

DNH3

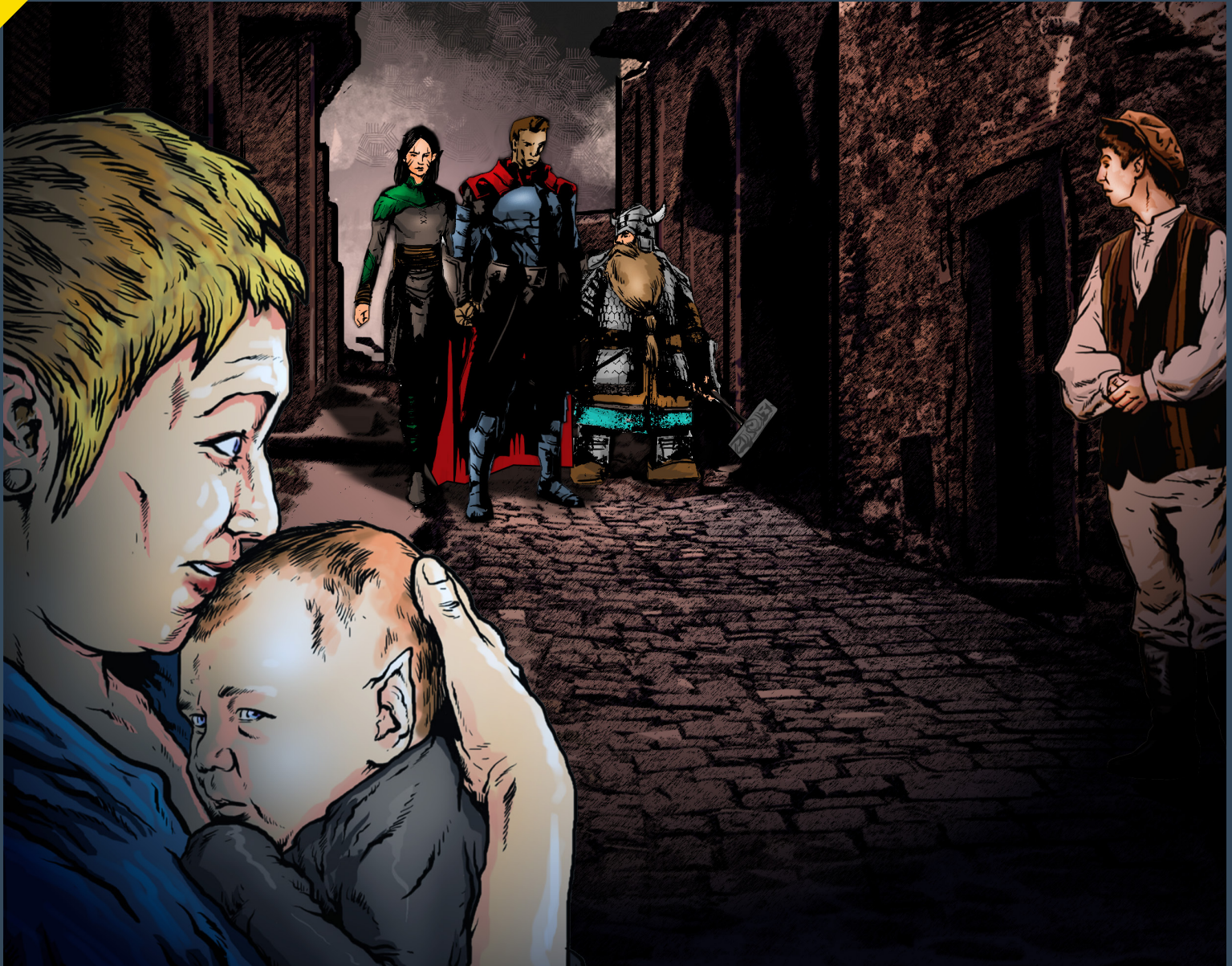
Fifth Edition
Fantasy

Part Three of the
Haunting of Hastur Series

The City of Talos

by L. Kevin Watson

An Adventure for Characters Levels 8–10



The City of Talos is an adventure for 3–7 characters levels 8–10 and designed for use with most versions of the best known fantasy roleplaying game. It is optimized for the fifth edition and for 5 characters at level 9.



