasion (Eloquent) 12, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 12, Attack (Caution) 10, Defence (Parry) 10, Magic (Studious) 8, Appraisal 5, Etiquette 10, Living Rough 6, Pedantry (Obelisks) 9, Perception 9, Stewardship 10, Wherewithal 6

Hornfels, Porter

Yes, madam, I'll make sure they gets put exactly where you want them. And in one piece an' all.

No one is quite sure how old Hornfels actually is. As with many retainers at academic institutions, he appears to have been there forever. He has a worn but comfortable demeanor and muscles like iron from a lifetime of dragging heavy equipment up stairs and across great distances. He likes a tippie, but never whilst on duty. He is as organized as Nepheline, but in a less obtrusive manner. He inspires great loyalty in the younger porters and has a wealth of hearsay and local legend stored beneath his balding pate.

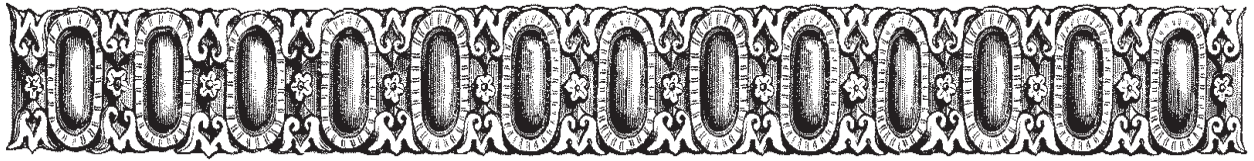
Persuasion (Charming) 12, Rebuff (Pure-hearted) 11, Attack (Strength) 10, Defence (Parry) 10, Magic (Curious) 2, Health 9, Appraisal 4, Athletics 6, Driving 7, Etiquette 4, Living Rough 8, Perception 10, Scuttlebutt (Xalguire Conservatory) 7, Stewardship 9, Wherewithal 6

Junior Porter

In a minute.

Young hauliers and porters are all very much the same, grubby, uncultured and skiving when they think the gaffer isn't looking. Recalcitrant with others, they snap to immediately when Hornfels gives the word.

Persuasion (Glib) 8, Rebuff (Contrary) 12, Attack (Strength) 9, Defence (Dodge) 10, Health 12, Athletics 10, Gambling 7, Living Rough 8, Perception 7, Wherewithal 5



patterned pillars appear to be older than the scripted and are covered in either strict geometric designs or flowing naturalistic depictions of flora and fauna, possibly native to this area in times long past.

The scripted columns could be the youngest of the spires present in the region. Scholarly opinion dictates that much, although not all, of the script is similar to that found at sites across the Land of the Falling Wall., although few scholars can now decipher it. Occasional parties of savants from Erze Damath and further afield do journey to the Plains to study the script in further detail. In many respects these scripted columns are similar to the Black Obelisk in Erze Damath (p. 44), but are generally more modest in scale and lack the octagonal dimensions of their counterpart.

Who placed the obelisks here is unknown, but rumours persist that they were erected during the 19th Aeon and may be linked to any number of empires extant at the time, including the Dastric Empire. They may be grave markers¹, ceremonial roadways, or

monuments celebrating the achievements of a vanished race. No one knows for sure².

Not all of the obelisks are intact. Throughout the Plains many have fallen through decay, poor workmanship, geological upheaval and, in rare cases, by dint of the sheer effort of persons unknown. The scripted columns appear to have escaped any deliberate toppling. Fallen patterned columns, which seem to have done so through natural means, have suffered varying degrees of vandalism, often with whole sections of decoration altered or erased.

The Blanwalt Forest

Lying on the eastern edge of the Plain of Obelisks, its southern fringes less than a day's brisk walk from Erze Damath, this ancient forest is the haunt of many strange and improbable creatures. Legend has it that Mad King Kutt instructed his mage Follinense to create a vast menagerie for his King's private entertainment. Purportedly, the King soon grew bored with his exhibits



Massive spires of stone that reach up to one hundred feet in height.

¹ Excavation has found few signs of interment and although it is rarely possible to dig under the obelisk itself.

² Despite the claims to the contrary made by more assertive academics who conflate uproar with scholarship

The Plain of Obelisks

and ordered them released. Most unusually for such magical hybridizations, the creatures were and are particularly fecund, hence they still roam both the Blanwalt Forest and the Plains of Oparona (see Appendix), no two the same. The temperament and feeding habits of the remaining creatures is impossible to gauge purely on appearance so caution must be exercised at all times, although many are caught for use as pack animals and beasts of burden, both by those peoples who live on the river margins of the forest, the nomads of the Oparona Plains and Saffer the Stockman in Erze Damath (p. 57). The forest is also a hunting ground for hoon and other unsavory creatures, although their numbers here are fewer than might be expected.

The hybrids occasionally venture on to the Plain of Obelisks, but tend to stick close to the forest margins. There is little food for them on the Plains and those that have been seen are often making use of fallen columns as scratching posts.

Sample Creatures

Although most of the creatures belong to no recognizable breed, consultation of *Follinense's Folio of Exotic Systemology* should lead to the identification of the following:

Cisden

Squat and ovoid, this blue-feathered creature is ringed with multiple rows of spiny teeth. It has no apparent eyes, and is crowned by a thatch of what look to be antennae that waggle frantically at all times. When it spots anything larger than itself it emits a piercing scream and runs away by means of a curious hopping gait.

Attack (Caution) ~, Defence (Dodge) ~+2, Magic (innate) 4, Health 12

Teulu

This tiny gliding creature has membranous wings and a mottled hide that can alter color to match its surroundings. It is a stealthy hunter of small mammals beneath the forest canopy and is not averse to scavenging. It dispatches its prey by strangulation with its long tail.

Attack (Speed) ~+3, Defence (Dodge) 2~, Magic (innate) 2, Health ~, Stealth 8

Newisc

Built like a wild boar but approximately twice the size, this puce-furred monstrosity is fortunately often heard before it is seen. Razor sharp fangs drip with ichor and dead vegetation and its tiny eyes blaze with incandescent fury. Insane and probably responsible for the low numbers of half-men in the area, it lives deep in the forest and attacks without warning at lightning speed.

Attack (Strength) 18, Defence (Sure-footed) 2~, Magic (innate) 6, Health ~+4, Wherewithal 8

Act 3: The Ironweed Pillar

After either an arduous and exhausting or comfortable and relaxing trip across the Songan Sea (or a mixture of both, depending on their tastes and experiences), the characters now find themselves on the Plain of Obelisks. Where is the marker that Edeten describes and who is his mysterious assistant?

3.1 A Vastness of Horizon

The open plain rolls on before the eye, the dark shadow of the Blanwalt Forest a threatening smudge on the horizon. From the clues in Edeten's workbook, the characters should know that they are looking for an object within the forest's boundaries. But what exactly is an Ironweed Pillar?

3.1.1 The Disgruntled Researcher

As the characters make their way towards the Blanwalt Forest, they come across a small caravan consisting of a single wagon, two young men in utilitarian clothing and an older gentleman in black wearing an unusual disc shaped hat. This is Pusym, and he is not in the best of tempers.

Pusym Almuire, Specialist in Painted Stone

What does it take for a man to work unmolested in this day and age?

Of uncertain age, but definitely beyond his youth, Pusym is another member of the Xalguire Conservatory. His dress is smart and in keeping with Erzite tastes and his unguent marks him as a man of modest but comfortable means. His speciality is the painted obelisks near the Blanwalt Forest. His recent trip has been most unsuccessful and he is returning empty handed, which will not please his financiers who were hoping for at least one small piece of mural from the area with which to grace their headquarters.

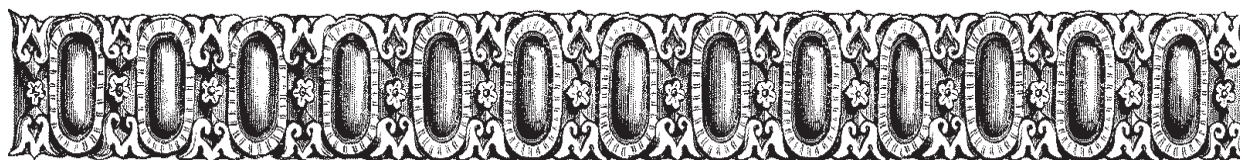
Persuasion (Forthright) 12, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 13, Attack (Finesse) 10, Defence (Parry) 9, Magic (Forceful) 12, Health 10, Athletics 7, Driving 6, Etiquette 9, living Rough 5, Stewardship 6, Wealth 4, Wherewithal 7

Rofil and Ledil, Assistants

The books are packed safely sir and we wrapped them double to make sure they stay dry.

Although not twins, Rofil and Ledil are virtually inseparable. They have been firm friends since before they could crawl. Ledil is the taller of the two, his dark hair cropped close to his head. Rofil is bulkier than his friend and he keeps his long hair fastened in a neat queue at the nape of his neck. They haven't been at the Conservatory for all that long and are still relatively enthusiastic about their work. This is their first expedition.

Persuasion (Glib) 8, Rebuff (Pure Hearted) 12, Attack (Strength) 9, Defence (Dodge) 10, Health 12, Athletics 10, Gambling 7, Living Rough 8, Perception 7, Wherewithal 5



If the characters approach Pusym, one of the young porters (Rofil) will intercept them and ask their business, whilst the other (Ledil) continues to lead the pack beast who draws the wagon. Pusym seems to be in a world of his own. Rofil is civil but watchful, and will only allow the characters to speak with Pusym if he feels that they are not a threat, at which point he will lead them to the gentleman in question and introduce them. Pusym will call on Ledil to halt the wagon but he will not climb down, preferring to maintain his higher vantage point.

Should they manage to engage Pusym in conversation his voice is strained and clipped, with a hint of barely restrained anger. If they ask him about the Ironweed Pillar he doesn't recognise the name and explains that ironweed is not native to this area (he will also offer an explanation as to what ironweed is, if they don't already know). As to strange animals, he can tell the characters about Kutt's menagerie and where the creatures are likely to be found. Showing him the map will lead to a brief description of the pillars marked on it (all of the painted type).

Questioning him about his mood leads to a withering glare from the scholar. Having never experienced trouble before with the "mad old fleabag" (his precise words) that lives under his beloved painted pillars, this time Hercurn went out of his way to drive Pusym off. This included stealing food, breaking equipment and throwing stones and other less tasteful substances at Pusym and his porters. Perceptive characters will notice that Pusym is watching them carefully. If asked why he shakes his head and mutters something about thinking he's seen them somewhere before.

If alarm bells are starting to ring in the players' minds as to just how many mad hermits can live in a wilderness such as this, Pusym can confirm that as far as he knows, no-one else lives permanently on the plain besides Hercurn. The inhabitants of the towns along the Scamander often venture into the forest to catch game and hunt for truffles, but only Hercurn lives there permanently. Pusym can give them precise directions as to how to find Hercurn, though he will attempt to discourage them from doing so, concerned about their safety.

3.1.2 The Painted Pillars

Using Pusym's directions (or the map, if they traveled straight to the Blanwalt Forest), the characters will soon find the painted pillars as marked on their chart. There are about twenty of them in various states of decay, mostly standing straight although at least half a dozen of them have been toppled. Careful examination of the layout of the pillars shows that they appear to lie along the circumference of a circle that is interrupted by the trees at the edge of the forest. The area encompassed by the pillars is quite large, with roughly thirty yards between each pillar. If the characters venture close to the forest margins, it is possible to see that there are further pillars hidden by the trees. There must be at least another ten concealed in such a manner to complete the circle.

As soon as the characters attempt to enter the forest, they will be greeted by howls of fury and a stinking, flailing humanoid comes tearing out of the trees at them, screaming at them to go away. This is Hercurn and he is not happy to see them.

Hercurn, Hermit of the Pillars.

They can feel your presence, you know. They know you and they will find you. Just as I could have found you, once.

Hercurn is, for the most part, madder than your average tree weasel. Once tall, with fine features and an unerring sense of fashion, he is now huddled and withered, dressed in faded black rags and reeking of stale hair unguents. There is an air of great loss and frustration about him and he is prone to violent outbursts at nothing in particular as his resentment bubbles to the surface for no reason he can explain. For the most part he speaks clearly but in a distracted manner, as if he were trying to remember something very important. He also has a habit of muttering and pointing, usually making thinly veiled threats at the target of his ramblings.



He was once a member of the Society of Aesthetes in Erze Damath (p. 55) and a prominent member of the Silver Quorum. He attempted to usurp the position of leader of the Wind Riders, thinking it would bring him extensive power over his rivals, but instead it drove him insane. The other Quorumites prevented his full ascension and banished him to the Plains to act as a guardian for the Ironweed Pillar (there is just enough of his mind left to comprehend that he must prevent the Chosen from finding it).

Persuasion (Obfuscatory) 12, Rebuff (Contrary) 14, Attack (Ferocity) 13, Defence (Misdirection) 11, Health 9, Athletics 8, Concealment 9, Etiquette 3, Living Rough 10, Pedantry 4, Perception 6, Stealth 8, Tracking 4, Wherewithal 8

There are a variety of ways in which Hercurn can be calmed. Walking away from the trees is the most obvious way, although the rapid application of such spells as Interminable Interim (DERPG p. 107) will also work well. Mind control spells such as Javanne's Enervation of Will (DERPG p. 107) will only have a limited effect—they will stop him from attacking the characters, but he can't easily be controlled. After all, to effect mind control your target really needs to have a mind.

Should the characters kill Hercurn (either deliberately or accidentally), then there is no impediment to them finding the Ironweed Pillar with a lot of time and effort. After all, it's not as if they actually know its exact location and there's quite a bit of forest that will need searching (the exaggerated drawing on the map is little help). They will also be able to search relatively unmolested except for the attentions of Kutt's beasts and the odd hoon (we can't make life too easy for them, now can we?).

The Plain of Obelisks

If Hercurn survives this encounter (and he isn't stupid, only insane), he is suddenly seized by a bout of apparent clarity and politely invites the characters back to his camp for refreshment. There is a very distinctive smell about him that the breezes of the plain do little to disperse. His behavior and stench should confirm that this is indeed the madman referred to in Edeten's notes.

3.1.3 Hercurn's Camp

Hercurn lives amongst the area of fallen painted obelisks close to the forest edge and has used the stones and the hides of various creatures to fashion a crude but effective compound to shelter him from the harsh extremes of the Plain. Many of the pillars here have retained sufficient pigment to make out actual images, although many are obscured by Hercurn's paraphernalia.

Despite Hercurn's unkempt appearance, the camp is spotless. Pots and pans are neatly stacked next to a firepit, which Hercurn tends to immediately upon his return. Casks of water shelter from the sun beneath animal hides a short distance away, beneath the trees. The largest lean-to contains bedding, blankets and skins, as well as a few small items of unknown origin. A large and brightly coloured pelt acts as a door.

Hercurn very formally invites the characters to sit down upon skins he has hurriedly retrieved from his dwelling, whilst he prepares them "his speciality". This turns out to be a palatable but insipid brew made from a variety of what he calls herbs (but what in civilised lands would probably be identified as weeds) collected from the forest and served in what at one time would have been very good quality china cups. He is very attentive and apologetic for his prior behaviour, stressing that he was only concerned about them wandering into the forest and becoming lost.

Those of a Perceptive nature may well notice that Hercurn is watching them even more intently than Pusym was. If challenged, he will deny it strenuously and claim that the brightness of the sun is causing him to squint badly, that is all (even if the weather isn't that bright). Otherwise, he is an engaging host in between his ramblings and occasional outbursts.

Should they mention Edeten or show Hercurn the notebook, he will become very agitated indeed, incessantly muttering "Poor, bad, mad; poor, bad, mad". Pressing him on the subject only leads to him becoming abusive and he will attempt to throw the characters out of his camp. This behaviour alternates with pitiful floods of tears and hair pulling. Despite their best efforts, the characters will gain no more sense from him today and their best option is to withdraw and allow him to calm down.

During these outbursts, very Perceptive characters may notice that Hercurn appears to have silver tattoos as well, hidden high up under the sleeves of his robes. They will only gain a quick flash of them, too brief to make out any detail, but they are there.

Suspicious

Hopefully by now the characters should be convinced

that not only is Hercurn utterly mad, but that he knows far more about what is going on than he will admit to. They have several options, one of which has already been mentioned above. Killing Hercurn in cold blood will garner the characters quite a few negative sympathy points (should you currently use that system¹), and the act may well return to haunt one of the characters later in their investigations (see Chapter 5).

Hercurn is now keeping a very close eye on the characters and is likely to become their persistent shadow, following them about as much as possible. He will even offer to take them on guided tours of the Plains (anything to keep them away from the Forest). If the characters insist he will take them to the Forest, but he will take them in the opposite direction to that in which the Pillar lies.

One of the best options to discover what Hercurn is up to is to observe him from a distance, using either Stealth or magical concealment, although care must be taken as he possesses a Talisman to Reveal the Hidden (DERPG p.117). As long as Hercurn can see the majority of the characters he will continue with his normal routine (when he is not pestering them). If they all disappear suddenly, he will become extremely vigilant and either refuse to move from his camp or run wildly about the woods searching for them.

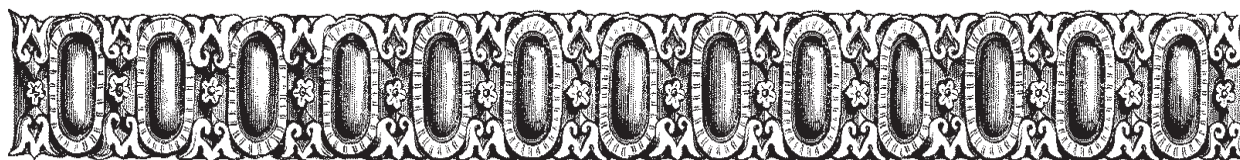
Once a day (if not provoked) the hermit walks for about an hour and a half to reach the Ironweed Pillar. Whilst there, he polishes the surface of the monument and carefully walks around its clearing checking for stray weeds and any other debris (such as ironweed needles; there is a large urn full of them in his camp). He has a bite to eat and relieves himself against the pillar. He then returns home. Again, if the characters are missing when he returns, he will become agitated and begin a search of the woods for them.

The Paintings

Whilst Hercurn is away the characters can search his camp. There is little of value there besides his everyday utensils. Of more interest are the paintings that survive on the fallen pillars. Although Hercurn has deliberately attempted to obscure them with hangings and boxes and even defaced one or two of the more obvious ones with charcoal from his fire, careful investigation reveals exquisite yet ancient and faded pictures of flowers and people.

The most common image is of a woman holding a sword. She is dressed in long flowing robes and her long white hair is simply styled. The other most common depiction is one the characters should recognise immediately—the Stars and Lily. On an Illustrious Perception success during any attempt to study the paintings there will be a surprise for the person scrutinising the stones. There, faded but entirely accurate, is a picture of themselves.

¹ The sympathy point system, even if run in a casual, even informal manner, enhances Turjan level play. At the very least, it means that should something unpleasant happens to the party, it happens first to the character with the lowest sympathy points.



3.2 The Living Marker

3.2.1 The Way Through The Woods

There are a variety of ways in which the characters can outwit Hercurn and gain access to the pillar, provided that they know where it is. Any spell which freezes time for Hercurn will give the characters the window they need to gain access to the Pillar, as will attempting to view it at night (a potentially very risky undertaking considering the unique variety of fauna inhabiting the area). Using certain of the characters to distract Hercurn whilst the others go to look for the Pillar will only work if Hercurn loses a Persuasion/Rebuff contest against the character with the worst Persuasion score. If Hercurn wins, he will become violently agitated and chase after the characters. If the characters prefer strong-arm tactics then they could always route march Hercurn to the Pillar, although he would have to be subdued and restrained first.

The Blanwalt Forest is an ancient woodland, close grown and lacking in undergrowth except in areas where a tree has fallen, allowing sufficient light under the forest canopy to encourage smaller plants. In amongst the trees rise the remaining pillars of the painted circle, their surfaces obscured by lichens and creepers. The air is still and thick with the heat and the light is shifting and dappled. Strange shadows flit between the trees and eerie calls echo amongst the branches.

Those with Tracking can easily locate and follow Hercurn's path through the trees. The path is remarkably straight and free from entangling debris and seems to lead on to the very heart of the forest. The way is utterly silent, almost as if the creatures of the wood avoid the area.

After about an hour's walk, Perceptive characters notice the soft sound of a female voice raised in song. The words are unclear but the more the characters walk, the clearer the sound becomes and the less oppressive the atmosphere along the path feels. By the time they reach the clearing everyone can hear the singing, which stops as soon as they enter the quiet glade. There is a feeling of calm and peace whilst the singing lasts, which lingers for a short while once the voice stops.

The clearing is an eerie place. Despite the lack of a breeze the knee-high grass sways gently back and forth making a strange whispering sound. It feels almost as if it is trying to say something, but

the words are just beyond the edge of hearing. The colour here is wrong, too—instead of the red tinged light the characters are used to it is brighter here and clearer. The outlines of the blades of grass and the leaves on the trees look harder and sharper than normal, standing out in sharp relief against the darkness of the forest. It is almost as if things are more solid, more real here within the glade.

In the centre of the clearing stands a remarkable sight. Approximately fifteen feet tall there stands a tree of the darkest grey, a highly polished sheen on its trunk. The lower branches have been cut away to a height of about eight feet and above that the bushy crown spreads to shade the area beneath. The ground is hard-packed and worn and several of the plant's roots protrude above the beaten surface. The most remarkable thing about this plant is its trunk. There, carved upon the entire surface¹, are pictures and text of immense age. This is the Ironweed Pillar.

3.2.2 Faces From the Past

As the characters approach the Pillar, they can see something propped against the base of the tree. The sound of a hunting horn splits the silence like a knife. The air suddenly becomes as black as midnight and a thick, swirling mist rises from the ground in front of the Pillar. If Hercurn is with the characters, he will begin to laugh and cheer hysterically, calling out "They are come, they are come". Out of the mists a monstrous shape begins to take form. A rank smell fills the air, ripe with rot and putrefaction.

The characters must now face the victims of their unseen enemy and defeat them if they are to proceed further. The Prey cannot be dismissed by such spells as Liberation of Warp once the ward is activated, nor are they affected by spells directed against the living (such as Rhialto's Green Turmoil or Lugwiler's Dismal Itch). Mind control spells do not work against them, but they are susceptible to standard blasting spells such as the Excellent Prismatic Spray and its ilk, fire being particularly effective (penalty of 1 on Health rolls). Once a Prey is defeated, its remains dissolve into a vile smelling pool of liquid that quickly soaks into the dry earth leaving behind an unpleasant oily stain.

This fight is intended to be difficult and traumatic for the characters and should push them to the limits of their resources but not beyond. Whilst we recommend that there are twice as many Prey as



¹ The Ironweed is a most unusual tree in that once it reaches a certain diameter its' bark becomes a protective sheath which shields the xylem and phloem. Thus the tree never exceeds this fixed diameter and puts its growth entirely into seed and maintaining a constant foliage of needles. Hence anything carved onto the trunk will remain undistorted for so long as the tree shall live.

The Plain of Obelisks

The Huntsmen's Prey

Range: Touch

Duration: Instant

Difficulty: Complex

Summary: A ward which causes the victims of the Wind Riders to rise against a proscribed target or targets

Description: Placed upon the head or skull of a victim of the Wind Riders, this enchantment activates when the named target(s) enters the locality of the focus (in this case Tovin's head). A tangled mass of bodies rises from the ground in front of the focus and attacks the target and anyone else with them. The spectral assassins appear as they did at the moment of death, so many are missing limbs (and heads) and flesh hangs from their bones. At the forefront of this attack are the shades of Edeten and the headless Tovin. There are (usually) twice as many corpses as there are characters. Each character must make a Wherewithal roll: if they are successful, they fight at no penalty. If they fail, all actions are at a levy of 1. On a Dismal failure, they flee the area.

Ratings: Attack (Ferocity) 2~, Defence (Parry) ~, Health 2~

Style Affinity: Forceful

characters, if they are making short work of the creatures have a second wave appear (there can always be more than one skull under the Pillar's branches). Unless the characters make a specific attempt to protect Hercurn he too will be set upon by the Prey and will be slaughtered where he stands, screaming in defiance.

Once the Prey are defeated, the characters are free to investigate the Pillar and the grisly item propped at its base.

3.2.3 An Ancient Prophecy

There is no mistaking the item resting in the roots of the Pillar now that the mist has cleared—it is Tovin's head. His features bear the same twisted mask of terror that they saw on Edeten's face while his skull peeks through the blond hair where chunks of flesh have been ripped away. Much of the back of his



head is missing. A strange mark has been carved into his forehead, which looks something like a hunting horn picked out in silver ink.

If Hercurn has survived, he is little more than a dribbling wreck and can no longer speak coherently. He merely sits and giggles, chewing on his filthy hair and hitting himself in the head with his balled fist. If he died during the encounter with the Prey, such spells as the Charm of Necroptic Enveiglement (TT p. 87) may be of use, provided enough of the body remains (determine randomly if required; any failure means that the body is so badly shredded there is nothing left to question). He can reveal that their nemesis resides in Erze Damath and that they must be prevented from completing the prophecy or great shame will come to them all.

Examination of his resisting body (or unresisting corpse) reveals that he does indeed have silver tattoos, but they have apparently been scored out with a hot iron. What they once represented it is now impossible to say.

The Ironweed Pillar

The entire surface of the trunk is covered in carvings. A large tableau at the top of the cleared trunk appears to contain the pictures of the characters found in Edeten's workbook. From this tableau, the text winds around the trunk in a gentle spiral until just above ground height. It will take several days to fully decipher what is carved on the pillar just through sheer volume of information rather than due to any translational problems or physical damage (of which there is virtually none). Below are the relevant extracts of what is written on the Pillar. There is other material, but it largely consists of lists of plants and the best growing conditions for them and is utterly irrelevant to the task in hand.

The Prophecy of the Lady of the Sword and Flower

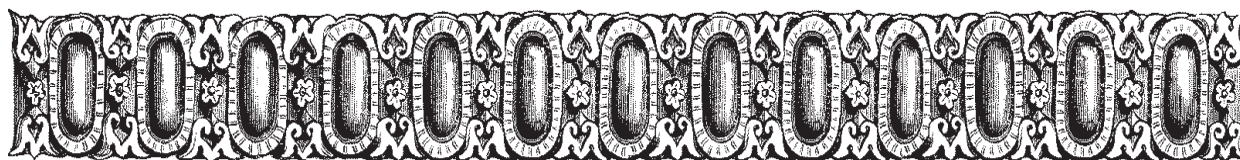
The Tableau:

In the carving, the characters can be seen standing on an apparently endless plain, the sky above them dotted with stars. A platform of some sort is visible in the distance and there appears to be someone standing before it. One of the characters (the one with the highest Attack score) is holding a magnificent blade. Another of the characters (the one with either Insightful magic as their style or the highest Magic score if no one has Insightful magic) is apparently holding a flower and looks as if they are singing. The accuracy of the characters' portraits is quite startling though the clothes are quite wrong, being very old fashioned indeed.

The Writings:

These take the form of a commentary. Occasionally there are comments that appear to be directed at specific people, rather than just being part of the narrative thread.

"It is by the hand of our Lady of the Sands that this pillar is raised here. It is the least we could do for her to aid her in her quest, so cruelly sabotaged by those whose shame is made



manifest by their lies and intrigues. But the day shall come when all will be set right and their deception made plain for the faithful to see. Her words adorn this living icon, a guide to those destined to see beyond this world to darker truths.

“Before he came to our lands along the river, all was peaceful and benign. We farmed the earth and our lady of the sword and flower gave us songs to soothe the beasts and aid the plants in their growth. We prospered. Then he came from out of the south, the false prophet, although we did not see him so at first. His message was close to that of our Lady, peace and friendship, kindness and charity. He gathered to him eight of the most faithful and taught them what he knew. But then he began to change and his behaviour grew strange. The faithful grew fearful and the disciples realised something must be done.

“And then there was a miracle, or so they say. The false

Character Death

If a character should die during the fight with the Prey, all is not lost. After all, we are dealing with a prophecy here. The very fluid nature of such foreshadowing gives you the perfect opportunity to insert replacement characters into the game at the first opportunity whilst barely missing a beat.

For example: Richard's character Onnac is killed during the fight. He was the character with the lowest Magic rating and the highest Attack rating. His picture was missing from Gilfig's Fane as he was going to be the target of the Huntsman's Mark. He was also the character pictured in the tableau on the Pillar holding the sword (if anyone managed to get a look at it during the fight).

To help the GM, Richard creates his new character before the action goes any further. He is no longer the best fighter nor does he have the lowest Magic rating. Although his character isn't just going to wander into the woods, it does become a part of the scenario in spirit immediately.

Louise's character Pantailamon now has the lowest Magic rating and so her character's picture disappears from the recovered pages to be replaced by Richard's new character and she is now the target of Farnuisa's spell. As Pantailamon also now has the Highest Attack rating, she replaces Onnac on the tableau holding the sword. Chris's character no longer has the highest Magic rating, so he is no longer holding the flower on the tableau, Richard's new character is. Onnac will have vanished from the pictures completely.

It is up to the GM to introduce the new character as quickly as possible. In this case, he may not appear until the remaining characters reach Erze Damath, or he may be part of an expedition they bump into on the Plains. It really doesn't matter, just as long as the new character has been tied in to the prophecy. This holds true for character death during any part of the game: although it is unlikely the characters will go back to the Pillar to check, the rubbings in Edeten's workbook change to reflect the characters making up the party regardless of who started out on the mission.

prophet was recalled to his creator, leaving naught upon this earth but his holy robes, enshrined in silver to bless the faithful. But there was untruth in the words of the disciples—for they had realised his true origins and done away with him, sealing him in that which could be hidden safely from the world to protect themselves from shame and ignominy but doing not so much as to invoke the wrath of his creator.

“And so the people continued on with their faith for after all, despite the nature of its founder, his precepts held true and were indeed noble. But the followers of our Lady sought out the truth and were horrified at it. They sent the brightest of her children to fetch that which was needed from their sacred resting-place in order that it might be purged from the world. But treachery, once learned, is an easy thing to fall back on. The guardians of the false prophet imprisoned her in a shifting bastille, set only to grace us when the flowers bloomed upon the desert.

“And then there was the second miracle—his most beloved disciples were taken up unto their promised paradise, so that they might share his glory and watch upon all those who were to follow, leaving disciples of their own to guard the faith. Such lies were spread as the four were set to guard the key, the three were set to hunt and the one banished to the darkness to watch over it, time out of time.

“But not so easily can justice be averted and when we were driven from our land under false charges of sedition we swore to guard her and do her bidding until the last of us gave up his dying breath. It came to the bright child, our flower of the desert, through her mother that the Chosen would come to punish those who had done these vile acts and that we must set forth her story and predictions upon that plant which guards the causeway of her restless tomb. And so we carved it and set it down close on the place where we once worshipped her benevolence. And we guard it still with our hearts though doubtless those of selfish intent will seek to prevent its message from reaching those it is meant for.

“There will come, when the sun grows blood heavy and weary of its trek across the cold sky, a band of travelers. They come at the bidding of those doomed to death at the hands of the three and their hounds. You who hold the key now, scholar enamoured of our Lady—you must return home swiftly, for their mark is now upon you and it cannot be cheated. It is not for you to find the Blood you seek. You are a marker, just as this tree is, as is he who follows you, the feathered merchant. Read no more, seeker after fairy tales—begone.

“Those whose task it is to seek the Blood of the eight-headed will travel here, beset by difficulties and confusion. They will find this marker and read it, unbelieving. Despite doubt, they must believe if they are to save us all. Evil is done in the name of good, although the good are unaware of their dark heritage and so stand innocently by. There is nothing you can do to prevent this, Guardian, no matter how you try. It is your sorry fate to fail. Beyond the sands she curses you for your folly and those of ages past, those of your reviled ancestors. Wallow in your madness and desecration while you can, they cannot save you.

“As to you who read this now, those whose faces stare back at

The Plain of Obelisks

them from time, find that which is hidden and destroy that which must not be. Enter the city of the Obelisk and pierce its black heart or there will be no entry to the secret place. Look not for the Sundered Pages just for their meaning (although the preservers can help you there), but find them and you find the key. Obtain this dark talisman, then hurry, for as they are protected so they cannot fall to its malign intent, you are not. Retrieve that which was lost out of time and end this charade. Beware those beloved of beauty and the silver clarion call of the four and three, they mean you naught but harm. They will seek to ensnare you, but be ever vigilant and avoid religious strife. Look to the old city on the river, look to its shining past and avoid its present terror. Go now with her blessing and free us all. from our shame.”

3.2.4 No Rest

The characters are no doubt tired after their exertions and the comfort of blessed sleep awaits. But such is not the fate of the character whose portrait was missing from Edeten’s notes (the character with the lowest magic score).

Whilst sleeping, this character is plagued with dark dreams. Something is stalking them through the streets of the city. Shadowy figures follow the character, only to disappear when confronted. Fleeting shapes are glanced out of the corner of their eye and strange sounds echo all around them. River mists cling to their ankles and ensnare their bodies in a cold, clammy grip. Then the woman’s laughter begins, harsh and mocking. A male voice (strangely familiar) asks “Is this what you are looking for?” and torn pages rain down from the sky followed by a torrent of blood that threatens to wash them from their feet.

The sound of chanting surrounds them. On the pavements, strange symbols glow through the enshrouding effluvium, constantly shifting and changing. The character should recognise them (are those shapes horns?) but the true meaning slips out of reach every time the answer is almost clear. And there, at the end of a dark, twisted alleyway in front of a place they nearly recognise stands a woman, bound and gagged, a silver sword dangling ominously above her head. Tears stream down her ebony cheeks. As the character approaches, the sword falls and a terrible scream rends the night air. But she isn’t there; there is only a flower, a lily of unsurpassed purity.

Then the horsemen come in response to the sound of a horn, masked and clothed in billowing dark cloaks, their horses making no sound as they surge through the empty streets towards the character. They crush the lily underfoot as they go and on they come, ever nearer, ever closer. They are almost here, so close that the character can feel the horses’ scalding breath upon their face. There is an almighty roar, a flash of flame, a searing pain of startling intensity.

And the character sits up in bed, dripping with sweat and feeling utterly exhausted. The pain is still there and it is coming from their arm. Investigating further reveals the presence of an angry red welt on the flesh of their upper arm. It is tender to the touch and circular in shape and is utterly resistant to Edan’s Thaumaturgic Poultice. Although they do not know it, the character is now in possession of the Huntsman’s Mark.

As a safety precaution should the characters survive the encounter with the Prey, Farnuisa took the portrait and the character’s name when she fled the lost fane. Having done so, she has now activated her fall back plan and can track the characters wherever they go.

There are a variety of ways in which the characters can investigate their comrade’s frighteningly detailed nightmare. If, of course, the targeted character happens to have a specialization in Dream Walking (TT p. 81), then they can analyze it for themselves quite effectively. Alternatively, Phunurus’ Outstanding Replicator may be used (TT p. 100) equally well. For those not blessed with such esoterica, then a day of rest pondering on the dream’s meaning followed by a successful Perception roll will identify the mocking voice as Tovin’s (Hair’s Breadth and above) and the falling pages as those from the Flower Manuscript (Prosaic or above).

And there it is—the characters have been given the responsibility to seek out and destroy the lost object of power they seek by a woman who is unknown to them, but clearly knows them well. The reason for Edeten’s sudden return home is explained as, to some extent, is his death and that of Tovin. But there are still so

The Huntsman’s Mark

Range: Near

Duration: Instant

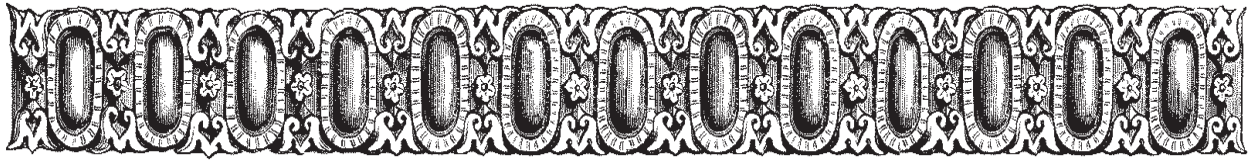
Difficulty: Complex

Summary: A means with which to target an individual at a later date

Description: A magical tattoo executed in the caster’s blood, this enchantment is another of those developed by the Silver Quorum to identify its victims after the Moon Key was lost. The spell requires an item belonging to the victim or the possession of an accurate likeness of the target as well as their name. This then permits the caster to enter the target’s dreams and place the mark upon them. The mark can then be used by the caster to locate the target as well as acting as a point of reference for the Wind Riders, should their services prove necessary. The mark can only be removed by the caster, but its effects can be abrogated by the application of the Mark of Grace (p. 99) or the Lady’s Kiss (p. 83)

Spell Failure: The mark becomes engraved on the caster’s skin

Style Affinity: Devious



many pieces missing from the puzzle. There is really only one pace for them to go now in order to find the answers they seek: Erze Damath, the ruinous city of scholars.

Rumors

An expedition from the re-formed Xalguire Conservatory (p. 53) in Erze Damath has disappeared whilst on a study mission to the area known colloquially as the Spires of Desire (a series of heavily graffitied columns rumoured to contain the origins of the Fourteen Silken Movements). Such disappearances are very rare due to the lack of bandits and such like on the Plains. What has happened to the expedition and have they wakened more than they bargained for by performing the rites allegedly detailed on the Spires?

The creatures of the Forest are disappearing and Saffer the Stockman is not pleased as his source of income is slowly vanishing along with the creatures. Have the hybrids bred themselves to infertility, the usual case with such vat creations, or is there a more sinister reason for their demise? Could Saffer have a business rival? Someone has been enquiring about a large vacant lot close to the Stockman's yard, but who and why?

Pilgrims crossing the Plain have reported earth tremors and strange lights in the sky on stormy nights. Some claim that certain of the obelisks are humming softly to themselves and even emitting a diffuse blue glow. Is the phenomenon due to the electrical nature of the storms, or is there something special about these pillars in particular? Are the legends of giant warriors turned to stone just stories, or are they trying to free

themselves from aeons of bondage to exert their revenge on the descendants of those that imprisoned them?

Essential Plot Points

- Yet more people the characters have never met seem to know them. Why do people find them so familiar?
- Someone, or something, doesn't want the characters to find the Ironweed Pillar or discover its secrets.
- The characters are part of some ancient prophecy to find the Blood (presumably the Blood of ZoZam) and destroy it.
- Who is the false prophet? Why is he a false prophet? Is it Gilfig?
- They must travel to Erze Damath and find a key or their quest will be in vain.
- The key is dangerous, but how and why?
- There are other items which must be retrieved from elsewhere that are also necessary in the quest. But what are they and where are they hidden?
- A secretive society seeks to do them harm. Who are they and whom do they serve?
- Who has the power to burn someone in their dreams and what is the significance of the mark they left behind?



Our last view of Blanwalt Forest



Chapter 5

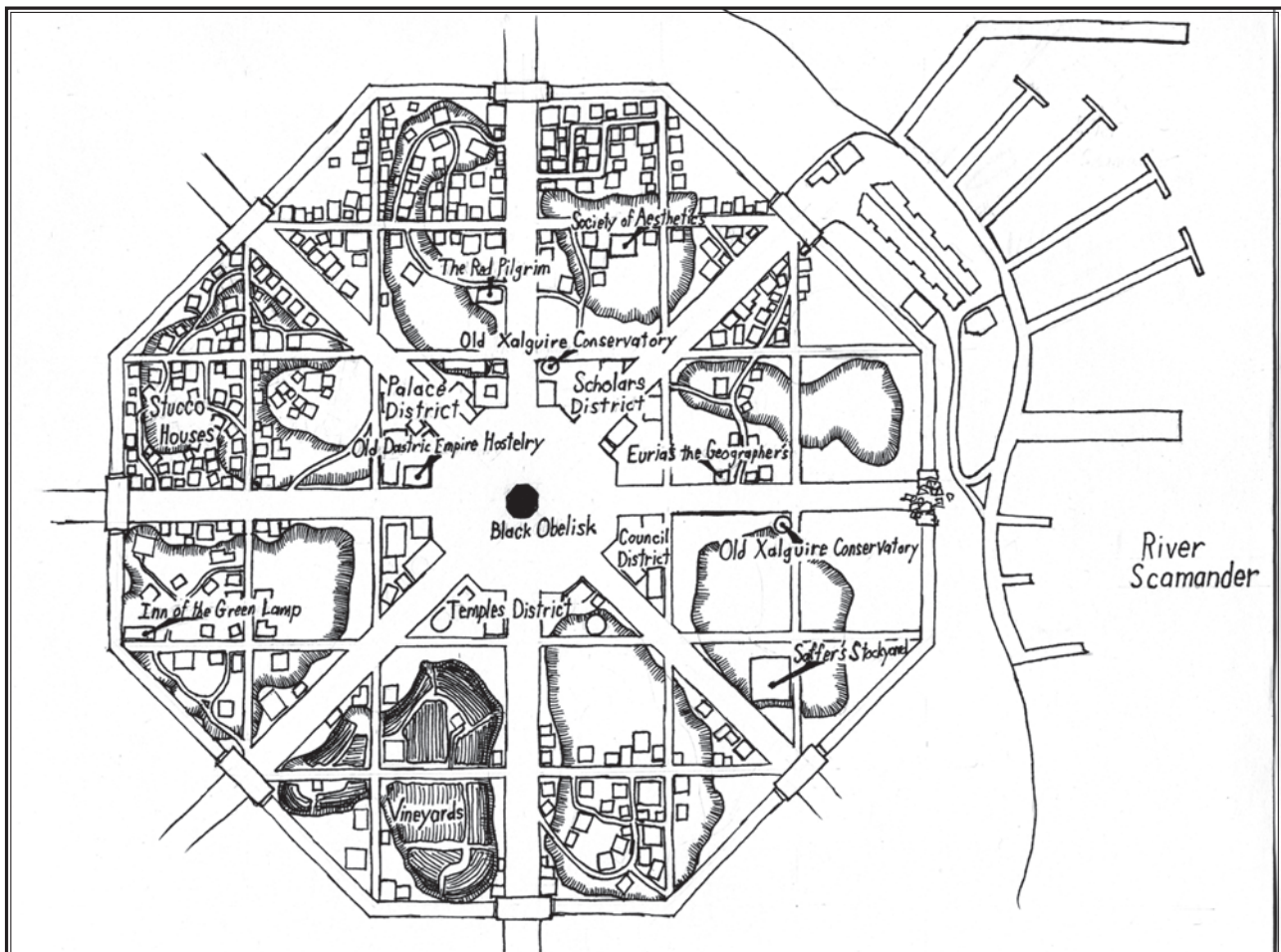
Erze Damath

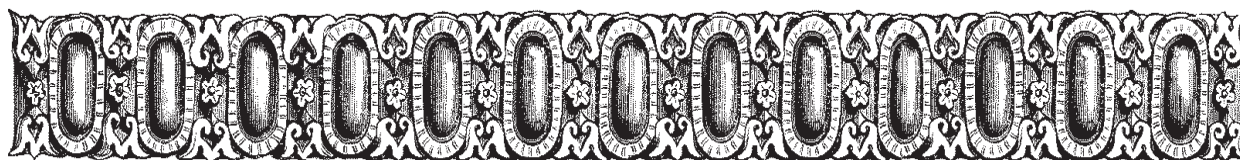
As far as I'm concerned, civilisation should be measured by one's ability to easily draw a hot bath. In that respect, as in many others, the city of Erze Damath, heir to the Dastric Empire, home of Gilfig, can justly lay claim to be a civilised place. I had thought Kaiin to be a marvel, but it pales into insignificance next to the elegance of this place. It's seen better days, but then, haven't we all (present correspondee excluded, naturally). I intend to stay here for a little while, the better to appreciate its charms and that I may be rested before we push once more into wilderness unknown. Please send bath salts as I just can't seem to find any here that suit me.

Sakonity the Adamantine

Erze Damath is a vast city, larger even than Kaiin, although much now lies in ruins. It sits on the western bank of the River Scamander and is built upon eight low hills that surround a curious fang of rock known as the Black Obelisk. Rumor has it that it may even be the site of the fabled Padara Palace, capital of ancient Sudun. Erze Damath is also mentioned in the *Compendium of Universal Knowledge* p. 73.

The climate here ranges from comfortably warm and dry to hot and humid during the day and damp and cold at night, thanks to the river mists that regularly shroud the city. Much of the city's agriculture takes place on land on the far side of the river on the very fringes of the Plains of Oparona, where the ground is better irrigated and there is more space.





Sacred Geometry

Erze Damath was built from the riches of the Dastran textile trade. Originally a small outpost of the Empire, it came to prominence with a rise in popularity of the god ZoZam and the related faith as propounded by his disciple Gilfig. The *Gilfigite Rotes*, an interminably long set of volumes comprised of what most scholars label “lurid folklore”¹ and ancient family trees (the so-called *Dastric Escutcheons*) record that, in the middle of a mighty storm, lightning struck the earth in the land between eight sacred hills, causing a spine of black volcanic rock one hundred feet tall to rupture the earth. Here the faithful constructed a mighty city devoted to order and reason around the geometric principles at the heart of their faith.

The number eight is highly significant to Gilfigites as is, to a lesser extent, the number four. This is clearly reflected in the layout of the city. The perimeter wall, which skirts the sacred hills and occasionally incorporates their cliff-faces, is octagonal in shape. There are eight city gates: four on the cardinal points and the four major points in between. The city sprawls across the eight hills of legend towards a central octagonal plaza at whose centre stands the Black Obelisk (also octagonal in shape). Eight processional ways lead to the plaza from the city gates, having been laid in the valleys between the hills.

The city is further subdivided into squares by wide paved avenues. These blocks of land are divide into anything up to sixteen smaller blocks depending on the status of the area. The annoying triangles formed in the angles of the walls were originally kept as parks and areas for public entertainment² their outlines blurred to hide their unfortunate existence. Nowadays, there are often buildings found in the lee of the wall, or the areas act as allotments for the nearby habitations. The lower south-western triangle is now home to the city’s vine tedders (for further details on tedders, see XPS1, available online at www.pelgrane.com).

City Zones

Within the confines of the sacred geometry, there exist defined zones of building. The poorer inhabitants of the city dwell in low stucco huts clustered around the western and northern gates in a region bounded by the first major avenues. Probably in an attempt to maintain some distance from hoi polloi, at some point in the city’s history large blocks of land were cleared between the avenues. The precise reasons for this organized demolition are unknown but the clearings form an effective no-mans land between the underclass and those who still cling to the extravagances of a dead age.

Within the cleared zone lie the former palaces and garden estates of the privileged, although few are still home to their original inhabitants and many have been converted to service the

¹ It is traditional among scholars to label as folklore anything that is widely known among sensible folk but contradicts a scholar’s pet theory. Folklore should not be confused with folktales, the latter consist of shrewd analysis of the actions of those currently in power, told in parable form to avoid censure.

² They are still used for public executions, maimings, the eviration of debtors and the exhibition of municipal algedonica.

pilgrim trade which sustains the city in these latter days. The outer area of the central zone is home to the business fraternity and the fragments of those upper crust still in possession of the family pile (in some cases, quite literally). The inner area is divided into further districts as discussed individually below.

The eastern fringes of the city lie in ruins, with the east and southeast gates all but blocked by fallen masonry. The Thief Takers ensure that there are few half-men incursions into the city from this area, but looting of the buildings is a common pastime amongst the scholars and beggars of the city. The area is avoided by most of the city’s residents. Builders’ merchants have operating licences issued by the Council to mine the area for dressed stone to be used in maintaining those regions of the city still suitable for habitation³.

The Plaza of the Black Obelisk

Shielded from view (except along the eight processional ways) by the eight hills of Erze Damath, this area is a wide, open plaza, paved with enormous black marble slabs. At its heart, the one hundred foot black columnar spire rises heavenward. There are usually large numbers of people milling about here, mostly pilgrims, religious officials, marshals and Thief Takers (such credulous crowds seldom pay close enough attention to their particulars and opportunistic theft would be rife without strict control). A few tasteful stalls at the edge of the plaza sell religious devotions and pilgrim badges under the watchful eye of the Precursor’s men, whilst others sell suitably pious snacks and beverages (for Gilfigites these tend towards the heady delights of pulses and water) to the gathered devotees.

Ifargis, Legitimate Trinket Seller

I think that would be a most decorative accent to your robes, madam, and a restrained yet pronounced declaration of both your taste and faith, if you don’t mind me saying.

Of medium height and build, Ifargis dresses smartly but humbly when purveying her hand crafted pilgrim badges to the faithful. In a variety of materials to suit all purses, the trinkets are well made and, at the upper end of the price range, eye-catching. She is very charming and sympathetic and appears to go out of her way to accommodate her customers, whatever their background. Still, her purse is never lighter than it should be.

Persuasion (Charming) 10, Rebuff (Pure-hearted) 11, Attack (Speed) 8, Defence (Dodge) 9, Magic (Insightful) 2, Health 9, Appraisal 7, Athletics 6, Craftsmanship (pilgrim badges) 10, Etiquette 8, Perception 9, Stewardship 6, Wealth 2

³ After a recent incident, when one innkeeper managed to get a licence to quarry a rivals’ premises for stone, officials are now instructed to take more care in specifying the area the licence pertains to

Erze Damath

The Black Obelisk

As mentioned previously, the *Gilfigite Rotes* claim that the pitch-black pillar burst forth from the earth at the bidding of ZoZam. Whilst modern scholars attach little credence to this claim, there is no documentary evidence to suggest how such a thing came to be. Its eight-sided form, although extremely rare, is entirely natural. The myriad carvings upon its surfaces are not, having been added over time by previous incumbents of the area and the various religious sects that have held sway over the city. The obelisk resembles those found on the Plain of Obelisks, both the scripted (which are carved in a similar style) and the earlier granite columns, built from hewn blocks in multiples of eight. The exact relationships between the two sites are unclear and it is unknown whether those on the plain preceded the Black Obelisk, or whether its discovery led to a positive design craze.

Unique to the Black Obelisk are the five carved statues at its base, each the Prime Adept of a particular creed. These statues are arranged in a semicircle arcing from east to west, with each of the figures pointing towards one of the five gates encompassed by this arc. Gilfig faces south, Huis southwest, Eudia southeast, Ilvaite west and Aegir east. These statues are not all they seem, containing secret compartments and control mechanisms that allow sect priests to deliver messages to the faithful in times of need, often accompanied by such divine crowd pleasing effects as flaming eyes. Similar arrangements can be found in the Temple of Teleologues in Kauchique¹.

Another unique sight in the plaza are the various scholars studying the writings of the Black Obelisk (many written in unfathomable dead languages) with the aid of the Epistolary Lifters, a minor branch of Gilfigites who believe it is their duty to help others unravel the mysteries of ZoZam. They do this by hauling researchers up the face of the Obelisk on carefully rigged slings attached to a counter weight mechanism. Once aloft, researchers can control their altitude and position by a series of

Muvell, Brawny Disciple

*These muscles are a sign of my devotion to Gilfig.
Devout, aren't I?*

By nature, all Epistolary Lifters tend towards the well built. Muvell is a quiet young man whose only weakness is an inordinate pride in his well developed physique. It was this rather than any burning religious belief that pointed him towards the Lifters but he is faithful in his own unassuming way. He enjoys the exercise and is constantly trying to improve the rigs and winches used to lift scholars up the Obelisk.

Persuasion (Intimidating) 8, Rebuff (Wary) 8, Attack (Strength) 14, Defence (Sure-footedness) 11, Magic (Curious) 1, Athletics 10, Etiquette 4, Perception 6, Wherewithal 7

¹This is a common technique amongst the clergy of many religions and the editor could indeed supply a list of others that use these arrangements. Hierophants wishing the name of their order to be removed from the list need merely contact Pelgrane Press at our address in Kaiin with the usual financial contribution.

Religion In Erze Damath

There are many religious groups in the Dying Earth and the lands around Erze Damath are among the most fertile in terms of number and diversity. The major faith in the area is Gilfigism, although there are many others, some of which are detailed below.

Gilfigism

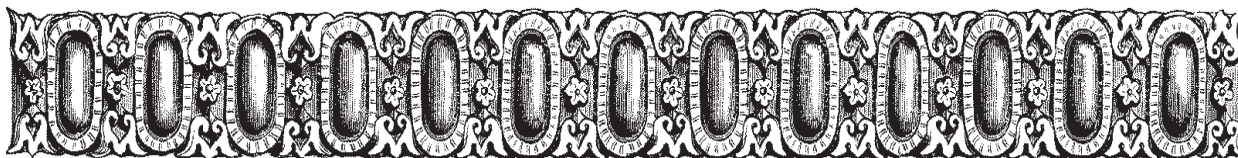
There are a wide range of personal belief systems operating under the sheltering umbrella of Gilfigism. In common they share their general acceptance of the *Protocols of Gilfig*, a code of behavior that counsels its followers to honesty, charity, decency and cleanliness (moral and bodily). Theft is possibly the worst crime a Gilfigite can perform (next to murder) and guarantees that the follower's soul will be denied entry into Paradaisical Gamamere after death. All who die whilst on pilgrimage automatically enter Gamamere as a reward for their devotion.

According to orthodox doctrine when ZoZam, the eight-headed creator deity, brought the cosmos into being he accidentally struck off his toe with his scythe. This severed member became Gilfig and the drops of spilled blood the eight races of mankind. Gilfig bound the wound with ribbon (dark red ribbons are a holy item to the faithful), then laid down his *Protocols* and gathered a group of disciples to spread the word of ZoZam, including Uenmund who taught at Angdithlaer (p. 107). It is reputed that Gilfig instituted the Gneustic Dogma in Erze Damath, but that point is hotly debated. It is also claimed that the scourging of Kazue, a notorious heretic, and the denouncement of the terrible witch Enxis took place before the Black Obelisk.

Other theories

Some other tenets of faith include (but are not limited to):

- There is no creator; the existence of the world is absolute.
- The sun is merely a cell in the immense body of the great deity ZoZam. The creation of the universe was more akin to the growth of lichen on a rock, wherein the earth is an animalcule deriving nourishment.
- A vast number of conditions are possible; many have been and all will come to pass.
- There has been a succession of creators, each absolute in their own right. ZoZam is merely the latest.
- The known cosmos is actually the shadow of a region ruled by ghosts, who in turn are dependant upon the psychic energies of man for their survival.



Religious Festivals

The major festival of the Gilfigite calendar is the Lustral Rites, which take place beneath the Black Obelisk once every eight years. At this time, Erze Damath is inundated with pilgrims seeking to abase themselves before the statue of Gilfig. The burning of offerings was once common, but after a particularly unfortunate incident involving the Precursor's most sumptuous robes, the tying of symbolic flame colored ribbons to specially blessed trellises is considered more acceptable. The full Rite lasts for eight weeks, although only the most devout attend for the entire length of the festival. The Rite culminates in a ceremony at which the Precursor releases eight scarlet warblers, the symbol of Gilfig. The Carnival of Light takes place every four years during the winter months, its highlight a silent torch lit parade through the city that finishes with a magnificent fireworks display. Other smaller festivals exist but tend to be more faction specific—there is some form of festivity most weeks in Erze Damath.



A particularly unfortunate incident involving the Precursor's most sumptuous robes.

Huis

Hardly worshipped in the west, where he is regarded as something of an upstart, Huis was always more popular in the furthest eastern reaches of the Dying Earth. Much of his doctrine is similar to that of the more popular Gilfig, except where it professes the active unearthing and subsequent dismantling of diabolic centres of worship. His greatest triumph was the defeat of the black demonist Juructail in the lost city of Ceinid Ul. His teachings are purportedly recorded in the *Book of Profound Dogma*, a rare document much sought after by bibliophiles. Copies containing details of the coin based virtue system that rewarded the faithful for acts of devotion are the most valuable. Among the more unsavory acts favoured by Huisitas, spitting in a forward direction when passing through a city gate is perhaps the most socially acceptable today. In terms of auspiciousness, dusk and the southwest are rated highly by this faith.

Religious Festivals

Few people follow the festivals of Huis after the faithful's expulsion from Erze Damath many centuries ago under a bit of a cloud. Dimly remembered and occasionally honoured are Black Ash Day, a period of ritual fasting and denial, followed by the Feast of Triumph (where the denial of the previous day is well and truly reversed).

Funambulous Evangels

Technically Gilfigites, most Funambulous Evangels would not thank you for mentioning this pertinent fact. These religious zealots refuse to place their feet upon the ground, believing that the earth is composed purely of the grave dust of every being that has gone before. Indeed, to quote the *Illuminated Texts of the Evangelic* "the earth is nothing more than damp and ubiquitous lich mould; as such it would be an act of sacrilege to set forth upon the very bones of our ancestors". They believe the earth to be twenty-nine aeons old (the more widely held consensus being twenty-three or even twenty one) and that for every square ell of soil, two and one-quarter million men have died. They have many interesting and improbable theories as to why the earth has not been choked with dust of the dead. In their own enclaves, they move about suspended above the earth on an intricate arrangement of tightropes and walkways. When forced to visit less enlightened locales and when on pilgrimage, the faithful wear specially blessed, extremely thick-soled and cumbersome shoes. The pain of walking in these creations is meant to focus the mind and bring about true piety. They're very good for blisters, too.

Religious Festivals

Funambulous Evangels mostly do not hold with festivals, which they see as frivolous. They do observe the Lustral Rites.

Erze Damath

The Pentatarch

Each the founder of a particular spectrum of belief, the statues have been here since the first major phase of construction on the city. Whilst they have waxed and waned in popularity, they are still only second to the Black Obelisk in terms of visitor attractions in Erze Damath.

Gilfig

Carved from a dark red marble, his fatherly gaze directed due south (a truly auspicious direction for Gilfigites), the four hands of Gilfig lift up his holy symbols to protect his children. In his upper hands are the scythe and glass (representing honesty and clarity), in the lower set the ribbon and the cloth (representing devotion and cleanliness). His feet rest upon the necks of supplicants, whose faces shine with enlightenment. His elongated toes curl skyward, both signs of elegance and delicacy. In times past, the sons of noble houses had their feet bound to encourage these Gilfigistic proportions, although that practice has all but died out and is more commonly represented by the up-curved toes of modern men's boots.

Huis

A rival of Gilfig, he stands to Gilfig's right, thus facing southwest. His statue is set slightly lower than Gilfig's and is carved from a warm orange sandstone. His face is bold and strong, with a rugged vitality missing from Gilfig's more genteel visage. His long hair streams in a divine wind blowing up from the east. In his hands he holds a mirror. At one time the mirror was silvered such that pilgrims could see their own reflection, but this has long since worn away.

well-established hand signals. In order that the proper moral integrity of the Obelisk be maintained and its glory unobscured, prior warning of at least two days must be given to the Lifters so that the rigging may be constructed in the appropriate place (it is not permanently in situ, although various critical spikes and pegs do remain between excursions). Such investigations are not permitted on the various religious festivals so as not to offend the worshippers.

The Temple District

At the southern edge of the Plaza, in the triangle formed by the south-eastern and south-western processional ways, lies the Temple District. Positioned here because of its auspicious location with respect to Gilfigite principle, it is the site of the Precursor's Palace, the Thief Takers headquarters and the Shrine of Gilfig as well as many other lesser temples. Most of the buildings here are in excellent condition, even the shrines of the neglected adepts, because the current Precursor has very firm ideas about keeping up appearances.

Sammech

A thin-faced woman in her youth, the statue of Sammech stands to Gilfig's left, facing the ruins of the south-eastern gate with a disapproving stare. Little is known of her now, although her mode of dress suggests a humble origin. In one hand she holds a lily. Her statue is of a pale blush colored stone, giving it an eerie semblance of life in certain lights, especially around dusk and dawn. Her followers were the original inhabitants of this area and she predates Gilfig.

Ilvaite

Another little remembered holy man, Ilvaite's green-tinged statue is not greatly loved by the superstitious folk of Erze Damath, but they dare not risk his removal. He faces west towards the Desert Gate, a look of joyous laughter on his aquiline face. He carries no symbols, but miniature herd beasts cluster around his legs, suggesting some form of agricultural ties.

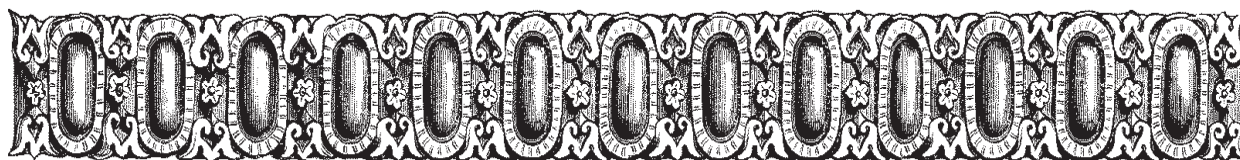
Aegir

Facing east, one plump hand raced to shield her eyes from the rising sun, stands Aegir the Midwife, mother of ZoZam. Her white marble face is stained with tears, her figure soft and rounded, and in her arm she cradles a dead infant, whilst at her feet a healthy tot clings to her voluminous aprons. So is the guardian of life and death, deliverer and dispatcher, represented to the faithful. Although little worshipped now, expectant mothers still leave offerings at her feet to ensure the safety of their unborn children.

The Truth About The Obelisk

ZoZam did not call the obelisk into being, a conclave of powerful mages did. Or, more precisely, a conclave of powerful mages constructed and concealed the obelisk until they had finished it and used it to flee the Dying Earth for realms unknown. The spire of the obelisk is actually the beam transposer of a massive underground complex designed by the mages. The eight hills of Erze Damath are, in fact, eight control centres hidden beneath artificial mounds. The flash of light which led to the discovery of the spire was the discharge from its one and only use. All concealments failed when the mages left.

Hints to the obelisk's true nature are carved on its surface at the very tip of the Spire. Spells such as Phandaal's Instantaneous Translation (Turjan's Tome p. 99) can be used to decipher this, but due to the unusual nature of the text and the precarious manner in which it must be studied, a caster suffers a penalty of -2 to each roll. If deciphered, details of how to access the spire (a hidden door at the base of the pillar that is outlined by a pale light after repetition of a command word) become apparent. There are no details on the outside of the pillar that suggest how the equipment works. That information is carefully coded into the control panels of the machines hidden deep in the hills.



The Precursor's Palace

Standing to the east of the southern processional way (also known as the Dastric Road) and right on the edge of the Plaza, the Palace is a magnificent gem-encrusted edifice. Home to the Chief Hierarch of the Black Obelisk, its opulence dazzles all who see it. Built and extended with donations from the faithful and a cut of all the hostelry fees in the city, it is the best maintained structure in all Erze Damath, as well as the brightest (especially on a sunny day when the effect can be, quite literally, blinding). It is here that all business pertaining to the Black Obelisk and the Gilfigite faith takes place.

Originally a simple square two-storey structure, subsequent Precursors have extended and embellished the building so that now it has four storeys (the upper storey the exclusive domain of the Precursor and his family) and whilst still remaining square, now encompasses a quiet and secluded central courtyard. The sides of the building facing the courtyard are not studded with jewels as the gardens are strictly private with no public admissions and it would be a waste of spectacle¹. Offices on the ground floor that back on to the courtyard have shutters on both the inside and outside of the windows, such that the Precursor's privacy can be maintained at all times.

The entrance to the building is a high double doorway. The doors themselves are richly carved with religious allegories and gilded with precious metals. It takes two strong men to open them and the Ceremonial Guard are responsible for providing this service. Once inside the building, visitors find themselves in a cavernous vaulted entrance hall. Every square inch of plaster is decorated with a riot of color and the highly polished floor is tiled in scarlet and black. Officers of the Hierarch are stationed behind ornate desks ready to direct visitors to the relevant department for dealing with their enquiries.

Cantiva, Ceremonial Guard

The doors date back to the 20th Aeon, when they were carved by a team of artisans to the exact specifications of Precursor Yntyn the Third himself.

Young, bored and desperate for another job, Cantiva is one of the sixteen strong Palace Ceremonial Guard. Following in his family's tradition he is more of a tour guide than a soldier, a fact about which he is deeply embarrassed. Still, he has a considerable depth of knowledge regarding Guard and Palace history, having been raised on it along with his mother's milk.

Persuasion (Glib) 10, Rebuff (Pure-hearted) 11, Attack (Finesse) 10, Defence (Sure-footedness) 11, Magic (Studious) 4, Health 10, Athletics 8, Etiquette 6, Pedantry (Palace history) 8, Perception 6, Scuttlebutt 3

¹ There is a strong suspicion that, whatever was the state in the distant past, now the upper floors are studded with more crystal and colored glass than with valuable gemstones, but there are questions a wise man does not ask and the ceremonial guard take a dim view of persons removing gems from the walls, even if "only for cleaning".

A large staircase leads up to the first floor, although few people ever get that far—most of the offices dealing with matters arising on a daily basis are situated on the ground floor. Only visiting dignitaries or high-ranking local citizens make it up to the suites on the first and second floors, all of which are lavishly decorated and furnished to the highest order of taste. Despite the Council's wish that it were otherwise, most of the important decisions regarding the running of Erze Damath are taken in these rooms.

The Office of Precursor

The Office of Precursor is a very wealthy and powerful one. Not only is the Precursor the Chief Hierarch of the Black Obelisk, he is also the Supreme Prelate of the Gilfigite faith. Historically the holder is also Chief Witchfinder to the Dastric Empire and Warder of the Weir (see *Ririmaud*, p. 107), although the duties pertaining to these titles are no longer strictly observed. The Precursor is responsible for overseeing the running and maintenance of the Black Obelisk and the Shrine of Gilfig, conducting daily religious observances and presiding over major religious festivals. Despite no official position within the Council, his acknowledgement as Ancient and Trusted Advisor gives the incumbent a great deal of sway over decision making policies in the city, particularly as his purse-strings are far longer than those of the Council.

Precursor Hulm

I see your point, Councillor, but I do not believe that it is our best interests to follow such a course of action. Ah, good, I thought you would see things my way.

Stocky and round of face, many people are surprised that this unprepossessing man is the most powerful individual in Erze Damath. His ruddy complexion marks him as more of an outdoor type rather than a bookish scholar, though in truth he is neither. A shrewd political mover, he is as devout as is outwardly necessary to maintain the dignity of his office, whilst never losing sight of his capacity to work great change upon the city. Whilst not the first choice of all eight appointing officers his immense skill in flattery, persuasion and coercion eventually secured him the position. Not a man to be trifled with, the current Precursor takes his job very seriously indeed. He leads by sheer force of will and has been known to turn beetroot in color when in full flow. A skilled public orator, he never raises his voice, his enunciation being measured and precise (although he does have a habit of growling menacingly at his opponents if riled). Usually to be found dressed in his ceremonial blood red robes.

Persuasion (Forthright) 14, Rebuff (Penetrating) 15, Attack (Strength) 10, Defence (Intuition) 11, Magic (Forceful) 10, Health 12, Athletics 8, Etiquette 9, Pedantry 12, Perception 10, Scuttlebutt 8, Stewardship 8, Wealth 6

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Not a man to be trifled with, the current Precursor takes his job very seriously indeed.

The position of Precursor is by awarded by the nominations of eight senior officials within the church hierarchy and is a lifetime tenure. At one point the sinecure was inherited, but a string of disastrous holders led to reform of the system¹. Upon taking up the position, the Precursor and his family are entitled to take up residence in the Palace and begin enjoying all the benefits associated with the living. Some Precursors have declined to live on site, but they have been few and far between. Most Precursors are ambitious and calculating individuals for whom being at the centre of activity is an important aspect of the job.

The Thief Takers

On the other side of the processional way sits the headquarters of the Erze Damath Legal and Honourable Constabulary, more commonly known as the Thief Takers. By a quirk of history, they answer directly to the Precursor rather than the Council. Responsible for law and order within the city limits, the job is well paid and relatively free of hazards.

The Constabulary building itself is a modest single storied structure, sturdily built and possessing a large basement in which

¹ The last hereditary incumbent died in the arms of a summoned Senjal and his heir was prevailed upon to sell the sinecure back to the church for a nominal cash payment. Unfortunately the effects of the rack meant that the heir's signature was unrecognizable but their subsequent death rendered the matter nuncupatory.

Jeicc, Chief Thief Taker

Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

Jeicc, despite his position, is a happy man. A lean man of middle years, he has worked his way up from lowly desk clerk to his current post by dint of twenty years of unstinting service. He knows how the city works and is extremely loyal to both the Office of the Precursor and his men. Careful, though not cautious, he is a competent manager and tactician, though his lack of political awareness prevents him from reaching dizzier heights. He has a charming voice and is very popular speaker with the older ladies at the Xalguire Conservatory where he regularly guest lectures on the history of law enforcement¹.

Persuasion (Charming) 11, Rebuff (Penetrating) 10, Attack (Finesse) 12, Defence (Misdirection) 12, Magic (Insightful) 6, Health 12, Athletics 8, Etiquette 7, Pedantry (law history) 10, Perception 10, Scuttlebutt 7, Stewardship 8, Wealth 2, Wherewithal 6

Bernuisa, Dispenser of Justice

Procedure dictates that at least some form of plea be entered. Is that quite clear?

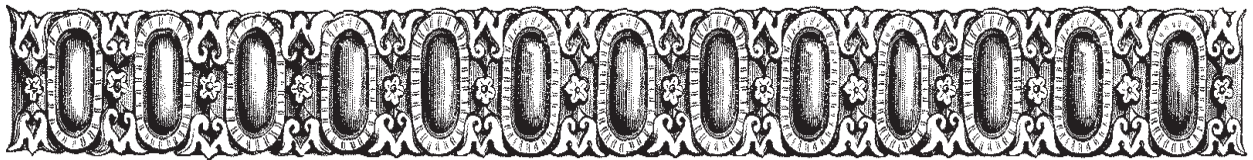
The thing most people remember about Bernuisa is her gimlet glare, the result of an unfortunate birth defect which otherwise mars her handsome face. Those on the receiving end of her justice also recall her unerring memory. This has been her greatest aid in serving justice for her beloved city. Descendant of one of the oldest families in Erze Damath, she is proud of her job and strives to perform it to the best of her ability. Unerringly honest, both a blessing and a curse to those who stand before her, she cannot be swayed by fair means or foul.

Persuasion (Intimidating) 12, Rebuff (Pure-hearted) 15, Attack (Caution) 9, Defence (Intuition) 10, Magic (Studious) 6, Health 11, Etiquette 8, Pedantry 11, Perception 12, Scuttlebutt 8, Stewardship 7, Wealth 6, Wherewithal 9

¹ His descriptions of such punishments as noyade, scaphism and deuterogamy are regarded as the very height of the social season.

felons are held prior to trial. The courthouse (more ornate, just as sturdy) is next door and is joined to the cells by an underground passage. There is no jail as such in Erze Damath, sentences tending towards community service in minor cases while the truly lost causes are staked out in the rubble of the eastern city for the small population of half-men to deal with. Trials are presided over by Jeicc, Constabulary Chief of Staff; and Censure Bernuisa, Head of the Judiciary.

A Thief Taker can be clearly identified by his uniform. Unlike other Erzites, male officers dress in yellow and do not wear the typical rim-hat, preferring to sport a reinforced cap bearing their symbol of office, the city shield. Female officers wear breeches—something a lady would not consider under any other circumstances.



The People of Erze Damath

Also known as Erzites, the inhabitants of the city are descended from pure Dastric blood and therefore have a dark and swarthy complexion. They are a lively people, making them quite unlike the more jaded inhabitants of Kaiin and Alмеры and although they live amid ruins, they don't allow that to spoil their outlook on life.

Male Fashion

Despite their gaiety, the men of Erze Damath dress in what some people would call a sombre manner, preferring to wear black at all times. The current fashion is for tight black trousers and vests adorned with pom-poms of varying size. Their boots are generally knee length with elaborate curled toe-pieces. In terms of headwear, a certain amount of tongue-in-cheek conservatism is again evident. Black discs, through which the scalp protrudes from a central hole, are all the rage, although much variation is observed in the precise angle of wear and the width of the brim. The men's dark hair is kept unruffled, glossy and sweet-smelling by the application of balms containing aloe, myrrh or carcynt, depending on the status of the gentleman in question.

Female Fashion

Unlike their male counterparts, the ladies of Erze Damath are colorfully decadent¹. Their long gowns are available in a host of shades, the favorites being yellow, red, orange and magenta. Currently, sleeves are worn short and fluted, with a tastefully

¹ While the use of this phrase might suggest otherwise, we do not wish to impugn the modesty or marital fidelity of the ladies of Erze Damath.

low rather than brazen décolletage. They too sport elaborate footwear, their dainty slippers adorned with orange and black sequins in a host of designs, both formal and frivolous. The ladies do not wear hats, preferring elegant hairstyles adorned with colorful plumes and sparkling pins. They too use hair balms, but the fragrances are more feminine. Jasmine and rose are the current favorites

The Importance of Color

Erzites are profoundly superstitious when it comes to color. Reds, oranges and yellows (the so-called sun colors) and black are regarded as the best palette with auspicious connotations. Blue and green are considered to be extremely unlucky colors and any visitors wearing them will be treated to shocked looks and social exclusion until they have taken the matter in hand and atoned for their unspeakable faux pas. Purple is the color of mourning, not black.

Family Names in Erze Damath

Although as many and varied as the names in the rest of the Dying Earth, there still remain certain indicators of family history amongst the names of the city's inhabitants. In particular, male names ending in -ere, -ire or -uire denote some link to the ancient Dastric aristocracy. The female versions -dia, -esa, -ir/-ira and -uisa are also commonly found. These suffixes occur in both first names (often passed down through a family) and surnames. Many of the bearers have no idea of the connotations of their given name.

The Shrine of Gilfig

A remarkably plain building compared to the extravagances of the Precursor's Palace, this is the major center of worship in the city, although there are smaller shrines dotted about the other districts. It has no steeple, though when viewed from the main entrance, an optical illusion caused by careful alignment of the building places the Black Obelisk in the position a steeple would be expected to take.

Inside, the air of holy simplicity is maintained. The pews are carved wood, black with age, the floor covered with plain black tiles. The high windows are a checkerboard of white and red glass, filling the building with a mottled tanvilkat light. The walls are unpainted, but do bear carved reliefs of the various symbols of the Gilfigite faith. The skill of the builders becomes most apparent when the faithful lift their voices in song. The acoustics are such that the sound is multiplied until it seems that a veritable host is gathered beneath the vaulted beams.

On the altar rests a silver casket, the work of the famous silversmiths of Dastra, now long gone. Here, it is claimed, reside the mortal remains of Gilfig. The power of this holy relic is reserved for the creation of sacred ribbons and the blessing of sick worshippers. Services are held here every eight hours, every

The Holy Robes of Gilfig

(250 points, Permanent)

The silver casket in which the remains of Gilfig lie have, over countless years of belief, grown to possess healing powers. The sick travel here for blessed relief and, mediated by a priest of the Shrine, they receive divine intervention in the treatment of their ills (known as the Blessing of Gilfig). Only the truly faithful benefit from the healing power of the Shrine. Results are slow and gradual rather than instantaneous, but pain relief is immediate. In game terms, any levies applied due to the level of injury are ignored but Health is regained as normal.

The cost of the article reflects its lack of availability on the market and the zeal with which it will be hunted down if stolen.



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four on holy days. The church is usually busy and at festival times the services often spill out into the small square in front of the building.

Having no bell tower, the faithful are called to prayer instead by the clarion call of eight large silver trumpets, whose unmistakable sound can be heard clear across the city. Again the work of the silversmiths of Dastra, these works of art are beautifully etched and of tremendous quality, both musically and aesthetically. They are stored in a strong room in the church, just to be on the safe side.

The Triteuchal Court

Although trials for witchcraft are rare these days, there is still a dedicated building for the prosecution of such cases. It is quite a grand structure, octagonal in shape and single-storied. The offices of the court clerks ring the building on its outer face and there is an ornate central courtroom. Carefully wrought into the decoration are a variety of protective runes (just in case).

Any trial is presided over by the High Stimator assisted by the Pontificant. There are also a number of Stimators called to each proceeding to act as expert witnesses to the High Stimator and act as prosecution and defence counselors should they be required¹. The Thief Takers also provide guards for such occasions.

The Palace District

Once the home of the elite of Erze Damath, this area is still well preserved, housing as it does those who have become wealthy from the pilgrim trade and those clever enough to have clung on to family fortunes. There are relatively few buildings here, each estate being gifted with large enclosed gardens to ensure privacy.

The Old Dastric Empire Hostelry

Housed in the precincts of the former Palace of Harmony, this is one of the few buildings open to the public in this area of the city. It has, through much effort on the part of its proprietor Dier and his father before him, risen to become the foremost boarding facility in Erze Damath. Its rooms are spacious, light and comfortably furnished, whilst its suites are the epitome of luxury and design. Situated close to the Plaza of the Black Obelisk, Dier has carefully balanced the needs of his wealthy city clientele with those of the pilgrim trade to the detriment of neither.

An arched gateway leads from the street into the large, well-manicured palace forecourt and garden, its ornamental walkways shaded by trellises of perfumed flowers, the flower beds and topiaries displaying bold splashes of color that draw the eye. At the garden's heart is a clear pool of water, whose basin is tiled with an exceptionally detailed mosaic of birds and flowers.

The main palace complex itself forms three sides of a square, with the gate wall providing the fourth. Stunningly carved columns support the covered cloister that allows access to all parts of the building without ever having to leave its confines. The main

¹ The toll of years has meant that the funds available for maintaining the system are sadly diminished. The High Stimator is a respected scholar it is true, but the other Stimators number in their ranks haberdashers, a maker of tulchans and an inveigher.

range is four storeys tall and directly opposite the gate, with two lower ranges to the left and right as you approach. A smaller stable complex is housed separately to the main complex² and is accessed by its own gateway from the street.

Within the main building are the entrance hall and lobby, tasteful in their soothing décor of muted peach. Fountains bubble as the staff arrange suitable accommodation for their guests, or take bookings for the renowned restaurant. It is in this building that guests are housed, the more expensive rooms overlooking the gardens, the cheaper ones the less well-kept gardens of the estates

High Stimator Anvish, Ardent Legalist

Well, are you a witch or not? I don't have all day, speak up!

Having risen to the position by the unfortunate dismissal of his predecessor Poroguire (after his lackluster handling of the infamous Jhail witch trial, DERPG p. 104 onwards), Anvish feels that he must behave with the utmost conviction and brevity in order that no such blunders happen under his watch.

Not a kind or forgiving man in the first place, his appointment has only made his suspicious nature even more convinced that witches and fiends lurk behind every door. This tends to make him rash and jumpy, which only heightens the fact that he looks like an overweight rodent with a nervous tick. Despite his bullying behavior, the man is a complete coward if openly challenged. He is also a vain man and likes to parade around his office in his purple judgement skullcap sentencing imaginary victims.

Persuasion (Intimidating) 10, Rebuff (Wary) 12, Attack (Ferocity) 11, Defence (Vexation) 10, Magic (Forceful) 3, Health 9, Etiquette 4, Pedantry 12, Perception 6, Scuttlebutt 5, Wealth 2, Wherewithal 3

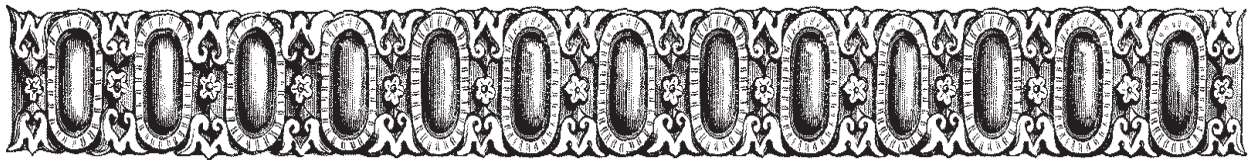
Pontificant Podertule

Court proceedings, being what they are, can be anything but fascinating. Sorry, I meant anything but boring...

Podertule is quite a young man who drifted into the job as Pontificant because of its good pay, steady nature and potential to meet interesting young women. The workload suits his nature (being given to indolence unless otherwise forced) although he is capable when called on to officiate at trials, where he acts as presenter of charges and records testimonies. His thick black hair seems almost resistant to unguent and his formal cap perches uncomfortably atop it. This often provokes a motherly response in any women in his vicinity, much to his despair.

Persuasion (Glib) 11, Rebuff (Pure-hearted) 12, Attack (Caution) 10, Defence (Parry) 10, Magic (Curious) 2, Health 10, Athletics 2, Etiquette 4, Pedantry 6, Perception 6, Scuttlebutt 4

² Tastefully downwind.



Dier, Genteel Proprietor

Yes, sir, just as you requested.

Dapper, aging and achingly sincere, the owner of the Hostelry is a sharp businessman with expensive tastes. He always wears a scarlet rosebud in his antique silver lapel pin. Quite prepared to get his hands dirty, he expects nothing less than perfection and the total commitment of his staff and gets it. Building on the success of his father, who acquired the run-down palace from its previous owner, he is rightly acknowledged as a leading light in the best social circles. Every year he gives two parties: one for society's elite and the other as a reward for his staff. Those who have attended both (i.e. the staff) would be hard pressed to say which was the most lavish.

Persuasion (Eloquent) 13, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 12, Attack (Caution) 8, Defence (Dodge) 9, Magic (Daring) 3, Health 9, Appraisal 8, Etiquette 10, Perception 12, Scuttlebutt 6, Stewardship 9, Wealth 6

Gansuire, Experimental Innovator

Braise it a second longer and it'll be you on that plate with a choke-apple in your mouth.

Athletic and dashing, Ganse (as he prefers to be known) is the grandson of the palace's former owner. Born a member of the nobility, he still has a tendency to lord it over his kitchen staff, a bad habit developed in the early days even when he barely had two pennies to rub together. He is not bitter about the irony of working in what would have been his kitchens had fate dealt a different hand and indeed finds it rather amusing. He enjoys the challenge of continually trying to outdo himself in the culinary field. His party trick is to create any dish that a patron can imagine, which on some occasions has been an unmitigated disaster but is often a performance of immense bravura.

Persuasion (Charming) 12, Rebuff (Contrary) 12, Attack (Speed) 11, Defence (Sure-footedness) 12, Magic (Forceful) 4, Health 12, Athletics 12, Craftsmanship (cooking) 12, Perception 9, Scuttlebutt 6, Stewardship 6, Wealth 1



to the rear of the hotel. Rooms are decorated according to historical periods, providing that they were not too dull for consideration. There is even a magnificent bathhouse for the relaxation of the guests as well as the more private facilities. The hotel is extremely popular and invariably full, particularly at festival times.

The right hand range contains the residents-only salon with its al fresco seating area and the public tavern (although tavern is quite a crude description of the place) with its own entrance from the road. The tavern sells the highest quality local wines and imported fruit cordials (see Vineyards p. 58 and Ririmaud p. 107) and is frequented by the city's scholars and aesthetes. Private rooms are also available for hire in the segment of the building. Both this and the left hand range are two stories high.

The left hand range contains the hotel dining room (residents only) and on the first floor, reached by both a residents' staircase and a public one from the street, is the famous restaurant. Tables on the balcony overlooking the gardens are booked anything up to a year in advance. The food is exquisite, prepared from the finest ingredients imported from around the world and far surpasses the quality of fare available at the Old Inn at Zoken (Scaum Valley Gazetteer p. 93), but not the price.

The Council District

The smallest of the central districts, this is the home of the Council Chambers, where those chosen to rule the city sit in state and while away their hours in petty debates and extravagant feasts. Bearing in mind where the real power lies in Erze Damath, the properties here are not altogether an unfair reflection on the true order of things. It is also the home of the Licensing Office, responsible for the issue of extraction permits for the eastern ruins.

The Council Chambers

Standing almost opposite the Precursor's Palace and rather gauche in its design, the Council Chambers so dearly want to be seen on a par with their more illustrious neighbor and yet fail on every level. The building materials are of a lesser quality, the decoration less tasteful, and the furnishings more homely. They still make many of the buildings in the city look terribly shabby by comparison, but the overall effect when comparing the two buildings is that of a poor country cousin trying to emulate his sophisticated city relatives.

There are two rooms of interest to the public here: the debating chamber and the banquet hall. The debating chamber opens its doors once a week to allow the public to see government in action and make known any views on current policy and management. The twenty-four duly elected Council members tend to dread these sessions, but aren't do away with the spectacle in fear of public outcry. The room is large and airy, lit from above by an enormous stained-glass window depicting the city in better days. Stepped rows of seats look down on to a dais at one end of the room where the Council presides in all its glory.

The banquet hall would be truly splendid but for two things: the lack of a firm design principle and good maintenance. Cobbled

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together from the fevered imaginations of a deranged few, the hall has no real distinguishing features nor traces its ancestry to any particular era. Tapestries that should be the object of covetous glances have been allowed to fade and rot, and the eighty-seat table defaced by ring marks and careless burns. Formal dinners are held here and it is widely agreed that the food is good, the

Provost Guismere

And then, of course, you had the Xabix Uprising of the Twentieth Aeon, a subject on which I am reputed to be an expert of no small renown. Let me tell you about that...

Middle-aged, greying and paunchy from too many formal dinners, Guismere is awfully dull. Leader of the Council because no one else wants to be, he thinks he is a sparkling raconteur and great historian, a firm pair of hands guiding the city into the modern era. He isn't any of these things and has a tendency not to change his hair balsam frequently enough, leaving him with a slightly rancid odor. He is the sort of person people desperately try to avoid making eye contact with, in case he should start to talk to them. His speeches, delivered in a painful monotone, are one of the best cures for insomnia currently available.

Persuasion (Obfuscatory) 11, Rebuff (Contrary) 12, Attack (Caution) 9, Defence (Parry) 9, Magic (Studious) 4, Health 10, Etiquette 3, Pedantry 12, Perception 4, Scuttlebutt 6, Wealth 2

Stipulator Poroguire

No, no, no. Geographical acumen is entirely relevant to the proceedings at hand.

Short and bespectacled, the advisor on formal proceedings to the Council has a limp handshake and a disingenuous smile. He does not inspire trust and yet he is thorough, capable and dependable—provided his tasks do not interfere with his own agenda. Regarded as something of a scholar and mapmaker, he has authored several tomes, including *Peoples of the River* which he describes as a concise and complete examination of life along the River Scamander. An interesting, though little known, fact is that he has never set foot outside of Erze Damath so the source of his insight remains unknown, although his rival Eurias the Geographer suspects sloppy plagiarism of ancient sources. His voice is high and nasal and he coughs frequently. His family has made a tidy profit from the sale of treasure maps to the ruins of Dastra, although he denies any direct involvement in this trade. He is not to be confused with High Stimator Terysmil Poroguire (no relation) formerly of the Triteuchal Court, although it is a simple mistake to make.

Persuasion (Glib) 14, Rebuff (Penetrating) 12, Attack (Caution) 8, Defence (Vexation) 9, Magic (Devious) 6, Health 10, Etiquette 8, Pedantry 8, Perception 7, Scuttlebutt 7, Wealth 3

wine acceptable and the company tolerable, provided that Provost Guismere, Council leader and terrible bore, is restrained from making after dinner speeches.

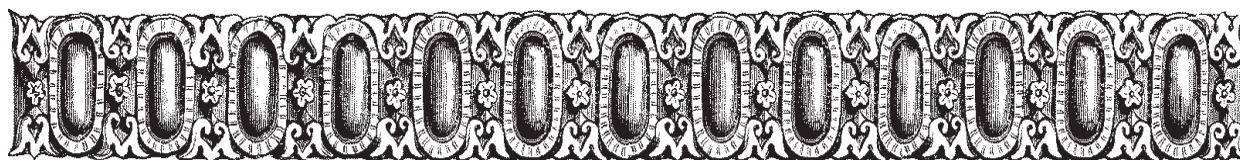
The Licensing Office

Far more ornate than the nearby Council Chambers, the Licensing Office has most obviously benefited from its regulation of the removal of dressed stone from the city's ruins both financially and more directly. Application must be made and approved here before anyone can undertake such mining, as it is referred to. An agreement to adhere to strict safety regulations must also be signed, particularly with respect to the disturbance and containment of noxious substances or creatures from the remains of any former scholars' residences.

The people who work here are dour and crotchety, buried under the weight of interminable Council legislation. There are rarely queues as there are few concerns willing to pay the processing fees and the half dozen that do so only have to renew their license on a yearly basis, providing there have been no breaches of safety or changes in regulations.



A limp handshake and a disingenuous smile.



Uska, Miserable Clerk

NEXT!

You could walk past Uska on the street and not even notice that you'd done so. She has no sense of humour, no hobbies and few friends besides those she works with. She lives with her parents near the Old West Gate and sometimes dreams of being whisked away to somewhere exotic. Unfortunately, she doesn't know anywhere exotic.