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DNH3: The City of Talos—Gazetteer

Dark Naga Adventures

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City of Talos—Gazetteer

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History of the Formene and the Formene Elves

Tumunzar hosts five tribes of elves. These tribes are represented on the continent of Barestir. Four of these tribes live in the vast forests of Barestir. However, one tribe left the forest during the First Age of Man with a mission, the Elonde.

Several thousand years ago, strong, light, and rare metals—adamantine and mithril—were discovered in the deep earth. This happened early in the First Age of Man; man, dwarf, elf, and halfling learned to make spectacular weapons and armor from these new metals. These items quickly became valuable due to their strength, durability, and ability to hold enchantment. Man's thirst seemed unquenchable. One tribe of elves, the Elonde, concerned that man would destroy the subterranean realm in pursuit of the metals and minerals of the deep earth, moved into "The Lands of Night", Formene in Elvish, and negotiated with the native denizens to become wardens of the subterranean realm and its resources.

The tribe was quite large, nearly five hundred thousand strong, and committed to the project. Some began contacting the intelligent denizens to initiate diplomatic talks. Others looked for suitable places to build cities and to establish their presence. The balance focused on finding and securing every entrance to the Formene they could find. This process took the bulk of a century and yielded enormous progress. During that first century, the elves changed dramatically, becoming the pale-skinned, bulbous-eyed creatures of rock that they are today.

The Elonde divided themselves among the five Formene regions, and became the wardens of their respective regions. The five Formene areas include the vast lands under the Batun and the Alithis (greater) Mountain ranges and the Gorthsea, Oliden, and Argors (lesser) Mountain ranges. Each nation acts independently of the others, but they share goals, values, and methods. Long tunnels carved from bedrock connect the nations to each other, and communication is steady. The actions of the party will be known to the entire Formene within a month. Each nation formed several cities

across its region, including a capital. The capital of the Batun nation is Talos; it is supported by six smaller cities, each of about fifteen thousand residents: Vinione, Hellone, Valone, Ossinone, Formone, and Eglone.

With time, the Elonde discovered that the Formene is divided into distinct bands. The Upper Formene consists of the top two miles of crust. Middle Formene and Deep Formene are two to eight miles deep and deeper than eight miles, respectively. These divisions are more temperature and natural flora and fauna driven than political, but most nations exist within a single band. The svirfneblin and the stone giant nations had a presence in the Upper Formene and Middle Formene even before the elves became the wardens of the Formene. Recently, deep duergar have hunted in the Middle Formene, but have not established anything beyond temporary hunting camps in the Middle Formene. Deep duergar have their capital (Akizdin) and dozens of smaller settlements (Zindin, Khathdin, Undin, Gabdin, and Naradin) in the Deep Formene. The elven diplomatic staff assigned to them expect expansion into the Middle Formene over the next century as they grow and become more comfortable with their distant cousins, the duergar.

Today, the Formene Elves of the Batun region maintain diplomatic and trade relations with ten races and sixteen nations. The kobolds are split into three nations along religious lines, the goblins are split into four nations due to irreconcilable tribal differences in leadership, and the grimlocks remain divided into two nations because neither wants to abandon its tribal territories to unite. The remaining seven races are consolidated into a single nation for each race, even when they are scattered hundreds of miles between their towns and other settlements.

The Formene nations of the Batun region have well-established boundaries to minimize conflict over hunting, farming, gathering, and living. While Talos is brightly lit, the diplomatic core has areas kept completely dark for the comfort of those visiting for formal meetings and less official reasons. Everyone is welcome to tour Talos; goggles are available to allow visitors to visit the city without discomfort. Few take this opportunity,

preferring to work with the diplomats assigned to their capitals and occasionally visiting the dark areas of Talos when a meeting of several races is called.

While most citizens are allowed free travel within the Formene, it has been closed to the surface world, except for the trade nexuses, since mithril was discovered early in the First Age of Man. Every entrance is warded with illusions, auras, and other protections. In over 2500 years, no one has ever managed to enter the Formene from the surface. There are several challenges to the Formene: entering, surviving, and navigating. Entering is countered by powerful wards and illusions that discourage interlopers from exploring. Defensive wards are placed to further discourage anyone who can overcome the wards and illusions. Anyone who manages to bypass these protections will face a harsh, almost cruel, environment full of natural hazards and predators, one that cannot be survived, much less navigated, by surface dwellers without support.

Until now, no surface dweller has been invited into the Formene. The party members have been invited, and with any luck, the Formene will start a new chapter of their story that revolves around the Second Age of Man. Every act the party takes

is being measured and taken as an example of the values of the Second Age of Man. One can only hope the players and their characters understand the gravity of the situation.

Denizens of the Upper Formene

The Upper Formene extends from the surface to a depth of about two miles.

Dopplegangers

Although most commonly found in the surface world, small groups of these neutral shapeshifters are found throughout the Formene, acting as parasites on more powerful Formene races.

Dragons

The magnificent wyrms who soar through the skies of Barestir are occasionally found in the tunnels beneath, particularly in the Upper Formene. Black, bronze, gold, and rarer breeds of dragons turn up in small numbers. Most of these wyrms can leave the Formene at will, typically through sheer vertical shafts in the mountains that are not secured, and are rarely used even by them.

Wyrms who lair in the Formene are looking to rest, enjoy their hoards, and savor life. Few denizens of the Formene would ever tangle with a wyrm. Often the wyrm will allow locals to worship it and allow them to guard its treasure. When they grow bored or hungry for more treasure, they venture out for a few months to raid, terrorize, and loot.



Negotiations with the Snirflebin. Artist: Adam Schmidt

Trade Nexus Network

The Formene used powerful wards and illusions to make every entrance difficult to find and almost impossible to access. They balanced the closing of the Formene by creating trading nexuses throughout the land. These nexuses allowed controlled quantities of resources to enter the surface world while shielding the Formene from exploitation. At these locations, they traded goods, knowledge (mundane and arcane), and rarely, services with the surface dwellers.

A total of thirty-five nexuses operated until they were shut down. Ten in each of the greater mountain ranges of Barestir: Batun and Alithis, and five in each of the lesser mountain ranges: Gorthsea, Oliden, and Argors. When cults dedicated to Hastur took over the surface world and threatened to overrun the Trade Nexus Network to gain access to the Formene, the elves elected to withdraw from the world of man, shutting down all nexuses and placing them in a magically induced lockdown state. Recently, one nexus has been breached, Batun #4. This breach was the subject of *DNH2 – The Buried Zikurat*.

Each nexus is a large space of eight levels. Structured like a pair of step pyramids, they mirror each other at the base with their equator separated by rock. The underground part belongs to the Formene Elves, and the upper half belongs to the surface dwellers. The two sides are linked by a pair of large trading floors where teleportation pylons moved tons of cargo between the sides. Most of the nexus pairs were separated by about two hundred feet of rock.

Surface sections held large doors at the ground level for staff and cargo to enter and exit throughout the day. Formene sections have tunnels that lead into the Formene. These tunnels are protected by force walls to prevent surface dweller incursion. When in lockdown, these walls are supplemented with four additional walls at random intervals along the tunnel. Many of the levels within the nexus are only accessible via teleportation pads. Additionally, magic maintains the lighting, refreshes the air, and reengages the locks for many of the doors. The powerful

magics involved in creating a nexus drained many Formene wizards to the brink of death.

Each half had an administrator. Most of the surface administrators were human, over half were women. Both sides had a staff, including security guards, archivists, and other support personnel. Fees paid by those who traded in the nexus, especially those paid by traders keeping a trading office in a nexus, supported the infrastructure.

The main rule of the nexus network was fair trade or walk away. This simple rule governed the nexuses for over a millennium. Fair is subjective, but commonly understood that no one could be forced to accept a trade felt to be unfair. The Formene declined to enter trade contracts; the fluidity of demand made contracts stifling. However, the Formene were quite consistent in the quotas governing what rare metals, objects, and minerals were available through trade. The quantities were carefully selected to approach a balance between sating man's thirst and preventing man from trying to manipulate supply, thus exploiting the ores and minerals of the Formene indirectly.

Fifteen hundred years ago, the cult of Hastur was poised to take over the lands of man. The Formene Elves closed and secured the trading nexuses, effectively sealing off the Formene from the surface. The nexuses never reopened and were mostly forgotten when the First Age of Man ended a few centuries later. Some legends persist, exaggerated and distorted by the dark ages. Legends can rarely be trusted to be completely truthful.