Persuasion (Intimidating) 10, Rebuff (Contrary) 11, Attack (Caution) 8, Defence (Dodge) 8, Health 9, Athletics 6, Etiquette 2, Pedantry 4, Perception 6

The Scholars' District

A reasonably well-maintained inner district and home to the wealthier members of Erze Damath's thriving academic community, the dwellings are mostly converted estates often split into smaller units to make best use of the land. It is really only of note to the visitor as the location of the reformed Xalguire Conservatory.

The Xalguire Conservatory

Originally located beside the eastern processional way (the River Road) in what is now the ruined portion of the city, the new home of this respected academic body is larger, though less impressive, than the former Conservatory whose current use is that of a repository of the finest dressed stone in the city. Named after its historical benefactor, it was once dedicated to the literary and performing arts, only expanding its role once the city's decay became all too obvious and fears arose that much of its history, learning and culture was about to be lost. The members of the Conservatory are split between those who believe that research and excavation are paramount to a thorough appreciation and protection of the city and those who believe the word conserve should be taken very literally indeed.

There is a regular program of talks and concerts held at the Conservatory, which members of the public may attend for a small fee. In fine weather the charmingly unkempt gardens serve as a backdrop to the entertainment, whilst in poor weather the central atrium makes a splendid alternative. The Conservatory is funded privately by bequests and membership fees but often has to resort to fund raising activities. Access to the Conservatory's extensive archives can also be arranged in return for a healthy donation.

There is a little love lost between the members of the Conservatory and the Society of Aesthetes, who believe that the Conservators in their race to understand and preserve the city's riches have lost sight of how to appreciate them in their true glory. The Conservators believe that the Aesthetes are hedonistic snobs who want to keep that glory for themselves, pointing to their isolated position on the margins of the Wide Avenue as proof of their aloofness from society as a whole¹.

¹ It is to be suspected that both groups are correct in their accusations.

The Median Sector

Sandwiched between the Wide Avenue and the city centre, the Median Sector is less opulent than those nearer the Black Obelisk, but still quite affluent. It is here that everyday business takes place and there are a range of shops and markets catering to the residents', rather than the pilgrims', needs. It is also home to the less well-off members of the scholarly fraternity, who, partly out of politeness but also a desire to be near their more lofty brethren, tend to be housed on the eastern fringes towards the Wide Avenue.

The Twelfth Manse On The Left

Identifiable by its ornate brass name plaque and located along the River Road, this typical smaller scholar's dwelling is presumably named after its original geographical location. Due to the various architectural upheavals in the city's history it now stands on the edge on the Wide Avenue lacking many of its former neighbors. It still retains a certain grandeur having managed to remain in possession of its black glass cupolas and its triple tower, purportedly made from hybrid ivory. Respectable, tidy and self-contained it is the home of reliable mapmaker, Eurias the Geographer.

Eurias the Geographer

In my younger days perhaps, but these days I prefer a good glass of Epuytine

Also known as the Epigamic in his wilder youth, Eurias is now a much more restrained soul devoted to the methodical study and application of geography and cartography. Despite his stooped shoulders, wrinkled visage and well rounded paunch, he is possessed of remarkably young eyes and considerable vigor. He has traveled widely and has prepared several learned treatises on the River Scamander, much of the material being in direct opposition to that of Poroguire, whom he regards as a charlatan. Partial to good wines and the odd fruit cordial, he can regularly be found in the Old Dastric Empire on a warm evening.

Persuasion (Obfuscatory) 13, Rebuff (Penetrating) 14, Attack (Cunning) 10, Defence (Intuition) 11, Magic (Studious) 17, Health 12, Athletics 8, Craftsmanship (cartography) 7, Etiquette 6, Pedantry (geography) 12, Perception 8, Scuttlebutt 7, Wealth 2, Wherewithal 8

The Red Pilgrim

Standing beside the northern processional way (also known as the Way of Red Pilgrims or the Angdithlaer Road) this sprawling family run inn is also the business premises for the Red Pilgrim Service. Popular with pilgrims because of its cleanliness and affordability, the Red Pilgrim has belonged to the Ikiluire family for generations. Chenen Ikiluire is the latest in a long line of innkeepers and he and his numerous offspring run the business with militaristic precision despite the easy going atmosphere.

Erze Damath

The main room of the inn is spacious and well swept, with clean rushes on the floor every morning. The ale, brewed on the premises by the twins Trem and Noli, is good and the food, prepared by Chenen's wife Ieri and his sister Izi, is wholesome if plain to suit the tastes of the various pilgrims passing through.

The rooms are modest, warm and well lit. Next to the Old Dastric Empire, this is one of the most popular hostelrys in Erze Damath, although nowhere near as exclusive.

Chenen, Proprietor

The key to success with a family of this size is to let the wife deal with it!

Lean and tough, Chenen loves his job and is especially proud of his children. Raised to be landlord of the family inn, he brooks no nonsense and is firmly in control, no matter how much he protests to be under Ieri's thumb. Possessed of a keen imagination, he enjoys meeting people from strange and far-off lands and has often wished that he could leave the inn and see new sights. His sense of duty to both the business and his family always keeps his feet firmly on the ground, although he does have quite a collection of souvenirs given to him by grateful customers.

Persuasion (Forthright) 11, Rebuff (Penetrating) 12, Attack (Speed) 11, Defence (Parry) 12, Magic (Forceful) 2, Health 12, Athletics 7, Etiquette 6, Perception 8, Scuttlebutt 6, Stewardship 8, Wealth 2, Wherewithal 6

Ieri, Accidental Chef

If it wasn't good for you, I wouldn't cook it. Plain and simple, like the food.

A dainty woman who dreamt of something other than Plains life, Ieri came to Erze Damath as a young woman. Impressed by the strength and intelligence of one particular innkeeper's son, she decided to stay and gain some respectability. Smitten by her looks and flaming copper hair, Chenen soon proposed and the pair set about running the business and producing a tribe of their own. Unlike Chenen, the children can wrap Ieri round their respective little fingers so she seeks refuge in the kitchens where things are nice and simple. Slightly clumsy, it is highly unusual if at least some part of any meal she prepares doesn't end up on the floor. She grows as many of her own ingredients as she can on allotments near the north gate, which gives her even more peace from the gentle teasing of her family. She is slightly wary of Izi, who tends to boss her about.

Persuasion (Charming) 8, Rebuff (Pure-hearted) 9, Attack (Caution) 9, Defence (Intuition) 10, Magic (Insightful) 6, Health 11, Appraisal 6, Craftsmanship (cooking) 8, Etiquette 4, Physician 4, Perception 8, Stewardship 5

Trem and Noli, Identical Brewers

The river water lends it an added zip that you don't get with these imported beers

More interested in fermenting things than running the inn, their skills have come in very useful in cementing the inn's reputation as a wholly self-contained enterprise. As

different again from their older sisters in look and character, the twins are quiet by nature, preferring to keep themselves to themselves. They are not sullen creatures, though and are happy to joke with the clientele—they just prefer to be in their shed perfecting their brewing techniques. Their mother insists it is all their older sisters' fault and that they only hide to avoid being bullied mercilessly, which of course the girls deny.

Persuasion (Obfuscatory) 9, Rebuff (Pure-hearted) 12, Attack (Strength) 10, Defence (Dodge) 11, Magic (Curious) 3, Health 11, Craftsmanship (brewing) 10, Etiquette 4, Perception 6, Wherewithal 7

Onama, Businesswoman

That is the price. There are other cheaper, inferior services available but we prefer to give an honest price for an honest job properly done.

Unlike her sisters, Onama prefers not to travel and so she stays at home, grooming herself for the day when she will take on the running of the inn from her father. She has a precise mind and is an excellent judge of character, which has saved the business from any unfortunate incidents—untrustworthy characters or potential troublemakers never get as far as taking a seat on the caravans. This is yet another reason for the service's excellent reputation. Onama keeps her hair short and tidy and dresses practically, but like her sister Anondo has a weakness for baubles, particularly pink pebbles that her sisters collect for her on their travels.

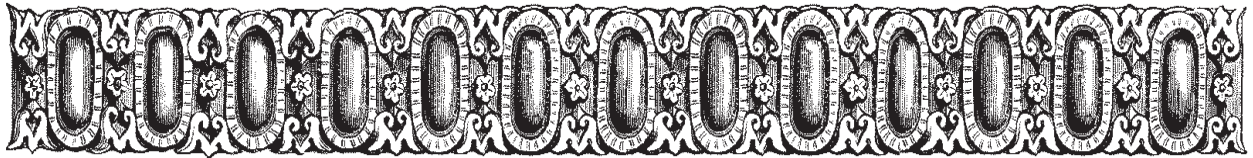
Persuasion (Forthright) 12, Rebuff (Penetrating) 14, Attack (Cunning) 9, Defence (Intuition) 10, Magic (Insightful) 2, Health 10, Appraisal 6, Perception 8, Scuttlebutt 6, Stewardship 8, Wealth 2

Izi, Aunt and Kitchen Tyrant

Oh really, Ieri, would you look what you're doing.

Thickset and humourless, there is a reason Izi is kept confined to the kitchens—she doesn't much care for pilgrims, which is a bit of a handicap considering the family profession. Here she rules with a ladle of iron, bullying Ieri and preparing the raw ingredients. Not an imaginative cook by any means, she leaves that to her sister-in-law, she is hard working but grumbles constantly and somehow gives the impression of being constantly up to her elbows in dishwater. Her husband, a long-suffering and quiet man named Vell, keeps to the stables where he tends to the pilgrim's steeds.

Persuasion (Intimidating) 10, Rebuff (Contrary) 9, Attack (Strength) 11, Defence (Vexation) 12, Health 11, Etiquette 1, Perception 4, Scuttlebutt 5



The office of the Red Pilgrim Service is housed in a lean-to attached to the side of the main inn. Here Onama holds court, running the service with a calculated efficiency. Her fiscal acumen and keen business mind she gained from her father. Her unusual copper hair, as with her siblings, she inherited from her mother who hails originally from the Plains of Oparona. The prices for escorted pilgrimage to and from Erze Damath are quite high, but as Onama is wont to point out “You could always go on your own, which will also save the funeral expenses.”. The pilgrims who have used the service usually agree that it is well worth the price. The wagons, when not in use, are stored in the large compound to the rear of the inn that also houses the inn’s stables and brewery.

The Society of Aesthetes

A small and exclusive club on the very edge of the Wide Avenue, the Society of Aesthetes gathers weekly to savor the finest wines rescued from the ruins of their beloved city and to bask in the glory of collected works of art robbed from far too many ancient tombs. Their building is large, well appointed and painstakingly maintained by a few trusted individuals who live on site. The walls are high and the gardens restrained and pleasing to the eye, giving the members refuge from the horrors of the decay all around them. Entry to the august ranks of the society is by strict invitation only and visitors are not permitted unless accompanied by a full member, with the approval of the entire

Senate (the committee in charge of the Society). The Society is entirely funded by the coffers of its members and their bequests.

Despite their notoriety, little is actually known about the Society. The exact number of members is uncertain and few have come forward to reveal themselves. Indeed, there seems to be only a single genuine spokesperson for the Society, one Zerimire, Archivist to the Senate. He regularly attends Council meetings to put forth the Society’s views and distribute manifestos stating their concerns. He also appears to be responsible for the acquisition of rare and unusual finds for the Society.

There is an air of seething resentment surrounding the Society. The Xalguire Conservatory mistrusts their motives entirely, having often been outbid by them for artefacts recovered from the ruins. The Council is a little afraid of them and the Precursor’s Office would dearly love to know just what ancient relics of the faith they have hidden away in their massive vaults. In turn, the Society’s members tend to treat other academics as beneath them and hold the Council entirely responsible for the reprehensible neglect the city has been forced to endure over of the centuries. They see themselves as guardians of the true heritage of Erze Damath and the Dastric Empire.

Zerimire, Public Spokesman

I have spent my life in the appreciation of fine things. Do not think to tell me what does or does not have value—I am far more qualified to judge than you.

Haughty and unapproachable, Zerimire relishes his role as the front man for the Society. It is his duty to allow his fellow members the anonymity they crave by distracting the public’s attention. His voice is acerbic yet carries a tone of utter boredom when discussing mundane matters although he cannot keep the excitement from his voice when discussing topics dear to his heart. He cuts a fine dash through the city streets in his exquisitely tailored robes, his wide-brimmed disc carefully positioned to shade as much of his face as possible. He does have excellent taste and a good eye for the rare and beautiful.

Persuasion (Glib) 14, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 12, Attack (Cunning) 8, Defence (Misdirection) 9, Magic (Devious) 14, Appraisal 9, Etiquette 8, Pedantry 8, Perception 9, Wealth 3

Rugo, Head Gardener

Flowers rely on muck. Good allegory that—much that is beautiful springs from dirt. Not that they’d ever admit to it—to them muck doesn’t happen.

Something of a worldly-wise philosopher, Rugo has worked at the Society since he was a child. He knows little of its running or exact membership, confining himself to his duties as gardener. The less he knows, he reasons, the less likely he is to get himself

removed from duty. He does not speak to the members who use his garden, the terms of his employment are very clear on that score, and spends his days in quiet contemplation of the earth and sky. He is somewhat scornful of the attitudes of his employers, but is smart enough to make sure that they never find out.

Persuasion (Eloquent) 10, Rebuff (Pure-hearted) 11, Attack (Caution) 10, Defence (Parry) 12, Magic (Insightful) 1, Health 9, Perception 10, Stealth 8, Wherewithal 6

Eilid, Gastronome

You too must sweat alongside the meat in order to truly appreciate the culinary splendor of such a dish.

Slightly unusual for an aesthete, Eilid likes to get his hands dirty. He adores food and takes great delight in preparing the banquets for the Society. He personally believes there is no higher form of art than cookery and searches constantly for ancient and superior recipes. Aided by a small and select staff, he is known outside the Society as Eilid the Grocer, proprietor of one of the most exclusive delicatessens in the city (not that he would ever be caught in the shop under any circumstances). Well built and perhaps a little on the stocky side to suit his own personal taste, he is very careful to control his gluttony so as not to ruin his appearance.

Persuasion (Obfuscatory) 11, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 11, Attack (Strength) 9, Defence (Parry) 9, Magic (Daring) 5, Health 11, Craftsmanship (cookery) 15, Etiquette 8, Perception 9, Scuttlebutt 6, Stewardship 7, Wealth 3

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The Wide Avenue

Derelict plots of land sit between the cracked avenues, precisely and deftly cleared of all buildings and rubble. Not even the weeds are allowed to gain purchase here. Formerly known more accurately as the Cleared Zone, the Council decided that a more refined designation was required, hence its newer, prettier name. There is little of interest to anyone in this area and the land is strictly kept clear of habitation and business premises with one notable exception. Purely in order that his charges disturb as few people as possible, Saffer the Stockman has been allowed to build an outfitters yard next to the city ruins.

Saffer's Yard

Run by the saturnine Saffer, this yard can provide the necessary pack beasts for any and all journeys in the surrounding regions. Stocked entirely with creatures from Mad King Kutr's former menagerie, this huge compound is surrounded by sturdy walls (a mishmash of mud brick and carved stone looted from the ruins) more to prevent the creatures from getting out than anything from outside getting in. Screams, howls and unearthly wailings ring out across the surrounding avenues, much to the discomfort of those living near by.

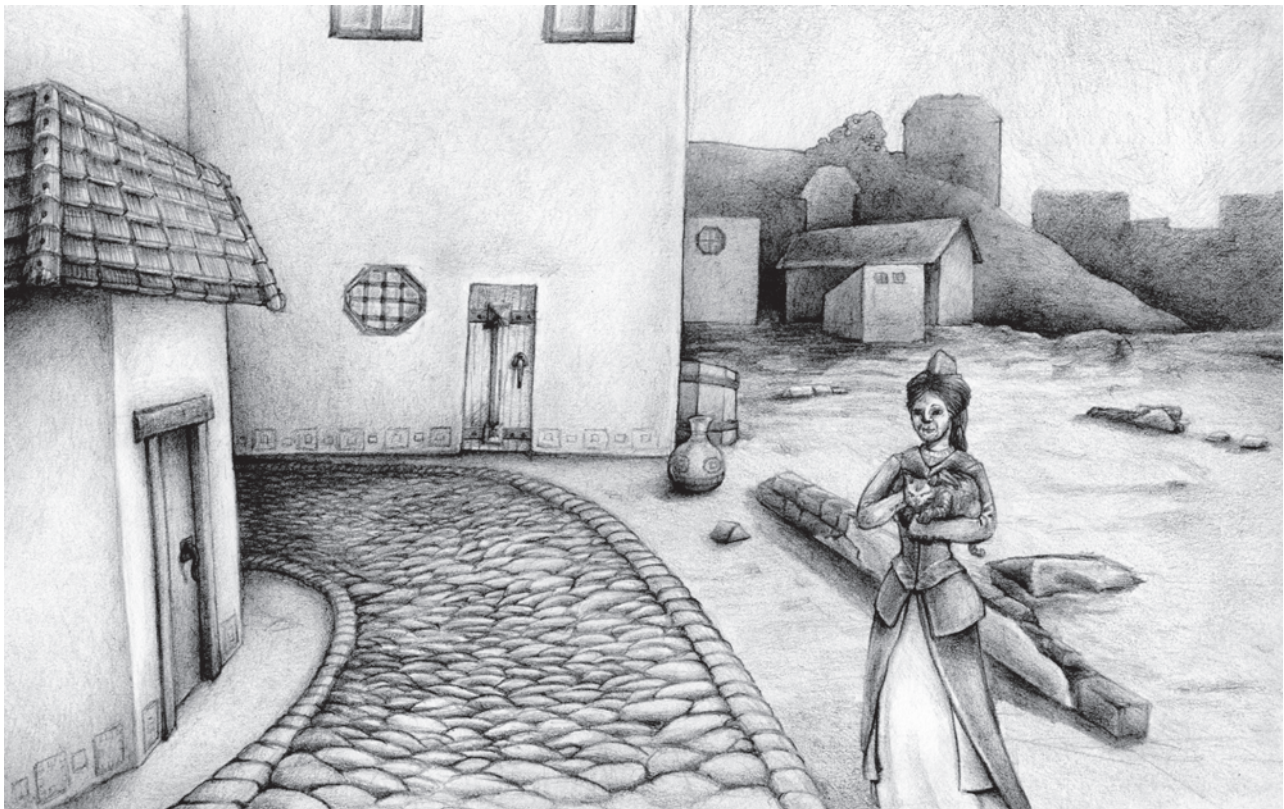
Inside the walls, the reek of animal waste and rotting vegetation is, quite literally, breath-taking and a sense of barely constrained chaos hangs over the animal pens. Handlers, armed

with long-reach barbed prods patrol between the enclosures. The offices are mercifully located close to the main gate and the stock can be viewed from a first floor balcony should closer examination be too much for the more delicate constitution.

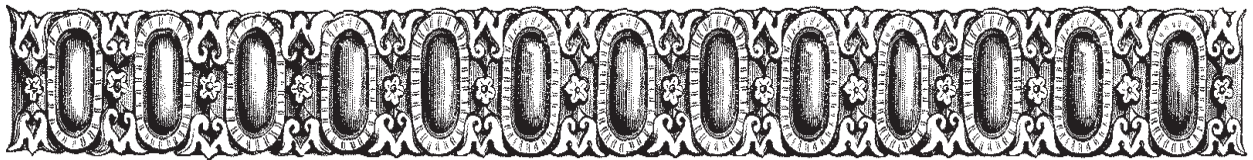
The animals here are technically available for hire, but Saffer's eccentric business sense leads him to charge the same for the beasts whether you bring them back or not (and he'd much rather you didn't). Each beast is priced individually, based on apparent usefulness as a pack animal and its temperament. Some can be quite fierce and as such are cheap but unpredictable. Those of a more docile temperament and broader girth are worth far more.

Although none now strictly match the beasts described in *Follinense's Folio of Exotic Systemology* thanks to their prodigious and unselective breeding habits, Saffer keeps a copy on hand the better to judge his stock based on their overall appearance. It's amazing how accurate he is under the circumstances. Despite their oddities, Saffer cares for the creatures as best he can and runs a tidy business in to the bargain.

Most of the creatures are taken from the wild and Saffer has a good working relationship with some of the more civilised nomads from the Plains of Oparona, although he prefers to deal with the Blanwalt Foresters who are more predictable and much less likely to take offence at their rewards. As his stock has grown, a slowly increasing number have been born within the compound.



Formerly known more accurately as the Cleared Zone, the Council decided that a more refined designation was required, hence its newer, prettier name.



Saffer the Stockman

*Are they not fascinating, my collection of this's-and-that's?
And they can be yours, for the proper consideration.*

Tall, yellow-skinned and missing his nose and one ear, the Stockman is an unnerving sight amongst the bedlam of his personal menagerie. Not all of his scars, he hastens to assure you, are from handling such creations; he has merely lead an interesting and full life. He wears a functional grey gown, belted at the waist and a striking conical black hat with flaring earflaps. The look would be positively comical if modelled by anybody else, but somehow is perfectly in keeping with the overall lunacy within the compound's walls. He is fascinated by Follinense's work and the number of grotesque and fantastical creatures it produced.

Persuasion (Forthright) 12, Rebuff (Contrary) 12, Attack (Cunning) 10, Defence (Intuition) 11, Magic (Curious) 5, Health 9, Appraisal 7, Athletics 8, Driving 4, Etiquette 2, Pedantry (Follinense's work) 5, Perception 9, Riding 6, Scuttlebutt 5, Stewardship 5, Wealth 2, Wherewithal 8

Follinense's Creatures

In addition to those creatures already described in Chapter 4, here are some other creatures likely to be found in Saffer's yard.

Decdo

One of several creatures referred to as Decdo in Follinense's journal, this particular hybrid appears to be a descendant of the twelve leg variety, though at twenty feet in length is considerably longer than those recorded. It has tawny fur and a grinning child's head. It appears to have some form of prankish humour, delighting as it does in tripping and butting those who try to lead it. Its only other distinguishing feature is its rank breath.

Attack (Cunning) ~, Defence (Sure-footedness) ~+2, Magic (innate) 3, Health ~+2, Athletics ~, Living Rough 6

Usim

Bearing some snake-like attributes, members of the Usim genera tend to be low and sinuous, capable of travelling great distances at speed. They make relatively good beasts of burden, being of an even temperament, but sometimes their handlers can find them difficult to keep up with

Attack (Speed) ~+3, Defence (Dodge) ~+1, Magic (innate) 2, Health 2~, Athletics 2~, Living Rough 8, Perception 8

Erca

Disturbingly human in shape, the descendants of the original Erca are tall and bifurcate. There is also considerable crustacean in their matrices, and their heads tend to resemble horseshoe crabs. Unable to carry large loads, they aren't particularly useful as beasts of burden and their limited intellect means that whilst they are docile, they are quite difficult to train.

Attack (Caution) ~, Defence (Dodge) ~, Magic (innate) 1, Health 8, Athletics ~, Living Rough 4, Perception 4

Eqoui

Perhaps the least bizarre of the hybrids is this horse-like creature. Easily trainable, possessed of intelligence and ideal as a pack beast it differs only from a true horse in its abundant plumage and extensive preening habits. It trills as it walks and is partial to honey (so much so that it can be used to locate desert hives).

Attack (Finesse) ~+4, Defence (Intuition) ~, Magic (Innate) 4, Health ~+2, Athletics 12, Living Rough 5, Perception 10

Shay

With their arched back and six legs, Shay are often mistaken for riding beasts. This error soon becomes apparent when the beast begins to move in a stiff-legged bouncing gait that guarantees the rapid onset of nausea, even in those merely watching the proceedings. Of more use than some of Saffer's creatures, Shay are at least controllable and friendly but of little use in the transport of friable items.

Attack (Speed) ~, Defence (Dodge) ~+2, Magic (innate) 4, Health ~+4, Athletics 10, Living Rough 5, Perception 7



The Outer Districts

There are three major areas shadowing to the city walls: the properties of Erze Damath's lowliest inhabitants, the vineyards, and the ruins

Wall Town

Clinging to the western wall and sandwiched between the south-western and northern processional ways lie the homes of

the city's workers, those who through hard toil have kept the pilgrim trade running smoothly whilst accruing few of its financial rewards. The buildings are by no means uninhabitable, and in many cases the stucco huts are in far better repair than their so-called smarter neighbors across the Wide Avenue.

Some areas are seedier than others and few pilgrims come out this way unless driven to by a shortage of accommodation elsewhere in the city. During important festivals, the only type

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of board left available here is with local families who rent out any spare space to shelter-less individuals.

The township is full of green spaces, overlapping as it does the former parks and gardens of the old city, most of which have been converted to allotments. During harvest times, small markets can be found in the triangles, selling a variety of fresh fruit and vegetables.

The Inn of the Green Lamp

Situated in one of the less reputable suburbs of Wall Town, pushed up against the wall by the Old West, or Desert, Gate is the Inn of the Green Lamp. The titular article hangs crookedly from a bracket above the door, winking balefully at passers-by. It is the lowliest who drink here, although it is the favoured watering hole of visiting Plains' nomads who appreciate its down-to-earth charm¹. Quite a few of the clientele are bandits from the desert here to fence their ill-gotten gains and the Thief Takers are regular, if unwelcome, visitors.

There is a large common room on the ground floor, its blackened beams and dark tile floor all adding to the gloom. There is an unpleasant stickiness to the floor that suggests it hasn't been mopped clean in quite a while. Stout posts, thick with cuts and gouges, support the low ceiling and numerous smoky lamps. Benches and trestle tables jostle for space and a badly kept fire sputters in the single hearth. The food here is neither appetizing nor filling, the congealing and meagre portions filled with gristle and disconcerting lumps unless prior special arrangements have been made with the innkeeper (for a fee, of course). The upstairs chambers are draughty, small and dingy, with badly worn bedding and grimy straw mattresses. There is a large compound to the rear.

Meluil, Barkeep

Who can say what might erupt here later. I am merely here to serve drinks and could not possibly pass comment

Flabby and florid, Meluil just about manages to keep control of the Inn by a combination of sheer nerve and studied ignorance of precisely what goes on beneath his roof. His leather apron is stained and grubby and his mug-rag is widely held by the locals to add more dirt to the tankards than it wipes away. Despite the poor quality of the food, he is a stickler for good beer and one of the best pints in town can be had in the Inn if you are not too fussy about the company you keep. He treats pilgrims as a necessary evil and dreads festival times as there is always trouble.

Persuasion (Obfuscatory) 11, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 12, Attack (Caution) 10, Defence (Dodge) 12, Health 9, Etiquette 3, Gambling 6, Perception 9, Scuttlebutt 10, Stewardship 7, Wealth 1, Wherewithal 6

The Vineyards

Nestled between the south and south-western processional ways are the extensive hillside vineyards of Erze Damath. Unlike the more formal regions of the city, the Wide Avenue does not mark the vineyards' southern boundary and the rows of vines gently peter out where the lower slopes give way to the Temple District.

The vines here are very different from those found in the great vineyards of the Porphiron Scar (XPS1 p. 12) and along the Scaum at Tanvilkat (Scaum Valley Gazetteer p. 71 and XPS3 p. 17), having adapted to survive mostly on water absorbed from the night mists. The resultant grapes are delicate and thin skinned, requiring extreme care when handling. They also tend to be smaller and either excessively bitter or sweet (depending on variety) making them virtually inedible, although after fermentation the flavour mellows considerably. The somewhat less than ideal growing conditions give rise to a relatively limited crop, restricting the number of bottles of the finished product each year. As a result, prices are high and availability usually limited to the richest patrons and the best quality hosteleries.

There are two varieties of grape grown on the slopes on the sacred hill. The lesser variety, which grows on the inward north-facing slopes, produces the lower quality but nonetheless perfectly acceptable wine Epuytine. Slightly acidic in flavour, it is a crisp white wine best served as an aperitif or to clear the pallet after a heavy meal. An inferior though potable vintage, also called Epuytine, is produced in greater quantity in the vineyards at Creman Stuk. The difference is obvious in both price and availability, but the unwary novice may well be duped into purchasing the lesser wine. It is always wise to check for the presence of the Master Vintner's seal on the cork to ensure that genuine Epuytine is contained therein.

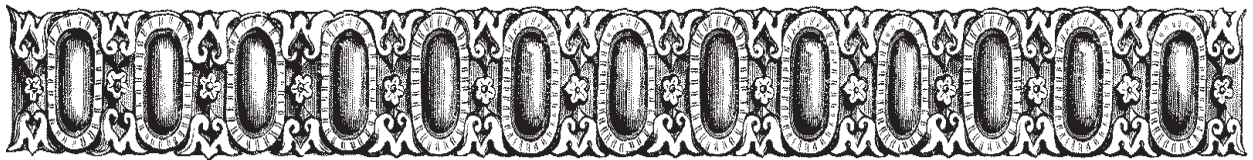
Keghia, Dealer in Questionable Goods

Not in the open you idiot. Come round to my office in a minute and then we'll discuss business

Quietly spoken and dressed not to attract attention, Keghia is the main contact for the desert-men who wish to profit monetarily from their raids. Related to several of the clans, she performs her services as discreetly as possible and has so far evaded the Thief Takers. She gives reasonable prices to the bandits and unlike other fences in the area, her ties of blood make her less likely to inform on her customers for any reward money currently on offer. Her "office", as she jokingly calls it, is the washhouse at the back of the compound.

Persuasion (Glib) 12, Rebuff (Penetrating) 14, Attack (Cunning) 11, Defence (Misdirection) 12, Magic (Devious) 2, Health 11, Appraisal 10, Athletics 14, Living Rough 7, Perception 10, Quick Fingers 11, Scuttlebutt 5, Stealth 7, Wherewithal 7

¹ Actually they are dazzled by its urban sophistication and the amazing things that can be done to keep the weather off using such exotica as joists, battens and tiles.



The higher quality of grape grown on the outward south-facing slopes of the hill produce the red wine known as Parona. Much sought after by connoisseurs, it is available in several different forms. The best is High Slopes Parona, a rich full-bodied wine garnered from the grapes which receive the greatest amount of sunlight. The lower slopes produce a wine that is less well rounded and is often distilled to produce the dessert wine Sweet Parona.

Reysh Lodira, Supreme Tedder

It has been a fine season and by my eye the grapes will be ready tomorrow

The Lodira dynasty is fiercely proud of its vineyards and the quality of its wines. Reysh is no exception. A plain woman of middle years and bronzed from a life outdoors on the hill, she spends little time at the family mansion in the Palace District, preferring to be among her workers and constantly monitoring her crops. She has an unerring weather sense, which has saved the harvest on several occasions. Quite scandalously for such a highborn lady, she wears tedder clothing and breeches and her fingernails are broken and stained with rich earth. She cares little for appearances, and has more time for her hard-working staff than most of her family, many of whom she regards as lazy freeloaders.

Persuasion (Forthright) 13, Rebuff (Penetrating) 14, Attack (Finesse) 9, Defence (Parry) 10, Magic (Studious) 4, Health 11, Appraisal 6, Craftsmanship (vintner) 9, Etiquette 6, Pedantry (viniculture) 10, Stewardship 9, Wealth 6

Telbe, Under-tedder

You have to watch for the mists. If they come too soon, they can turn the crop; too late and there's no crop at all.

Like many of the people involved in the wine-trade, Telbe's family have been here since time immemorial. Living in the small community of tedders in the lee of the south wall, Telbe has walked the hill every day of his long life. With his well-honed skills, he trained Reysh and others of her family in the care and management of the vines. He talks to his plants, whispering words of encouragement and minor cantraps to keep them healthy and strong. His outfit is worn and patched and his strong hands carry the scars of a lifetime working the earth. His grey eyes shine with pride and his smile, though crooked, is warm and friendly. Heaven help you if you damage his charges, though; legend has it that he single-handedly took on and bested two deodands who had wandered in for an evening's stroll to sample the tempting goods on display.

Persuasion (Charming) 9, Rebuff (Pure-hearted) 10, Attack (Strength) 13, Defence (Sure-footedness) 14, Magic (Insightful) 4, Health 10, Appraisal 7, Athletics 7, Craftsmanship (vintner) 10, Pedantry (viniculture) 11, Scuttlebutt 6, Stewardship 6, Wherewithal 9

Much of the wine currently available in Erze Damath has come from family hoards and the wine cellars of the ruins. Although both types keep surprising well once laid down, the ruins are not an infinitely sustainable source of fine vintages, although some seem to treat them as such. There has been talk of expansion of the vineyards onto the hill on the other side of the Dastric Road. The vineyards are run by the Master Vintner under license of the Precursor, and the position has been under the control of the Lodira family for generations out of mind.

The Eastern Ruins

Once full of sumptuous villas and well manicured gardens, the avenues between the north-eastern and southern processional ways contain only sad reminders of an age now past. With the fall of the Dastric Empire and increasingly hostile neighbors, the inhabitants of the city began to withdraw to its more central districts for fear of encroachment. Changing river levels made the jetties and walls unstable and foundations were undermined, making the district unsafe for further habitation and speeding the citizenry's relocation.

Of the city gates encompassed by this district, only the north-eastern gate Water Gate has survived, allowing continued access to the waterfront. Although the jetties here, too, are crumbling, they remain more or less intact, unlike those by the East, or River, Gate, which for the most part have fallen into the silty water. A conscious effort was made on behalf of the Council to keep as much of the river accessible as physically possible, but the River Gate was too badly damaged by subsidence to rescue it. The gatehouse finally collapsed only recently, blocking the entrance completely. Prior to that, rubble from other collapsed buildings had been used to secure the entrance. Such is also the case with the south-eastern gate.

Besides the recovery of building materials from the fringes of the area, other licences for official excavation of the ruins can also be obtained from the Xalguire Conservatory. Enforcement is frequently lax and much of the recovery work carried out in the area by the Erzites is freelance and unsupervised. As the buildings on the outskirts have been picked clean, looters are having to push further into the ruins in search of lost wonders and cases of fine wine.

The Stake

This unpleasant area is the scene of terminal judgement in Erze Damath. In a cleared area in the depths of the destruction there is a central carved stone pillar the height of a tall man in a miniature, monstrous parody of the Black Obelisk. Those who have committed the most heinous crimes are brought here under armed guard and manacled to the pillar, then left to await their grisly and often protracted fate.

In accordance with an ancient compact, a small number of deodands have been permitted to settle within the city ruins. They are allowed to live in peace provided that they prevent other half-men incursions into the city (gaun and ghouls have occasionally ventured into the ruins), do not attempt to enter any other part of the city themselves and refrain from attacking any people in the

Erze Damath

area other than those chained to the pillar. If they are fastened to the pillar, then their fate is entirely in the deodands' claws. Whilst this may appear to provide the ideal opportunity to perform the perfect murder, most people are too afraid of the creatures to risk coming here for their own nefarious purposes.

Should there be more than one offender sentenced to the Stake at any one time (a particularly rare occurrence), then smaller temporary posts can be erected into pre-cut slots around the main Stake.

The Old Xalguire Conservatory

Now more of a quarry than a palace of refinement, the old home of the Conservators is an industry in itself. The most popular site for the recovery of masonry due to its location on the River Road and being close to the edge of the ruins (as well as having been a large and tremendously well built structure), several rival companies have licences to excavate here. Each keeps to their own portion of the site and sabotage is rare—the licences cost too much to risk having one withdrawn due to idiotic behavior. The overall impression to the unskilled eye is one of utter chaos; choking dust and deafening hammering fill the air (as well as the occasional curse). Nevertheless, the area is well supervised and actually far safer than any other area of the ruins. There is nothing of value other than the stone to loot here, as the Conservators were very thorough in their removal of every possible article of value.

Kysel, Chief Excavator

That's a fine sandstone that has been well protected from the elements. It will do nicely for the repairs to the Yruisa property.

A skilled mason in his own right, Kysel has only recently taken over the largest mining project at the Conservatory due to the retirement of his predecessor. Having worked all manner of stone with his hands, he is a much better judge of its properties and potential flaws than the other gaffers on site. His hands are large and calloused, his jaw square and determined and his dark hair permanently coated in stone dust to such an extent that he appears prematurely aged. He is laughingly known as “the old ghost” by his workers for his dusty and dishevelled appearance. When not supervising the extractions, he can be found carving the stones ready for use elsewhere in the city. Despite his size, he can coax the most delicate of tracteries from the unrelenting stone.

Persuasion (Intimidating) 9, Rebuff (Wary) 10, Attack (Strength) 13, Defence (Parry) 12, Magic (Curious) 2, Health 12, Appraisal 8, Athletics 7, Craftsmanship (stonework) 10, Perception 10, Scuttlebutt 6, Stewardship 5

The River

Access to the Scamander is now through the north-eastern gate. It is here that merchants and boatmen ply their trade. The Scamander is still reasonably deep at Erze Damath, allowing quite large vessels to dock at the crumbling wharves and jetties. Trade routes run from Creman Stuk to Barlig township (see *The Compendium of Universal Knowledge*) and all the towns in between. By far the largest and most profitable trade is in pilgrims.

Act 4: The Silent Watchers

Most likely against their better judgement, the characters have become embroiled in some form of ancient quest to destroy a relic and bring to an end ancient misdeeds. They need to know who guides them and who hunts them, and where better to find out than in the greatest ancient city in the world, Erze Damath.

4.1 A Familiar Face

The details that the characters so far possess imply that some religious figure (possibly Gilfig) is not all he seems to be, although the exact nature of his calumny is unknown. There is really only one destination in Erze Damath that springs immediately to mind (once the characters have arranged board and lodging): the Plaza of the Black Obelisk.

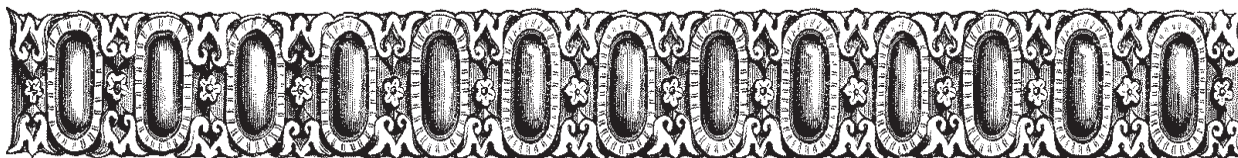
4.1.1 The Obelisk Plaza

The characters seem to have picked an excellent time to visit the city—it is festival time. Not only will this make gaining accommodation an interesting and exhausting task, but the streets are also packed with the faithful and manoeuvring along the crowded avenues is tediously slow. There appear to be two distinct factions of pilgrims. The first all teeter along on high-platformed shoes, studiously ignoring the second group who wear a blood red cockade on their hats and carry switches of grey painted twigs. Still, there are plenty here to answer any questions the characters may have.

Should the characters deign to question any of the festival-goers, they discover that all is not well within the city limits. By an unfortunate calendrical coincidence (which only occurs every twenty years or so), the Funambulous Evangel's Celebration of Dust Renewed (see box) has coincided with the Gilfigite Festival of the Scourge. Tensions are often high between the two groups anyway but unrest is mounting, as each group believes that the other should have postponed their ceremonies until their own personal rites of devotion were over.

Anyone on the streets can direct the characters to the Black Obelisk. If anything, the plaza is even more crowded than the streets, with the Evangel's jostling for position around the base of the Obelisk with mummers in strange costumes performing odd little plays.

The climax of these plays takes place before the Pentatarch, with different groups of performers taking turns to entertain the crowd. Less prestigious groups (those with fewer members



The Sweet Fancy

A modest but sturdy vessel, the Sweet Fancy has ferried pilgrims along the mighty river for quite a number of years. The riverboat is low with a broad beam to enable it to negotiate far higher upstream than many of the commercial trading vessels. Accommodation for the discerning traveler consists of shared cabins at the stern of the vessel, which are surprisingly spacious for a ship of this size. The Sweet Fancy can take up to ten passengers (twelve at an absolute push) and the fares are on the high end of reasonable (all meals included).

Calbersc, Ship's Captain

The wind is good, the sails trimmed, the staff tidy and presentable. All is proper and correct.

Calbersc is a good example of ne'er-do-well made good. A headstrong and flighty youth, he ran away from home as a lad to join the crew of the Sweet Fancy. It was the making of him. He worked his way up through the crew to the position of First Mate and when the previous captain Oltay decided to retire, he had settled down sufficiently (having married Derisi by that time and set about creating his enormous brood) to take on the role with calm aplomb. His dark hair is still thick, although he pays little heed to the fashion conventions of his home city and prefers to wear it long and loose rather than gunged with unguent (which he insists attracts biting river insects). He is an unpretentious man with quiet tastes and is dedicated to his family. His only real peculiarity is his insistence on serving good wine from tarpaper cups.

Persuasion (Charming) 13, Rebuff (Penetrating) 14, Attack (Strength) 12, Defence (Parry) 12, Magic (Curious) 4, Health 13, Athletics 10, Etiquette 6, Perception 8, Scuttlebutt 7, Seamanship 10, Stewardship 8, Wealth 3, Wherewithal 7

Lewldis, Aspiring Mate

It is the Captain's preference that we ship immediately.

Having seen the prosperity attained by his captain, Lewldis has decided that he too shall be in charge of the Sweet Fancy one day. A wiry creature with crooked teeth and an eager keenness, he misses little and takes every opportunity to watch his captain in action. The other crew often watch him for entertainment as he swaggers about imitating their leader. If Calbersc knows of this sincerest form of flattery, he pays it no heed.

Persuasion (Glib) 11, Rebuff (Wary) 12, Attack (Cunning) 11, Defence (Dodge) 13, Magic (Daring) 1, Health 9, Athletics 10, Perception 10, Scuttlebutt 6, Seamanship 7, Stewardship 4, Wherewithal 5

Derisi, Artisan and Mother

Please remember to give this to mother and don't forget my wood, dear.

Although she does not live or work on the Sweet Fancy, Calbersc's wife Derisi has quite an influence over its running. Indeed, if it were not for her and her prodigious brood Calbersc would probably have retired by now! A feisty woman with good taste and a skilled wood-carver, the family lives on the edge of the Median Sector close to the Water Road. She never regrets leaving Shossledord (see p. 108) and thoroughly enjoys city life. Her fine hair is kept plaited much of the time and she has a tendency to stick her tongue out of the corner of her mouth when she is deep in thought. She adores her husband and children, although she'd never admit to such in public.

Persuasion (Forthright) 12, Rebuff (Contrary) 11, Attack (Cunning) 11, Defence (Intuition) 12, Magic (Forceful) 2, Health 10, Appraisal 7, Athletics 5, Craftsmanship (woodturning) 11, Perception 9, Stewardship 7, Wealth 3, Wherewithal 5



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and tattier costumes) are forced to perform on the periphery of the Plaza in order that the proceedings maintain some sense of decorum.

The Celebration of Dust Renewed

Although not generally holding with festivals, this is the only other one that the Evangel's celebrate besides the Lustral Rites. They believe that during this Holy Week, the excess corpse dust that would otherwise threaten to swallow the entire surface of the earth is swept up and redistributed in the form of new stars in the heavens. They take these proceedings very seriously indeed and enter Erze Damath in sombre clothing in order to worship in their shrine in the Temple District and lay wreaths of flowers at the feet of the Pentatarch. The festival lasts a week.

The Festival Of the Scourge

Lasting for two weeks, the Scourge festival mainly consists of daily attendance at special services in which various aspects of the Scourge story are dissected and analyzed for application to modern life. There are also the plays, which are performed throughout the festival. The climax of the festival is a full dramatic presentation in the Shrine's plaza (complete with inspirational dialogue) followed by a service held in the open air in front of the Pentatarch. After this, the pilgrims hand in their switches to be ceremonially burnt. The cockades are then changed from red to white, to symbolise the spiritual purity attained by the acceptance of Gilfig's teachings.

The Tale of the Scourge

Every good Gilfigite knows the story of the Scourge. In the distant past, not long after the founding of the city, a notorious group of heretics led by Kazue the Misguided were driven from the city by Gilfig and his faithful disciples. They took to their horses and rode like the wind hunting the nay-sayers, driving them deep into the desert to the south and east. Only Kazue was caught and he was ritually flogged beneath the Black Obelisk until he repented his warped and seditious ravings.

This story is popularly retold in play form by actors in brightly colored costumes. Several "horsemen", blasting away on flat trumpets, and a group of "hounds" chase a man dressed in silver robes around the base of the Obelisk until he is caught (much to the delight of the crowds). The hounds then playfully savage him before dragging him back to Gilfig (really two men under a voluminous robe with two extra arm slits) who then beats him with a switch of grey wood. The man in silver (Kazue) then begs for forgiveness before being given new robes of blood red to symbolise his acceptance of Gilfig's teachings (the red cockades the pilgrims wear also represents this). There are a few minor variations on this theme (mainly the number of horsemen, which in bigger troupes can reach eight), but otherwise the story is very much the same.