Four Things to Know about the Trade Nexus Network:

- 1—Not all survived the two millennia – Of the 35 nexuses, 21 survived the ravages of time. Three were destroyed by earthquakes, and one was destroyed by surface stone giants. In all four cases the surface step pyramid was destroyed, leaving the subterranean portion without a mirror. Rebuilding a nexus takes about two years of construction after a year of preparation. The magics used are not currently practiced since the initial thirty-five were built ten generations

Goblins

Goblins are small, lawful evil humanoids with flat faces, broad noses, pointed ears, wide mouths, and small, short fangs. Other goblinoid races live within the cities and other settlements of the goblins. Bugbears are giant, hairy, chaotic evil cousins of goblins. Hobgoblins are lawful evil bulky humanoids with hairy hides ranging from dark reddish brown to dark gray. The confederation considers the goblinoids guests; however, some of them break the edicts of the confederation. This makes their presence a subject of diplomatic discussions and occasional sanctions. The bugbears are particularly disinclined to keep the peace. Hobgoblins tend to be much better behaved and are under consideration for a city and supporting smaller caves of their own.

The goblins are divided into four nations. In a chain of events that roughly parallels the War of the Roses, four leaders claimed to be the true goblin king. The backers of the goblins making the claim divided as well. When the Formene Elves approached the goblins, the easiest road to peace was to recognize each would-be king as a separate nation. Borethir founded Borethet, Byzou founded Byzothet, Anindel founded Anindethet, and Samua founded Samuthet. These leaders are long dead. The current leaders would end the division and settle who would be the rightful leader in a peaceful way; however, tradition keeps them from talking to one another, and thus prevents any progress down this line.

ago. The library contains the documentation needed to perform the work but only one of the many spells necessary is currently practiced, **Destroy Stone**. The remainder would need to be mastered by the current generation of wizards.

- 2—Reopening the first nexus won't happen in less than a year – Once the decision to reopen the network is made, the first reopening will be nearly a year after. The staff necessary will come primarily from the Trade Quarter, who will need time to shift responsibilities to other staff before they can train elves to man a nexus. If the four destroyed sites will be rebuilt, reopening all 35 nexuses could easily take forty to fifty years from start to finish.
- 3—Not all nexus sites have a significant settlement nearby – Meawold is a week's travel by caravan from Caford, situated near Batun #4. While this distance is not impossible for trade to be successful, it will mean dramatic changes for Caford over the coming decades. (It will grow along the six-mile road from the nexus

and clay pit mine back toward Caford.) Lagduf, the duchy that is the focus on **DNH1 – The Lost Temple of Forgotten Evil**, is nearly two weeks from Caford and roughly three weeks from two other, currently dormant but intact, nexuses. The Second Age of Man's civilization covers less than a third of the ruled lands of the various kingdoms during the height of the First Age of Man. Many of the nexus sites are too far from cities large enough to foster trade. This will affect the order and rate at which the Trade Nexus Network would reopen, the direction of growth of the Five Kingdoms, and will put a great deal of pressure on the leaders of the kingdom to claim the lands leading to each nexus. Of the thirty-five:

- ◇ Three are within a week of a capital
 - ◇ Six are within a week of a major city
 - ◇ Eleven are within a few days of a town that could become a city or major city in time
 - ◇ The remainder are in what is currently the 'the wilds' of Barestir
- 4—The elves knew Hastur was defeated, but chose to leave the network closed – Hastur is obsessed with the elves of Tumunzar, and they can sense his presence. Evidence of this can be seen in the encounter with Sherin Pothole; he reports that the elves of Talos sensed Hastur's aspect being destroyed. The reasons why the network remained closed are, for some, the stuff of conspiracy. The leaders of the Formene observed man to see if they would fall back to their ways. After a century, the fate of man was clear to them: self-destruction and obliteration. The elves focused on strengthening their new subterranean civilization and left man to his own devices. Only when Hastur's aspect was destroyed in DNH1 did the Formene Elves realize that man had built a new civilization. In the months since the Aspect of Hastur was brought into Tumunzar and subsequently destroyed, very intense debates concerning resuming contact with the surface have been a nightly occurrence.

The Ecology of the Formene Elves

The Formene is a vast subterranean world. The tribe of elves that moved into the Formene to become its wardens adapted dramatically over time. Their adaptations can be reversed if they change their environment for about a century. These adaptations make living in the Formene routine. Many people use Formene to refer to the elves and the lands interchangeably.

The Formene are attuned with nature and worship mostly the same elven gods of Life, Light, Knowledge, and Nature as their surface cousins. Their guardianship of the Formene has led to millennia of peace among the subterranean races and prevented human exploitation of the Formene. Over time, they developed a pale, rough skin and large dark eyes that have two sets of eyelids. Their eyes can see in "normal" light with the inner lids closed, and often do so when in Talos or other Formene Elf cities. This reduces the incoming light by 96%. In dim light, they open both sets of lids, which allows all available light to enter the eye. In complete darkness, they close both sets, freeing their minds to process other sensory information, which manifests as darkvision/blindsight 75'.

Like all elves, Formene Elves do not have body hair. Unlike their surface counterparts, many males keep their scalps closely cropped. Female Formene Elves tend to prefer very short hair as well, above the shoulders, typically in a pixie cut. Like all elves, the Formene live between 500 and 600 years.

Elven children adapt to their environment during puberty, which for elves is typically between ages 16 and 32. By the end of puberty, elves are fully adapted to their home environment. During their childhood, elves look generically "elven", and during puberty progressively take on the appearance of their tribe. By mid to late puberty, the exterior appearance changes are complete, and the internal changes finalize.

Adults adapt more slowly when they move into a new environment or change lifestyles. Adaptation pressure is noticeable after 25 or 30 years in the new situation, and changes start about ten years later; adaptation is usually complete about a

century after the elves are introduced to the new environment.

During the First Age of Man, the Formene Elves enjoyed the delights of the surface world through trade with it. They enjoyed fine cuts of meat, surface fruits and vegetables, wooden goods, spirits, brews, varietals, and art. These they combined with subterranean plants, particularly mushrooms, and some lizards to create a unique cuisine. Like their surface cousins, the Formene Elves live in harmony with the subterranean world. Since closing the Formene to the world, they have shifted their diet to exclude the surface delights of old.

Talos, the Batun Mountain region's Formene capital, is a brightly lit, open city. Within Talos, about 40,000 elves live (around 32,000 adults and 8000 children and adolescents). It is the jewel of the Batun Formene, and while difficult for the other races of the Formene to visit due to the bright lights, remains a dream for many young members of the other nations to visit.

Some see the Formene Elves as paternalistic toward the other nations. With their long lives, and the attitudes that come with them, they do behave paternalistically at times. The Formene deeply embrace practices and values that avoid exploitation of anyone, and work to lighten their touch over the centuries. Closing off the Formene was an extreme decision driven by a genocide level threat, and something that a small number of Formene Elves struggle with three millennia later.

Relationship with Hastur

Since closing the nexuses and withdrawing from the world, the Formene Elves have spent centuries debating a return to interacting and trading with the surface and other issues. The biggest issue is Hastur. His influence on the world nearly destroyed man. Scrying and other intelligence gathering suggests that the threat is largely neutralized. Only once has an Aspect of Hastur reached into the world (see *DNH1 – The Lost Temple of Forgotten Evil*). Seeing the aspect arise and be confronted so quickly in Boldon has led to a growing movement to open the nexuses again. A marginal majority of the Formene feel that man is ready to try again and that Hastur's incursions will be confronted and stopped instead of taking root and spreading.

Connecting with the Surface

The Formene Elves and their love of knowledge led them to build a collection of human knowledge. Man's thirst for discovery and innovation intrigued them and led to a vast library. Most of this library has been translated into Elvish by scribes who preserve and reproduce books regularly.

Much like the role of Moors and Arabs and the Greco-Roman knowledge they translated and preserved, the knowledge from the First Age of Man that the Formene preserved will be critical to initiating the coming Renaissance phase of the Second Age of Man, assuming the party pursues the goal of restoring interaction and trade with the surface.