Whereas those performing the play near the Pentatarch are gaudily dressed, there is one group on the farthest edge of the Plaza who are dressed in an altogether more sinister manner. They have only three "horsemen" and the ending of the play is far more bloodthirsty than those wowing the crowds in the main arena. This is a troupe of young actors sponsored by the Xalguire Conservatory and they are lead by Dasyuire, the great-nephew of the curator Hestmir.

Should the characters question Dasyuire, he can provide them with some very interesting information. Despite the fact that most of the troupes use four to eight horsemen, the earliest form of the myth quotes only three riders. They were not gaily dressed, but clad in masks and dark garb the better to conceal their features (and indeed are frighteningly reminiscent of the figures in the marked character's nightmares). Gilfig's exact involvement in the story is a little unclear and again he tends to appear directly only in the later versions. Some stories put not Kazue but a white haired woman as the victim of the hunt. Other versions claim that the first inhabitants of the land were driven from the city to prevent the pollution of the true faith. In most of the early stories there is no cleansing and forgiveness, only death at the teeth of the hounds. In some of the later versions, it is the followers of Huis who are driven out of the city and into the farthest east.

Description of the images in the nightmare to Dasyuire (or any other locally acquired contacts) will lead to the identification

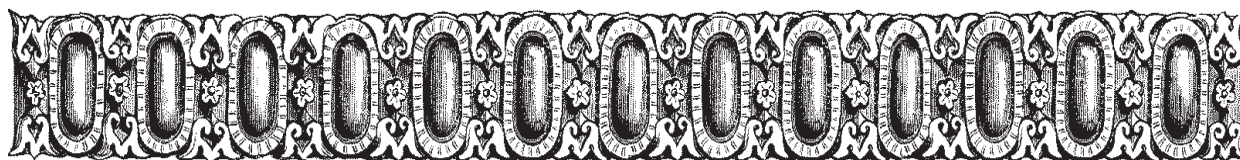
Dasyuire, Jobbing Mummer

There are over one hundred different variations of this particular mystery, but we perform the most authentic.

Wearing tattered robes carefully painted with fake blood, Dasyuire's noble face is caked with mud and sweat from his exertions as Kazue the Misguided. His thick shock of hair is full of dust and twigs. He is a robust but thoughtful chap who carefully considers his words before uttering them and is not given to rash statements. He has spent the last year researching the origins of the Scourge plays and is presenting his own version for the first time to the bewildered onlookers.

Persuasion (Eloquent)
12, Rebuff (Pure-hearted)
12, Attack (Strength) 11,
Defence (Sure-footedness)
10, Magic (Studious)
4, Athletics 7, Etiquette
6, Imposture (acting) 5,
Pedantry (dramatic history)
7, Perception 7, Wealth 1,
Wherewithal 5





of the Society of Aesthetes as the building in the dream. The contact can be of little help in deciphering the rest of the dream and are at a loss to explain the mark, though.

4.1.2 And There She Stands

As the characters approach the Pentatarch, the details of the five statues become clearer. There stand three men and two women, surrounded by people and wreathed in flowers (for a full description, see p. 46). The characters will only be able to get a good look at the statues later in the day when the mummers have moved on and the crowds dispersed.

There, facing south-east, is the woman from the painted pillars. It will take a moment for the characters to realize that she is not alive but a beautifully carved stone statue, which in the fading light of the dying sun seems as flesh. In her left hand is a symbol familiar to them, the flower of the Starsand Lily. Looking up into the cold face, the characters hear again snatches of the song they heard in the Forest. It almost looks as if tears are falling upon her blushing cheeks and the characters may well feel the urge to wipe them gently away. Attempting to do so breaks the spell and the music vanishes. She is nothing more than hard, unyielding stone after all.

Anyone with a skill in Craftsmanship (as long as it is related to carving or masonry) can tell that the statue has been altered in the past and that something has been removed from her right hand. Beside her is the statue of Gilfig, holding items that the characters should recognise from their visit to the Fane on the shores of the Songan Sea.

4.2 A Storm Brewing

4.2.1 The Sound of Doom

First thing the next morning, as the characters enjoy their morning repast, they are startled by an all too familiar sound—the fearful wailing of a hunting horn virtually identical to that which accompanied their encounter with their former comrade Tovin and his late associates. Strangely though no one else seems at all perturbed by the noise and most carry on about their business. Those dressed for the Scourge festival seem to be heading in one particular direction—the Temple District. If the characters ask what the noise was, they will be politely informed that it was the call to prayer at the Shrine of Gilfig.

Following the pilgrims to the Temple District leads the characters to the square before the Shrine, which is packed to overflowing with worshippers. Through the throng walks a stocky man in ceremonial robes carrying an ornamental scythe: this is Precursor Hulm. At the door of the church stand eight buglers who, as the Precursor approaches, raise their instruments to their lips. Oddly, only one person (a plump woman whose hair is shot with grey) unleashes another barrage of sound, the others remaining silent. Those watching the Precursor can see him wince visibly at the noise. Once he and his flunkies have entered the shrine, the buglers lower their instruments and follow him inside. Then the faithful are permitted to enter the building.

Should the characters wish to attend the service, it is dry and worthy, touching on the main tenets of the Gilfigite faith and covering in depth the current celebrations. There are no mentions of anything as grim as Dasyuire's version of events, the whole festival being shown in a light of forgiveness and redemption. Throughout, the silver trumpets rest on ornate stands on either side of a magnificent silver box. The service itself lasts for approximately one hour, after which the Precursor leaves the building through the main doors. As the worshippers file out of the building, the buglers take their instruments from the stands and carry them towards a back room.

Approaching the woman who played the largest horn at the summoning ceremony attracts the attention of a wizened old man whose hands are cruelly twisted. He demands to know what the characters want. They will quickly be rescued by the person they

Queris, Despairing Musician

*I said on the count of four: one, two... NO, FOUR!
Weren't you listening?*

Old, querulous and utterly devoid of hair (except, bizarrely, for the back of his hands), the head trumpeter struggles to maintain the dignity of his position in the face of all comers. Strict, unforgiving, and bad tempered, he too is a very skilled musician who is very nearly completely deaf from fifty years of religious duty. Crippled by arthritis, he hasn't played one of the silver trumpets in over fifteen years, having previously been responsible for sounding the Huntsman's Horn. He is currently locked in a battle of wills with Pieta, whom he would cheerfully dismiss if he had the choice.

Persuasion (Obfuscatory) 10, Rebuff (Contrary) 12, Attack (Cunning) 8, Defence (Vexation) 8, Magic (Curious) 3, Health 8, Crafts, Etiquette 2, Pedantry (music) 9, Stewardship 5, Wherewithal 4

Pieta, Bugler and Warden

Each of the trumpets plays a different note, but in all honesty, you'd be hard pressed to tell what note that was actually supposed to be

Matronly in aspect, Pieta is anything but in terms of behavior. She has a wicked sense of humour, much to the despair of the current Head Bugler Queris, who tries to take a scholarly approach to their role as Gilfig's heralds. Still, her talent is undeniable and she is one of only a handful of people who can coax a note from the largest of the trumpets, also known as the Huntsman's Horn, much to her amusement. She is aunt to the triplets who run the Red Pilgrim Service (Anondo, Naicia and Onama) and taught Naicia most of her dirty jokes. She also acts as warden for the Shrine and whilst lively, is never disrespectful in the presence of the shrine.

Persuasion (Charming) 13, Rebuff (Pure-hearted) 12, Attack (Caution) 9, Defence (Intuition) 10, Magic (Insightful) 4, Etiquette 6, Pedantry (music) 10, Perception 11, Scuttlebutt 6, Wherewithal 7

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wished to speak to in the first place, who gently scolds the old man, much to his chagrin.

Pieta is quite happy to answer any questions the characters have about her instrument and she is an accomplished storyteller. The Huntsman's Horn is allegedly that used by Gilfig to call his disciples to the Scourging of the Heretics. Although normally played in concert with the other trumpets, during the current festival it alone calls the faithful to prayer. There was a bit of a problem with it a while back (well, bless it, it is rather getting on a bit), but that was soon sorted out by a silversmith in the Median Sector who gave the stupid old thing a good overhaul and it was soon as good as new.

If the characters are polite and courteous, Pieta will allow them to examine the horn in detail, which only serves to annoy the hovering Queris further. It is an exquisite piece of workmanship. All is not quite right, though, as anyone who either has a Craftsmanship skill in such things or an Illustrious Perception success can see. This horn is not ancient like the others in the collection but a more modern fake, carefully tarnished in just the right places to convince those who wouldn't know any better. This does not detract from the quality of the piece, but nevertheless it is not the original Huntsman's Horn.

Should the characters mention this, Queris will deny it strenuously and assert that the characters are nothing more than rabble-raising Evangels determined to ruin his festival. That horn is perfectly proper and correct because he would know if it wasn't. Didn't he play the thing before it was cleaned and hasn't it been the same horn the entire time Pieta has played it? Even Pieta is forced to agree with him—the instrument hasn't changed since she took over its care after it was cleaned fifteen years ago.

If questioned about the silversmith who undertook the repairs, Pieta vaguely recalls that he was named something like Utyum and his shop was located somewhere out by the Society of Aesthetes' building. There was something else about him, but she just can't remember what. It would be best to go and talk to him to see if he can remember anything more about the restoration work.

4.2.2 A Sorry Tale

It is a steady walk up to the area of the Median Sector that Pieta mentioned as the location of the silversmith's shop. The streets are, if anything, busier than yesterday and the characters are constantly jostled and shoved. At this point, the character with the lowest sympathy rating becomes the target of a pick-pocketing attempt (if you do not use the sympathy system, then determine who is the target based on the characters' behavior thus far in the game: the least agreeable and most argumentative character will be the victim).

The character now finds themselves in a contest of their Perception versus Caill's Quick Fingers. If they fail, then a small item of little value is removed (something that will easily be overlooked, or even Vozurd's Pin if they forgot to invest wisely in it). If they succeed, then the attempt will be foiled and they can chase and attempt to apprehend their attacker using an Athletics

Caill, Random Footpad

Oi, get off me, I didn't take anything. You haven't got anything worth taking.

Small, wiry and fleet of foot, Caill is one of those people that other people mostly fail to notice. He slips through gaps, between things and away without most people even knowing he was there. Known to the Thief Takers for petty misdemeanors, he's an opportunistic thief who loves festival time.

Persuasion (Glib) 10, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 11, Attack (Speed) 10, Defence (Dodge) 12, Magic (Curious) 2, Health 10, Appraisal 8, Athletics 10, Concealment 8, Quick Fingers 14, Stealth 10, Wealth 1, Wherewithal 5

contest (Caill will have a Boon of +2 due to his familiarity with the back streets of Erze Damath).

If they do catch Caill, then he will attempt to shrug the whole thing off as a misunderstanding. Threatening to take him to the Thief Takers will cause him to wheedle pathetically and he will then offer up the following information. Unlike his normal marks, he was specifically asked to hit the character in question and was paid very well for it as well. He doesn't seem to know who it was that paid him nor why they wanted something belonging to the character. What the characters wish to do with him then is entirely up to them, but clemency or recourse to the law are by far the best options.

Nowhere To Be Found

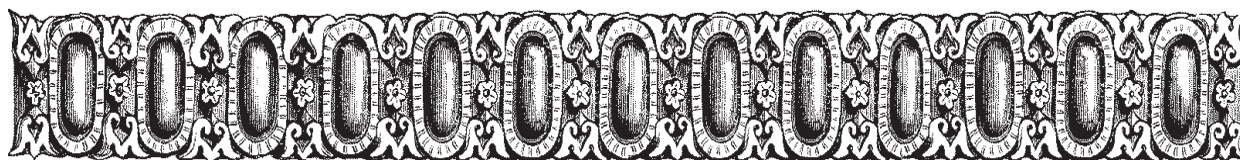
Asking about in the other shops leads to a certain degree of confusion—no one recalls a silversmith practising in the area lately and neither does anyone recall the name Utyum. All is looking bleak until the last shop they try, a small bakery run by a pleasant woman and her young daughter. Valtuisa remembers that when she first bought the shop about fourteen, fifteen years ago there was a silversmiths over the road (the building is now a house),

Valtuisa, Mistress Baker

The cottage loaves will be out in a few minutes, so they'll be good and warm for breakfast.

After the death of her husband, Valtuisa decided to put her bakery skills to good use. After all, she had several little ones to take care of. They've all flown the nest now bar the last one, Hentie, who helps her in the shop. Valtuisa has large, strong hands and is a demon arm-wrestler despite her apparent lack of bulk thanks to all the kneading of dough she does. Her face is usually smudged with flour and often bits of dough trail from her brow, something that amuses her greatly.

Persuasion (Eloquent) 10, Rebuff (Pure-hearted) 11, Attack (Strength) 10, Defence (Sure-footedness) 10, Magic (Studious) 3, Health 10, Craftsmanship (baking) 11, Etiquette 6, Physician 3, Scuttlebutt 5, Stewardship 5, Wealth 2, Wherewithal 6



but there was some sort of scandal and he disappeared. She can't remember what exactly, but it was bad (something about a murder perhaps?)—she was a little distracted at the time as she was setting up the business and had just had her daughter here. His name wasn't Utyum but Qutyuim, that she does know, because it was her grandfather's name. Perhaps the Thief Takers might know more?

4.2.3 The Halls of Justice

Back in the Temple District, the Thief Takers' headquarters are busier than usual. Any festival increases their workload appreciably and the constables are all looking a little worn out. Behind the main desk is a young woman, her shoulder length hair tucked neatly behind her ears.

Seteh herself does not recognise the name of Qutyuim, but if there was such a case it will be recorded in the Constabulary archive with all the other criminal records. She is quite happy to go and search the archive for the characters (no civilians are allowed in the stacks) and asks that they return tomorrow by which time she should have located the information for them. The characters are now free to do as they please within the city for the rest of the day.

Seteh, Desk Clerk

And how may the Constabulary aid you on this fine day, madam?

Seteh is bright, polite and enthusiastic about her job. She genuinely likes helping people and her sunny disposition has made her ideal for handling public enquiries. She doesn't mind the desk job as she's not overly keen on running after criminals—after all, it's not as if the uniform's a very practical color to keep clean.

Persuasion (Charming) 13, Rebuff (Penetrating) 13, Attack (Finesse) 11, Defence (Misdirection) 12, Magic (Curious) 2, Health 11, Athletics 8, Etiquette 7, Pedantry 7, Perception 9, Scuttlebutt 6, Wherewithal 7

When they return the next day, Seteh is nowhere to be found. Unfortunately, according to the new desk clerk, she was taken ill suddenly last night and has apparently left nothing for the characters. The young clerk will not divulge her address and insists that he is too busy to undertake any research on the characters' behalf.

4.2.4 A Quiet Word

As they are about to leave the Thief Takers' building, an officer approaches the characters, his uniform cap tucked carefully under his arm. He motions the characters to one side and asks that he might be permitted to have a quiet word with them in private. His actions depend very much on the behavior of the characters at this point. Should they become argumentative, he will be forced to place them under arrest and have them thrown

into the cells. Should they be cooperative, he will usher them into a room reserved for just such purposes.

Bledryn has received a worrying complaint from Queris, the Master of Bugles at the Shrine of Gilfig. Apparently, the characters have accused him of stealing the Huntsman's Horn and replacing it with a fake. A devout Gilfigite, Bledryn does not take kindly to such suggestions that a humble old man who has devoted his life, limbs and hearing to the service of the church would steal one of its holiest relics. He wishes to know on what grounds the characters have made such an awful accusation and why they did not refer the matter to the Constabulary if they believed such a crime was indeed the case (provided of course that they haven't; characters being what they are, we doubt that they will have done so).

It is time for some fast-talking on the characters' part. Bledryn regards Queris as a holy man not given to idle accusations (not that he really knows him; he's only seen him officiating at services, or he would know that Queris is *highly* likely to make such a complaint). He is also concerned that someone may well have stolen the Huntsman's Horn, particularly as such a theft could spark serious religious strife under the current circumstances. Rumors have been circulating that troublemakers are determined to ignite the conflict between the Evangels and the Gilfigites by any means necessary. As strangers who mysteriously "discovered" the forged trumpet right after a Scourge service, the characters are under suspicion of being involved in the plot to start a riot.

Officer Bledryn, Devout Enforcer

*I am merely having a polite word with this person.
Nothing for you to worry your head over. Good day.*

Bledryn is athletic and sturdy, a former runner (and winner) of the Race of the Avenues. He always looks hot and entirely possibly constipated. His manner is steadfastly polite but ruthless. Many have compared him to a deodand worrying a thighbone—he will not let go until the very marrow is drained from any case. His handshake is extremely firm, his dress crisp and pressed and his beard immaculately groomed and trimmed.

Persuasion (Forthright) 14, Rebuff (Wary) 13, Attack (Speed) 12, Defence (Sure-footedness) 14, Magic (Daring) 2, Health 12, Athletics 12, Etiquette 5, Pedantry 7, Perception 10, Scuttlebutt 6, Wherewithal 8

4.3 Other Avenues of Investigation

Of course, there is much that the characters may wish to research besides the missing silversmith. For one thing, who is the female statue in the Pentatarch? This is an ideal opportunity to introduce the characters to the Xalguire Conservatory and its boundless archives. After all, the Ironweed Pillar did say that the preservers would help them find the answers!

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It will take many days to sift through all the information here that could aid the characters and spells such as Ildefonse's Accelerated Comprehension (TT p. 111) will greatly aid in this gargantuan task. If such advanced research applications are unavailable to them, they could always throw themselves on the mercy of the Conservatory's curator, Hestmir.

Hestmir, Congenial Organizer

Why yes, it is an unusual topic for a presentation, but intriguing never the less.

Hestmir acts as curator, program organiser, public liaison and general shepherd of people for the Conservatory. A descendant of Xalguire, she is very proud of her family's contribution to the city and despite getting on in years has rarely missed a days work. She can locate any item within the archive with pinpoint accuracy, knows all the members and their field of research and yet has an air (entirely assumed) of gentle dottiness that quickly disarms even the most irate academic. She is very partial to flattery and cakes.

Persuasion (Charming) 13, Rebuff (Penetrating) 14, Attack (Caution) 8, Defence (Dodge) 8, Magic (Studious) 5, Health 9, Etiquette 7, Pedantry (Xalguire Conservatory) 14, Perception 10, Scuttlebutt 8, Stewardship 7, Wealth 2, Wherewithal 4

4.3.1 Sammech

Under Hestmir's guidance, the characters will be directed to the lower basement (the deepest of the three subterranean levels under the Conservatory). Few people come down here as there is little public interest in the older of the region's faiths, although occasionally a scholar will venture down into the depths in search of an obscure piece of arcana. The air is cool but not damp (quite surprisingly as it must be below the water table) and the lack of sound is quite uncomfortable. Speaking too loudly causes eerie echoes to bounce around the vaults, encouraging people to whisper quietly rather than speak in normal tones.

There really isn't much to find (see the description under "The Pentatarch"), except for a few references to veneration of the moon. As with many good things, there is one all-important exception. Hidden beneath a thick layer of dust at the bottom of a pile of musty manuscripts is a rather tattered folio covered in a midnight blue skin of unknown origin. On the cover is the picture of a six-petalled lily, picked out in silver. It is another copy of the Flower Manuscript, only this one has its pages intact. Its real title is *The Romance of the Desert*.

4.3.2 Gilfig

Information pertaining to this popular Adept is stored in the upper basement for ease of access. The air here is warmer and the dust is under much better control. The information here confirms what Dasyuire told the characters about the Scourge plays (if they ask Hestmir about her great-nephew's work, she can even give them a list of the books he used for his research).

The Romance of the Desert



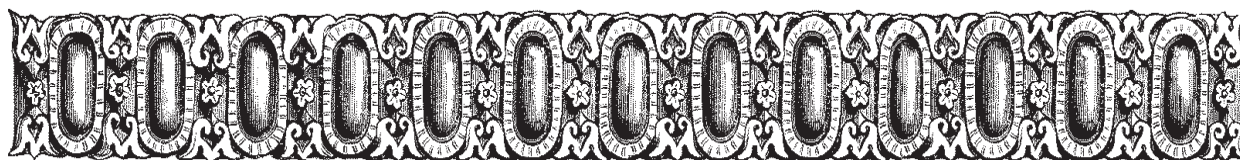
Despite its name, this book is not a love story. It is a collection of folk tales regarding the Silver Desert collected in the dim and distant past by a historian called Verwin. Two tales are likely to be of particular interest to the characters: "The Shifting Sands" and "The Hidden People".

The Shifting Sands

Written as a fairy story, this tale details how a young woman called Sammia (which, in the desert tongue, means "flower of the desert") was sent on a quest by her mother to find the sacred weapon of her people, a shining silver sword that never grew dull. It had been hidden deep in the heart of the desert in a beautiful castle made from the silver sands themselves. Only the true leader could retrieve it and bring it to bear on an evil demon that had arisen in the land. But the white-haired woman was betrayed by those who wished to curry favour with the vile creature and just as she was about to retrieve the very item that would free her people from slavery, the castle was set adrift on the seas of time and space by powerful sorcery. There she remains, trapped for all time, wandering the galaxies, returning to the desert every now and again, her arrival heralded by the flowers sacred to her mother Sammech, goddess of fertility and secret places.

The Hidden People

Possibly contemporary with the above story (according to Verwin) is the tale of the Hidden People. In it, a peaceful race of agriculturalists are driven from their homes after they discover that a powerful artefact brought amongst them (referred to throughout as the "Black Blood of Eight") is a dangerous fake. This knowledge could destabilise the current rulers, who whip up hatred and fear against the farmers and set about murdering them to keep them silent. Given no other option, the landsmen flee their home and take to the deserts, guided to a holy place by the shining moon and a causeway of living iron. Here they live in secrecy, shunning the world and waiting for a time when the wrongs done against them will be avenged by a force from the West.



On an Illustrious success (Pedantry or Perception at the players' discretion), the characters find an interesting snippet in a very old and crumbling book entitled *The Blessings of The Gods* by a scholar called Ternig the Determiner. It is basically a long forgotten list of artefacts sacred to a variety of local faiths. In it there is a listing for the Blood of ZoZam:

ZoZam, Blood of

LOST ARTEFACT OF THE GILFIGITE FAITH. PURPORTEDLY GIVEN TO HIS DISCIPLES BY GILFIG HIMSELF BEFORE HIS MIRACULOUS ASCENSION TO GAMAMERE. AN OBSIDIAN BOTTLE CONTAINING THE BLOOD OF THE CREATOR GOD CAPTURED BY HIS SCION IN THE INSTANT AFTER HIS INCEPTION, ITS POWERS ARE UNKNOWN. LAST RECORDED EXISTENCE JUST PRIOR TO THE SCOURGING OF THE HERETICS, WHO ALLEGEDLY STOLE THE ITEM AND DESTROYED IT. SEE ALSO ROBES OF GILFIG, HOLY.

This is virtually identical to the inscription inside the cover of Edeten's Flower Manuscript. Should they wish to look up Robes of Gilfig, Holy, here is what they find:

Robes of Gilfig, Holy

THE EARTHLY REMAINS OF THE PROPHET GILFIG, LEFT BEHIND UPON HIS ASCENSION TO THE PARADISE OF GAMAMERE. CAPABLE OF BESTOWING BLESSINGS UPON THE DEVOUT. CURRENTLY LOCATED IN THE SHRINE OF GILFIG IN A MARVELLOUS SILVER CASKET, YET MORE OF THE FABLED WORK OF THE DASTRAN SILVERSMITHS.

They may also be intrigued to find, whilst flicking through the book, the following entry:

GMs Note: The Truth About Qutyuim

Ardac had every reason to distrust the story as it is completely false. Qutyuim was approached by Hernuire (also known to the characters as Hercurn the Hermit) to create a working replica of the Huntsman's Horn. It was part of Hercurn's plan to gain control of the Wind Riders: he would use the horn to summon the fell hunters and assert his claim to their leadership. Wary but intrigued by the challenge, Qutyuim agreed. After all, how often did you get the chance to prove your skill in such a manner and who else alive could do it? Vanity is truly a terrible thing.

Hernuire (disguised as a worshipper) complained to Queris (who was already going deaf) that he had noticed a distinctly odd timbre to the horn's sound and recommended a young chap who could sort it out at a very reasonable price. Queris, at that time afraid his deafness would lead to his expulsion from the heralds' ranks, quickly agreed and sent the horn to Qutyuim. With Hercurn's magical assistance a detailed replica of the horn was soon fabricated and given back to the worried musician.

Hercurn then took the horn (which had been left in the Shrine for safekeeping by the Quorum in the days when it was still closely allied to the Gilfigite faith) and in the seclusion of the Society of Aesthetes' hidden basement, set about summoning

Sammech, Sword of

LOST ARTEFACT OF THE SAMMECHITE FAITH. A PERMANENTLY SHARP BLADE MADE OF PURE GLIMMISTER. ALLEGEDLY POSSESSED THE POWER TO SLAY UNEARTHLY CREATURES. NO KNOWN RECORDS OF ITS EXISTENCE, BUT IS REPRESENTED ON HER STATUE IN THE PLAZA.

Those who have seen the statue of Sammech know that she isn't carrying a sword anymore. Is this what has been removed from her right hand?

4.3.3 Qutyuim

Asking Hestmir about Qutyuim will lead to the characters descending back to the lower basement, where records of some old trials are now stored. There used to be a researcher here by the name of Ardac, whose speciality was court history and procedure. He was an avid collector of cases, particularly the odd or unusual ones. When he died, his collection was moved to the lower basement for safekeeping. If they have anything on Qutyuim, it will be here.

Searching through the documents will take a long time, but any form of Pedantry success will lead to the discovery of notes about the Qutyuim case. Ardac found the affair particularly interesting because, in his eyes, the facts of the case never quite added up.

Qutyuim was a silversmith who had trained under the late Master Denere, a craftsman of unparalleled skill and the last of the descendants of the Dastran silversmiths. It was often said that Qutyuim was more skilled than even his master and was somehow

the Riders. The other Quorumites had suspected for some time that Hercurn was not to be trusted and had been watching him closely. At the point of summoning they halted the ritual, sundering Hercurn's mind in the process.

Not only did they now have a bibbling idiot on their hands, there was also the small matter of the silversmith. Having the true horn in their safekeeping was really a bonus as the time of the prophecy was drawing near, but Qutyuim could not be trusted to keep his mouth shut. Therefore, a more permanent solution was required.

Quite in keeping with their morbid powers, Qutyuim was summoned to the Society on the pretext of creating a new set of silverware for the formal banquets. As the Moon Key was still lost at this time, the Quorum members merely inscribed the unsuspecting craftsman with the Riders' summoning mark that night while he slept (see p. 40). It wasn't long before the hunters found him.

Another member of the Quorum, posing as Hercurn's valet, reported his master missing that same night and then falsely identified the corpse when it was found the next day. He alone gave evidence at the inquest, thus blackening Qutyuim's name forever and expertly covering up the forgery. To tie up all the loose ends, Hercurn was banished to the Plain of Obelisks and his role of guardian of the Ironweed Pillar.

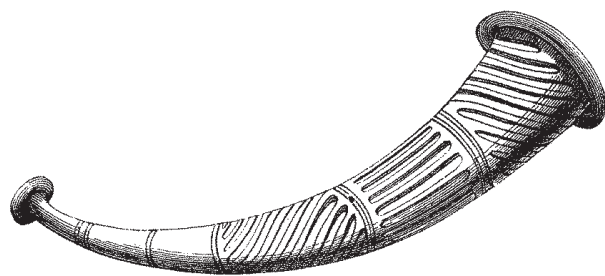
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able to talk to the very metal itself to coax from it the finest items seen in many a lifetime. Not only did he create exquisite new works for the city's elite, he was a skilled restorer of ancient pieces salvaged from the Dastric Empire. He was widely regarded as a quiet and conscientious man, a man without enemies and many friends.

But everyone has a dark side, or at least that's what was claimed at the inquest. Not long after restoring a piece for the Shrine of Gilfig, the silversmith had apparently entered into a feud with a local gentleman called Hernuire. Hernuire, descendant of a respectable family, had commissioned Qutyuim to restore a valuable family heirloom but was dismayed to discover upon its return that the item had been replaced by a fake. When he confronted Qutyuim in his shop (in front of Hernuire's valet, Matino), a bitter argument erupted in which the silversmith vehemently denied any such forgery and demanded that Hernuire recant his defamatory slur. The gentleman refused and threatened to ruin Qutyuim, whereupon the silversmith vowed he would not draw breath long enough to spread such vile slander.

That night, during one of the worst storms in living memory, Hernuire was murdered as he made his way home from his evening revels. His body was viciously attacked and mutilated, such that Matino could only identify the body by the signet ring his master wore. Of Qutyuim there was no trace; the Thief Takers believed he had fled the city to avoid the consequences of his actions, which would most definitely have ended at the Stake.

In neat, precise handwriting Ardac comments that having had work done by Qutyuim, the arguments made at the inquest into Hernuire's death made little sense to him. He had never seen the man drawn to anger, despite some severe provocation on the part of Ardac's interfering wife. He was more the sort who would have stood his ground and cleared his name through the proper channels rather than resort to base and brutal murder. That there was only one witness to the affair also bothered him, especially a witness who conveniently left the city shortly after the matter was tidied up. In all, Ardac remained unconvinced and believed there was much more to the case than was made public. The final note in the file reads: "And who was the poor unfortunate corpse? I fear it was the accused himself. Still, some things are best left undisturbed."



4.3.4 The Odd Symbols

There is nothing in the archives that can help them as to what the strange symbols in Edeten's workbook may represent.

4.3.5 Optional Research: Cloth-of-Silver

If the characters visited Woodkiln and they still have the unusual pouch that belonged to Edeten, they can attempt to determine its origin here. Showing it to Hestmir will get the characters sent to the upper floor of the Conservatory where Giemadia has her workshop.

Giemadia is an expert on eastern fabrics. Her room is full of textiles and threads. Three large trestle tables occupy the middle of the room and these are groaning under the weight of folios, manuscripts and fabric, whilst the walls are covered in shelves bearing yet more textiles. A variety of drawings are pinned to the remaining wall space. The room is well lit and smells sweetly of jasmine.

Giemadia instantly identifies the pouch as cloth-of-silver, a rare and expensive material not made since the fall of the Dastric Empire (see p. 94 for further details). She is intrigued as to where the characters obtained it, as she has only a few tiny samples herself and none in as good condition as this. Much of what she knows she has gleaned from histories, workbooks and Guild records brought to Erze Damath after Dastra was abandoned. She can answer the characters' questions regarding cloth-of-silver and how and where it was made.

Whether or not the characters go to see Giemadia, she will engineer an "accidental" encounter with them at the Conservatory having heard about them from Hestmir. She knows who they are and wants to weigh them up for herself.

Giemadia, Seamstress Extraordinaire

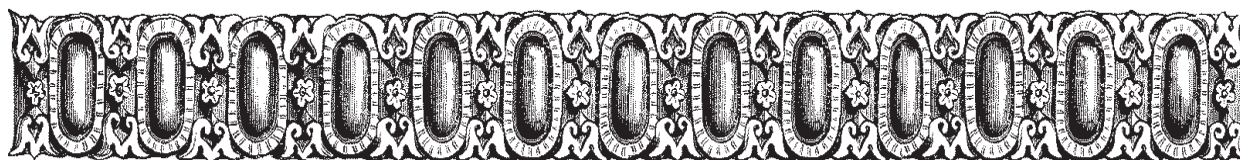
This particular bodice belongs to a period we have termed the Restrictive era. See how tightly the laces fasten in the front?

A shapely woman of middle years with glossy chin length hair shot through with silver. She wears few feathers, preferring pink clips to keep the length out of her eyes whilst she is working. Her hands are delicate though the skin is dry from handling so much fabric. She has an elfin face and intriguing almond shaped eyes that sparkle with a dry wit.

Persuasion (Charming) 9, Rebuff (Penetrating) 12, Craftsmanship (textiles) 12, Pedantry (textiles) 10. For Giemadia's other statistics, see p. 103

4.3.6 Optional Research: Huis

If the characters are interested in why the Huisita are mentioned in the Scourge plays, then Hestmir can direct them to the lower basement again for further information. At some time in the distant past, after Huis had left for the Far East, there arose tension between the followers of Gilfig and those of Huis.



No one seems certain as to what that schism was, but it led to a pogrom against the Huisita who were driven out of the city and the surrounding area. The statue of Huis was left untouched as the problem had occurred not with him but with the petty and jealous guardians of his faith he had left behind (some texts hint at a fear of divine retribution if the statue was removed, rather than any existential argument for who was at fault). Over time, the dispelling of the Huisita appears to have become muddled with the earlier story of the Scourging of Kazue and they are often presented as one whole story, rather than as independent fragments of historically separate events.

4.4 An Interesting Invitation

After several days of hunting through the archives, the characters should be beginning to see the full extent of the predicament in which they find themselves. Not only does their research suggest that Gilfig may well be a false prophet at best (and a demon at worst), but that his disciples were responsible for the banishment and destruction of the original inhabitants of the area when they discovered the truth. Someone is not above using murder to maintain the secret, having left a trail of the corpses of those who asked too many questions across the region's history. Who should they trust now and who should they fear?

As ever, timing in this scenario is very important. Allow the characters plenty of time to do all the research they need. All the while, tensions are rising between the Evangels and the Gilfigites due in no small part to the machinations of the Silver Quorum. It has been a most disturbing few days for the characters, what with discoveries of ancient murder and mayhem and they may need time to cool their heels and enjoy all the city has to offer.

Unexpectedly the characters receive an invitation to dine at the Society of Aesthetes. They are to make themselves known to the housekeeper, Thaea, precisely one hour before dusk. If they have the cloth-of-silver pouch, the note quite oddly asks them to bring it along too.

The characters may well not wish to accept this invitation (and really, who could blame them?) and it is entirely up to them if they want to attend or not. Still, enquiring about the Society garners very positive noises and looks of awe from almost everyone they ask (provided they don't ask the Conservators, of course!). Still, no matter who they ask, it isn't everyday you get an invitation from such an exclusive club and most people believe it would be a mistake to turn it down.

4.4.1 Optional Encounter: Dinner Is Served

Upon arriving at the Society of Aesthetes building (directions were kindly enclosed with the invitation) the characters find themselves faced by a building that is all too familiar from their comrade's dreams. Perhaps now it might be a good time to remind the characters (a successful Pedantry roll) that they were warned to beware of those who were beloved of beauty.

Should they summon up the courage to knock upon the imposing door, they will be greeted by a stern woman in old-fashioned attire. This is Thaea, housekeeper to the Society.

Thaea, Keeper of Order

Discretion is a valuable thing, a very valuable thing indeed.

Responsible for the running of the household, Thaea has been here longer than any other member of staff. All her memories are of this one place. She is neither eager nor slovenly, and performs her duties exactly as instructed. Unbeknownst to her, she is a vat construct created for this one purpose alone. Anyone with an item such as the Amulet of Azoic Revelation (TT p. 34) will be able to spot her unusual nature immediately. Her loyalty is unswerving, an important asset to a Society so protective of its members identities.

Persuasion (Intimidating) 12, Rebuff (Pure-hearted) 15, Attack (Caution) 8, Defence (Intuition) 9, Magic (innate) 2, Health 10, Etiquette 7, Pedantry (Society rules) 9, Perception 8, Stewardship 9, Wherewithal 7

She has been expecting the characters and politely invites them into the tastefully decorated hallway. If they have cloaks, she will offer to take them. Before they can enter the banqueting suite, she explains, they must don decorative masks. All of the other members will be wearing them to maintain their anonymity and they ask that their distinguished guests do the same. If the characters refuse it doesn't matter, but it is rather insulting to their hosts and will garner them a frosty reception upon entering the sumptuous dining room.

The Meal

It is unlikely that the characters will have eaten so well during their trip, if ever. There are many courses, all cooked to perfection and beautifully presented. The wines that accompany each course are the perfect compliment to the flavours and aromas of the dish with which they are served. Talk is kept to a minimum during the meal. The servants are responsible for the fetching and passing of all condiments and carafes so that the dinner guests never have to directly refer to each other by name.



All cooked to perfection and beautifully presented.

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Every guest (of which there are about forty) wears a mask, completely concealing their features. All represent some creature or plant and are stunning examples of their kind. All the guests are also dressed somberly in heavily embroidered robes (black on black) including the female guests (something which should strike the characters as highly unusual).

After Dinner Conversation

After the meal (which lasts several hours), the diners retire to a plush drawing room, furnished handsomely with many deep and welcoming sofas and armchairs. Some guests engage in unfamiliar board or card games. Others take themselves to the library next door before returning to their chosen seat. The characters are automatically targeted by a woman wearing a pure white animal mask (glittering pink stones pick out its nose and the whiskers are pure gold wire) who smells faintly of jasmine. She is accompanied by a tall gentleman hidden by a hound's head (rich velvets detail the fall and wave of the creature's fur, his whiskers are of jet-black crystal strung on fine silver wire).

Perceptive characters (Prosaic or better) recognise the woman's voice—it is Giemadia (although it would be most impolite to say so). If the characters have Edeten's lost pouch, she explains that the gentleman is a botanist who is most interested by the flower the pouch contains and is very keen to see it. Indeed, it was he who arranged for their current invitation. He will question them casually about all they know regarding the pressed bloom. Suspicious types might even suspect he is pumping them for information.

If they don't have the pouch, the gentleman has arranged their invitation as distinguished guests "traveled far from foreign lands to grace our glorious city". He chats amiably about religion without ever professing a single personal belief. Suspicious types might feel he is attempting to establish just what they know about the state of play in Erze Damath.

Throughout their conversation with Giemadia and her unknown associate, the characters are being closely observed by the rest of the guests. Few of them seek to approach the characters or engage them in any way, shape or form. Somehow, it is almost as if the characters are there as this evening's entertainment.

An Unfortunate Accident

Refreshments are served periodically throughout the evening with a very generous hand. Whilst she is explaining the intricacies of some point of contention, a passing guest accidentally jogs Giemadia's arm, causing her to spill red wine all over the character nearest to her (which, of course, they may attempt to dodge using their Athletics skill). A servant is hurriedly called for to take the character to a quiet room where they can be cleaned up. The character is given a robe to cover themselves with whilst the garment in question is taken away to be laundered.

The room in which they find themselves is small compared to the room they have just left and lacking in the opulence and grandeur of the other parts of the building the character will so far have witnessed. Curiously, an intricate orrery sits upon a highly polished table in the centre of what is otherwise quite a plain room.

It is a remarkable piece of workmanship being fashioned entirely from precious metals and glowing gemstones. It is astronomically correct in every detail except that at its heart sits not a citrine to represent the sun, but an upright shining silver disc.

There is a delicate silver key set into the base. Turning the key causes the glittering planets to revolve around the central disc whilst a tinkling tune accompanies their movement. The tune is more than familiar to the character as they've heard it twice before; once in the Blanwalt Forest and again when they stood in front of Sammech's statue.

As the character watches, it appears as if something is happening to the disc at the centre of the device. The shape appears to be changing. Unfortunately, at that moment the door opens and Giemadia sweeps in to bustle the character out of the room, bursting with apologies for their unfair abandonment. If questioned about the orrery, she dismisses it casually as a toy they had rescued from the Conservators. Despite its beauty, it is one of the lesser pieces in their collection and as such not put on general display.

Unaccompanied Exploration

Should the characters have become sufficiently suspicious by this point, they can of course take it upon themselves to go exploring the building in search of the items they seek. This will be difficult as they are closely watched at all times, both by the Quorumate and the real Society members. Particularly ingenious plans should be rewarded with the details described in the following section (4.5.2) if carried out successfully.

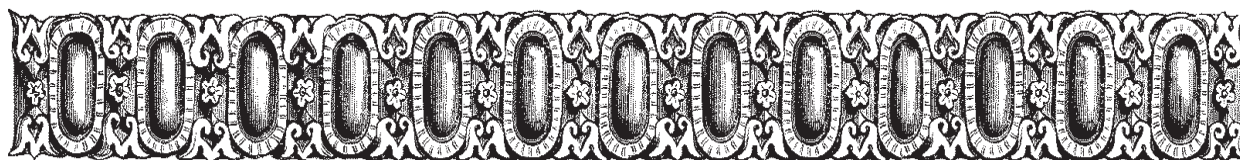
As dawn approaches, the yawning guests begin to silently file from the building. Each leaves alone in order to maintain their privacy. As the characters are preparing to leave, the person who was accidentally drenched is informed that their garments have not yet fully dried but will be returned to them once they are so (and they are later on that day). They are quite welcome to keep the robe even after their own clothes have been returned, should they so wish.

4.5 A Trap Sprung

4.5.1 A (Return) Visit

If the characters did attend the Society banquet, then they have the perfect excuse to return to the building foreshadowed in their nightmares. After all, they are still in possession of the robe that was so kindly lent to them. If they did not attend the dinner, there is little to stop them from wandering up to the door and asking for admittance. Under normal circumstances such an act would be firmly rebuffed, but Thaea has been given very special instructions: these visitors are to be admitted and given every assistance necessary.

More devious characters may wish to put their skills to more covert methods of entry, although they are still falling into the Quorum's trap. Usually the building is guarded with a variety of safeguards and alarms but the Quorum have disabled them, sure that the characters will be desperate to discover what is going on.



One obvious spell to use is Phandaal's Mantle Of Stealth, either in conjunction with a mundane act such as returning the robe (thus ensuring the cloaked character an easy entry) or a more magical one such as use of the First or Second Felicitous Progression (TT p. 90 and p. 115). The Spell of Temporal Stasis is another handy spell for gaining entry without notice through an open door. And then there are spells such as the Definite Reduction (and its companion the Second Definite Reduction; TT p. 88 and p. 115) and Morreion's Immediate Impulsion (TT p. 96) that will gain access through less conventional means.

4.5.2 Within These Hallowed Halls

No matter how the character(s) gain entry, the building is strangely quiet. Only the servants are in attendance and they steadfastly refuse to acknowledge the existence of the characters, should they still be visible (in strict accordance with the terms of their contracts). If anything, the silence here is more dense and oppressive than in the Conservatory's lower basement. There is a distinct feeling of being watched.

Depending on what they are specifically looking for, the character(s) have a variety of places they can visit.

The Library

Where better to look for a missing book? The library is located on the ground floor across the rear of the building. It can be accessed from both the hall and either of the drawing rooms. The shelves are lined with books of all sizes and from all ages. A treasure trove of information is held within these closed walls for the privilege of a chosen few.

Still, there is something not quite right about the dimensions of this room. The use of either the Revelation of Veracity or Shabar's Ambient Attunement (TT p. 102) or just plain old Perceptiveness reveals that there is a hidden chamber secreted behind one of the bookshelves.

The Secret Room

Behind the false façade, the hidden chamber is bare. In one corner, a set of stairs leads down into the darkness.

The Basement

There are several flights of stairs to travel down into the bowels of the Society's headquarters. As they travel downwards, faint smells of cooking assail their senses (they are travelling past the kitchen to a hidden sub-basement below).

At the bottom of the stairs lies an octagonal workroom carved from the rock on which the building sits. A low plinth in the centre of the room supports a lamp, which automatically ignites when someone enters the chamber. Neatly stacked against one of the walls are four chairs. There is also a large, plain cabinet. Otherwise, this room is as bare as the chamber from which they have come.

The cabinet is not locked (although it is anyone's guess as to whether or not the characters realize that this is fairly unusual). Inside lie the ripped pages of the Flower Manuscript. Beneath them lies something alarmingly familiar: the Moon Key.

The Moon Key

Approximately one inch across, the key is a tiny silver and gold amulet. Reference to Edeten's notebook will reveal that it precisely matches symbol 1. Delicate tracks are cut into the surface of the central gold disc and the silver crescents appear to be suspended above the disc on little pins that sit in these grooves. The surfaces of both the crescents and the discs are richly engraved with abstract geometrical designs. A small ring attached to the rear of the disc attaches the amulet to a fine silver chain.



Members of the Silver Quorum had the key created by the silversmiths of Dastra as a means of entry to the Plain of Midnight. The curse was placed upon the item to prevent any but the Quorum from surviving the acquisition of the key. The Quorumites only evade the attentions of the Wind Riders by having the Mark of Grace tattooed on their bodies in silver lily ink.