The Formene Elves spend many nights debating the

impact of sharing their knowledge with this new Age of Man, both their knowledge and the knowledge they saved from the First Age of Man. The potential impact on the Second Age of Man intrigues and concerns the Formene Elves. Humans could greatly benefit from a Renaissance much like Earth did in the Sixteenth Century, or man could become externally and internally destructive as he did during the fall of the First Age of Man. The Formene are not of one mind on the subject. When they come to a consensus, the impact on the Second Age of Man will be massive.



Formene Female and Male. Artist: Adam Schmidt

The Ecology of the Dehava

Dehava are typically six to eight feet diameter at the ground in a rough oval and average between four and five feet in height. They could be mistaken for a mound of rocks around a tar ball when sleeping. When active, tendrils of a thick, tar-like substance extend between the rocks to touch the ground. They are typically dark brown to dark purple. These creatures are living rocks, silicon-based life, with a connection to the Elemental Plane of Earth. However, they are not elementals.

Before their relationship with the Formene, the dehava were deeply afraid of the other denizens of the Formene. Their eggs were taken as trinkets and decoration by other races. When they attacked to recover their children, they left no survivors to help keep their existence secret. When another creature was sensed nearby, they froze, hoping to escape detection as more than a mere pile of rocks. The initial encounter with the Formene was violent. The patience of the elf who could make a telepathic connection with them, Alotel, changed their world. She is still regarded akin to a prophet of the dehava. Her ability to relate to life previously thought impossible allowed for an understanding to be established. Eventually, mutual need and opportunity combined to the current, near symbiotic, relationship that exists today. Dehava are no longer feared, and in many cases, are deeply respected. Their place among the nations is secure, and they travel unhindered throughout the Formene.

When the Formene mines were active, the dehava ate the veins of rock and metal, spitting out odd, purified metal structures that resemble hair balls expelled by house cats. These balls of metal are easily smelted into ingots of various metals, including the elusive mithril and adamantium for smithing. The dehava are no longer actively mining, but they wander the paths of the Formene eating fallen rock, occasionally stumbling across veins of the metals, which they mark and leave idle for future mining efforts, once they take enough ore for casual needs. In fact, the species is mostly hibernating. Only a few score adults are active.

The others are waiting for their next active period. The small amount of metals collected from their explorations have been saved and are the source of a stockpile, primarily mithril and adamantium. Clearing cave-ins keep the dehava busy and mildly entertained.

Their children lie in clutches of eggs, near the elven farms, waiting for a time when the Formene residents request large projects or resume mining. The eggs will rest in suspended animation for millennia, needing to bask in heat over 300 degrees for a year to develop into dehava fledglings.

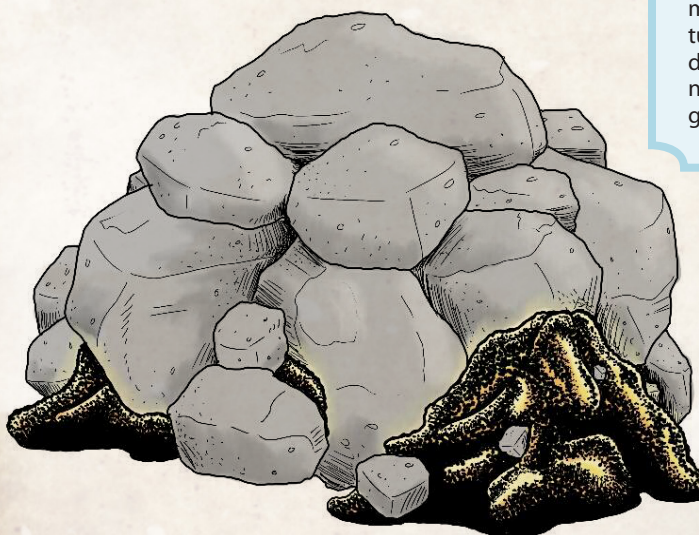
The Batun Formene Elves have a stockpile of 10,000 ingots of mithril and 8,000 ingots of adamantium, in addition to thousands of ingots of more common metals, for the eventual return of trade with the surface. Each dehava typically produces a score of ingots per year through incidental ingestion from clearing cave-ins and excavation requests. They also have thousands of veins of each metal marked for future mining.

Any denizen of the Formene can request a dehava excavation. They assess the request site, and if there are no risks, execute it. Denizens have requested new tunnels and expanded living space this way. The dehava follow the natural patterns of the rocks to ensure safe, sustainable expansions are made.

The dehava have learned to understand several languages. They 'hear' by interpreting the soundwaves striking their outer bodies. They are fond of the denizen groups that still practice oral history education, often sitting front and center close to the speaker so they can absorb the sounds and enjoy the stories. Histories and legends interest them the most. Debate and governmental details bore them. The dehava found a purpose when the elves moved into the Formene. The symbiotic relationship benefits both parties (dehava and the Formene denizens). The bigger reward for the dehava, beyond hearing oral history, myths, and legends, is the security that the Formene Elves provide for dehava eggs. This frees the adults to maintain paths throughout the Formene without worry that someone will discover and destroy their eggs.

Their diet does not allow them to easily consume the denser rock beyond the roots of the mountains, thus they are rarely seen beyond the mountain ranges. Because of this, Dehava do not maintain the intra-Formene tunnels, nor did they participate in their creation, due to the indigestion that afflicts them when they consume denser rock. On a few occasions, they have performed rescue missions in the tunnels. After such a mission, the dehava may lie dormant for a month to get over the strain of digesting the harder rocks.

Within the Formene, they are well known for clearing tunnels after cave-ins, helping towns and villages expand, and are legendary for their rescue efforts when denizens are trapped. Every nation welcomes them in their towns with open arms, something the dehava have learned to appreciate. They are very sensitive to seismic disturbances and often respond to emergencies before anyone else knows there is a problem.



Kobolds

Kobolds are short, lawful evil humanoids with hides that range from dark, rusty brown to rusty black, and non-prehensile, rat-like tails. Although kobolds are little more than pests in the world above, in the Formene they are a major threat. Kobolds can quickly strip a region of resources if their numbers remain unchecked. The independent races of the Formene enslave many kobolds; they are used primarily as front-line troops in the initial skirmishes of any war. The member nations actively work to prevent or liberate enslaved kobolds.

The kobolds are split into three nations along religious lines. The Duraga worship Ukalan, who has no form, but corresponds to the dog-men aspects of kobolds. The Amedos worship Eduban, who takes a form like Anubis and appeals to their war-like nature. Finally, Egal worship Akisun, an ancient red dragon. They are drawn to him through their inherent greed. The kobolds are the most difficult nations in the confederation, primarily due to their chaotic, warlike nature. The nations are constantly a source of discussion and sanctions within the Formene Confederation.

Minotaurs

Hulking and fierce minotaurs dwell in the Upper Formene, usually favoring the most confusing and complex cave systems for their lairs. Minotaurs generally lived by raiding and plunder, although most now sell their services to other folk who offer gold, food and a chance to fight the various predators of the Formene alongside them. Minotaurs are kept as slaves by Upper Formene dwellers such as shrooms, but such slaves are not numerous.

The vast delve known as the Labyrinth was once a minotaur empire of sorts. While no signs of the former minotaur civilization remain, thousands of the creatures still infest the area. Having fallen from those glory days, today they are more sell swords helping weaker nations keep their areas clear of predators and hunter-gatherers trying to restore their past prominence.

Education on Survival and Navigation of the Formene

Navigation

About two feet off the ground, throughout the Formene, are hidden, subtle symbols that serve as navigation aids and warnings. These symbols are like road signs for the Formene. They are only visible to native species and those wearing Rings of Elvenkind.

Risks

Living below mountains means living below billions of tons of rock. The major risks include pockets of unbreathable air, flooded passages, cavern ceiling collapses, and predators.

Air

Many things threaten air quality in the Formene. Open fires are banned from use by any citizens of the Formene, because they deplete oxygen rapidly. (Lack of airflow affects air quality.) Rocks that heat to cooking temperatures are one of many alternatives to fire for the citizens of the Formene. Blacksmiths use magically generated heat to convert ore, mined or deposited by dehava, into ingots, and from there into weapons. Formene citizens have various means to detect and avoid pockets of bad air.

Flooding

Water exerts a great deal of pressure on rock. When enough water accumulates, stone yields, and caves that were previously dry, flood. These flash floods involve millions of gallons of water, tons of pressure, and submerge miles of tunnel in extreme cases. Most of these events give off seismic warnings hours or even days ahead of time. From contact with the rock, or from other senses, most denizens of the Formene have a way to sense these issues and avoid them. Some denizens travel with sentinel animals, using their sensitivity to seismic activity as an early warning device.