Somehow the key became lost after one member visited the prison realm. Eventually he was punished for his folly: the other members scorched away his protective mark and burnt him with that of the Huntsman for his carelessness (a spell they had created especially for him, but which proved just as useful as the key itself). No trace of the key could ever be found.

This did not worry the Quorum greatly (they were quite content for it to remain lost, particularly after they rid themselves of the troublesome Huisitas who would only have made dangerous use of it had it been available) and they had little faith in the Sammechian heresies that appeared on a mysterious pillar in the woods around the same time.

Indeed, the Quorum were most surprised when the Wind Riders again became active at the key's behest. Hercurn had not bothered to inform them that the scholar from the west had even visited the pillar (they do not know if this was deliberate or due to his madness), let alone that he held the key. A member was dispatched to the west to find the key and managed to retrieve it and the Flower Manuscript shortly before the characters arrived at the lost fane. (If they used Pasko's Deducible Placenta then this is the person they have spoken to).

Now that it looks as if the prophecy is about to come to pass, what better way to deal with the characters than to let them carry the means of their own destruction. Giving them the Huntsman's Mark is merely adhering to the belt and braces philosophy—being in possession of both, they cannot fail to experience an encounter with the Wind Riders at some point in their immediate future.

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The Orrery Room

Alas, this is object is a red herring. The silver disc in the centre of the piece merely spins around as the tune (commonly regarded as an old folk tune, should the characters have investigated its origins) reaches its climax. For all her faults, Giemadia was actually telling the truth about this one.

4.6 The Hand of Mischief

4.6.1 A Disturbance in the Night.

Finally the characters can look forward to a pleasant and undisturbed evening and a good night's sleep. There are, after all, good wines to be had here and depending on where they choose to drink (see background section) the company is affable and well behaved. They have the key they were searching for and now they can pause to catch their breath (unless they have been smart enough to figure out the meaning of the amulet they now hold; in which case panic must surely ensue). Ah, if only it were that simple...

During the night, the characters are awakened by the ear-splitting sound of the Gilfig trumpets, a truly dreadful commotion. Investigating leads to the discovery that a terrible act of sacrilege has been committed—the Funambulous Evangels' Shrine has been set on fire!

4.6.2 The Finger of Blame

People from all over the city are flocking to the Temple District as the Shrine burns out of control, the flames roaring high into the night sky. Crews of people have formed bucket chains to nearby wells in an attempt to stem the blaze and prevent it from reaching other buildings in the area. All is chaos, soot and smoke.

Should the characters follow the crowds to see for themselves what is happening, they are in for a shock. As they approach the conflagration, a man in thick-soled boots shouts, "That's them! Arrest them immediately!" Several Thief Takers (who had been talking to the man) approach the bewildered characters, intent on having another polite word in their ear. At the forefront is Bledryn and he doesn't look happy at all.

Again, the characters' response to the officers will determine their subsequent treatment. Attempting to run away will lead to an unfortunate encounter with the Interminable Interim (all officers are issued with an easily concealable staff enchanted with ten charges of this spell for just such occasions) unless they are suitably protected or avoid the blast. Polite disbelief and/or confusion as to what is going on will lead to the characters being quickly hustled away from the seething crowd who have realized that these people might have had something to do with the attempted destruction of their church. If the characters are not removed quickly, a full-scale riot is likely to erupt.

Should the characters choose not investigate the source of all the fuss, they will be rudely awakened in the early hours by Bledryn and a number of officers equal to the number of characters.

Random Officer of the Law

Please don't do that again or it won't go well for you.

Persuasion (Intimidating) 11, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 12, Attack (Strength) 13, Defence (Parry) 14, Health 11, Athletics 10, Perception 9, Scuttlebutt 7, Tracking 8, Wherewithal 7

Interrogation

Bledryn will remove the detainees to the cells under the Thief Takers' Headquarters in order to question them. The characters will be asked to hand over any and all items they are currently carrying on their person if conscious; if they were brought here to recover from the after effects of the Interminable Interim, these items will have already been removed when they come to. At least two officers will be left guarding the characters at all times.

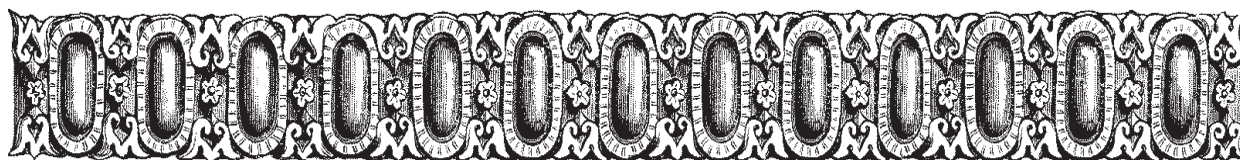
At some point during the morning after the fire, Bledryn will ask for the characters to be brought up to his office. Again, they will be escorted by a number of officers equal to their own. An escape attempt could be made at this time, but it isn't really recommended. As with any judiciary system, abscondance is considered an admission of guilt¹.

Bledryn looks even less happy than he did the last time he saw the characters. His hot, stretched face is grey from lack of sleep and he paces the floor behind his desk. He is openly wearing Laccodel's Protective Rune (DERPG p. 117) on an amulet about his neck. Once the characters are seated, he dismisses the guards and begins to talk to the characters. He explains that the custodian of the Evangels' Shrine swears blind that he saw at least two of the characters running from the building shortly before he discovered the blaze. The fire itself was indeed deliberately set. If Caill managed to get away with an item from one of the characters, Bledryn presents it to them now. It is charred but still recognizable and was found at the scene of the fire.

All the evidence points to the characters' involvement in this most unforgivable of crimes. In concert with the fact that they have already been questioned about causing trouble at the Shrine of Gilfig, Bledryn will accuse them of being Huisita sympathizers out to destroy the peace of this good city on the anniversary of their expulsion from Erze Damath all that time ago (which, funnily enough, was last night). This may not make any sense to the characters unless they researched Huis at the Conservatory, but Bledryn is in no mood to explain.

The characters now have the very difficult task of convincing Bledryn, by whatever means they have at their disposal. If they fail, they will be returned to the cells to await trial. If they succeed, they are free to go with the warning that no matter what, their movements will be carefully monitored as long as they remain in the city. If it isn't them trying to spark a riot, someone is determined to shift the blame onto them and that makes Bledryn very nervous indeed.

¹ A not unreasonable assumption. Note that the Thief Takers' regard 'shot while trying to escape' as an entirely adequate way to close a case.



4.6.3 Optional Encounter: The Trial

If the characters failed to convince Bledryn that they have nothing to do with the current unrest and arson, they will in short order find themselves before Bernuisa (see p. 48). She is very unhappy about the speed with which this prosecution is being brought, concerned that the necessary time for gathering evidence is being bypassed in order to calm the emotions of the affronted Evangels. Provided that the characters can provide the names of witnesses who can verify their whereabouts at the time the fire started (or demand the assistance of someone in possession of the spell *The Impropritorialious Tongue*, TT p. 91), Bernuisa will dismiss the case. If they cannot provide such evidence, then despite her own misgivings, Bernuisa will be forced to find the characters guilty and recommend that they be taken forthwith to the Stake. After all, she has an eyewitness and (possibly) evidence left at the scene by the characters' themselves.

Whilst this is indeed an unfortunate and tricky situation, all is not lost. After the Thief Takers have left the characters manacled to their posts, it becomes obvious that the deodand are less than determined to claim their free meal. After about an hour or so, a hooded figure appears from the rubble carrying a large hessian sack. From this they draw steaming chunks of meat, which they deposit in a pile on the edge of the arena (although the deodand still seem remarkably reluctant to venture anywhere near it).

The delicate figure then makes its way across to the shackled characters. Carefully and silently, they pick the locks and release everyone from their bonds. There is a dry, hot smell about the figure, very like the desert winds that sweep across the city. The creature hands something to one of the characters then turns and beckons for them follow. The item is a fragile white flower.

4.6.4 The Desert Guide

If the characters avoided being taken to the Stake, Ceque approaches them after they are released from either Bledryn's custody or that of the court. He appears at first to be a child begging for alms due to his small stature. Instead, he gives the characters his flower. The nature of this calling card should be obvious, but he will not talk to the characters in public. He knows very well that unfriendly eyes are watching and that his enemies have already delayed the characters sufficiently to put their lives in extreme danger if they do not act swiftly.

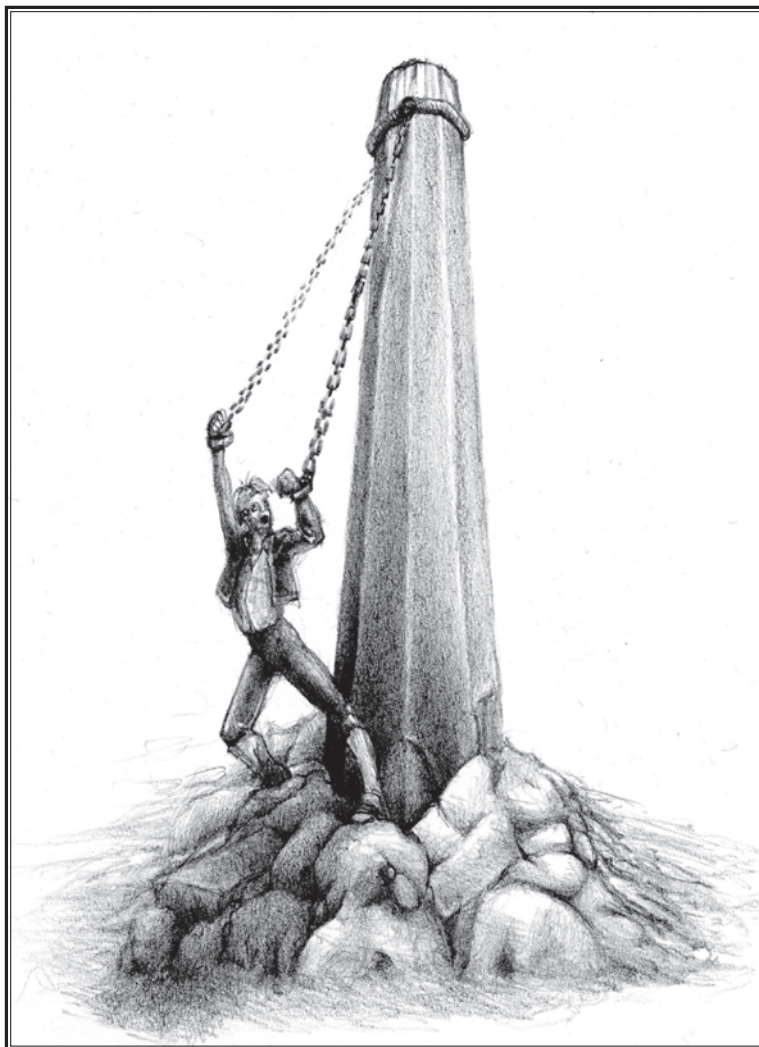
Once he has taken the characters to somewhere more secluded, he will explain the reason for his contacting them. It is his job to escort them to the Lady of the Desert so that they may finish the task that she began so many sundowns ago. Would they please care to follow him now; time is of the essence.

Ceque, Diminutive Rescuer

It is time. Come with me please.

Given this task to prove his manhood, Ceque has come to the evil city that persecuted his ancestors to fetch the people who will redress the balance. His dark skin is relatively free from the tattoos of his people and so far he bears only the Lady's Kiss (p. 83). He is very proud of his role in the coming events and is eager to please those he must escort. His face betrays no sign of fear and his large eyes radiate great pride and courage.

Persuasion (Forthright) 11, Rebuff (Pure-hearted) 12, Attack (Cunning) 11, Defence (Intuition) 13, Magic (Studious) 3, Health 12, Athletics 12, Concealment 10, Living Rough 10, Perception 11, Stealth 8, Tracking 7, Wherewithal 7



Left to await their grisly, and often protracted, fate.

Rumors

Amongst the young men of the city, there is an increasing craze of proving one's manliness by venturing deep into the heart of the eastern rubble to retrieve a bone from the Stake. The Thief Takers are doing their best to discourage this practice, but several gallants have gone missing. The current chief suspects are the resident deodands. This is highly unusual behavior for them, as their continued survival depends on them leaving the city residents alone. Are they really responsible for the disappearances?

The vineyards are under attack, but there is little evidence of the perpetrator, despite assaults on several of the tedders. The grapes have been tainted with what appears to be some form of dye, ruining them utterly. Is someone trying to ruin the Lodira family out of spite or trying to muscle in on the considerable profits available from the Vintner's Licence? Or, as some truly uncharitable souls have suggested, is the family trying to drive up prices and sympathy through the use of a mysterious saboteur?

The annual Race of the Avenues is due to take place shortly and the local teams have been training furiously for the big day. This ancient tradition makes use of the four cardinal processional ways in a form of giant endurance relay race starting and finishing at the Black Obelisk. Problem is, the favorites and winners for the last three years are missing several of the requisite eight runners. Are the characters up to the challenge? We suggest running the race as a series of Athletics Tallies (DERPG p. 37), one for each of the eight steps. Of course, the race will be subject to cheating, nobbling, bets of great complexity and all other types of shenanigans. Not only is personal pride at stake here, but also so is the adoration of the local young socialites, a handsome antique silver amulet (which may or may not contain untold charms) and an all expenses paid meal at the Old Dastric Empire Hostelry.

Essential Plot Points

- Someone stole the original Huntsman's Horn from the Shrine of Gilfig and replaced it with a cunning forgery. Who and why?
- The person who most likely created that forgery seems to have been another victim of the same thing that killed both Edeten and Tovin.
- How do their deaths relate to the Festival of the Scourge?
- What do the stories in Romance of the Desert have to do with the Ironweed Pillar? Do they tell the characters where they need to go next?
- The lost pages from the Flower Manuscript are in the basement of a building one of the characters saw in their nightmares. Why are they there? How did they get there? Could this be anything to do with the mystery woman travelling with Tovin shortly before he died?
- What is the nature of the amulet they found with the missing papers? Is it the same as the things drawn in Edeten's notebook?
- Who is so intent on having the characters arrested for inciting religious tension?
- It would appear that they are meant to travel into the desert with an unknown guide. Can they trust him?



Chapter 6

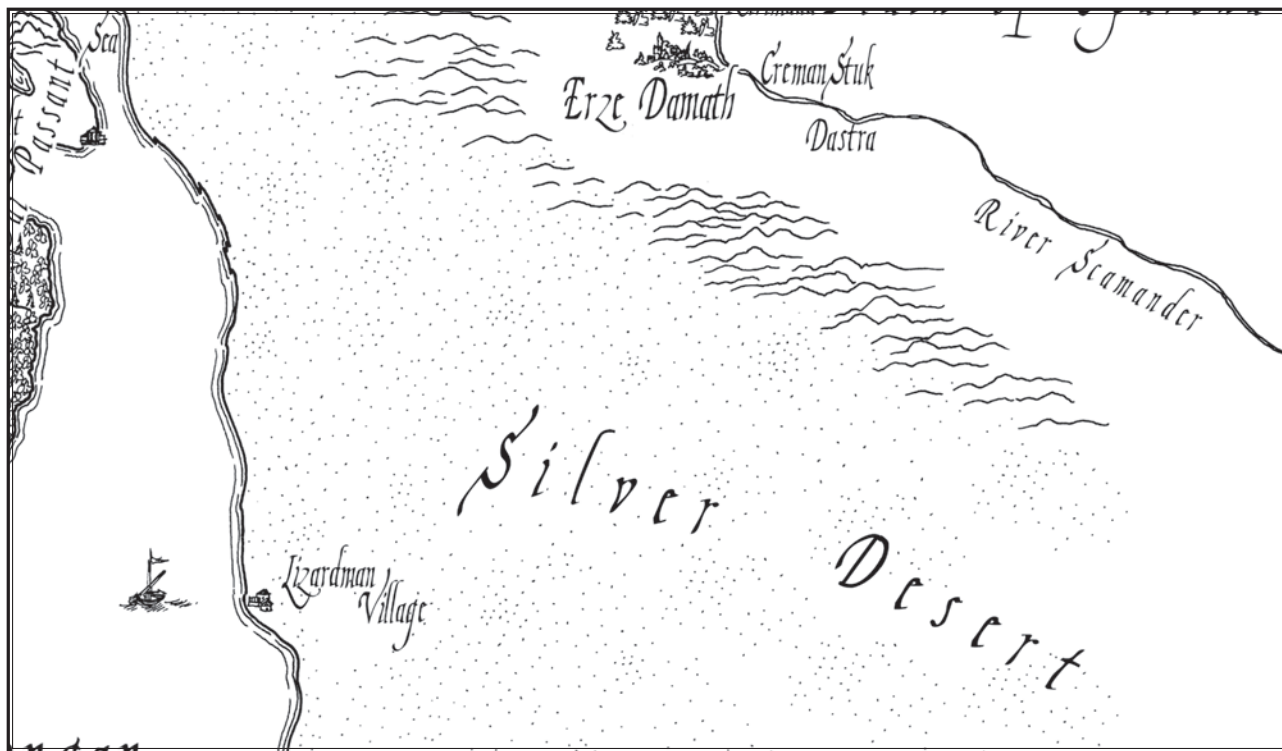
The Silver Desert

I take it all back, Relfan, everything that I have written previously. If you truly desire desolation and solitude, then you could do no better than to come here and watch the landscape unfold forever before you in waves of grey nothingness. Although I have spied moving shadows on the hills, who could be foolhardy enough to dwell here in this silent vastness? I shall double the watch tonight and shall institute rations to ensure our water supply. I don't doubt that there will be oases, there always are, but water is precious and so am I and thus both of us require diligent guarding.
Sakonity the Adamantine

The Silver Desert

An arid grey waste, it stretches south and west of Erze Damath. A chain of hills runs southeast along its eastern fringes, roughly mirroring the course of the Scamander itself until both they disappear into the silver sand. The area is covered with flints, many of which show signs of working, and the tough low shrub known as ironweed¹ dots virtually the entire landscape. It takes just over two weeks to cross the desert heading west and south

from Erze Damath to the Lizard Men village on the shores of the Songan Sea (although there are more direct routes). No one has returned from the furthest southern reaches of the desert, so its true size is merely guessed at and will probably remain unconfirmed, as few scholars feel it necessary to risk the dangers incumbent on such a voyage of discovery. The desert is the location of the Wall of Orquean Kinar (TT p. 144), the Black Tower of Turnool (DDE p. 113) and is also mentioned in the *Compendium of Universal Knowledge* (p.211).



¹ As mentioned elsewhere the Ironweed is a most unusual tree in that once it reaches a certain diameter its bark becomes a protective sheath which shields the xylem and phloem. Thus the tree never exceeds this fixed diameter and puts its growth entirely into seed and maintaining a constant foliage of needles. Under certain circumstances, (not well understood but assumed to be related to drought) Ironweed reaches this limiting diameter early and thus remains forever a bushy shrub rather than growing into a tree.

The Silver Desert

Few living things dwell here, and most that do are decidedly unfriendly towards travelers. The area is haunted by giant scorpions, which whilst by no means truly gigantic in proportion, reaching only up to five feet in length, are often deadly to those unfortunate enough to be stung. There are also snakes and other crawling things, but thankfully not of mammoth proportions. Pelgrane have also been observed drifting on the thermals high above the desert, though where they roost is a mystery¹. As well as ironweed, there are the fruiting plants known as purple lyebush to tempt the unwary and these prove to be invariably fatal too. And then there are the bandits who prey on caravans crossing the northern tip of the desert on their way to the sea.

The weather in the desert can be freakish, with sandstorms of immense fury rising suddenly in the calmest of skies. Unrelentingly hot and parched during the day, at night the temperature falls rapidly and enveloping mists creep over the desert fringes from both the Songan Sea and the River Scamander². There is always a breeze, although it brings little relief from the heat.

The desert was not always so desolate as it is now. In the time of the Dastric Empire in the 19th Aeon the area was mostly fertile plain, famed for its production of fine herd beasts and the mining of both raw silver and the ore necessary for the production of glimmister (DERPG p. 116). These riches were among the reasons for the area's original annexation by the developing Empire. Remains of the processing facilities are rumored to still exist in the depths of the desert, although the profitable extraction of the ores ceased centuries ago. The former glory of both Dastria and Erze Damath resulted in no small part from the riches of the desert.

The Silent Hills

The Silent Hills form a virtually unbroken chain along the upper eastern edge of the desert. At their northern most reaches, where they rise from the Plain of Obelisks, they are rocky and strewn with boulders. Rock falls are common here, natural or otherwise. At their southern extremities they are barely hills at all and more immobile dunes of immense size. The hills provide shelter from the incessant wind that blows across the open desert and semi-fertile valleys are hidden in their depths, particularly in the north, where the moisture of the night mists are hidden from the sun long enough to allow a few strong plants to cling to a meagre existence. The hills are also the haunt of a variety of unfriendly creatures and gaun, gid and leucomorph have all been reported by survivors.

It is in these valleys that the tribes of bandits build their settlements, safe from prying eyes. The bandits are rugged folk who struggle to survive in the harsh climate, but for whom, for one reason or another, a return to civilization is neither possible nor desirable. Some believe that they are the remnants of the

¹ The same could be said about their diet, as many consider the only fauna to be entirely androphagous. Some scholars suggest that most creatures found in the Silver Desert exist in a state of torpor from which they are awakened by the arrival of human prey in their vicinity, others merely claim that numbers are exaggerated.

² Lost travelers have survived by collecting the thin film of ice which forms in some parts of the desert as the mist condenses and freezes during the early morning.

Giant Scorpions

Fearsome creatures, sufficiently small at birth to be mistaken for normal scorpions, they rapidly grow to become dangerous predators up to five feet in length. The exact biology of the creature is unknown as successful study has been rare, although they do seem to regard man as a perfectly acceptable form of prey. They tend to lie in wait in the desert scrub in order to ambush prey and are more common in the hills, where they hunt the bandits and their flocks. Fortunately for travelers the scorpion is a solitary, though formidable, creature¹.

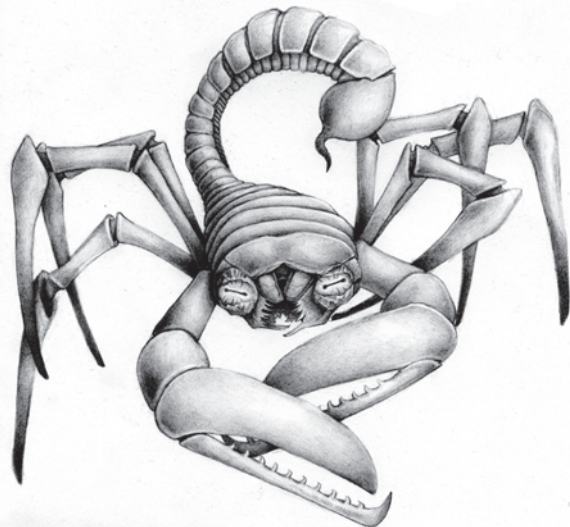
Attack (Ferocity) ~+2, Defence (Dodge) ~+1, Health ~, Athletics 8, Perception 4, Stealth 6

If the scorpion scores an Illustrious success whilst attacking, it hits home with its sting. The poison it injects is not always fatal, though some individuals are especially sensitive to it.

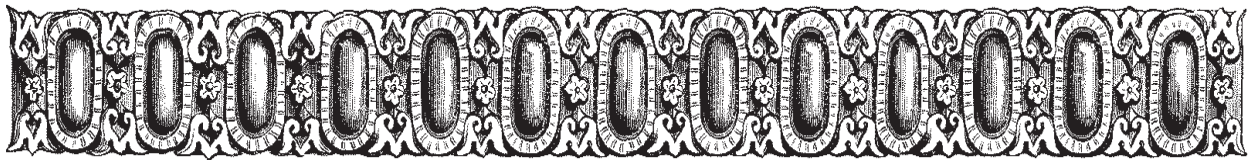
Potency: Levy 2 (the pain of the sting makes concentration difficult)

Interval: One hour

Effect: Two to three injuries depending on sensitivity. Roll a d6: a dismal failure (cannot be rerolled) indicates hypersensitivity to the venom and results in three injuries. Any other result gives rise to two injuries. No matter what level of injury inflicted, the victim is left screaming in agony until they pass out or are dealt with, successfully or otherwise.



¹ They are considered to make excellent eating, being considered as good as the best Val Ombrio Lobster. In truth it must be admitted that scorpions probably eat more people than people eat scorpions.



Sample Bandit Clan: The Shifting Weeds

This is one of the largest clans in the Hills and also one of its most ancient. Currently it consists of fifteen adults and eight children. It is based in the northern range, where pools of water are able to develop amongst the rocky crevices. A variety of hidden traps and alarms protect the village from unwanted incursions, be it beast or rival clan.

Tegra, Leader

I would judge by the sag of its axle that they carry enough to feed us for a good month or more. We'll take it.

By his coloring Tegra is of mixed stock, his swarthy skin denoting some Dastric ancestry and his odd shock of bright blond hair a constant reminder of the variety of folk exiled to the desert. He has known no life but hardship and theft, having been born in the Valley of Weeds and raised to be clan leader. He is cunning (because if he wasn't he would be dead by now) and confident and only ever leads sorties against poorly guarded caravans that will give easy gain for little pain. He carries the scars of many fights and is missing one hand, the result of an encounter with a giant scorpion as a child. His apparent disability often leads people to misjudge him, which has often been a fatal mistake on their part. He sometimes uses rock falls to trap caravans, although he prefers to use the night as a cover for his operations.

Persuasion (Intimidating) 11, Rebuff (Penetrating) 12, Attack (Cunning) 14, Defence (Misdirection) 13, Magic (Devious) 2, Health 11, Appraisal 7, Athletics 9, Concealment 10, Living Rough 9, Stealth 8, Tracking 9, Wherewithal 7

Raiders

Squeal and I shall spit you faster than those scorpions you bleat about to your companions.

The raiders in the clan (of which there are twelve) are all of mixed stock, although unlike other smaller clans, they were all born in the valley. It is very rare that the Shifting Weeds welcome vagabonds from outside the desert, although this has been known in exceptional circumstances. Raiders are of both sexes; women only absent themselves from fighting alongside the men if they are heavily pregnant or suckling. The Shifting Weeds dye their long scarves green and embroider their sleeves with the plants on which their survival depends. At all times two of the raiders stand guard at the hidden entrance to the valley.

Attack (Speed) 12, Defence (Sure-footedness) 13, Health 11, Athletics 11, Concealment 9, Living Rough 9, Perception 8, Stealth 8, Tracking 7, Wherewithal 7

Cimel, Husbander

The mists give the plants life; they give us life. We are mist, nothing more.

The role of husbander is an important one if a clan is to remain healthy and survive the rigors of the desert. Caravans are often few and far between and cannot be relied upon to provide all of the goods necessary for life here. Cimel is Tegra's mother, although the husbander is, ironically enough, usually the leader's wife. Unfortunately her son's wife Chamo died in childbirth two seasons ago and Cimel was forced to take up her former position once again. A tiny woman, wizened beyond her years, she takes her duties very seriously. She tends the small pool at the base of the valley that gives her clan its name (for nutritious plants grow in its meagre depths) and manages their water supplies, taken from collection pits dug into the rocks to trap and funnel the recurrent nighttime mists. She also supervises the care of the few goats the clan manages to maintain. She speaks little, but misses even less.

Persuasion (Eloquent) 12, Rebuff (Penetrating) 12, Attack (Caution) 8, Defence (Dodge) 9, Magic (Insightful) 3, Health 8, Living Rough 11, Physician 7, Scuttlebutt 6, Stewardship 7, Wherewithal 5

Esclo, Adopted Outsider

Above all I am alive, although it is better that my name remains dead. I'm sure you understand.

An old woman now, Esclo is one of the few who have been adopted into the Weeds. She insists that she was captured from a caravan in her youth when the clan was short of women and there is no one alive now who can contradict her. Although uncommon, such things do happen, which lends some credence to her tale. The truth is somewhat different. Accused by her neighbors of being a witch, the Precursor of Erze Damath was forced to issue an order for her arrest and correction, whereupon Esclo fled into the desert. Using her skills, she was "found" by members of the Weeds, who took her under their wing. Now, apparently frail and terribly ancient, she uses what little she remembers to protect her family (several of the raiders are her grandchildren) and looks after the clan's tots when their parents are otherwise engaged. She may have been a great beauty in her day, but the years have not been kind. Still, she retains a certain air of grandeur you would not expect to find in this harsh wilderness.

Persuasion (Obfuscatory) 11, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 13, Attack (Cunning) 8, Defence (Parry) 9, Magic (Devious) 8, Health 7, Perception 7, Physician 3, Wherewithal 6

The Silver Desert

farmers who once worked this land. Others identify them as felons escaped from the ThiefTakers, determined to live their lives to the detriment of others. The truth is often somewhere between these two extremes. The one constant truth is that life here is short and hard; getting much beyond thirty is considered to be down to good luck, skill or a certain amount of both.

It is virtually impossible to survive here alone. Clans consist of approximately ten to twenty individuals, depending on the size and fertility of the valley in which they live. Each clan has its own ways and will fight to protect its chosen valley and source of water. Clan members can tell rival clans by their mode of dress, although a long scarf to filter out the blowing sand is a common article of clothing between all clans. To outsiders, the differences are often indistinguishable, which has on occasion led to unfortunate misunderstandings and grave insult. Some clans allegedly have a preference for human flesh, although these rumors are mostly unsubstantiated.

Whilst bandits will take almost anything from a caravan, there is a hierarchy for items of interest. Food is always at the top of the list, although they will not usually take water from their victims unless desperate¹. Clothing and fabrics are important, with jewelry and coins usually low on the list of priorities. Some clans, those made up from escaped thieves and vagabonds, do take valuables and sneak in to Erze Damath to fence their stolen goods, exchanging them for more useful items.

The Shining Oases

These tranquil places are traps for the unwary traveler. Not cruel mirages (it would be better if they were), and most definitely not watering holes, the Shining Oases are scattered across the desert. Their glittering surfaces glare malevolently up at the dying sky, promising rest and refreshment but delivering only death.

Residing in dips in the landscape, they can be identified by the twisted scrub of purple lyebush that grows around them. Somewhat surprisingly, there is a total absence of ironweed from these places, another telltale sign that all is not well. The water possesses the slick shimmer of quicksilver and despite the ever-present desert breeze its surface never betrays a ripple, remaining undisturbed and implacable. Even if a stone is thrown into the water, there are no ripples; the stone sinks without trace, slowly, as if descending through thick treacle. There is a faint metallic tang close to the water, but this is rapidly dispersed by the wind.

The sands surrounding these oases are full of the eggs of carrion eating insects. When a creature falls victim to the water, either through stupidity or desperation, the expended warmth of the body through the sand causes the eggs to hatch and the larvae to burrow into the carcass. As a result, little remains of the victim and any bones are quickly buried by the sand or taken away by larger scavengers.

Deadwater

The viscous silver liquid that fills these pools is poisonous and anyone possessing such things as a Tablet of Sufficient Nourishment (DERPG p. 116) will be able to identify it as such immediately. Those with high Living Rough or Perception scores may also notice that something is wrong about these pools.

Those encountering a pool of Deadwater must resist Gourmandism. It may not be fine wine, but the way it catches the light is intoxicating and draws the unwary to it. Failure leads to imbibing great draughts of the liquid, which has an unpleasantly thick texture when swallowing, and should be treated according to the Poison rules on p. 58 of the main rulebook.

Potency: Levy 2

Interval: 1 minute

Effect: Three Injuries. Survivors are left feeling dehydrated and as if their mouths were full of sand for several days after recovery. Their skin will also carry an unhealthy, grey pallor, very much like the desert sand.

The effects of Deadwater can be neutralized by boiling with Ironweed needles, which absorb the toxin from the water. It is for this reason that the plants do not grow in the area of these pools—their bizarre biology means that they take up and concentrate the poison and in doing so, poison themselves.

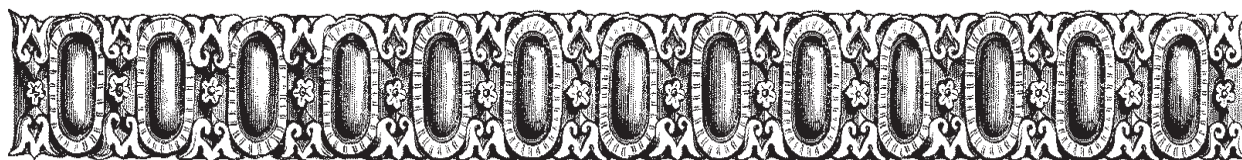
True Oases

Whilst these do exist, they are few and far between. Natural springs occasionally bubble up through the sands and many of the true oases show signs of man made basins to collect and hold the precious water. Elaborate fountains, broken and unused, fallen statues and other evidence of habitation usually surrounds them. Sometimes, these are all that remain, the spring having long ago dried up or shifted further away. Very rarely, undisturbed springs can be found, surrounded by green reeds and the sounds of life, an unusual sound indeed in the Silver Desert.

Long ago, in the time after the land began to burn but before it became truly parched, desert nomads roamed between the true oases, using their own cunning and skill to survive. Banditry was anathema to them and it is held that they would rather starve than resort to thievery. For this reason, they are often identified as followers of Gilfig. Although the stone basins date from a time before the nomads, they made great use of them and defended them fiercely from intruders. There have been no reports of nomads for centuries and it is believed that the desert finally won the unrelenting battle they had waged against it for generations².

¹ It should be remembered that this list of priorities is transmitted to us by survivors rather than the bandits themselves. It may be salutary to note that where the bandits take the water, there are unlikely to be any survivors.

² Scholars note that the stories of nomad greatness are all told by those bandit tribes who still survive and might reasonably be considered the descendants of those nomads forced to abandon their wandering lifestyle by the very hostility of the desert.



Act 5: The Castle of Sand

During their trip through the Silver Desert, we would recommend a few chance encounters with the indigenous wildlife of the area (should they fail to pay heed to Ceque's warnings). Whilst we wish to create a sense of urgency by occasionally slowing the character's progress, it would be a terrible shame to over do it such that they run out of time to solve their conundrum. Remember to keep track of how much time has elapsed from their acquisition of the Moon Key: on the night of day 30 they will receive some unwelcome visitors. Whether or not they can withstand such an encounter depends not only on their own skill but on the intervention of a mysterious lady.

5.1 Into The Desert

Hopefully it should have become clear to the characters that at least some of the answers to their current predicament lie to the south-east in the Silver Desert. Should they decide to go it alone, they will most likely need to visit Saffer the Stockman and various sundry outfitters in Erze Damath. They do have Edeten's map and so far the scale and positioning of other landmarks has been quite accurate. Still, it will be a very difficult journey unaccompanied.

If the characters agree to accompany Ceque (a far safer proposition), he takes them to the eastern ruins of the city where he has secreted rations sufficient to get them back to his homelands. These provisions are not entirely appealing (particularly if the characters attended the meal at the Society of Aesthetes) but they are nourishing. They also have several water-skins each¹. Ceque is very watchful the entire time the characters remain within the city and is very anxious to get under way.

Ceque is quite a chatty soul once the characters leave the confines of Erze Damath (he takes them through the ruins of the

south-east gate). Unfortunately, he assumes that the characters know exactly what they are here for and will blithely yammer away about them without stopping to explain. If asked to explain, he will laugh uproariously and accuse the characters of teasing him because he is not yet a man.

Despite his chattiness, Ceque is well aware of the dangers of the desert and keeps a very careful eye out for any trouble. This is most likely to come when the characters pass through the low hills approximately three days south of Erze Damath. This section of the hills is still sufficiently rocky to permit bandit ambushes, should the need arise (but should only take a day or two to cross).

Ceque prefers to travel at night when it is cooler. The desert sands give off a faint phosphorescence under the starlight and the little guide has provided the characters with odd candles that also emit enough light to navigate by. The light they emit is very similar to that given off by a species of night-flying insect that lives in the desert. During the day Ceque finds shelter and erects a camouflaged groundsheet he carries to protect them from the sun. He is quite happy to sit guard and asks for only a few hours sleep a day.

Desert Rush Tapers

Made from dipping the rushes that grow around the Hidden Peoples' oasis in a mixture of animal fats and the contents of the glow sack of the Desert Night Beetle, these candles are slow burning and give off just enough light to see by. They are used by the Hidden People to move about at night and they have developed a simple but effective means of carrying the tapers so that they appear to be a small swarm of the beetles flying across the desert sands.



¹ A gallon of water weighs approximately ten pounds and, unless they are very disciplined travelers, is unlikely to last them more than two days. It is most unlikely that they can carry more than a week's water supply each. You may wish to play on their fears in this regard.

The Silver Desert

5.1.1 Optional Encounter: The Glimmister Mill

After they have crossed the hills, the desert becomes a vast sweep of grey as far as the eye can see. Ceque seems to be able to smell fresh water and always manages to find a fresh spring before the water-skins run out. Occasionally he finds honey to liven up the dried meat they carry.

About a week after they leave Erze Damath, a ruined building becomes visible as the sun crests the horizon. As they get nearer it becomes clear that this was once a large complex of buildings although few now remain visible above the surface of the sands. The building they first spotted appears to be long and narrow, two storeys tall and with a curved roof. Many of the tiles are missing and the wooden walls have seen better days. The half-buried shacks are of various sizes.

Ceque seems unsure of the place and wants to go around it, but those with a good Perception can hear voices coming from within the main building. If asked, Ceque will only shake his head and mutter about the place being filled with madmen who still seek the sharpness powder despite the fact that it was mined out centuries ago. If the characters insist on going in to the compound Ceque will not go with them, preferring to wait hidden beneath his ground sheet close by.

The approach to the building is littered with broken equipment and strange mounds of sand and rock debris. There are occasional pits dug into the sand and shovels and picks peep out from the rapidly refilling holes. Someone has made an attempt to patch the walls of the main building and as the characters draw nearer, the voices resolve themselves. One is a woman's voice, loud and bossy, the other is very faint but definitely male.

There are a variety of strange signs pasted on to the outside of the building, badly faded but still just about legible. The most common ones read: "Don't Lark with Sparks", "Danger of Explosion" and "Please Refrain from the Use of Improper Magics"¹.

Opening the door leads into a barn like structure full of broken conveyor belts and rusting machinery. High in the rafters are numerous pulleys and gantries. The current activity in the building is focussed on a single shaft cut into the floor in the centre of the room. Standing next to the shaft are a tall woman and a muscular man.

Mirine is the last of a long line of glimmister miners who have eked a living from the Silver Desert. Her family, technically speaking, still holds the operating licence for this place, which was once the largest operation of its kind in the desert. The family business has fallen on hard times, forcing Mirine and her remaining staff to seek out lost workings in an attempt to extract whatever might have been overlooked in the past.

She is highly surprised to see anyone else in the desert and is very wary of the characters, unsure as to their intentions. On spotting them, she orders Xasin to haul up the rope bringing her business associate Beske back to the surface.

¹ Tradition demands that at least one of them read "Tampering by unauthorized personnel invalidates manufacturers guarantee"

Mirine, Lady Excavator

Do you see anything down there yet?

The lady in question is tall and sturdy through steady labour in the wilderness regions of the Dying Earth. Her hair is short and her clothes dusty and utilitarian. Her knee length boots are those of a workman and have shiny toecaps. She wears a reinforced hat and thick leather gloves. Her most prominent feature is her voice, which booms loudly within what was once the refining building of the mill. The little finger of her right hand has been permanently affected by an encounter with glimmister when she was a child (hence the gloves).



Persuasion (Forthright) 10, Rebuff (Wary) 11, Attack (Cunning) 11, Defence (Vexation) 12, Magic (Forceful) 4, Health 11, Athletics 9, Driving 5, Engineering 6, Living Rough 6, Perception 7, Stewardship 4, Wherewithal 6

Xasin, Burly Laborer

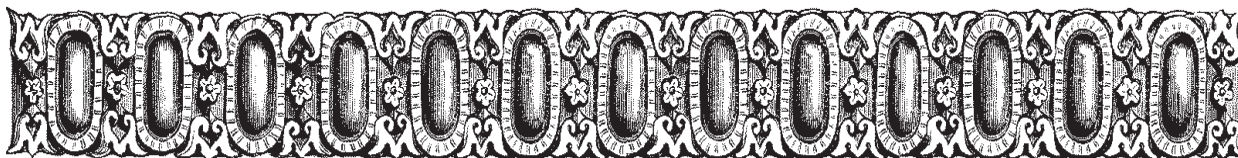
*Ye gods, man, yank the rope if you want to come up.
I'm not a mind reader.*

Xasin is not as tall as Mirine but makes up for lack of height by sheer muscle. His thick curls are plastered to his head with sweat as he works the guide ropes descending into the pit below. His skin is bronzed but beneath there is a greyish pallor (desert life does not suit him and the heat makes him short-tempered). He too wears heavy boots with toecaps, a leather apron and very heavy leather gloves (to protect his hands from the ropes). He rarely speaks, being a naturally shy man, and is quite content for his boss to do all the talking that could ever be required.

Persuasion (Charming) 9, Rebuff (Pure-hearted) 10, Attack (Strength) 14, Defence (Sure-footedness) 14, Health 8, Athletics 8, Craftsmanship 6, Engineering 7, Living Rough 4, Physician 5, Wherewithal 5

Glowstone

The only safe way to light the glimmister workings, these thumb-sized cabochons are extremely rare these days. Cut from pale blue crystals often found in association with glimmister ore, these stones must be soaked in a strong salt solution for at least six hours to fully charge them. After removal from the charging solution, they emit a strong white light for an equivalent time period. The exact nature of the salt solution is a closely guarded secret known only to the miners.



Beske, Geologist

The rock is good and there may well be some ore left in there.

Beske is a slight, pale young man who has an affinity for rocks. His hands are surprisingly strong for one of such a delicate build and heavily calloused from years of breaking stone. His only concession to protective clothing is a reinforced helmet akin to Mirine's upon which is mounted a glowstone. His geologist's hammer is never out of his hands and he has a tendency to play nervously with it. His voice is remarkably assured and deep, completely at odds with his boyish frame.

Persuade (Obfuscatory) 10, Rebuff (Contrary) 10, Attack (Caution) 8, Defence (Misdirection) 9, Magic (Studious) 8, Health 9, Appraisal (rocks and minerals) 8, Athletics 6, Living Rough 5, Pedantry 8, Perception 9, Wherewithal 6

Glimmister Mining

As described on DERPG p. 116, glimmister is a silvery dust that imbues incredible sharpness on anything it touches. It is not found naturally in this state but as a metallic ore that must be carefully refined to release its full potential. One theory as to why the Silver Desert acquired its name is that for a considerable period of time it was the site of the most expansive glimmister refining industry in the known world.

Once the ore has been excavated from pits sunk into the desert surface, it is put through a series of grinders and extraction processes to produce the very pure end product. The work is dangerous as the powdered ore is highly explosive as an airborne particulate suspension (akin to flour). In other mining areas water is used to damp this effect, but such is not an option in the heart of the desert. Breathing masks are also necessary in the larger operations due to the unfortunate effects of large quantities of raw glimmister on the lungs. It is also not unusual to find workers who have had various parts of their anatomy permanently silvered due to industrial accidents.

Still, it is a lucrative business and fortunes can be made quite easily if a rich vein of ore is discovered. Most mining businesses tend to be family run operations. Most extraction now takes place in the Magnatz Mountains and the desert was abandoned centuries ago as a source of profitable extraction. Rumors abound that pools of Deadwater are a deadly reminder of the glimmister industry, their silvery waters being the slurry ponds of the refining process.

Unrefined glimmister dust is particularly susceptible to fire and the discharges caused by certain offensive spells, such as the Excellent Prismatic Spray (DERPG p. 106) and Gilgad's Instantaneous Galvanic Thrust (DERPG p. 112). Use of any such inflammatory foci is an instant sacking offence as every mill is coated in the stuff and ignition is potentially disastrous.

So far the mining operation has avoided attracting the attention of any of the local banditry (being pretty much on the southern extremities of their range). Once Mirine is satisfied that the characters are neither bandits nor rivals, she is quite happy to explain her presence in the desert and the intricacies of mining for such a dangerous substance as glimmister.

The area around the shaft is littered with more modern equipment and several tables on which stand glass receptacles and small scale grinding equipment (very similar to a large mortar and pestle). Lumps of a dull grey rock jostle for position with bottles of oily liquids. There is an odd smell and a faintly bitter taste in the air.

Over towards the far wall of the building there are three tents. Mirine decided to camp inside the building for protection from the fierce sandstorms that rise in the desert (as well as from the scorpions). There are casks of water, and sacks containing other provisions are suspended from a rope over the makeshift camp. A dray beast of indeterminate origin is tied to one wall away from the tents.

None of the miners know anything about a castle in the desert—they're far too busy trying to stay alive out here while they determine if the mill can be brought out of mothballs on any sort of profitable scale.

A Midnight Raid

Should the characters choose to tarry here all day talking to the miners, they will become the subject of a bandit attack as soon as the sun sets. The nearest local clan has realized that the mill is active again and has come on a sortie to see what they can salvage.

There are two raiders for each character and two for each of the miners. Use of certain spells is not recommended (for the reasons described above) and if anyone does use such spells, there is a four in six chance that they will ignite the powder (only a Prosaic or Illustrious success indicates sheer luck in avoiding such an incident). If the glimmister mill does explode, then failing a Health roll will result in the victim sustaining two injuries.

Under no circumstances (short of everyone bar the characters being dead) will Ceque approach the mill. He cannot risk the existence of his people becoming common knowledge.

Desert Raider

Hand it over now or you can die where you stand.

Wearing pale yellow scarves, these raiders belong to the Hekin clan. This particular clan is mostly fugitives from Erze Damath and it is to them that Keghia (p.58) owes allegiance on her mother's side. They are well aware of the dangers of glimmister mills having stripped others in the past for abandoned equipment to pawn in the city.

Attack (Cunning) 2~, Defence (Dodge) ~, Health ~, Athletics 2~.

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Once half their number are down or dead, the bandits will flee. No amount of salvage is worth that cost. Provided the mill is still intact and her people are safe, Mirine will be very grateful. They have managed to extract a small amount of glimmister from the old shaft and she will happily give this over as a reward for the characters part in the defence of the site. There is only enough to anoint one blade. If the mill was destroyed or any of the miners killed, she will ask for assistance in burying the dead and tending the wounded. The survivors will give up the claim and leave in the morning (or whenever they are fit enough to do so).

5.1.2 The Hidden People

After nearly another week of travel, Ceque becomes very excited. The dunes here are immense and the characters have often found themselves walking along deep valleys between the sand mountains. It is noticeable that Ceque has not been so guarded and is positively beaming nearly all the time.

As the sun rises after a tiring night's journey, they enter another deep valley. But this one is very different to the others they have walked through before. Here there is a beautiful stone lined oasis, surrounded by tall reeds. Robed people the same build as Ceque carry out their daily chores around the deep blue pool and there is the sound of children's laughter. A variety of tents are nestled beneath the dunes and the place is full of life, in stark contrast to the desert through which they have just journeyed.

Ceque can contain himself no longer. He rushes forward towards a small group of people who have been watching the characters approach. His arms wave excitedly as he gesticulates back towards the characters and they can hear rapid chatter in an unfamiliar tongue. One man, taller than the rest, breaks away from the group and approaches.

Dopor greets the characters warmly and invites them to take their rest. He will speak to them when they have had a chance to wash away the grime of their journeys and filled their stomachs with better things than dried goat's meat. The night is the best time to discuss their travails, he explains, and she will not be here before morning. Ceque, smiling broadly, will lead the characters to a comfortably furnished tent in which washing materials¹ and food have been laid out ready for them. Although simple, it is indeed better than the rations they have eaten for the last two weeks! There are also clean clothes similar to those of the desert people for the characters to change in to.

The Ceremony of the Passage

After they have 'bathed' and slept, the characters are escorted to a quiet grove of ironweed trees (very similar to the pillar in the Blanwalt Forest) by a young woman they have not met before. The Hidden People are standing in solemn silence amongst the trees watching the ceremony taking place at its heart. The characters can see Ceque standing at the centre of the grove, stripped entirely naked. His few tattoos sparkle faintly in the starlight. Dopor is also there, chanting quietly, and he is accompanied by a middle-aged

¹ Washing materials basically consist of bowls of clean dry sand with which the washer is expected to rub themselves down, followed by a vigorous towelling to remove the last of the sand. The idea of using water for washing is not one these people are familiar with.

Dopor, Chief of the Hidden People

We are a silent people. That is why we survive. It is my intention that we continue to do so.

The people of the deep desert are small in stature and build. Dopor is considered to be quite tall, although he barely reaches shoulder height. The skin beneath his silver tattoos is dark, but overall his face is the color of light reflected from a mirrored surface. He smiles frequently and has a light, melodic voice. Knowledgeable about the desert, he can smell the changes on the wind that herald the arrival of Dendara. Although wary of strangers, he will not kill out of hand, as some would wish him to, preferring to judge all comers by their actions before deciding their fate. As Chief of the Hidden People, he literally holds life and death in his hands.

Persuade (Eloquent) 12, Rebuff (Pure-hearted) 12, Attack (Speed) 11, Defence (Intuition) 12, Magic (Insightful) 12, Health 10, Athletics 7, Concealment 10, Living Rough 10, Perception 12, Stealth 9, Tracking 8, Wherewithal 9

Hidden Person

You are welcome, finally, deliverer. We have awaited this time for an eternity.

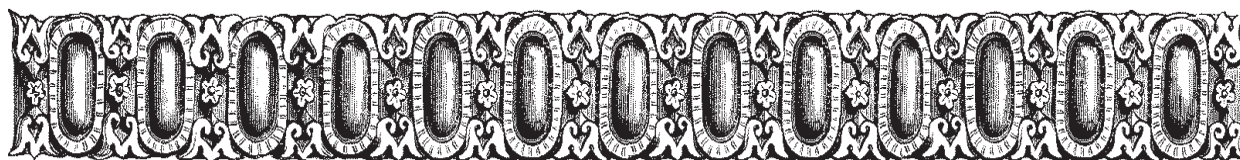
Short of stature, strong and determined, the Hidden People are the remnants of those driven from Erze Damath by the actions of the Silver Quorum. Although not the desert nomads that originally inhabited this area before they finally died out, the Hidden People have long been confused with them, which is fine as far as they are concerned. They are deeply faithful to their goddess, Sammech, whom they credit with their long-term survival against the odds. Curious and friendly, they are fierce if provoked. Each of their tattoos has a meaning and their skin is a history of each person's life.

Persuasion (Forthright) 10, Rebuff (Pure-hearted) 11, Attack (Strength) 12, Defence (Intuition) 12, Magic (Curious) 3, Health 11, Athletics 10, Concealment 9, Craftsmanship 6, Living Rough 10, Perception 11, Tracking 8, Wherewithal 8

woman holding a bowl. Two other young men join the group and take hold of Ceque by the arms, bracing themselves as they do so. The group wear only what is necessary to preserve their dignity, the better to show off their magnificent tattoos.

As the characters watch Dopor is handed something by the woman, which he then dips into the bowl she is holding. With great solemnity, he begins to work steadily on Ceque's chest with an ironweed spine to engrave the mark of adulthood, chanting softly all the time. Ceque's face is filled with pain but he never makes a sound (although those watching closely can see him sagging slightly into the arms of his supporters).

When Dopor is finished, Ceque is gently lowered to the ground and a great cheer erupts. Tapers are lit and everyone retires back to the oasis for a celebratory feast.



5.1.3 A Meeting of Great Import

At the feast, Ceque is the guest of honour, although he is looking a little the worse for wear and is not his normal chatty self. The characters are seated with him on wondrous woven rugs around a comforting fire. Dopor and the woman are also with them.

Yalyati, Keeper of Flowers

I hold the secrets of the flower as my husband holds the secrets of our people. It is as it should be.

Yalyati is a striking woman, her ebony skin enhanced by her bright tattoos. Her eyes are large and kind and her voice is soft and strong. Although she speaks the characters' language more haltingly than her husband Dopor, she is a charming conversationalist. It is her role within the tribe not only to manage the smooth running of the oasis but also to keep alive the teachings of Sammech and the secrets of preparing ink from the sacred lilies. This ink is essential in their rituals for the protection of her people. Most of the tribes-folk call Yalyati "Mother", even those who are far older than she.

Persuasion (Charming) 12, Rebuff (Pure-hearted) 11, Attack (Cunning) 10, Defence (Sure-footedness) 10, Magic (Curious) 11, Health 11, Athletics 8, Living Rough 9, Perception 12, Physician 8, Stewardship 6, Tracking 5, Wherewithal 8

Again, the food is simple but tasty and the thin beer brewed from the reeds is interesting to say the least (if only mildly intoxicating). It is not long before Ceque excuses himself and he is gently escorted back to his family's tent to recover from his ascension into adulthood.

Once Ceque has gone, Dopor and Yalyati are willing to answer some of the questions the characters may have about their quest. They can fill them in on the details of how the Hidden People came to be here but insist that the Flower of the Desert must tell them the nature of their adversary tomorrow when she comes again to the desert. They can also tell the characters about Edeten's visit and how he was unable to speak to the Lady in person because he came too late. Fortunately she had left instructions with Dopor for this poor traveler from the West, which he had duly passed on. Again, as to what these precise instructions were the Chief is reluctant to say, insisting that she will have all the answers tomorrow.

If the character with the Huntsman's Mark shows it to Dopor, he will become guarded. The presence of the mark here is very dangerous to his people and he is torn by his desire to protect his family and the task laid upon him by fate. He will offer the character the chance to have the Lady's Kiss preferred upon them immediately, or they can wait to see what the Lady herself has to say.

The Lady's Kiss

Range: Touch

Duration: Instant

Difficulty: Complex

Summary: Abrogates the effects of the Huntsman's Mark

Description: Given to the Hidden People by Sammia as a protection against the Wind Riders and their masters the Silver Quorum. The symbolic tattooing of a Starsand Lily using the ink made from the flower's pollen onto the target's body confers a bonus of +2 to Wherewithal rolls when faced with the Riders (allowing the target to stand and fight unless they gain a Dismal Failure). It also confers a Boon of +1 to the target's Attack and Defence pools, allowing free re-rolls during any encounter with the Riders. In accordance with the ruling on DERPG p. 29, this boon does not reduce the cost of nullifying Dismal failures or countering any Illustrious successes the Riders may score.

Style Affinity: Insightful



If the character says yes to the Lady's Kiss, then Dopor and Yalyati will ask the characters to return to the ironweed grove with them. Dopor will ask if the character understands what is about to happen to them and if they don't, he will explain.

It is this mark that Edeten attempted to carve into his own body before his death. Unfortunately, without the correct incantations and the specific ink, the symbol itself is useless. It is routinely applied to all of the Hidden People as soon as they are old enough to accept the pain of the ceremony.

Should the character still be willing to go ahead with this, Dopor will request that two of the other characters act as restrainers for the person about to be tattooed. Dopor will ask where the person wishes the tattoo to be placed. Fortunately it does not need to be visible to protect against the Riders and the character can chose a discreet location for it (unless of course they fancy having it tattooed across their forehead). He will also ask if they wish to lie down whilst the ceremony takes place. It is entirely up to the character; Dopor will not think less of them should they prefer to be prone rather than standing during the procedure.

Once the decisions have been made, Dopor and Yalyati will begin. The character undergoing the ritual must make a successful Wherewithal roll or they are likely to faint from the pain. When the ritual is finished, Yalyati will take the characters back to their tent while Dopor goes to make ready for tomorrow's special journey.

If the character refuses to undergo the rite, then Dopor and his wife will bid them good night, warning them to be ready bright and early.

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5.2 Dendara

5.2.1 The Heart of the Desert

The next morning, a few hours before dawn, Yalyati rouses the characters from their beds. She asks them to dress in the clothes they were given (if they hadn't already done so the previous evening) and requests that they meet her at the ironweed grove.

The grove, when they get there, is as busy as it was the night before for Ceque's ceremony. He is there, looking pale but determined, but he does not approach the characters. Instead, Yalyati walks forward and takes the hand of the most sympathetic character (determine randomly if you do not use the sympathy system) and leads them into the centre of the throng. She beckons for the other characters to follow.

Dopor, arrayed in ancient but still fine robes made from cloth-of-silver, emerges from a small shelter hidden from view previously by the darkness. He approaches the characters and asks if they are ready to find the answers to their questions. If they are, he will lead them quietly from the grove and away from the oasis. The rest of the community follows a little way behind the procession in total silence.

After an hour or so walk through the desert the characters emerge onto a vast expanse of silver sand ringed in by mammoth dunes. Those at the far end are mere specks to the naked eye. It is unlikely that the characters will notice this though, as there is something far more striking immediately in front of them.

The Living Causeway

Stretching out before them for over a mile is a raised iron causeway. This in itself would be unusual enough here in the middle of such a wasteland, but this particular causeway is made from the intertwined branches of enormous ironweed plants. The trunks reach up over twenty feet in height and the girth is enormous. How the plants came to be here is mystery enough, but the manner in which they have grown together so ornately and in such an ordered fashion is nigh on miraculous.

Dopor will smile at the characters' amazement (should they care to profess it), but the causeway is not the only wonder. Surrounding the walkway the sands seem to flow like water, swirling and sucking before disappearing beneath the desert surface. There are also creatures resting atop the columns. It is here that the pelgranés of the desert roost and although they eye the characters with interest, they make no attempt to speak to them nor to attack.

Dopor sniffs the air and then nods to his wife. Yalyati then moves forward and gives each of the characters a fresh flower (which they should recognise instantly). She warns them not to stray from the causeway no matter what or they will be pulled beneath the sands and lost forever. When they reach the end of the causeway, Dendara will be waiting for them. The flower will guide them and allow them safe passage.

The surface of the walkway is smooth but not slippery beneath their feet and is approximately six feet wide. Every thirty feet two new massive trunks sprout from the whirling sand to

support their passage. The Hidden People stand and watch the characters go in absolute stillness. The only sound is that of the characters' heartbeats and the rushing noise of the falling sand.

After a few minutes walking, Perceptive characters notice that the surface of the causeway up ahead appears to be writhing. As they grow nearer, they can see that the path is covered with black birds as far as the eye can see, silently milling across its surface. They appear to be crows. If the characters attempt to scare the birds away, a small clump will rise quietly into the air in a flurry of wings only to resettle behind the characters. If the characters walk on, the birds noiselessly shuffle to one side allowing them to pass. They will occasionally peck at the characters' heels but, like the pelgranés (which now and then lift suddenly into the desert sky and glide away) they make no overt attempts to attack them at all.

After approximately a mile, the characters reach the end of the causeway. As they do so, the immense flock of birds through which they have just waded lifts as one into the air and speeds away across the desert sand accompanied by the loud whirring noise of thousands of wing beats. In front of them lies a field of floating white blossoms.

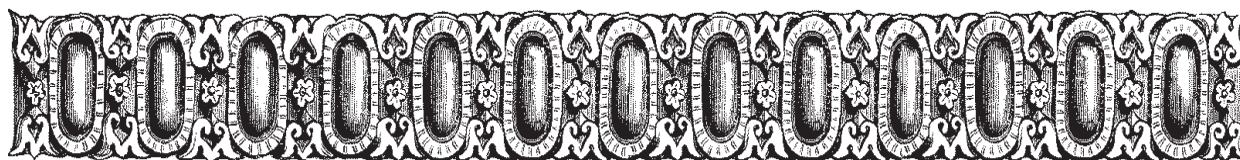
As they watch, a huge cloud of silver sand rushes up the length of the valley towards them, only slowing when it reaches the delicate blooms. A hot, dry wind brushes the characters' faces as the spiral of sand advances over the petals. Slowly, something begins to take shape in the heart of the sandstorm, eventually resolving itself into a building they should recognise. It is the same one that they found illustrated on the inside cover of the Flower Manuscript all that time ago in Edeten's workroom. This is Dendara, Castle of the Shifting Sands.

5.2.2 At A Lady's Will

A bridge appears from the castle to the causeway allowing the characters to gain entry to the building. The ornately carved silver doors (in some respects very similar to those of the Precursor's Palace in Erze Damath in terms of style and decoration) swing open at the merest touch, bringing the characters into a large and empty entrance hall. A large double staircase sweeps up to a higher floor and there are several doorways leading from the entrance chamber.

As they open the doors, they can hear singing. It isn't the same song that they've heard before, but Perceptive characters do recognise the voice. It is coming from somewhere upstairs.

Searching the rooms downstairs reveals that they are full of fine furniture and beautiful tapestries from a time before even the Dastric Empire (although anyone who professes to know about these things is sure that some of the items here were obviously an inspiration to those craftsmen too). The colors are strong and vibrant, as if they were made yesterday, and there is not a speck of dust in the place.



The Room of Stars

At the top of the stairs a broad landing leads to a further double staircase that winds back on the one just ascended and yet more doors. The song is coming from still higher up in the castle. The rooms on this level are similar to the ones downstairs but are obviously guest rooms by the furnishings.

When they have climbed the final flight of stairs the characters find a similar landing, but this one has only one door leading off it. Engraved upon it is the figure of Sammech, only here she holds both her flower and her sword (unlike her statue in the Pentatarch). When the characters reach the door, the singing stops and a woman's voice calls to them to enter.

Upon entering the room, the characters find themselves in a large domed chamber, its deep blue ceiling covered in tiny silver stars. At the apex of the dome is a highly decorative rendering of a full moon (which happens to look a lot like symbol 5—see page 14). At the far side of the room, standing on a small dais that opens out onto a high balcony, stands a silver haired woman.

Sammia, Lady of Dendara

Bitter? No, there is little point. What bitterness I had I shed as tears a lifetime ago.

Whether Sammech is a ghost or truly corporeal is a matter for debate. Her face is deeply lined and her flowing hair is pure white, suggesting great age, although her voice is that of a much younger woman. There is a sad yet determined beauty about her, although she could by no means be described as classically beautiful, her nose being slightly too long and her pale lips mildly crooked. Her grey eyes are cold and piercing and give the impression of being able to see through everything before her. Her fine robes seem to glow and move about her as if she were actually underwater. Those who have seen the statue of Sammech in Erze Damath will find her strangely familiar.

Persuasion (Charming) 14, Rebuff (Penetrating) 15, Attack (Finesse) 12, Defence (Intuition) 14, Magic (Insightful) 15, Health 10, Etiquette 7, Pedantry 10, Perception 11, Physician 6, Wherewithal 10

Sammia smiles at the characters and asks them to join her on the balcony. She will shush any questions the characters have for the moment in a firm but motherly fashion and asks that they take the time to look out across the desert with her.

The view from up here is magical. The crenelations of the castle stand proud against the sea of swaying flowers at its base. The causeway stretches off into the distance, melting into the dunes at its farthest edge. The dark smudge there may just be Dopor and his people awaiting their return. Beyond that, as the sun climbs higher in the sky, there is a flash of light that might just be the domes of Erze Damath glinting in the morning sun.

When they have had sufficient time to take in the stark beauty of the desert, Sammia calls them back into the room and gestures

that they should take a seat. There are exactly enough chairs for the characters, plus a high-backed chair for Sammia herself. When they are comfortably settled, she begins to speak:

"I have waited for you for a long while now and at last the time has come. I cannot leave this place or time will finally catch up with me and I can be of no help to my people that way. All I can hope is that you will do as I ask and redress the injustices done to my people and to me by those who should have known so much better. And then there is the small matter of what they have also done to you and your friends."

Sammia's Story

It is so long ago now that she can't recall precisely how long she has been here. She needs no food, no water and she and her castle travel about space, drifting slowly on the currents of time. She returns here every now and again, to the site where the castle once stood on this earth. Sometimes it is not for what feels like an eternity, other times (like recently) she has come back in quick succession. She has no control over her wanderings and is completely at the whim of the curse the disciples of Gilfig laid upon her home.

At least, they would like to think that (and here she smiles ruefully). Gilfig wasn't the only one with power and the Sammechite Prophecy has been working hard of late to ensure that all the pieces are in the right place to ensure her final rest is close at hand. That is why the characters are here.

Her voice is heavy with sorrow and there are tears in the hard grey eyes, just as there were on Sammech's statue. She is very sorry about the death of their friend Tovin, there was nothing she could do to stop that, and although she wishes that she could have protected Edeten's life, it was not to be. She could only tell him what had to be found and how he might achieve his task. But she can protect their lives and will endeavour to do so. Whilst she cannot affect the Moon Key or the Huntsman's Mark directly, she can give them her blessing to protect them and hand over to them the tools necessary to exact vengeance upon her enemies.

If the character bearing the Mark has not received the Lady's Kiss already, she will beckon them forward. She asks if they will receive her gifts willingly and kisses them upon the palm of their chosen hand. The pain is intense (a failed Wherewithal roll will result in fainting, much as it would have for the tattooing procedure) but afterwards there is the perfect image of her signature lily on the underside of their hand. She will then offer the same to each of the characters. No-one will be forced to take the kiss, but she will point out to them that they will be at a severe disadvantage should they not do so. They carry with them the means of their own destruction and their only hope is to stand and fight rather than flee in terror, as have all the Riders' other victims.

Sammia is quite willing to explain to the characters everything she knows about the shadowy Silver Quorum and the Wind Riders, giving the characters' nemeses name for the first time. Whilst she does not know the names of the current members of the Quorum, she knows that there are four of them and that they

The Silver Desert

have already met at least two of them in their travels and know of a third. Not only that, she knows where the Blood of ZoZam is hidden and what it really is (see "The Silver Quroum", p. 5).

Despite the fact that she neither drinks nor eats, she has brought forth a platter of fruits for the characters to dine upon and some crystal clear liquid for them to drink. The dark, velvety blue skins of the fruit hide juicy silver flesh and although the colors are anything but appetizing to those unused to them, the fruits themselves are delicious. The liquid is icy cold but very refreshing.

Once the characters have finished refreshing themselves and asked any questions they feel the need to have answered, Sammia will ask them to accompany her whilst she fetches the items they will need to complete their quest. She then descends the stairs into the entrance hall.

The Hidden Treasure

Laid into the floor of the entrance hall, executed in marble, is a magnificent representation of the sword and flower of Sammech. Sammia asks the characters to join her at the centre of the flower and mutters a short phrase. After a brief moment of disorientation, the characters find themselves in a dimly lit chamber. Under a faint shaft of light stands a direct copy of the statue in the Plaza of the Black Obelisk (or is it the other way around?) holding a shining sword and a silver flower. Only this time, the items are real and not just carvings.

Sammia explains that it was these that she was sent to fetch all that time ago before she became trapped here. With great care, she lifts the flower from the statue's hand and offers it to the character with either the Insightful magic style (her preference) or the highest magic rating. With this, she explains, they can defeat the Wind Riders who cannot stand against its power.

Taigmes Dew of the Dawn

Range: Touch

Duration: Instant

Difficulty: Straightforward

Summary: Transfers the morning dew to a nearby receptacle

Description: Created long ago to ease the difficulty of finding safe water in strange locations, Taigmes spell merely transfers millions of tiny water droplets formed as dew into a suitable receptacle. In the process the water becomes chilled and safe to drink. The spell can only be cast within a few hours of sunrise before any potential dew has had a chance to burn away, but provides sufficient water for the entire day.

Style Affinity: Insightful

The Fruit of the Desert

Range: Touch

Duration: Instant

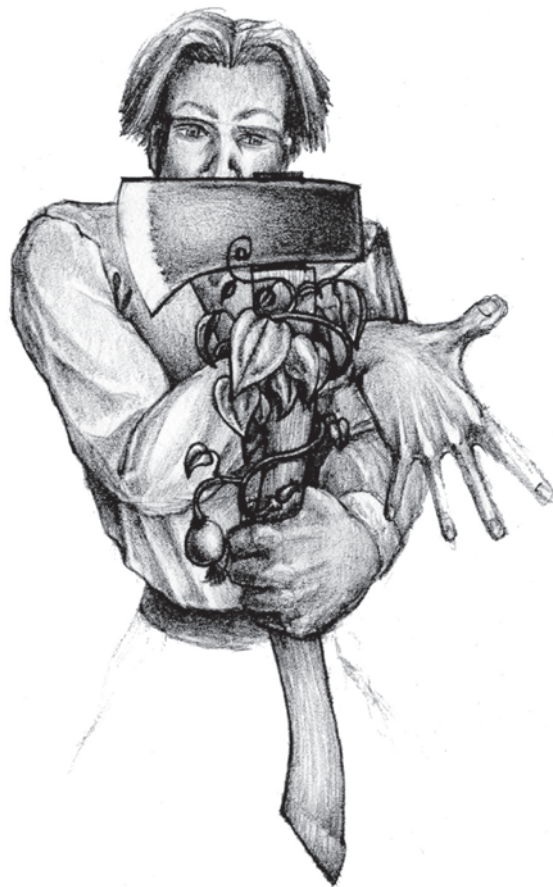
Difficulty: Straightforward

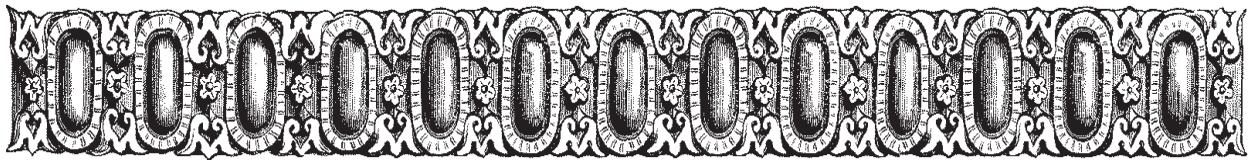
Summary: Causes edible fruit to burst forth from any wooden object.

Description: The application of this spell to any object made of wood causes first leaves, flowers and then fruit to burst forth in rapid succession. These fruit are similar to peaches in size and texture, but are covered in a deep blue furze and contain sweet juicy silver flesh. The fruit is both refreshing and nutritious. Up to two dozen fruit will burst forth from the enchanted object depending on its size (the wooden item in question must be at least six inches in length to start with). The stone from the centre of the fruit can be planted with great care, although the resulting tree never bears fruit itself unless similarly enchanted.

Style Affinity: Insightful

Spell Failure: The fruit is at best inedible, at worst mildly poisonous.





Somehow, the character who receives the flower knows the activating song. After all, they have heard it twice before. Sammia warns them to take great care of this artefact—they will only have one chance to use it. Whilst she has few doubts that they are more than capable of handling the Wind Riders without her help, it is unlikely that they could destroy them completely. These seeds will enable them to do so.

After Sammia has given over the flower, she takes down the glittering sword and offers it to the character with the highest Attack rating. If they accept it, she will explain its powers.

These are treasured gifts and she requests that the characters not only take great care of them but also return them to her allies (the Hidden People) when they have finished their allotted task. They have many enemies still to face and must use her gifts wisely or they will fail and the Silver Quorum will be victorious.

The Desert Flower

(20 points, Charged)

Fashioned from a variety of fine fabrics and intricately embroidered and embellished with tiny crystals and precious metals, this flower is identical in all respects to the Starsand Lily. It is surprisingly heavy (due to the wire support hidden by the delicate detailing). It is enchanted with one charge of the Song of Life.



The Song of Life

Range: Touch

Duration: Instant

Difficulty: Straightforward

Summary: Causes plant seeds to rapidly sprout and entangle the target.

Description: Originally used by the farmers indigenous to the area where Erze Damath now stands, this enchantment was used to encourage the growth of crops. In its current form it is much more violent and bloodthirsty. Special seeds (see below) sprout at a terrific rate when the spell is activated, rapidly entangling the target. Anyone (or thing) not protected by the Lady's Kiss is likely to be ripped to shreds by the resultant murderous vines. They are not repulsed by Laccodel's Protective Rune and are, if anything, attracted by creatures bearing the Mark of Grace (p.99). Against the Riders they cause one Injury per successful hit (a single roll per round on behalf of the plant, no Health roll allowed for the Riders).

Style Affinity: Insightful

Lily Seeds

Produced by the Starsand Lily after pollination, these seeds are very rare. They are necessary for the full effects of the Desert Flower enchanted item. Fastened to the stem of the Desert Flower is a small cloth-of-silver bag containing the seeds the Hidden People have gathered for Sammia since she was imprisoned. A successful Attack roll is required to throw the seeds under the feet of the target, after which the spell can be activated by singing the ancient song.

The Sword of Sammech

(30 points, Permanent)

Made of pure glimmister in a time when mages knew how to transmute the very nature of materials, the Sword of Sammech has great power against otherworldly entities. It is particularly effective against demons and their spawn and shares several similarities with the spell the Virtuous Blade of Motholam (DDE p. 37) in that it ignores any innate demonic defences. During combat with an otherworldly entity, use of the sword gives a Boon of +1 to all Attack rolls (see note under the Lady's Kiss). On an Illustrious success, the sword automatically deals one Injury to the target (no Health roll allowed). There is no penalty for using this sword even if it is not the signature weapon for the character's fighting style. The magical blade adapts to the user such that it handles exactly like the weapon they are most adept at using.

The blade is incredibly sharp and must be kept sheathed in a special scabbard to avoid accidental injury. In normal combat, treat as if a standard blade had been treated with glimmister powder (but the effect does not wear off).

As Sammia finishes explaining the properties of her gifts to the characters, a high-pitched wailing noise fills the air. Sammia sighs and shakes her head. The sound is the warning that the castle is about to shift out of time again and they must hurry or they will be trapped with her. Quickly she utters the words that allow them to regain access to the entrance hall and ushers them as fast as she can out of the door. They will be safe once they are on the causeway¹.

As the characters turn to watch the castle go, the doors slam violently shut allowing them only the briefest glimpse of Sammia. Perceptive characters notice that somehow she did not seem so sad, almost as if a great weight had been lifted from her shoulders². The castle begins to shudder and writhe and slowly begins to fade into a funnel of silver sand, which then moves off swiftly across the desert in the direction from whence it came.

¹ It is perhaps inevitable that some character will manage to get themselves trapped in the castle when it moves. Fear not they spend the journeys in what amounts to suspended animation, and their waking hours are spent viewing beautiful but inaccessible alien landscapes. It may be the character goes mad from boredom, or dies pointlessly trying to survive on an alien world.

² If your party of adventurers are more than usually incompetent you might wish to have Sammia looking even more sad and resigned as the doors close]

The Silver Desert

Leave-taking

Once they have returned across the ironweed causeway (the crows are still missing, although one or two pelgranes remain silently watching their progress) the characters are escorted in silence back to the Hidden People's oasis. Night is coming on but tonight there is no feast, only an air of great sorrow. Food is eaten in silence and everyone retires to their tents with hardly a word. The kind-hearted desert people find the castle's visits very sad and they are in no mood to celebrate the retrieval of the artefacts.

The next morning after breakfast, Dopor comes to see the characters. Time is running out and they must be on their way. He has assigned them another guide to help them reach Dastra, the young woman who showed them to Ceque's ceremony. Her name is Quamyo and she is his youngest daughter.

Quamyo, Young Guide

Please, follow me. Are all city people so slow in walking?

Quamyo is a plain young woman who has yet to grow into either her mother's beauty or her father's wisdom. Still, she is curious and watchful and seeks new knowledge with a cautious but committed appetite. She is not as chatty as Ceque, but when she does speak it is usually to ask a question or to point out something important. She also has few tattoos and is hoping to gain the mark of adulthood by showing the characters to Dastra (she already bears the mark of womanhood, but it's still not quite the same in her eyes).

Persuasion (Forthright) 10, Rebuff (Pure-hearted) 11, Attack (Caution) 9, Defence (Dodge) 10, Magic (Curious) 4, Health 10, Athletics 10, Concealment 9, Living Rough 9, Perception 10, Stealth 8, Wherewithal 8

Once the characters are fully equipped, Dopor will wish them good luck and all speed to what their fate holds in store for them. Yalyati gives them each a kiss (this one is much more pleasant) and several small packets of herbs (two each).

Oasis Herbs

Chewing these herbs for ten minutes allows the character to refresh their Health pool. They are also very effective in poultices to treat bruising and prevent wound infection (adds a bonus of +1 to Physician rolls if used in such a manner). They don't taste wonderful and smell slightly green and muddy, but they are very useful.

5.3 The Approaching Storm

As soon as the Lady's Kiss was applied to the person with the Huntsman's Mark, the Silver Quorum lost track of that person. Although they can still sense the presence of the Moon Key, they are not entirely certain of its location (only the Wind Riders know that innately). Understandably, they are worried as they have no idea how close to Dastra the characters are and have decided to activate the Mark in an attempt to deal with the characters once and for all. By a quirk of the ancient enchantment, it will still take six days from the activation of the mark before the Wind Riders can attack.

5.3.1 Showdown

The desert is still hot during the day, as the characters travel the further north it is often damp with river mist at night. A few days after they have left the oasis, the weather begins to behave very oddly and rumbles of thunder race across the threatening sky. Then there is the clear, chilling sound of a hunting horn. The characters should know what this means by now—the Wind Riders are coming for them¹.

The weather grows increasingly worse for the next six days until even during the day the sky is like midnight and is continually riven by huge flashes of lightning. Quamyo is frightened, although she will not admit it and the characters may want to send her home before the attack begins. If they do not, she will stand and fight against the Riders, but she is in severe danger if she does so.

The Wind Riders

That which is hidden shall remain hidden and those that seek to disturb it must die.

Seated on spectral steeds, the cloaked figures of Gilfig's former disciples are hideous to behold. Their faces are a twisted parody of the human face, scarred and deformed by the magics that transformed them. They have no eyes and their lips, ragged and torn, are stained with the blood of their victims. Their fingers resemble claws and these too are stained and hung with tatters of decaying flesh.

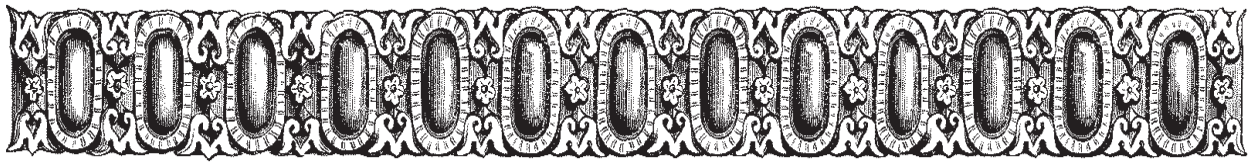
Attack (Ferocity) 2~, Defence (Misdirection) ~+2, Magic (innate) ~, Health 2~, Riding 10, Tracking 15, Wherewithal 10

The Hounds

There are eight of these fell beasts accompanying the Riders. What they are exactly is unclear, although from their uncanny reactions, they could once have been human too. Huge gobbets of drool hang from their maws and they constantly bar for blood.

Attack (Ferocity) ~+4, Defence (Dodge) ~+1, Magic (innate) 4, Health ~+4

¹ If they still haven't worked this out, Quamyo will tell them, explaining the situation as one would to a small and not terribly bright child.



The Silver Desert

The Attack

As it nears midnight on the sixth day since the storms began, the temperature in the desert suddenly drops. The wind howls and tears ferociously at everything. It is difficult to see for all the disturbed sand and if it wasn't for the scarves the Hidden People gave them, they would have choked by now. From the south there comes the hideous trumpeting of a silver horn and a sound like the very sky is tearing open.

Turning to identify what the noise could be, the characters see bearing down on them from the thunderous clouds three cloaked horsemen and eight enormous slaving hounds with eyes like wildfire. The character who had the nightmare recognizes them instantly—it is the Wind Riders.

Everyone who faces the Wind Riders must make a successful *Wherewithal* roll or they will flee (allowing the Riders the chance to hunt them down). Those characters bearing the Lady's Kiss (including Quamyo if she is still with the characters) should be able to stand their ground ready for the fight. The characters have one shot at ranged attacks before the Wind Riders touch the ground. As soon as they have touched down the character carrying the Desert Flower will have a chance to throw the seeds and activate the spell (everyone else also has a second chance at a ranged attack before the Riders close the space between them and enter melee combat). The hounds are ahead of the Riders and characters will have only one ranged attack from the creatures' appearance to close combat (not the two they have against the Riders).

If the seeds are activated immediately, then thick, rope-like tendrils shoot up from the ground surrounding the riders. They entangle the horse's feet and legs, causing them to trip and spill their masters. If the Riders remain seated (successful Riding rolls), then they too become entangled (no Attack roll necessary). If the Riders fall, they can make a Defence roll against the plant (Attack of 15) to remain free. Once the Riders are entangled, they must each make a Tally of 10 in five rounds using their Defence skill (no cooperation or pooling allowed) or they automatically take an injury. If they roll a Dismal failure during the Tally, they also take an injury (a Health roll with a limit of zero is allowed in this case).

If a Rider succeeds in making the tally, they can attempt to break free (successful Attack roll versus the plant's Defence of 14). The struggle continues until either the Rider is dead or has managed to remain free of the plant for two rounds (at which point they can join the main fight). If this seems like a little bit too much bookkeeping for you, give control of the plants to the player who cast the Song of Life. This not only helps you to manage the fight more easily, but it gives the players a hand in destroying the Riders rather than it happening all off-screen.

The hounds are a more immediate problem. They have a certain resistance to mundane weapons (bonus of +1 to Health rolls) but they are susceptible to magic and the Sword of Sammech. They will automatically target the weakest character first¹.

This is meant to be a very difficult fight, even with the assistance they have been given by Sammia. If the characters appear to be winning too easily, adjust the odds in the Riders' favour (perhaps the plants aren't quite as effective as Sammia hoped). If the characters appear to be getting trounced, remove the non-magical weapon restriction against the hounds and don't let the Riders free themselves from the entangling vines. Use your judgement so that the characters win, but only by the skin of their teeth.

When the fight is over, the hounds and the Riders should be dead and the Desert Flower discharged. When the last creature dies, the storm clouds rapidly reverse direction, coalescing on a single point above the battlefield before disappearing with a noise like a very large cork popping from a wine bottle. The sky will appear calm and untroubled, and the air will feel clean and fresh. The magical plants begin to wilt as soon as their job is done and they will quickly die under the desert sun come morning, leaving greasy dark patches on the sand where the Riders fell.

The moment the Wind Riders are destroyed, the Moon Key snaps shut to the position shown in symbol 5. It does not darken with time and the Riders cannot be resurrected.

It is now time to face the final test: Dastra, lost city of Empire.

¹ This will normally be Quamyo. If the characters do not realize this and endeavour to form some sort of protective screen round her she will probably

die and they should lose sympathy points due to their thoughtlessness.



Rumors:

Bandit attacks on pilgrims and trade caravans are becoming increasingly bold and organized. The main target appears to be children and young men, rather than the usual comestibles. One child has wandered out of the desert claiming to have escaped from a cave in the southern hills, although the people he describes as his captors do not sound like the normal bandits (their mode of dress is totally wrong for a start). Who are the kidnappers and what are they up to?

Flowers have begun to appear in the desert just beyond the Silent Hills. What this has to do with the loud explosion that was heard a few days ago is anyone's guess, but the fact that it actually rained at the same time might have had something to do with it. Motom, expelled from the Xalguire Conservatory as a crackpot for his bizarre ideas of bringing life to the desert, has been conspicuous by his absence lately. Has he stumbled upon the answer to restoring the fertility of the region, or is it just a freak weather anomaly caused by the unseasonable heat?

The secrets of the Erzite Glassblowers have been lost for centuries and although glass is still made in the city from the desert sand, it no longer has the clarity and tone of more venerable material. As a reward for the recovery of these secrets, which recent research suggests to be located in a forgotten desert workshop known as the Oasis of Light, the Glassblowers are prepared to offer a reward of four exquisitely hand engraved glass goblets. Beyond their aesthetic value, the goblets have been enchanted such that any noxious substance placed within will bubble and froth until the toxin is rendered safely palatable. Still, there must be others who would pay a higher price for such information. What is such a secret truly worth?

Essential Plot Points

- The Hidden People are the worshippers of Sammech who were driven out by Gilfig's disciples
- The name for the four disciples left behind to protect their wicked secret is the Silver Quorum
- The name for the three horsemen is the Wind Riders
- Sammia is trapped in a shifting castle because of the curse laid upon her by Gilfig's disciples. It can only be broken if the Silver Quorum are defeated
- The Desert Flower can be used to defeat the Wind Riders
- The Blood of ZoZam is hidden beneath the Imperial Palace in Dastra, the ancient capital city of the Dastric Empire
- Without the Moon Key, the characters cannot gain entry to the Midnight Plain, the pocket dimension in which the Blood of ZoZam is hidden
- The relic is indeed a prison for the scion of ZoZam, Gilfig
- The Sword of Sammech can be used to defeat Gilfig



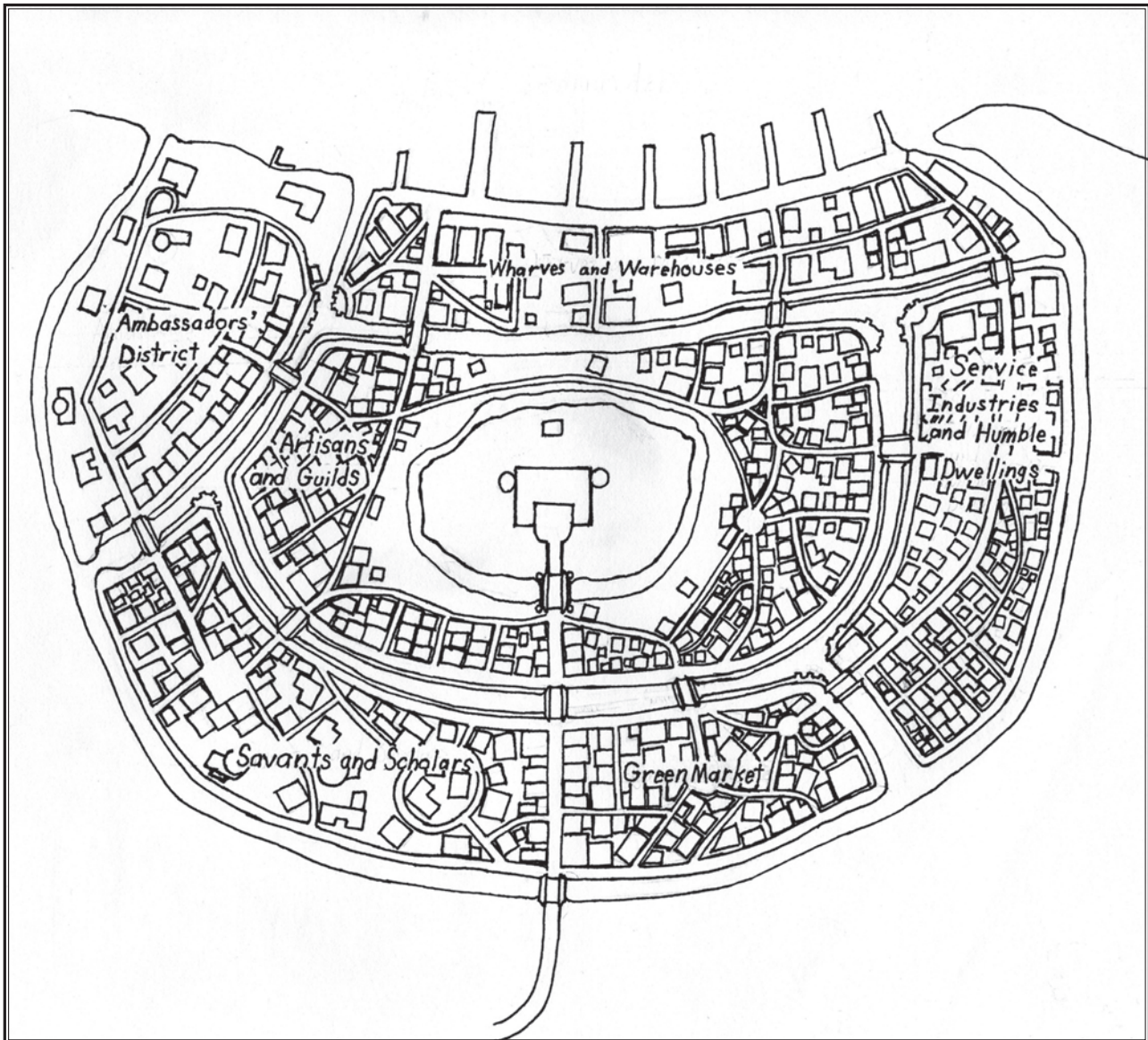


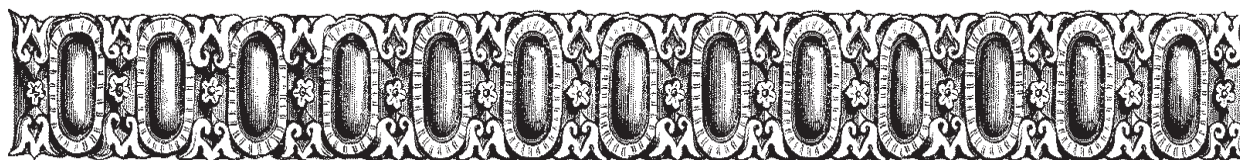
Chapter 7

Dastra

It always sorrows me greatly to see such aesthetic wonders brought low by age and intemperate climes. Mighty Dastra, how low indeed have you fallen, with your graceful columns all but lost beneath the unrelenting sands of desert and time. Still, my nose tells me that there are riches aplenty still here and we have buckets and shovels at the ready. I have selected a most favourable spot overlooking the river that does not seem to be too structurally unsound. Now, if the deodand keep out of the way, we may find something to our advantage—perhaps even that fabled cloth you told me of. Although, with your colouring, I would suggest that gold would be more suitable. Not that I wish to question your obvious taste, you understand.

Sakonity the Adamantine.





The Dastric Empire

There is little left now to proclaim the former glory of this ancient place. The Dastrans swept up from the south in the early 19th Aeon to wrest control of the area from its previous inhabitants. Their Empire once held sway over an area that in current terms stretched from the Silver Desert to the Great Erm and from the Plain of Obelisks to the environs of fabled Vir Vassilis itself. Its wealth depended on the fertility of the region before it became bleak desert and windswept plain. The region now known as the Silver Desert was the centre for the wool trade, an immensely lucrative business under strict imperial control. The plains surrounding the city itself were predominantly used for the cultivation of an unusual and valuable strain of flax, perhaps the most valuable commodity the Empire ever owned.

Textiles in the Dastric Empire

Wool

The herd beasts of Dastra were created as hybrids specifically for their fine, warm wool and excellent mutton. The exact matrices of these hybrids have been lost with time, although many believe that records pertaining to this matter do still exist in the strong rooms of the Herdsmen Guild (not that anyone knows where it is, but that is a minor point). The shorn fleeces were of exceptional quality and possessed a lustre found nowhere else. Precious metal particles, predominantly silver, in the soil of the plains were believed to be disturbed by the herd beasts as they munched their way through the grasslands, becoming trapped in the fine fibres of the fleece, giving them their shimmering hue.

Once washed (any silver particles shaken loose by the process were collected and passed on to the famous silversmiths of Dastra), the fleeces were processed, requiring little carding due to their high quality. The ubiquitous ironweed played a large role in the industry. Although the fibres were fine, they were strong and had a tendency to wear through plain metals with ease. Carding equipment made from ironweed spines lasted far longer any other type and what had once been regarded as a nuisance to the herders became an integral part of their livelihood.

The washing of the fleece, carding and any subsequent dyeing was not performed in Dastra—the smell and noise was considered to be far too unpleasant to be allowed to mar the beauty of the city. Instead, it took place in a purpose built encampment one day upriver from the city, but alas nothing remains of the bustling and colorful town of Onnial other than the strangely stained earth on

which it stood. As well as its other unusual properties, both fleece and yarn took any dye well, the color remaining true and bright throughout the lifetime of the material.

Spinning of the carded fleece was performed on a massive scale in Dastra and the remains of the sheds can still be found amongst the rubble of the city, as can the sheds in which unspun fleece was transformed into the highest quality felt, again with the help of the essential ironweed needles. “Shed” is something of a misnomer—as the wealth of the Empire grew, so did the grandeur of these centres of industry and the sheer quality of the stone used in construction and the levels of ornate decoration bear little resemblance to what most people would actually regard as a humble shed.

Although the finished felt was shipped abroad to those places desirous of hard wearing and warm work fabrics, the yarn was exclusively woven in the area by craftsmen and women of supreme skill and artistic genius. Fine fabrics with a sheen and drape matched only by silk and magnificent carpets of complex mathematical design were amongst the true treasures of Dastra at the height of its powers. That and all the gold the sale of these lucrative items brought to the Empire, of course.

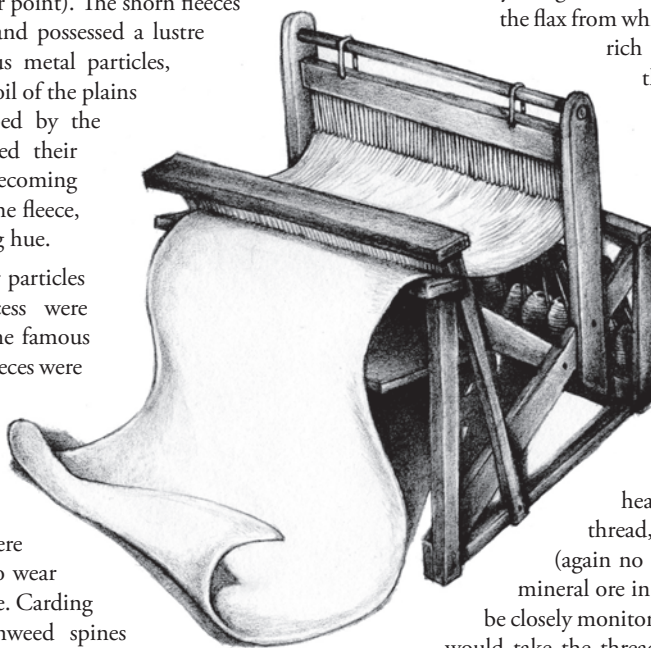
Linen

Possibly the greatest treasure of the historic Dastric Empire, the flax from which the linen was prepared grew on the rich lands surrounding the city and gave the region its long forgotten name, the Fields of Silver. Unlike normal flax, which has a beautiful powder blue flower, the flax of Dastra was pure white. Instead of dark stalks, the stalks were a matte silver, giving rise to a fine thread of surpassing beauty. When viewed from a distance in the summer, when the tightly packed flax was in bloom, Dastra appeared to float above a sea of liquid light.

As with the wool, initial processing was performed in a heavily guarded suburb of Onnial. The thread, inexplicably being nearly pure silver (again no doubt due to the rich presence of its mineral ore in this region¹), was too valuable not to be closely monitored. Under careful watch, great barges² would take the thread to be woven in the sole mill built specifically for this purpose, within the confines of the Imperial winter palace. Here, linen known as cloth-of-silver was woven by the blind (legend has it so that they did not feel tempted to steal what they made, because they had no inkling of its true worth) in a dark prison known jokingly as the Shining Hole.

¹ Academics postulate that the plant deposited metallic contaminants on the fibres as a way to trap them and prevent them poisoning it. Others claim that the plant was a creation some long dead Arch-mage. For myself I merely note that silver does not suit my complexion.

² Thus ensuring thread was stolen by the barge load or not at all.



Dastra

Only tailors in Dastra were permitted to make up garments from this cloth, whose cost limited its availability to those of very noble birth or great personal fortune. Rich patrons traveled far and wide to become the proud owners of such garments and a thriving industry catering to their every whim was another important reason for the Empire's wealth. Eventually, a city ordinance had to be passed to prevent the imitation of cloth-of-silver, as enterprising lesser citizens began to find innovative means to ape their social betters via inferior materials.

Whereas the woollen textiles from Dastra were heavily patterned or embroidered in exquisite color, the linen was very rarely embellished, it being considered a vulgarity to mar the surface of such an exotic fabric. When it was embroidered, only cloth-of-silver threads were employed, the patterns imitating the flower of the plant from which it was made.

Textile Guilds

Whilst control of the linen was an entirely imperial affair, the processing of wool was controlled by several powerful guilds under strict licence to the Emperor: the Mordanters, the Wheelers, the Artisans and the Purveyors. Although not the case initially, these guilds effectively became family affairs and eventually ascended to the nobility as the wealth of Empire increased. There were other guilds, such as the Herdsmen and the Silversmiths, but they never reached such dizzy heights as their brethren, despite at one point the Herdsmen having non-other than Dalmasius the Tender, the Earthy Emperor (as he was jokingly known) as their patron.

The Mordanters were always the least powerful of the four textile guilds, due to the unsavory and often toxic nature of their business. Although dyeing enhanced the fleece and yarn, it was not considered entirely essential and the associated smells and stains were always looked down upon, particularly by the Artisans. Their power base, for what it was, was rooted firmly in Onnial, with only a meagre guild house in Dastra. Rented, naturally.

The Wheelers, on the other hand, were immensely powerful; not only were they responsible for the production of yarn on their giant spinning contraptions, but they also controlled the flow of raw material into the industry by handling the acquisition of fleeces and operating the initial washing and carding mills. With a heavy presence in Onnial, there was also a sumptuous guild premises in Dastra, surpassed only by the Purveyors ornate premises.

Dalmasius the Tender

One of the few names that have come down to the modern era is that of the Earthy Emperor, whose coins are still occasionally found in the area. His jocular nickname is due in part because of his interest in farming (coinage from his reign always display a herd beast of some sort on the reverse) but also because of his considerable harem. At its height, it contained 10,000 concubines from many different lands. Tender by nature as well as name, he ordered a periapt designed (characteristically in the shape of a ram's head) such that when employed, no advance would injure the sensibilities of his courtesans.

The Artisans were the craftsmen who took the fibres and created the cloth. More a mutually beneficial alliance than a highly organized guild, they were still very protective of their corner of the market and were just as formidable as the Wheelers if push came to shove. In their own eyes they were superior to all the other guilds, but often failed to keep this to themselves, making them deeply unpopular. Felt, although by no means a high-class textile, fell under their aegis. As well as overseeing the production of bulk material for export, some artisans did specialize in hand felted carpets of unusual design and vividness. They were always regarded as a little strange by the other weavers in the guild, but tolerated because of their artistic merit. They had no presence in Onnial, residing firmly in the city in a pleasantly modest, but aesthetically pleasing, property.

The Purveyors were essentially at the top of the chain, handling as they did the marketing and export of the finished products. Second in power (but not wealth) to the Wheelers, their guild house in Dastra rivalled the Emperor's summer palace (although not too closely, obviously—that would be in very impolitic). They owned fleets of barges and caravans and were immensely shrewd and wealthy businessmen.

With the change in climate, the silver flax failed, the plains dried out and the herd beasts starved. The glory of the Empire began to fade as its coffers emptied and petty squabbling between guilds and nobles led to the slow decline of the city. The silting and widening of the river made it difficult to accommodate large barges without the risk of grounding and production was eventually shifted upriver to Creman Stuk, where the textile industry eventually gave its last gasp as the Empire finally crumbled into dust.

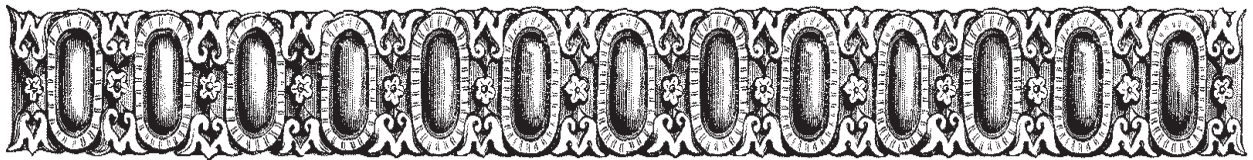
Dastra

The city sits upon the southern bank of the River Scamander at the point where it widens to become more of a lake than a mighty waterway, its once glorious wharves sagging with decay. The city is four days downstream by boat from Erze Damath and is the haunt of ghosts, hermits and other unsavory creatures. Once it was a city of canals, but now the waterways are choked with desert sand.

Built with limestone (the more opulent buildings being faced with marble), the crumbling remains of the city still shine weakly in the fading sun where they have not been obscured by the encroaching dunes of the Silver Desert. In ages past the glow from the city walls on a bright day was said by one poet, Muberd Hant, to act as a beacon to sailors on the Ocean of Slow Tides¹ and was occasionally likened by another ancient poet² to "the moon fell to earth".

¹ It has to be admitted that the metaphor, whilst cleverly wrought, would be more easily believed if the city were within sight of the coast. But Hant was a poet, not a cartographer, so may perhaps be excused for overlooking the obvious.

² Whose name has been happily forgotten.



Built before Gilfigism became predominant in the Empire, Dastra is not limited by any sacred geometry and was constructed instead to follow what was once the gentle sweep of the river, gently evolving to become virtually circular in aspect. The meandering city wall was tall and imposing and ran down to the river's edge, where the immense wharves formed as much of a defensive barricade as a gateway to the city's riches. The walls were skirted by a canal fed by sluice gates from the river, effectively forming a moat around the city. This waterway, and those inside the walls that formed the divisions between the city districts, have for the most part been drained, falling river levels having starved them of their water supply. Opposite the city, and half submerged by the widening of the river, lies the Emperor's summer palace. The pleasure gardens are gone, sunk beneath the turbid water, and only colonnades and cornices remain.

Inside the city walls, the central feature is the immense Winter Palace compound, surrounded by its own decorative moat. Built on the highest ground in the city, the delicate minarets once gave unparalleled views across the plains. Within its tumbled walls and at the rear of the compound, behind the main palace building, lie the ruins of the Shining Hole. What would have been the formal gardens lie in front of the palace range, although they are now but a verdant shadow of their former selves.

A formal processional way leads directly from the impressive arch of the palace gates to the main city gate and the road to Erze Damath. Beyond the palace canal, the guild buildings and artisan district lie in ruin, their cellars stuffed with the lost knowledge of an age. At the riverside edge, this section of the city backs onto the tumbled warehouses of the wharf district. The original city wall once lay just beyond the artisans' homes, although with increased prosperity the city needed to expand and the wall was demolished

Under The City

Occasionally treasure hunters from Erze Damath and further afield will brave the journey downriver to excavate what they can from the intact cellars and underground storerooms of the imperial capital. Rare vintages, moldy tomes, disintegrating textiles and trinkets and baubles have all been brought back into the light of day. Nests of grue, deodand and other such non-valuable items are also to be found throughout the ruins, although they do seem to avoid the palace compound. There is a roaring trade in treasure maps, many of which are false, although enough of them have led to interesting discoveries that the general level of faith in their accuracy has been maintained.

The richest pickings are not to be found in the palace complex, these having been worked clean centuries ago, nor in the ambassadorial quarter, for similar reasons. Careful sifting of the artisan district is most likely to yield riches untold without the hazards incumbent on investigating former mages' lairs. Surprisingly, many of the basements in the service quarter are well stocked with excellent goods once overlooked but becoming fashionable as interest in the Dastric Empire rises in the lands to the west.

and moved to accommodate the growing number of scholars and savants wishing to dwell in such a prestigious city.

Towards the eastern outskirts of the city, the quality of the buildings changes, being home to the dockers and labourers essential to the running of such a massive enterprise as once thrived here. Below this lay the Green Market, the area where fresh produce and everyday items were traded. At the western water's edge, a specially screened quarter of the city, complete with its own wall and private moorings, was erected to deal with ambassadorial envoys and those wishing to purchase the fine wares of the Empire. It has its own pleasant avenue leading off from the main road and its own private entryway through the city wall. This area is the best preserved of the city due to the quality of both the building materials and the construction employed here. Many of its buildings are still habitable, at a stretch. The former Sumptuary Plaza Inn is the largest remaining building and the best preserved, although it has lost its roof and most of the upper two floors. Much of its preservation is due to the activities of Vernise, its resident hermit.

Vernise, Persecuted Collector

Look, I found it, so it's mine. And I'd thank you not to tread on the carpet. It's very rare, so get off it.

Vernise claims to be a follower of Huis, who sought sanctuary from Gilfigite persecution in the ruins of Dastra. Skeletal in appearance, ragged in dress, his voice betrays signs of a good education somewhere in Almetry, though his hands are calloused and worn. His voice is reed thin and he stumbles over words, being unused to conversation. He is armed with a variety of amulets he either brought with him or found in the ruins (he can no longer remember which).

By dint of vast effort, he has cleared several rooms in the old Inn and furnished them with finds from around the city. The courtyard gardens have been converted into a vegetable patch, where priceless statuary is used as supports for beans and berry bushes. The plants are irrigated by the natural spring that once powered the grandiose ornamental fountains, and whilst no more than a trickle now, is sufficient to support Vernise's needs. His existence is spartan but by no means harsh and he has been wily enough to avoid the depredations of the cities half-men by careful application of his amulets.

Persuasion (Obfuscatory) 11, Rebuff (Wary) 12, Attack (Caution) 10, Defence (Dodge) 11, Magic (Studious) 4, Health 9, Athletics 6, Concealment 4, Craftsmanship 5, Living Rough 8, Physician 4, Wherewithal 6

Tablet of Sufficient Nourishment, Periapt of All-Seeing, Ring of Fire

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The Desiccated Canals

Once the wonder of visitors, the waterways of the city are a sorry reminder of the lost beauty of Dastra. Drained by changing river levels and mostly choked with sand and fallen masonry, it is no longer possible to navigate about the city or take a pleasure boat to see the sights. Originally there were only two canals, that surrounding the first city walls (later to become the artisan canal) and the one isolating the Winter Palace from the rest of the city. With the expansion of the city, further canals were engineered to both provide boundaries to the city's districts and also to allow easier movement of goods between those districts.

Of the bridges that spanned the canals, many remain intact. The highest concentration of bridges lie between the wharves and the artisans' district to allow easy shipment of materials between the two areas. These tend to be sturdy and unadorned, being strictly for the purposes of business (as are the numerous bridges between the service sector and the wharves). The bridges elsewhere in the city, particularly those linking the ambassador's district to the savants' and the artisans' districts are exquisitely carved with vines and plants, especially the flax, and mythical beasts stand guard at the entrance and exit to the spans. Interestingly¹, there are no bridges between the wharves and the ambassadors' district—here the canal acts as a screen in a similar manner to the one surrounding the palace.

Along the canals there are many landing platforms for small transport boats. Eager to maintain the untroubled air of the city goods were moved, wherever possible, by the waterways such that the streets would remain free for people to enjoy the sophistications of the city. The only real exception to this is the boundary along the wharves, where the bridges were often used instead.

An underground waterway, whose existence has long been forgotten, ran from the wharves to the subterranean dock directly under the Shining Hole. This allowed rapid and safe shipment of cloth-of-silver threads from the river to the weavers without the need for it to be taken through the city, thus lowering any real or imagined security risk.

Act 6: Reflections

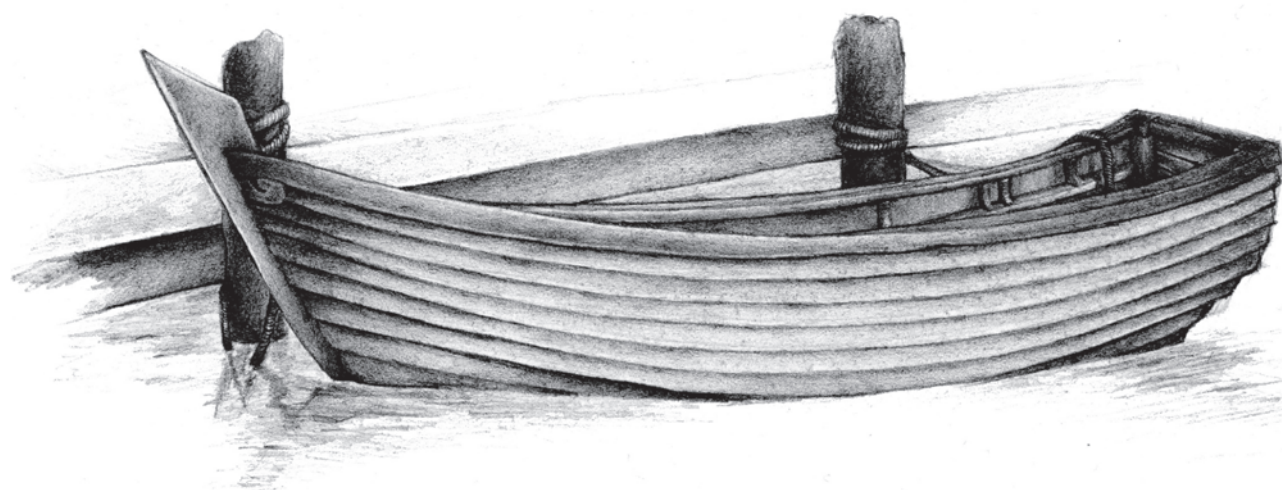
The defeat of the Wind Riders in the Silver Desert leaves the way clear for the final push to find the Blood of ZoZam beneath the city of Dastra. But what other horrors await them there and can they successfully banish Gilfig back to the demon realms? Are the Silver Quorum going to sit idly by now that their accomplices in duplicity have been slain?

6.1 The Sands of Time

Dastra rises pitifully from the breaking sand waves of the desert. The air here is still and damp due to the wide expanse of river on which the city stands. The silence is eerie, as if all sensible creatures have shunned the place. If Quamy is still with the characters, she will leave them at the main city gates and head for home. She does not wish to enter this place of hidden evil. She will bid them farewell and wish them luck. She hopes to see them again² when they have freed her people from their burden.

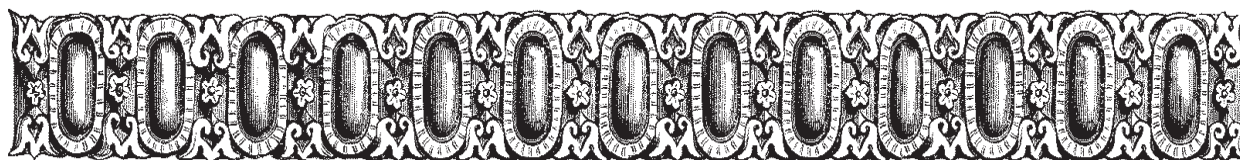
6.1.1 Stolen Moments

As the characters stumble through the ruins of the Scholars district, they can hear the sounds of excavation coming from a nearby building. If they investigate, they find a man of medium build sweating heavily as he attempts to move boulders from a blocked doorway. He cries out in fear when he sees the characters



¹ It has been suggested that the authorities were wary about allowing communication to become too easy for those in the Ambassadors district. Also while the bridges are elegant and festooned with tracery, anyone crossing soon realizes that the bridges are very difficult to cross unobserved.

² But her parting words will give the impression that she doesn't really expect to. At this point the characters might be feeling a little smug and self satisfied. Quamy can prick that particular bubble for you.



and inexpertly draws a battered sword, which he proceeds to point at the characters and wave vaguely about in what he obviously thinks is a threatening manner.

If the characters are sufficiently reassuring about their motives, the man will lower his sword and proffer his hand in friendship. He introduces himself as Dandfrezar, lately out of Erze Damath.

The gentleman in question seems a little nervous, but he passes that off as due to the recurring problems he's had with the half-men that lurk about in the ruins. Fortunately, they seem to prefer making a nuisance of themselves at night and he's managed to find an intact room he can barricade himself into of an evening to keep them away. He's feeling a bit bushed, would they care to join him for a bite to eat?

Should the characters wish to stop for a break, Dandfrezar pulls out a few emaciated looking pieces of fruit and begins to chew with great vigor. He chats happily about inconsequential things in between noisy bouts of mastication. Highly Perceptive characters may very well notice that he is not all he seems (roll versus his Imposture) and is quietly casting an appraising eye over the characters.

When he has finished eating, he stands and dusts off his hands and breeches. He then steadfastly reapplies himself to shifting stones. He will not ask for the characters' help, but should they wish to offer it, he will not refuse.

If the characters (wisely) decide to ignore the rogue, he will cast Phandaal's Mantle of Stealth upon himself and follow them. It isn't often that he sees other people here during his forays and this lot could be good marks. Provided the characters are not wearing anything that can detect hidden creatures and are being only averagely observant, he will continue to tail them until they set up camp, at which point he will attempt to steal an item of value. He will cast Arnhoul's Sequestrious Digitalia and root about through the characters' belongings until he finds something of value. If they still have either Vozurd's Pin or the Desert Flower he will target those, but on an Illustrious success he will find (and take) the Moon Key.

Of course, if it suits your story to have Dandfrezar steal the Moon Key to allow the characters to flex their collective muscle a little more before they enter the Midnight Plain, then go ahead. Without it, the characters cannot enter the hidden realm and they must recover it before they can proceed any further. If, of course, the characters have been entirely noble in their actions thus far¹, allow them to carry on unimpeded. After all, cosmic balance must be maintained...

Dandfrezar, Lonely Excavator

No, no, I'm sure it's over here. If I have the map the right way up it's definitely over here.

An apparently average sort of chap with a kind soul and a gullible nature, Dandfrezar has journeyed here from Erze Damath to seek his fortune. His floppy black hair, small disc hat and dusty clothes of modest means all attest to that fact. At least, that's what he'd like you to believe. Look closely into his dark eyes and you can see an instinct for survival. He's really a crook and a petty thief out to swipe what he can from the half-buried cellars of the old city. He has a map (stolen, obviously) and is using it to navigate around the ruins. Still, he's an opportunist and will take what he can get (quite literally). He's managed to twist his ankle whilst investigating a hidey-hole and walks with a slight limp. The only spells he knows are Arnhoul's Sequestrious Digitalia and Phandaal's Mantle of Stealth, both of which have often come in handy since he entered the ruins.

Persuasion (Charming) 12, Rebuff (Wary) 10, Attack (Speed) 11, Defence (Dodge) 11, Magic (Devious) 4, Health 10, Appraisal 8, Athletics 10, Concealment 8, Imposture 10, Living Rough 7, Quick Fingers 12, Stealth 11

6.1.2 The Winter Palace

The broken palace gates stand half open, leading in to the tumbled mass of vegetation that was once the stunning formal garden, pride of the Emperor himself. Bits of statuary peek forlornly from under the dense foliage and every sound is muffled by the verdant growth.

The skeletal remains of the Palace are a sorry sight. In its heyday it must have been a splendid building, but now it is just another ruin among many. Sammia told the characters that the Midnight Realm was hidden here beneath a building originally used to make the fabric cloth-of-silver. All they have to do now is find it.

Searching through the ruins here will eventually lead to the discovery of a row of silver birch trees behind the main palace complex, close to the rear wall. It appears to form some sort of screen between a fallen building and the palace. The area is now impossibly tangled and overgrown. As for the ruins, they are oddly out of step with the faded grandeur and delicate tracery of the buildings that surround it, its fallen masonry is unadorned and improbably sturdy. These are the walls of the Shining Hole. If you are using Demons of the Dying Earth, the spell Amberlin's Discontinuity Determiner (p. 35) could be used to pinpoint the location of the entrance to the Midnight Plain, otherwise the characters are going to have to hunt on for a way into the underground dock.

After what seems like hours (and possibly is) the characters eventually succeed in finding a broad set of steps hidden beneath a particularly prodigious creeper. They seem to lead down below the Palace's outer wall and deep underneath the city. They are

¹ In an infinite (but shrinking) universe it has to be pointed out that the possibility exists.

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extremely broad with a long, shallow tread. Light from the surface rapidly fades away down here, so the characters will have to provide themselves with some illumination (if they still have the reed tapers given to them by Ceque, these will be ideal, otherwise there is plenty of spare wood within the ruins to construct crude torches).

6.1.3 Impossible Visions

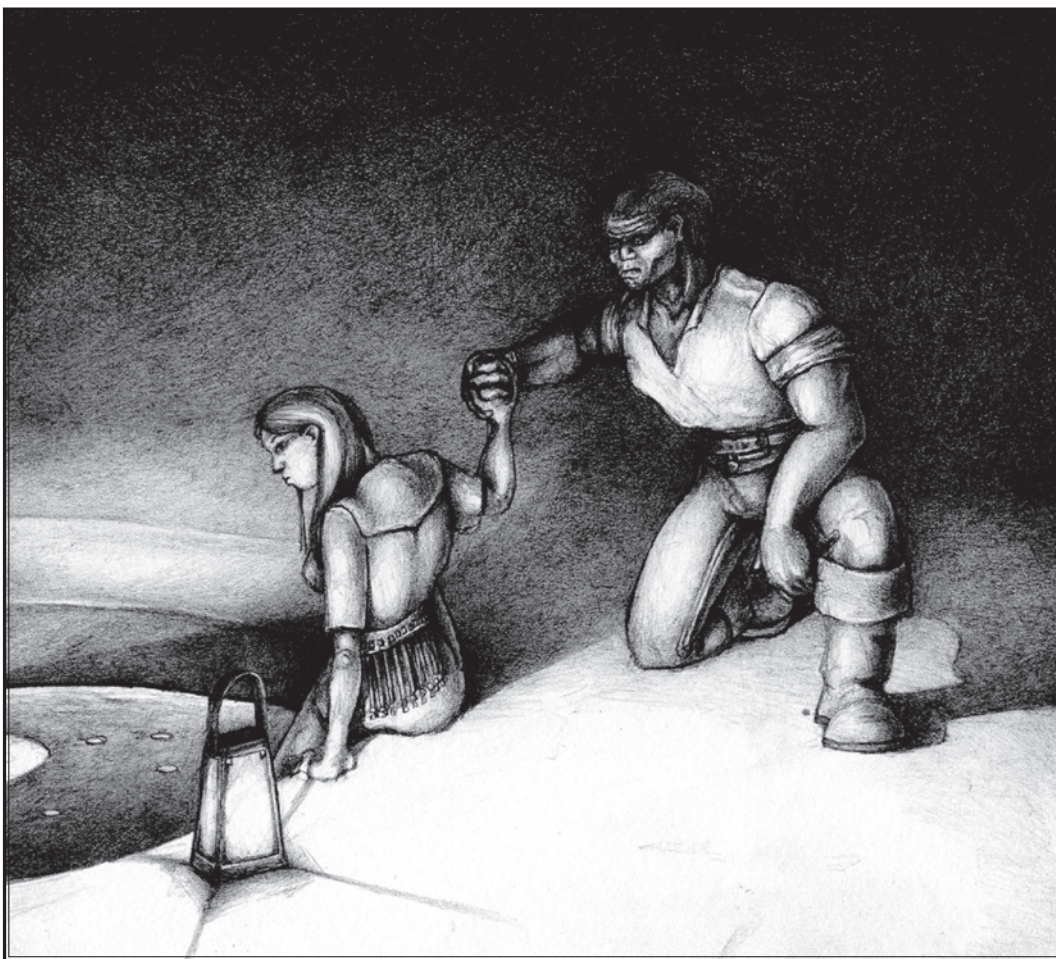
Deep under the city, the characters come at last to the subterranean dock used to secretly bring in the raw materials for the production of cloth-of-silver. The damp steps slowly level out onto a wide stone platform that forms the outer edge of an enormous cavern. Large columns carved from the natural stone support the roof and any lights the characters carry cast strange shadows up the dark walls. Every sound is amplified by the dripping darkness.

The water in the deep pool ahead is not immediately obvious (water levels have dropped considerably since this chamber was excavated) and the characters must take care not to blunder over the edge of the walkway. When the characters look over the edge of the rim, they are in for a surprise.

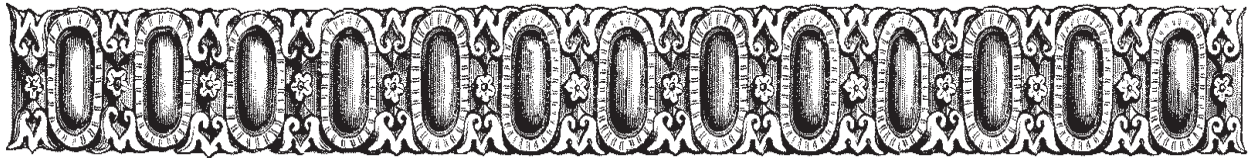
Despite the lack of external light, there, reflected back up at them from the water's surface are a million stars. More bizarrely, there is the moon, just as it was on the dome in Sammia's chamber. Although faint ripples play across the water's surface, they do nothing to disturb the images. The character who is carrying the Moon Key can feel themselves being tugged towards the dark water.

Fortunately, Sammia warned them that this would be the case when they found the entrance to the Midnight Plain. If the characters wish to enter, they must all hold hands and step over the rim of the platform. Strangely, there is no sensation of falling or a sudden splash, just utter blackness, a heart-numbing cold and stark terror. Characters must succeed at a *Wherewithal* roll or they are likely to let go of their companions' hands (the *Lady's Kiss* should help them to avoid this if they bear it) and find themselves waiting on the dockside for their friends' return.

Once they have passed through the barrier, the characters' pools will have refreshed to their usual levels.



They must all hold hands and step over the rim of the platform.



6.2 The Midnight Plain

The cold and fear do not last for long and soon the characters are back on firm ground. When their vision clears they can see that they are standing on a stone paved avenue which runs straight across a vast, flat sandy plain lit only by the stars. There is no moon here. In the distance there is a tiny speck. The sight is horribly familiar—it is the same as the tableau on the Ironweed Pillar.

Although the Plain is not a demon realm it does share some of the same quirks with regards to magic (DDE p.54). Because of this certain spells do not function in quite the same way as they would in the real world. For example, the Spell of Some Mediocrity (TT p.115) will not function here—it is a little difficult to cause mundane happenings when you are trapped on an infinite plain lit only by stars. See the boxed text on page 100 for a comprehensive list. Unlike demon realms, the Plain has no effect on magical items and spells can be encompassed here if the characters take the time to do so.

If you are using the Demons of the Dying Earth supplement, then demonic spells can be encompassed here although they are subject to the same restrictions as spells from other supplements.

6.2.1 The Dais

The avenue is long and monotonously straight and there are no landmarks with which to judge their passage, other than the ever-nearer speck on the horizon. Should they turn around and attempt to walk in the opposite direction away from the speck, they soon realize that they are still walking towards it and there is no evidence for where they entered this place.

After what feels like an eternity, more detail becomes apparent. The speck is really a raised platform on which rests an altar. Beside it stands a tall man, naked except for a simple loincloth and shining tattoos. He carries a large staff. As they grow nearer still, they can see that the altar is eight-sided and on it sits an obsidian bottle, an exact likeness of the Black Obelisk in Erze Damath. On this obelisk, though, the writing on the outer surface is not carved but inscribed in silver ink and it moves unnervingly over the black volcanic glass.

Llawy cannot be persuaded to step down from the dais nor can he be convinced to let the characters take the glass bottle. He challenges the character with the highest Attack rating to a duel. Not only does he bear the Mark of Grace, but he is also tattooed with the symbol of Gilfig's Armor of Righteousness.

Llawy, the Final Guardian

By the oath I swore, you shall not obtain that which must be hidden

Despite his midnight dark skin, Llawy's complexion is ashen, speaking clearly of his life sequestered out of time. His cheeks are sunken and his smile a rictus grin. His eyes are sewn shut, the clumsy stitches glinting silver on his dark cheeks, the eyelids tattooed with the glowing Mark of Grace. His voice is little more than a whisper, but in the silence of his realm, it rings out far too loudly, each word precise and cutting. Of all of the disciples of Gilfig chosen to guard this powerful artefact, he has perhaps been the most fortunate as he has at least retained his humanity. He has been here since the Blood of ZoZam was hidden and he will die before he lets it be removed from this place.

Persuasion (Intimidating) 15, Rebuff (Penetrating) 16, Attack (Strength) 14, Defence (Parry) 15, Magic (innate) 6, Health 12, Athletics 10, Perception 11, Wherewithal 10

Screen of Cold Fire

(5 points, Charged)

A blue crystal set in a silver cage suspended from an ornate silver chain. Activation of the enchantment leads to the formation of a coruscating sheet of icy cold flame centred on the caster. The protected area has a diameter of thirty feet. Anyone approaching the wall from the outside must make a successful Health roll or begin to suffer the effects of the extreme cold (one Injury). Those inside the circle are not affected by the cold. The flames exist for twelve hours or until dismissed (whichever is shorter). Carries five charges.

Gilfig's Armor of Righteousness

Range: Touch

Duration: Instant

Difficulty: Complex

Summary: Renders the bearer immune to attack by non-magical weapons

Description: Inscription onto the skin (in lily ink) of the four holy symbols of Gilfig confers upon the target a resistance to attack by non-magical weapons. If attacked by an unenchanted blade, the target gains a boon of +1 to all Defence rolls (allowing free rerolls of everything but Dismal failures as described on DERPG p.29).

The Mark of Grace

Range: Touch

Duration: Instant

Difficulty: Complex

Summary: Protection from the attentions of the Wind Riders

Description: Effectively this spell is the Quorum's equivalent of the Lady's Kiss. A silver tattoo of a complex, interweaving eight-sided design is the visible reflection of this spell and it need not be openly displayed to be effective. Not only does it render the target safe from attack by the Wind Riders, it also endows the target with resistance to mind control spells such as Javanne's Ennervation of Will (bonus of +1 to resistance rolls).

Style Affinity: Forceful

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Spells In the Midnight Plain

Below is a list of spells from DERPG and TT that do not work in the Midnight Realm. If a spell is not listed, assume that it functions as normal or is not applicable to the situation at hand. If you are not sure what effect any other spells might have, bear the following in mind: spells which create illusions or physically alter some aspect of the caster's body (such as Enchantment of Another's Face or Malakan's Silver Skin) do not work. Neither do spells that summon creatures or those that affect time (as there really is no time there).

Straightforward Spells:

DERPG

Arnhoul's Sequestrious Digitalia
Astounding Oral Projection
Brassnose's Twelve-Fold Bounty
Charm of Brachial Fortitude
Enchantment of Another's Face
Illusion of Vile Arthropods
Interminable Interim
Liberation of Warp
Panguine's Loyal Porter
Phandaal's Inside Out and Over
Spell of Dissolution
Spell of the Loyal Servitor
Spell of the Slow Hour
Thasdrubal's Laganetic Transfer

TT

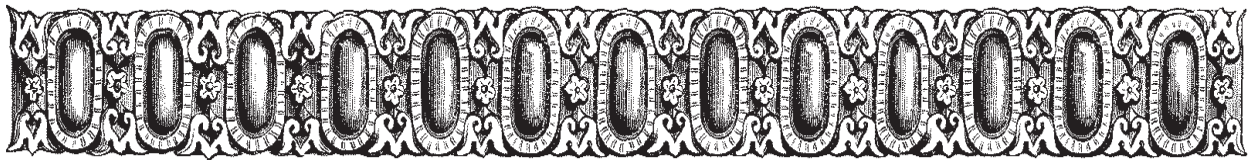
Alteration of Compelling Advocacy
Arrant Verbal Accomplishment
Balm of Local Compromise
Calantcus' Instant Dispulsion
Call to the Ominous Enthusiast
Depurative Pulse
The Elegant Combatant
Extensible Auditory Range
The First Retrotropic
The Inanimate Assailant
Klopag's Wandering Manipulator
Llorio's Superior Restraint
Lorgan's Leaping Flame
Lorgan's Trifling Typhoon
Malakan's Silver Skin
Panguine's Providential Presumption
The Peculiar Peril
Phandaal's Observational Confinement
Prompt Call of the Pelgrane
The Puissant Word
Read Shadows of Time
Spell of Mundane Reality
Turjan's Temporary Replicant
Utilitarian Demonic Repulsion (not in mundane world)
Vorredol's Removable Eye
Warding Eyes

Should any of the other characters attempt to intervene in the fight, Llawy also bears an amulet that has been imbued with the Screen of Cold Fire.

If Llawy defeats his chosen target, then he will challenge the character with the next highest score to a duel until he is either defeated or there are no more characters left to fight. Once Llawy is defeated, the characters can claim their prize: the Blood of ZoZam.

The Blood of ZoZam

An octagonal, black obsidian bottle approximately eighteen inches high and fashioned after the Black Obelisk in Erze Damath. The silver writing on its surface is not for decoration, but acts to hold the demonic scion Gilfig imprisoned within his miniature cell. The writing is impossible to read as it shifts and changes constantly in response to Gilfig's attempts to escape. As long as the stopper remains in the bottle (it is sealed with black wax), Gilfig cannot break free. His only other means of escape is if the bottle is smashed.



Spells In the Midnight Plain (cont.)

Complex Spells

DERPG

Call to the Violent Cloud
 Charm of Forlorn Encystment
 Relocalisation
 The Second Retrotopic
 The Spell of Temporal Stasis
 Temporal Projection

TT

Calantcus' Precise Deception
 Curse of the Inspid Desuetude
 Curse of the Undignified Ancestor
 Gomoshan's Demoniatic Presence
 Lubyon's Concealing Mist
 The Personal Phantasm
 The Spell of Some Mediocrity
 Summons of the Improvident Gap
 Thasdrubal's Enfeebling Gaze
 Ventovol's Undeviating Excursion

Now that the characters have the bottle, they must decide what to do with it. Sammia has asked them to destroy the demon within, which requires them to open the bottle. They are under no obligation to do so and can now attempt to leave the Midnight Plain with their prize. If this is their choice, they emerge from the Shining Hole and come face to face with the Silver Quorum as detailed below (6.3.1).

6.2.2 The Demon's Child

If the characters decide to fulfil the task they have been set, it is probably better to get it over with as quickly as possible and to do it in a place where as few other people as possible can get involved. Whilst the Midnight Plain is an ideal location in many ways, there are limitations (see above). Opening or smashing the bottle will release the demon, who is itching to get his revenge on those who imprisoned him all those millennia ago.

When Gilfig appears, the characters must make a Wherewithal roll to avoid fleeing (again, the Lady's Kiss should help them here). After that, it is up to the characters to determine the best way to destroy the creature (the sword being the most useful thing they have for this) although he is susceptible to some types of magic (see box). If you are using Demons of the Dying Earth, spells such as Calantcus' Imminent Splendor and Simbilis' Diabolical Restraint may also prove handy.

If the characters prove to be victorious, Gilfig gives an almighty roar (a failed Health roll will result in perforated eardrums and a levy of 1 on all subsequent actions until healed

Gilfig, Scion of ZoZam

*Give me their names that I might make them writhe
 in agony for an eternity.*

Gilfig is rather tall for a man, being approximately seven feet in height. His skin is flesh colored but with a slight greyish-blue mottling on his limbs. His once beatific face is twisted into a permanent sneer of disdain and there are signs of scorching on his naked body (his robes are currently in Erze Damath). His voice is full of rage and pain and his eyes are blood red and swollen. His jet-black hair is long and unkempt. He has two pairs of arms mounted on his broad and elongated chest, but is otherwise anatomically correct. He is unarmed.

Persuasion (Intimidating) ~+4, Rebuff (Penetrating) ~+3, Attack (Ferocity) 2~, Defence (Vexation) ~+4, Magic (innate) ~, Health 12, Athletics ~, Perception 10, Wherewithal 12

Innate Magic: if he gains an Illustrious success on an Attack roll, Gilfig can cause blood to gush through the victim's skin where it was touched (even if the target's Defence/Health roll was successful; in this case it does no Injury, but the character acts at a levy of 1 unless they make a successful Wherewithal roll).

Gilfig makes his Health check at a boon of +1 (to reflect his partial resistance to mundane physical damage) and in keeping with the rules set out in Demons of the Dying Earth, the symbol ~ is not capped at 8 for him. He can also attack up to four people at a time with no penalty due to his extra appendages (although to start with he will probably be limited to two as a result of being somewhat rusty after his long imprisonment).



Dastra

Gilfig and Magic

As with other demons, Gilfig is resistant to some spells but particularly susceptible to others. Below is a list of spells that do not affect him and two that have enhanced effects:

No Effect:

Charm of Necroptic Enveiglement
 Charm of Perceptual Disarray
 Clambard's Rein of the Long Nerves
 Felojun's First Hypnotic Spell
 Felojun's Second Hypnotic
 Formulary of Expedient Ambiguity
 Javanne's Enervation of Will
 Klopag's Inaccurate Recollection
 Lugwiler's Dismal Itch
 Mazirian's Irrational Hatred
 Peritaur's Monitory Atheism
 Rhialto's Green Turmoil
 Spell of Twelve Unavoidable Questions
 The Impropratorius Tongue
 The Seventh Set's Web of Hiding
 The Sudden Spell of Irritation

Special Effect

Issuance of the Primordial Whisper: actually makes Gilfig feel more confident and he subsequently gains a bonus on his next three rolls

Literal Organic Expulsion: as quoted on DDE p. 45, this spell is particularly effective against demons (not that this is widely known), causing them to explode in a shower of stinking goo and pulsating blobs.

instead of the normal Hurt levy) and appear to tear himself apart at his very seams. The whole of the Midnight Plain will begin to quake and collapse in upon itself. It is definitely time to leave. There is a shaft of light coming down into the Plain from their entry point—standing in it will propel the characters back onto the platform in the underground dock beneath Dastra (with the same sensations as when they entered).

If the characters fail and Gilfig is victorious, then a very angry scion is about to go and hunt for those people who betrayed him (and seeing as they are long dead, that means any and all of their descendants are in for a bit of a nasty surprise). Once he has avenged himself he will return to Gamamere, the demonic plain from which he hailed originally, leaving a trail of carnage in his wake (provided Valdaran's Green Legion don't get him first).

If the characters decide to keep the Blood as it is and not open it at all, then they risk the bottle smashing in transit. It is

The True Blood of ZoZam

(30 points, Permanent)

As we mentioned all that time ago in Chapter 2, what the true Blood of ZoZam can actually do is really down to you. Please permit us to make some useful suggestions as to its true nature:

Each drop of blood forms a warrior of the faith to fight for the person who holds the bottle. The warriors are resistant to mind control and fight with the statistics: Attack (Ferocious) *, Defence (Parry) *, Health *

Adding a drop of the blood to a drink forms a potent poison that slowly transforms the victim into a ravaging half-man with four arms (Potency 2)

Placing a drop of the blood on each eye allows the target to travel to the demon realm of Gamamere

Weapons anointed with the blood gain a boon of +1 in all attacks against demons and otherworldly creatures.

relatively fragile to begin with, but removal to the mundane world just increases its fragility. Any Dismal failure that the character carrying the Blood suffers has a 50% chance of breaking the relic as well.

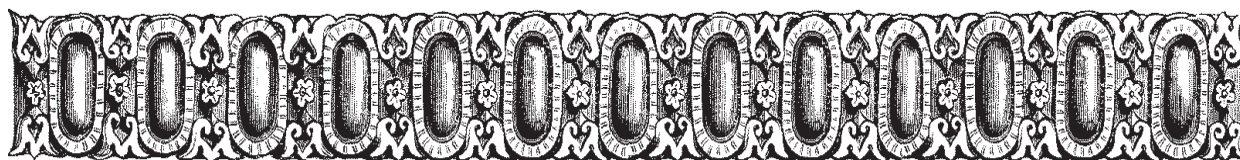
If the bottle remains intact after opening (i.e. the characters release Gilfig by taking out the stopper rather than by brute force), they will find themselves in possession of a quite remarkable and potentially very powerful artefact. Funnily enough, once Gilfig has departed the bottle it isn't anywhere near as fragile as when he was in it and is no longer subject to the above breakage ruling.

6.3 The End In Sight

The characters (if they succeeded) are no doubt feeling very pleased with themselves right around now. But there is one important thing that they may well have forgotten about—the Silver Quorum. If the party is in poor shape after its battles with Llavy and Gilfig, we suggest postponing this encounter until they have had a chance to regain some of their strength. This not only allows them a fighting chance against the Quorum, but should also give the players chance to catch their breath. Each member of the Quorum has a list of suggested spells, but feel free to alter them with one exception—those spells specific to the Quorum must be kept (Huntsman's Curse, Huntsman's Prey, Mark of Grace and Octagonal Curse). Each member of the Quorum also bears the Mark of Grace.

6.3.1 Out of the Frying Pan

As the characters make their way out of the ruins of the Shining Hole, they find a familiar face waiting for them. It is Giemadia, but she is no longer the pleasant textile expert from Erze Damath. Now she is revealed in her true glory as a member of the Silver Quorum and her eyes no longer burn with dry wit, but with incandescent fury.



Giemadia, Irate Witch

Now let's see just what you are capable of.

The change that has come over Giemadia is alarming. Gone are the friendly smiles and the witty banter to be replaced by a face filled with suppressed rage and a voice that hisses bile with every word. Worse still is that she is not alone. Determined that even if the characters should defeat Llawy and liberate/destroy Gilfig their secret will remain hidden, the whole Quorum has decamped to Dastra to destroy the party.

Persuasion (Intimidating) 14 (Charming) 9, Rebuff (Penetrating) 10, Attack (Finesse) 11, Defence (Intuition) 12, Magic (Devious) 10, Health 10, Appraisal 6, Athletics 6, Craftsmanship (textiles) 12, Imposture 7, Pedantry (textiles) 10, Perception 8, Seduction 7, Wherewithal 8.

Spells: Archemand's Unlikely Self Restraint, Calancus' Instant Dispulsion, Curse of Unwitting Merriment, Edan's Thaumaturgic Poultice, Excellent Prismatic Spray, Huntsman's Mark, Javanne's Ennervation of Will, Phandaal's Instantaneous Translation, Shabat's Ambiant Attunement, Treviolus' Emblematical Restorative

Kodarnis, Unmasked Man

You look so tired after your recent exertions. I cannot say I pity you for you are beneath contempt.

Although they do not recognise his stern face, the characters do recognise his voice—he is the gentleman behind the hound's mask at the Society of Aesthetes. Without the mask his eyes seem less jolly than they remember and he too has a look of grim determination. He really is a botanist and comes from a respected and apparently devout Gilfigite family that is even mentioned in the *Dastric Escutcheons*. He is all too well aware that if it were not for Hercurn's betrayal he would not have become a member of the Quorum and is desperate to prove both his loyalty and usefulness. As a result, he can be a little reckless (such as when he started the fire at the Funambulous Evangels Shrine).

Persuasion (Glib) 14, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 13, Attack (Strength) 15, Defence (Parry) 14, Magic (Daring) 10, Health 12, Athletics 11, Etiquette 8, Imposture 8, Pedantry 10, Perception 9, Wealth 5, Wherewithal 9

Spells: Call of Scholastic Leakage, Charm of Perceptual Disarray, Enchantment of Another's Face, Enchantment of the Stilled Tongue, Inanimate Assailant, Lorgan's Trifling Typhoon, Malakan's Silver Skin, Octagonal Curse, Phandaal's Critique of the Chill, Phunurus' Phantasmal Net

Farnuisa, Missing Companion

Such a charming man, your friend—for a peasant and a fool.

Haughty and proud, Farnuisa is too cruel to be beautiful. Her eyes are small and cold, her nose upturned and her mouth a thin, hard line in the paleness of her face. The description the characters received of her from the logging camp guards is quite correct, she does look out of place no matter where she is. All her life she has been trained to protect the family's dark secret. She relishes her role as a Quorum member and will not allow a bunch of upstarts from nowhere to ruin her family name.

Persuasion (Intimidating) 12, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 12, Attack (Cunning) 14, Defence (Vexation) 15, Magic (Forceful) 9, Health 11, Athletics 8, Etiquette 6, Imposture 8, Pedantry 10, Perception 8, Riding 4, Seduction 6, Wealth 5, Wherewithal 8

Spells: Agonising Immolation, Edan's Vibrant Restorative, Huntsman's Prey, Inviolable Attire, Mark of Grace, Obstructive Ether, Phandaal's Repudiation of Curses, Relocalisation, Rhialto's Green Turmoil

Item: Yadrnitz Charm

Trofomuire, Agent Unseen

And so, I believe, our little gathering is complete. Shall we begin, then?

This member of the Quorum is perhaps unknown to the characters (unless they've been before the Triteuchal Court where he acts as a respected Stimator), although he would be more familiar if he introduced himself as Matino. His bald head and thinning locks give him an air of respectability and his clothes add to the sense of faded grandeur. His jowly cheeks and glowing nose speak of fine living that has finally caught up with him. The oldest member (and titular leader) of the Quorum, he has grown weary of the deception but is reluctant to see all he has worked for destroyed. Still, of the group gathered here, he is the most unwilling defender and in many ways hopes that the characters will win out in the end.

Persuasion (Eloquent) 13, Rebuff (Wary) 14, Attack (Caution) 12, Defence (Dodge) 12, Magic (Studious) 8, Health 8, Athletics 6, Etiquette 8, Imposture 8, Pedantry 12, Perception 10, Stewardship 7, Wealth 4, Wherewithal 8

Spells: Edan's Thaumaturgic Poultice, Extensible Auditory Range, First Retrotropic, Llorio's Spell Stealer, Mark of Grace, Mopouchar's Reliable Proscription, Phunurus' Outstanding Replicator, Unassailable Intellect

Dastra

The Octagonal Curse

Range: Sight

Duration: Instant

Difficulty: Straightforward

Summary: Causes unsightly and painful boils to erupt on the victim's skin

Description: An old spell little used now, the Octagonal Curse inflicts multiple very painful thumbnail sized black pustules on the target. The boils are arranged in octagonal patterns and if left untreated they will rapidly grow into each other. They also harden in a short space of time, making the skin become brittle and sensitive to splitting at the slightest movement. Every round after they have been hit by the spell, the target must make a successful Health roll (mages may substitute their magic pool) or the boils spread. After eight rounds, the boils stop spreading and begin to harden. After a further eight rounds the boils are completely solidified and a successful Health roll (limit of zero) is required to prevent massive skin trauma and Injury. The spell can be halted (and cured) by Edan's Thaumaturgic Poultice and any other spell that negates magical effects.

Spell Failure: The caster is subject to this very painful rash. On a Dismal Failure, the boils erupt in the throat and mouth preventing speech (and thereby any attempts by the caster to cancel his own spell).

Style Affinity: Daring

And so, the final battle commences. If the characters have not yet dealt with Gilfig when they meet the Quorum in the ruins, then this would be a perfect opportunity to allow the demon to do their dirty work for them. Of course, they will also become his target once he has dealt with his first priority irrespective of whether or not they aided him in dispatching the Quorum. If they have destroyed Gilfig, then they must handle this fight alone.

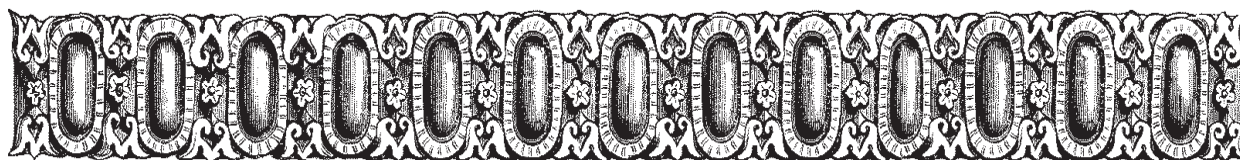
If you feel that it is in the tone of your adventure for this to be a fight to the absolute death, then please feel free to conduct it in that manner. If you wish there to be repercussions for the characters, then there is always the chance that when it becomes clear that the odds are against them, certain members of the Quorum will flee (not Farnuisa, she would much rather die than suffer the shame of defeat). If they are Hurt (or any other member of the Quorum are Down), they must make a successful Wherewithal roll. If they fail, they seek to escape back to Erze Damath (using all the standard rules for breaking off from an engagement as described on DERPG p.53).

6.3.2 Loose Ends

The Sword and Flower

If the characters defeat Gilfig and the Quorum, they are almost (but not quite) free of the nightmare they have endured over the last few months. They still have one more task to complete: the return of the relics to the Hidden People. Of course, they are under no obligation to do so, but possession of the relics should cause them nothing but trouble should they break any promises they made to Sammia.





If they do decide to honour their word, then they easily find their way back to the oasis even without a guide. The Hidden People are in mourning (whether or not Quamyto survived) and are all arrayed in purple. With the fulfilment of the Prophecy, Dendara has been released from its curse and has returned to the desert. Sadly, it is now as it would have been if it had been there all the time—a broken and empty ruin devoid of life. Of Sammia there has been no sign.

Dopor will thank the characters for their aid and for finally giving their Lady rest. He will provide the characters with food, water and a guide to reach the nearest settlement (of the characters' choice) and bid them farewell. No matter how hard they might try, there is no way back to the oasis for them once they leave this time. The Hidden People have finally sealed themselves off from the world forever.

Escape

Should any of the Silver Quorum flee the battleground, then they have the potential to become the characters' Adversary (2-5 points, depending on who it is that escapes). As they will immediately go underground after the battle, they will not be easy to find and can then prove to be a thorn in the characters' side for many adventures to come.

Should the characters be forced to flee the final battle, then the Quorum has two options: seek and destroy or watch and wait. The chosen strategy will entirely depend on which members of the Quorum survived. If Farnuisa or Kodaruis survive, they will press for seek and destroy. Trofomuire will always push for watch and wait.

Of course, the characters' actions will very much determine what response they receive. If they run straight back to Erze Damath to blab about what has happened, then any survivors will be forced to hit them fast and hard to prevent their own personal ruin. If the characters decide (wisely) to return home and try to pretend nothing happened, then they will be left in (relative) peace until such time as they decide to rake over hot coals.

Loss of Faith

There is always the chance that the golden situation (the defeat of both Gilfig and the Quorum) comes to pass. What, then, for the religion of Gilfigism? The characters should have amassed more than enough evidence to rock the foundations of the church quite severely. They've already been falsely accused of attempting to destroy one or other of the local faiths, so why not do it for real? In all fairness, the modern Gilfigite faith knows absolutely nothing about its demonic ancestry, but characters being the petty little creatures that they are, we doubt that this argument will hold much sway if they have decided to wreak spiritual vengeance upon the folk of Erze Damath¹.

The First Promise

It is such a long time ago now that the characters may well have forgotten the promise they made to Masnia. If they have the Pin, the poor lady would be most grateful for its return whether or not there are any charges remaining on it. Whilst we can see that some characters may wish to keep such a useful item, it would be most un-gentlemanly (if not downright churlish) to deny the unhappy lady's request. Any such behavior should be rewarded accordingly².

And thus ends the quest for the Blood of ZoZam through the Fields of Silver.

¹ It is up to the GM to decide whether the characters are actually believed, or end up as the unwitting founders of yet another schismatic sect.

² Should any character suggest returning the item without having to be prompted, then improve their sympathy rating instantly.



Appendix 1

Towns on the Scamander

Below are details of the towns that can be found along the River Scamander both upstream and down from Erze Damath. The list is by no means exhaustive, finishing as it does below the confluence of the Scamander and the River Asc, but should your characters wish to travel further afield from the city of scholars, we hope the following information will prove useful.

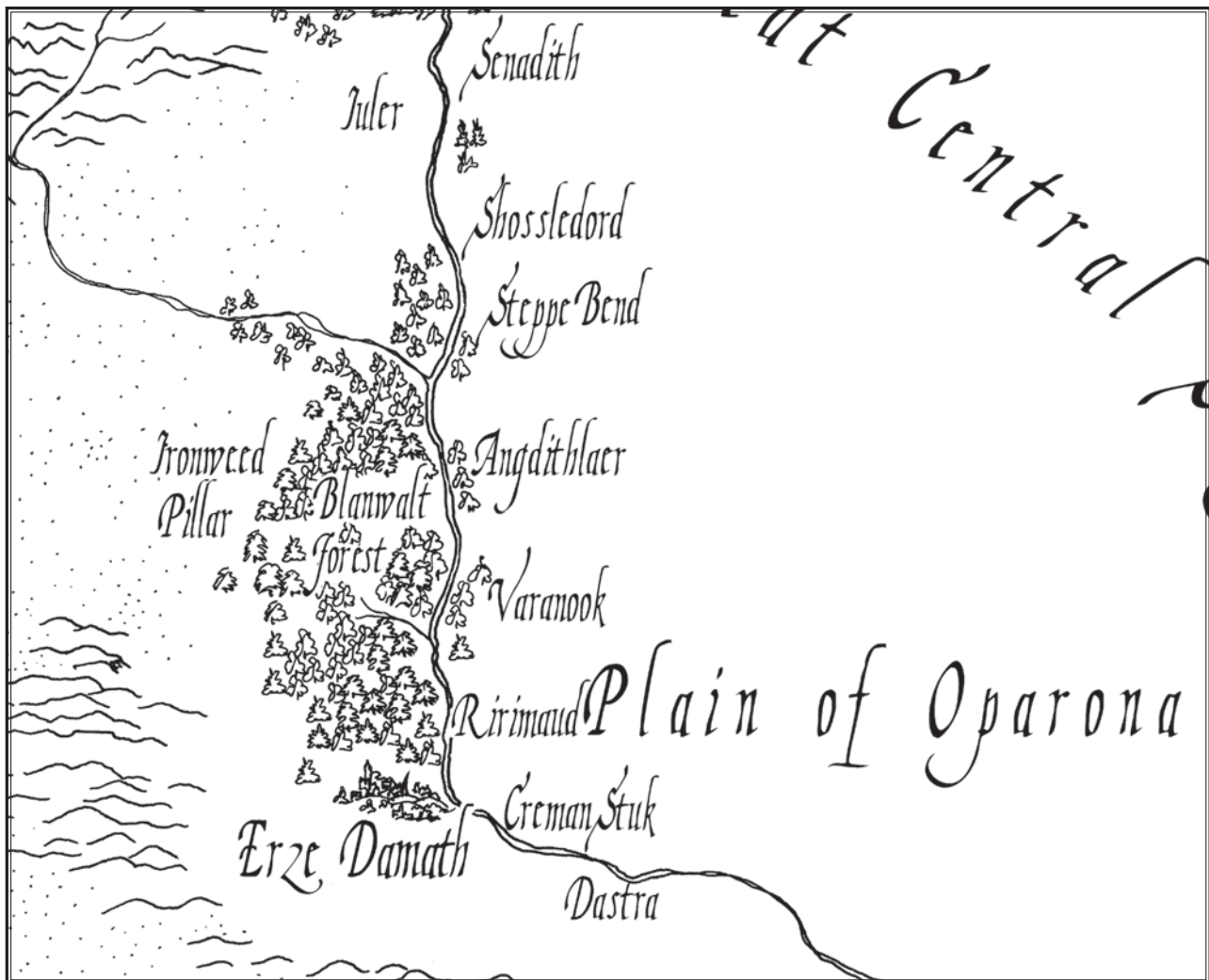
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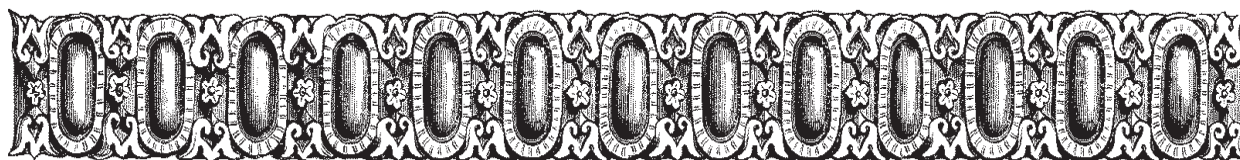
The Weir

Two days upriver from Erze Damath the itinerant traveler will find this ramshackle collection of stout posts and iron chains that

block the Scamander to waterborne vessels. Once a municipality of Erze Damath, the position of weir-keeper and toll-taker was bequeathed by the rulers of the Dastric Empire upon certain individuals of merit. As is often the case with minor officials, though, the holders stole much of the levy and so the position was officially abandoned centuries ago.

The weir is now unofficially managed by the mad hermit Bulas, who demands that travelers on the river prove their virtue by performing certain tasks before he lowers the central chain that will allow them passage downstream. His threat—that he accepts the sacrifice of the most evil traveler if there are none of virtue—is a mere jest, one that his warped mind finds highly amusing.





Bulas, River Zealot

Go back, go back! The virtuous only may pass and not one of you looks anything of the sort.

A former scholar (he attended the Nault Symposium with Eurias the Geographer), Bulas is an odd sort. Despite his proximity to Ririmaud and the bountiful river, he is gaunt and undernourished. His black robes are tattered and grubby and his personal hygiene can leave much to be desired (particularly after he has been cleaning the chains of river weed and dead fish). His long, sparse hair sticks out from his angular head like an electrified halo. He has a perverse sense of humour. He carries a large iron staff to both defend himself and maliciously prod at boats and passers-by.

Persuasion (Intimidating) 11, Rebuff (Contrary) 12, Attack (Cunning) 12, Defence (Dodge) 14, Magic (Devious) 5, Health 9, Athletics 9, Living Rough 9, Perception 11, Wherewithal 8

He has yet to make good upon it and if he is in a good mood, alcoholic beverages will suffice instead. If he is in a bad mood, the weary travelers may have to wait a considerable length of time until Bulas can contrive another task at which they can prove their worthiness.

Bulas lives in a poorly furnished but adequate hut on the east bank of the river. Much of the furniture has been salvaged from the river or taken as payment from the less virtuous. He has a cordial if distant relationship with the village of Ririmaud over the river.

Ririmaud

Close to the weir lies the village of Ririmaud. Situated on the west bank of the river, the locals are for the most part friendly and affable. Although they nod towards Gilfigism, they also regard the river as a deity as it provides for their every need in a far more immediate way than the locally revered prophet of ZoZam.

The village itself is carved from the edge of the Blanwalt Forest and consists of approximately a dozen or so huts and houses. There are no more than ten families living in the village, which makes a steady income from pilgrims returning home up the river (for some odd reason Bulas leaves these travelers alone, preferring to persecute those going to the city not coming from it).

The inn at Ririmaud is good, clean and reasonably priced. Its food is of a high quality and has the distinction of serving Kutt's hybrids as the central ingredient of its culinary creations. The wine here is not so good, but the fruit cordials (also to be found at the Old Dastric Empire Hostelry) are an excellent substitute. The three most popular varieties are musk-apple, mungberry and tang-grass (although this last one is something of an acquired taste). Care must be taken if unused to these beverages, as many travelers have lived to regret unwary overindulgence of these surprisingly alcoholic juices (whilst fervently wishing they hadn't).

Bunil, Host of the Inn on the River

Might I recommend the fillet of newisc served on a bed of forest herbs?

Bunil is a quiet woman, watchful and patient. She sees many strange sights here beside the river (not least of which is Bulas) but it takes a lot to faze her. Her business is steady and she enjoys her role as unofficial mayor of the village (which allows her to exercise her formidable organizational skills on everyone, not just her customers and staff). Her coloring suggests that there is Plains Nomad in her ancestry.

Persuasion (Charming) 12, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 14, Attack (Caution) 10, Defence (Intuition) 11, Health 10, Perception 10, Scuttlebutt 8, Stewardship 6, Wealth 2, Wherewithal 7

The villagers supplement their diet with fish caught by slinging nets across the weir. Some of this fish is dried and traded with the nomads on the Plains of Oparona. Cereal and vegetable crops are coaxied from the cleared soil of the forest and overall the land is prosperous and fertile.

Varanook

A further three days upstream of Ririmaud lies the hamlet of Varanook. There is little of note here as there is no inn to tempt the traveler, but the inhabitants are friendly and quite willing to take in travelers (for a small fee, naturally). It is one of the few places left that still practices Upaithric Ecdysiasm, a rustic cult given over to naturalistic worship in sacred glades. As a result, the village is popular with the younger men of Erze Damath seeking to "broaden their cultural horizons" as it is politely phrased.

The village lies on the east bank of the river and as such there is often contact with the Plains' nomads. The relationship is wary but not hostile as the villagers also supply the nomads with fish and religious principles. As a result, the population is mongrel to say the least, with aspects of every race ever to have inhabited the area (and quite few that haven't) represented in the resident population.

Angdithlaer

The village of Angdithlaer nestles against the edge of the Blanwalt Forest a two-day trip upstream from Varanook. The village was allegedly established by Uenmund, a disciple of Gilfig from his time as a wandering preacher.

It is notable only for the presence of the Temple of the Order of the Acersecomic. The temple is the home of a mendicant cult of Gilfigites who wear their hair long and unadorned. The monks maintain a library of sacred texts (the Manuscriptorium), which is open to research by local scholars. There is a small fee for such research and the monks provide spartan catering facilities and board on request. There are often members of the Xalguire Conservatory to be found deep in study in the dimly lit research chambers.

Other features of the temple worth seeing (the monks provide guided tours for a terce) are the orioide chamber (exquisite

Towns on the Scamander

mosaics adorn the walls and the ceiling positively glistens with enamelled portraits of the saints of the Gilfigite faith) and the merkin chamber (a room in which the less hirsute brethren store their ceremonial wigs, many of which have been handed down through successive generations).

The founder of the village Uenmund is credited as the author of *Travels and Preaching in the Farthest East*, only one copy of which still resides in the temple. The other was apparently stolen by a visitor¹. As a result, no one is left unattended in the Manuscriptorium and even regular visitors must be accompanied by a brother at all times.

Steppe Bend

A considerable distance (approximately ten days travel) upstream from Erze Damath is the Funambulous Evangel enclave of Steppe Bend. It rises above the eastern bank of the river on tall pillars that are connected by a cat's cradle of ropes and wires. These pillars are an extension of the jetties that stick out into the river.

Not only are the walkways in Steppe Bend aerial, but all the gardens and vegetable plots are too. By a cunning arrangement of platforms and irrigation systems, the dietary requirements of the local population is catered for without ever having need to set foot on the ground below. The locals shun animal flesh, preferring to eat only fish and shellfish caught from the river.

There is no inn at Steppe Bend, although there is ample mooring for riverboats and the inhabitants are willing to provide catering if required. Although gracious hosts, the piety of the inhabitants is not to all tastes (nor are their attempts at conversion to the faith) and many orthodox Gilfigites prefer to avoid the town altogether.

Shossledord

At the northern tip of the Blanwalt Forest sits the hamlet of Shossledord. In fact it is barely even a hamlet, consisting as it does of only three houses. These are built on stilts out into the river and are connected to the bank by a drawbridge (to protect the inhabitants from the attentions of the forest creatures which occasionally come down to the river here to drink).

The people here are also Funambulous Evangels, although this does not prevent them from entering the forest to collect small quantities of exotic woods, which they trade with merchants and pilgrims who pass through. As with Steppe Bend there is no inn but here the mooring is limited and the locals cater only to a passing trade. The only other feature of note is that Calbersc's wife Derisi originally hailed from here and her aged mother is still a resident.

Iuler

A curious cluster of houses on the western bank a few days upstream of Shossledord, Iuler has no wharves, only a gentle sandy beach on which the locals draw up their fishing boats. The inhabitants are very industrious and farm the land with great

diligence and as a result have one of the best diets of all the river inhabitants, being an even mix of vegetables, cereals, herd beast and fish. The vegetables they produce are a source of income and are often traded to other villages if the crop is bountiful.

A more secure form of income for the villagers is the sale of their alcoholic beverages (produced from cereal crops). The beer is famed locally for its potency and they also produce a grain spirit that those unused to the taste may prefer to use as lamp fuel. The villagers also do a roaring trade in carved bone trinkets, which they sell to the pilgrims who stop here on their way to Erze Damath.

The most notable feature of Iuler, though, is the peculiar dress sense of its inhabitants. Although the clothes are not grand and tend to be made of locally produced fibres colored with natural dyes, the cut of them is totally unique to very individual. No two people will ever be dressed the same here and the uniformity of dress seen elsewhere in the region is a source of great amusement to the villagers (not that they would be so rude as to actually laugh in front of their visitors, though).

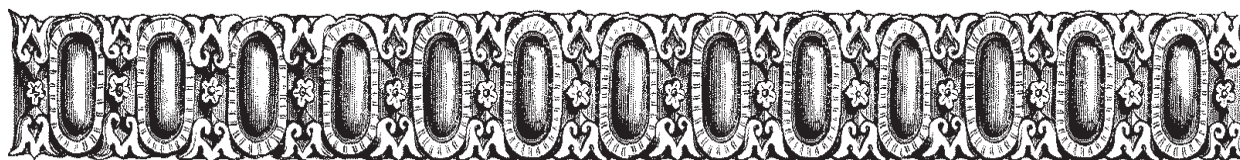
Senadith

The crumbling remains of this walled town lie on the eastern bank of the Scamander four days further on from Iuler. Although the wall has seen better days, the stockade around the city is in much better repair. The houses here are built into the fabric of the wall (where possible) to keep them above both the water and the ever-present mud. The town is criss-crossed with all manner of duckboards to enable the inhabitants to keep their feet dry and the fashion is for long, thigh-length boots of sturdy leather held up by shoulder braces.

Senadith is one of the few places along the Scamander that fresh water molluscs grow (due to the faster flow of the river keeping the water clean and oxygenated). These creatures are not only a delicacy in their own right, but are also the source of a powerful purple dye used in the manufacture of high quality textiles. The associated pearl fishery is also of great value to the town and both the dye and the pearls can be seen gracing the beautiful people of the Dying Earth the world over. If the molluscs ever failed, the town would soon cease to exist.

There is an inn in Senadith, which is basic but mostly comfortable (if you don't mind mud). Most people prefer to stay on their boats as the town is occasionally harried by nomads from the Central Steppes. Attempts at setting up trade relations with the nomads have failed and all adult inhabitants still able to walk unaided are part of a local militia charged with repulsing unwelcome advances from the east (meaning that all manner of weapons are openly displayed here).

¹ A foul canard if ever I heard one. It was doubtless merely removed for restoration by a well-wisher



Downriver

Creman Stuk

Once home to the last throws of the Dastric textile industry, Creman Stuk is now the location of inferior vineyards that seek to rival those of the sacred hill. It lies one day downstream of Erze Damath on the eastern bank of the river. It is still considered a pleasant place for a day out from the city and as a result is home to a fine inn, the Pilgrim's Dusk. The ale here is good, the food sufficient, and the wine passable.

The land on the edge of the Plains is excellent wine country, although the growers have yet to garner the expertise of their city rivals. It is still a young winery that improves with each passing season and the tedders are growing more confident in both their horticultural skill and repelling any odd hybrid that wanders in from the Plain. The nomads are quite happy to stay away, too, as long as they receive a small tribute of the end product every year.

Other

The Plain Of Oparona

Running along the eastern shore of the Scamander lies the Plain. These are fertile grasslands, guarded jealously by their inhabitants. It was here that King Kutt had his palace (exact location unknown) and housed his menagerie. Indeed, the majority of the wildlife in this region is directly descended from those creatures. The benefit of these creatures to Erze Damath is immense as they have discouraged attacks from the eastern Steppe since time out of mind. As a result, hunting here is frowned upon whilst that in the Blanwalt Forest is positively encouraged.

Also in this region are the fabled orchards of the mad monarch. They are currently believed to reside in an area between the weir at Ririmaud and Varanook and it is rumored that many of the glades used by the Upaithric Ecdysiasts are the remains of the once ordered rows of fruiting trees. The exact nature of the fruits grown here has been lost to horticulture, but rumors persist that a miraculous berry-bush that helped to retard the aging process was at the heart of Kutt's design. There may even be some truth to it, as Kutt purportedly died at a very great age.

The nomads who do live here can be identified by their pale skin and silky red hair (in marked contrast to their swarthy Erzite neighbors). The style in which their distinctive topknots are worn indicates both family and tribal affiliation in a manner similar to that of the scarves of the desert peoples. Although most are decidedly unfriendly towards travelers (who they regard as interlopers rather than sightseers), those tribes on the western fringes do maintain trading relations with villages and towns along the river and can often be seen in the less reputable establishments in Erze Damath.

Still, they are all distinctly more pleasant than those tribes of the Central Steppe (to whom they are closely related), whose altogether harsher existence has done little to temper their manners towards outsiders. The boundary between the two lands (at least

Efstral Twil, Proprietor and Vintner

Ah yes an excellent choice of ale, even if I do say so myself.

The senior male of the Twil family runs the Pilgrim's Dusk. He is undistinguished in his features and bearing and is passing his middle years. His manners, though, are impeccable and he is a good host who takes pride in his service. The inn, a former weaver's residence, is his inheritance although he plans to leave his son far better. As well as the landlord of the Pilgrim's Dusk, Efstral was instrumental in his youth in the development of the Stuk vineyards and is somewhat of an expert on the vintner's art.

Persuasion (Charming) 13, Rebuff (Penetrating) 14, Attack (Caution) 10, Defence (Parry) 10, Magic (Curious) 2, Health 8, Athletics 6, Etiquette 7, Pedantry (wine-making) 8, Perception 9, Scuttlebutt 7, Stewardship 6, Wealth 2, Wherewithal 6

Minin Twil, Struggling Fop

Not again? Are you quite sure that the rules are thus and so?

Minin is a pleasant chap, who tries hard but has little success in managing his affairs. The customers who frequent his father's inn regularly fleece him at cards (but always make sure he gets his money back by the end of the evening¹) and it is somewhat of a local sport to see who can relieve him of his coins the quickest on any given evening. He runs a local boat-tour taking visitors along the river as far as the Summer Palace in Dastra and also provides fishing trips for the more sportsman-like traveler. Unlike his father, he has no interest in wine other than the drinking of it. He secretly dreads the day when he will be expected to take control of his father's vineyards and wants nothing more than to spend his days on his beloved river, fishing.

Persuasion (Glib) 10, Rebuff (Pure-hearted) 10, Attack (Speed) 11, Defence (Sure-footedness) 12, Health 10, Athletics 10, Gambling 2, Perception 4, Seamanship 8, Wherewithal 6

¹ Minin has a wife, Nyra, who is powerfully built, astute and remarkably light on her feet. A back handed slap from her once broke the jaw of a bosun who thought to take liberties

at the western frontier) is demarcated by a line of trees running in a south-easterly direction. Who planted the trees is unknown, but King Kutt is widely blamed (as he is for almost everything not directly attributable to the Dastric Empire).



Appendix 2

Items and Spells of Interest

Below is list of items (both magical and mundane) and spells that are likely to be encountered in the Fields of Silver, accompanied by a brief definition and where they are to be located within this book.

Items of Note

The (True) Blood of ZoZam

An octagonal obsidian bottle originally used to imprison Gilfig, but possessed of untold power after his release/destruction. (p. 102)

The Desert Flower

Ornate silk flower heavily embellished with embroidery and jewels used as a focus for the Song of Life. (q.v.) (p. 87)

Desert Rush Tapers

Slow burning and faint candles used by the Hidden People to aid night travel. (p. 79)

Glowstone

Charged luminescent crystals used by glimmister miners. (p. 80)

Holy Robes Of Gilfig

Item sacred to the followers of Gilfig. Confers healing on the faithful (the Blessing of Gilfig). (p. 49)

The Huntsman's Horn

One of a set of ceremonial silver trumpets used to call the faithful of Erze Damath to prayer. Also an essential item in the summoning of the Wind Riders. (p. 68)

Lily Seeds

Collected from the Starsand Lily after pollination (and hence incredibly rare) these seeds are necessary for full use of the Desert Flower. (q.v.) (p. 87)

The Moon Key

Beautifully crafted but deadly key to the Midnight Realm. Made by the renowned silversmiths of Dastra at the behest of the Silver Quorum. (pp. 14, 71)

Screen of Cold Fire

Amulet containing an icy barrier to outside interference. (p. 99)

Sword of Sammech

Mythical sword made entirely from glimmister. Incredibly sharp and strong, it is particularly effective against otherworldly entities. (p. 87)

Vozurd's Pin of Expedient Transit

Useful item for rapid travel. Excellent for ensuring that you are always on time, no matter where you started. (p. 27)

Spells

New spells introduced in this supplement.

The Fruit of the Desert

Encourages unusual but edible fruit to sprout from any wooden object above a minimum size. (p. 86)

The Octagonal Curse

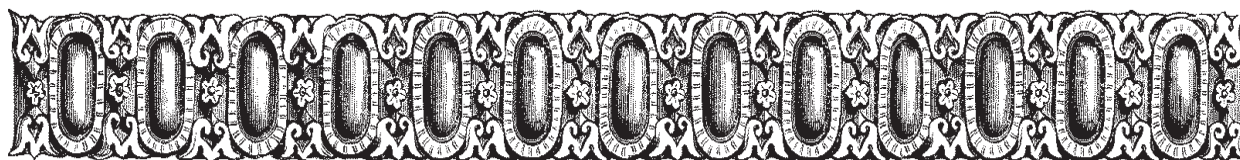
Causes painful and unpleasant skin eruptions on the target. (p. 104)

The Song of Life

Encourages the violent growth and behavior of Lily Seeds. (q.v.) (p. 87)

Taigmes Dew of the Dawn

Produces cool and refreshing water in a suitable nearby container. (p. 86)



Inscriptive Magic

This is a very ancient form of sorcery in the Dying Earth, one that is all but forgotten by modern scholars despite its continued practice amongst what might often (and erroneously) be called the less sophisticated peoples of the world. Most often associated with protective forms of magic, it also works equally well under less beneficial circumstances.

To perform this type of spell, the caster must not only have a copy of the verbal component of the spell and the necessary inks and instruments but also thorough understanding of the associated design element as well. This element consists of both the design itself and the correct order in which the symbols contained therein must be inscribed. It is very rare for such information to be completely committed to paper (the practices are usually transmitted from teacher to pupil orally and by example) and over time many of the inscription sequences have been lost.

In order to perform the “ritual” (for want of a better word), the caster must prepare the pigments according to a strict recipe (often, but not always, garnered from some innately magical plant or animal). Needles range from ironweed spines to sharks teeth and everything imaginable in between. Incantations are chanted as these tasks are undertaken and a stumbled word here can ruin the final effect just as efficiently as at any of the later application stages.

After the target has been prepared (this is a difficult brand of magic to apply to unwilling targets if they are conscious), the full procedure can commence. The formula of the main enchantment is now incanted, each phrase precisely timed to one particular line of the tattoo as it is worked into the flesh. Some procedures can take hours to complete if they contain particularly complex central elements. Both the chanting and the tattooing must be successful if the spell is to have its full effect.

The only way to negate such charms is to remove the tattoo in some way (burning and flaying have both proved to be effective in this regard) or to have a counter-spell inscribed to negate its effect. It is rare for such magics to be taught to outsiders and full proficiency requires years of dedicated learning and practice.

Examples of such spells in this supplement are below.

Gilfig’s Armour of Righteousness

Protection against damage from mundane weapons. (p. 99)

The Huntsman’s Mark

A means with which to tag and ultimately destroy your enemies. (p. 40)

The Huntsman’s Prey

Causes those murdered by the Wind Riders to attack a named target or targets. (p. 38)

The Lady’s Kiss

Protection against supernatural forces. (p. 83)

The Mark of Grace

Protection against supernatural forces and mind control. (p. 99)



Appendix 3

Creatures and Plants

For those creatures which are detailed in the main text, we provide below a brief summary and a guide to where they might be located. We also provide for your further use a selection of other creatures of note.

Those of an Animal Nature

Follinense's Creatures

Also known as King Kutt's menagerie. Bizarre and fertile hybrids created by the wizard Follinense for his insane master.

Cisden: Nervous toothy creature with a high pitched scream. (p. 34)

Decdo: Twelve-legged trouble maker (p. 57)

Eoqui: Intelligent feathered horse (p. 57)

Erca: Crab-headed humanoid hybrids (p. 34)

Newsic: Bad-tempered forest hunter (p. 34)

Shay: Bouncing transporters of sturdy items (p. 57)

Teulu: Agile aerial strangler (p. 34)

Usim: Speedy serpentine beasts of burden (p. 57)

Location: the Blanwalt Forest and the Plain of Oparona (in the wild); Erze Damath (in captivity)

Desert Night Beetle

Nocturnal insects that live in communal groups. The males and females both have glow-sacks, but they are of different colors. Scholars believe that not only are they useful for the beetles in locating others of their kind at night over great distances, but that they are also used in a rudimentary communication system (having been observed to flash in complex patterns under study conditions).

Perfectly harmless to humans, in a pinch they make an acceptable snack when roasted over a campfire. The contents of the glow-sack (as well as being used to create tapers) give the bug a piquant flavour and may have mildly hallucinogenic properties.

Location: Silver Desert

Giant Scorpions

Large, cantankerous and potentially deadly insects. p. 76.

Location: Silver Desert.

Sand Weevils

A small and unpleasant inhabitant of the Songan Sea's eastern shoreline. Although under most circumstances it is quite content to live off the marine life abundant in the shallow waters of the Sea, in those areas frequented by the Yob it has developed a taste for humanoid flesh (including that of half-men). The jumping flea-like adult attempts to gain purchase on its target's hair, then burrows into the scalp to lay its eggs. When the larvae hatch, they proceed to eat the poor unfortunate alive.

The creatures dislike thick, coarse hair (which is harder to dig through) and have a particular aversion to the seaweed preparation the Yob use to arrange their hair. The best way to remove an infestation (eggs or larvae) is to apply this thick paste and leave it to suffocate and poison the young. Fire is also an effective, if extreme, method of dealing with the little blighters.

Location: Sandy beaches along the eastern coast of the Songan Sea.

Reibeike

Large black animals resembling a cross between a shark and a whale (p. 28)

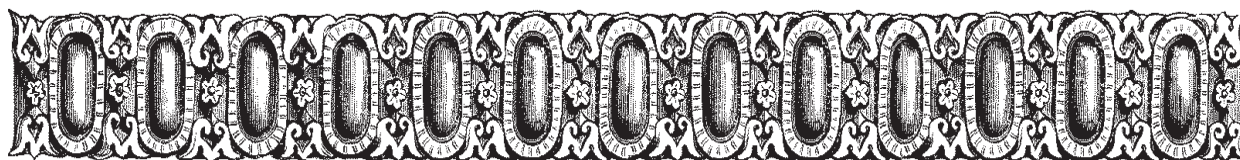
Location: The dark sea

Scurrids

The scurrid is an ugly creature with no external ears, a short thick nose and sharp, dagger-like teeth. They have large, flat eyes and are covered in a dense coat of fine hair (which insulates them against the river's cold). Although some scholars would have these creatures classified as people, their heritage is altogether more varied and unsavory than such an epithet would suggest. Whilst their base matrix is indeed human, scurrids also contain plasms of both the vinuncular gid and the aquatic rat.

As a rule they are timid creatures who shun human contact as far as it is possible, but their carnivorous lifestyle and volatile nature (in no small part due to the gid in their makeup) means that they can be a danger to unwary travelers along the Scamander. They speak gutter Dastric amongst themselves and can manage little better when forced to deal with outsiders.

The creatures are nocturnal and prefer to fish from reed bundles, which they sit astride and paddle along the river with their large, webbed hands. Although there have been no reported cases of such barbaric practices, it is widely believed that scurrids would have little problem in feasting on human flesh. They like their fish raw and are partial to reed pith, which is good for the maintenance of their teeth.



Persuasion (Obfuscatory) 8, Rebuff (Contrary) 9, Attack (Speed) 10, Defence (Dodge) 12, Health 11, Athletics 9, Craftsmanship 7, Living Rough 8, Wherewithal 6

Location: Upstream of Erze Damath as far as Schossledord. It is believed that they nest in the Blanwalt Forest during daylight hours and their range extends only as far as the northern reaches of the trees.

Ulangers

The Ulander in its natural state is a magnificent bird possessed of an intelligence rare in avian species as a whole. Originally from the Plain of Oparona, it is a large bird, naturally crimson, russet and black with a wingspan of nearly twelve ells. They are carrion eaters and have thrived on the rich pickings from Follinense's hybrids.

Its intelligence has made it the subject of several successful experiments on the part of the aviphile Ptarmigan Corax (who maintains an estate to the south-east of Erze Damath). He has managed to not only blend its matrix with those of other useful birds, but has also devised a method for placing a tiny water elemental in the bird's sensorium upon which can be impressed a picture of any destination. This has made it particularly useful in the drawing of such aerial modes of transport as the whirlaway, where (by analogy to wormingers and their craft) the birds can be utilized to speed the passengers safely on to a set destination (See the illustration on page 16). In this guise the birds display a peculiar fascination with singing, particularly bawdy tavern ballads.

Attack (Speed) 8, Defence (Dodge) 10, Magic (innate) 2, Health 10, Perception 12, Wherewithal 7

Location: Primarily the Plain of Oparona, otherwise in private collections

Those of a Floral Nature

Ironweed

A tough, grey shrub whose spines have many uses.

Location: The Silver Desert and (rarely) in private collections. The only wild example outside the Silver Desert is in the Blanwalt Forest (p. 39, 75)

Oasis Herbs

Medicinal (if bitter) plants. (p. 88)

Location: Tend to be found around true oases in the Silver Desert (particularly that of the Hidden People).

Purple Lyebush

Tempting but deadly fruiting shrub. (p. 76)

Location: The Silver Desert in association with pools of Deadwater.

Starsand Lily

See page 17 for a description. Believed to be extinct, this lily still survives in the heart of the Silver Desert on the site of the castle of Dendara. For much of the time it is dormant, springing to life only when the castle is due back in the desert. In an evening (or the first light of day), it appears as if the white flowers float above the desert supported by nothing more than thin air. The pollen sacs were once used to produce a fine ink beloved by scholars for illuminating manuscripts. It is now solely used by the Hidden People in their rituals.



Location: Dendara in the Silver Desert

Swallet Hornwood

A relatively rare tree, prized for its fine white wood that resembles animal horn when stripped of its bark. It is used predominantly for high quality panelling and the production of objets d'art (which can be found for sale in the better establishments in Kaiin). One of the largest known stands of this tree appears to mark the boundary between the Plain of Oparona and the Central Steppe. Due to its potentially hazardous location, these particular trees have so far escaped felling on any sort of scale. The bark can be used in the production of an acrid incense guaranteed to drive off insects and can also be woven into baskets after soaking in vinegar.

Location: Isolated pockets across the Dying Earth