Cave-ins

Ceilings collapse, the ground quakes, and fissures open. These threats haunt every denizen of the Formene daily. The dehava can sense seismic activity for hundreds of miles, and often respond to render aid, mark the danger, and if possible, clear the passage and restore normal travel. Like the floods, creatures sensitive to seismic activity provide warnings to those who cannot natively sense these disturbances.

Predators

Not every living thing in the Formene is civilized or part of the Formene Elf driven civilization. There are numerous threats that roam the Formene. The citizens do not attempt to purge or control them. Denizens travel and hunt in packs sufficient to drive off the predators likely found on the paths. This keeps them from becoming prey. These threats are typically non-sentient beings and beings that refuse to join the confederation, like: basilisks, behirs, cloaklers, elementals, lizards, trolls, undead, and worms.

Misunderstandings

In *DNH2 – The Buried Zikurat*, Sherin Po-thole gives the characters three magic items to allow them to survive travel in the Formene. Once the City of Talos accepts them as ambassadors of the surface, the council gives them a clasp for their cloaks that doubles as a badge telling all Formene citizens the characters are under the protection of the elves. This protection does not make the characters immune to consequences for their actions. The characters are in a foreign land with customs completely alien to surface dwellers. A misunderstanding is a significant risk. Hot heads rule the day, while cooler heads prevail in the end. Although the Formene and their diplomatic corps commit significant resources to ensure that the cooler heads prevail, a slight might result in a slaughter that goes undiscovered for weeks or longer.



Duergar Escaping a Cavern Collapse. Artist: Brian McCranie



Humans Learning to Navigate the Formene. Artist: Brian McCranie

The Batun Formene

If the party played *DNH2 – The Buried Zikurat*

At the end of the adventure the characters encounter Sherin Po-thole, who invites them to travel to Talos and provides rings, boots, and cloaks for each member of the party to facilitate their travel. (See *Appendix 2, New Magic Items*.) From the trading nexus, the trip to Talos is along paths that were well traveled for over a millennium before being abandoned for 1500 years. The Formene marginally maintained the paths. The trip takes about three days.

If the party did not play *DNH2 – The Buried Zikurat*

The characters are approached by a female halfling who leads them to one of the warded Formene entrances in the Batun Mountains, where they meet Sherin Po-thole, who will send them on a quest to prove their worth before giving them permission to enter and the items necessary to survive in the Formene environment. Use the first adventure seed in the adventure book to allow the party to follow an alternative path to being allowed to access the Formene. From the meeting with Sherin Po-thole, the trip takes eight days to

reach Talos from the point of entry that Sherin provides. This journey will require one roll per day on the Formene Random Encounter Table (See *Adventure Book, Appendix 3*, except for the last two days, when the party is observed and thus shielded from random encounters.)

The gear to get to Talos

Once the party is in the Formene, they can start making their way to Talos. With the rings, boots, and cloaks equipped, travel is possible. The Boots of the Formene are important to navigating the Formene. They impart the ability to interpret navigational symbols placed by the inhabitants of the Formene and provide warnings of seismic events. The Cloak of the Formene is vital to survival within the subterranean realms. It provides breathing support, suppresses fires, buffers the wearer from damage, and helps make the foodstuffs of the Formene edible. The Ring of Elvenkind is the key element to communicating, seeing, and maintaining mental stability within the realms. Combined, these three tools can allow someone to travel the Formene with lowered risk from its unique hazards.



Welcome to Talos, Honored Guests. Artist: Adam Schmidt

Entering Talos

As they near Talos, the characters notice the natural caves give way to dressed corridor ten foot wide and ten foot long. After a hundred yards, the corridor takes a large 'S' curve, the second half of which is dimly lit, but progressively brightens. The light continues to grow brighter until the end of the corridor, another hundred yards after the 'S' curve, where they move to a world of near daylight.

Reception of Surface Dwellers

The party is monitored throughout its last two days of travel to Talos. When the party members step into Talos, there is a group of Formene Elves to greet them and escort them to quarters so they can rest and prepare to meet the elders of Talos.

Within Talos, the characters have no need for their boots, cloaks, or rings. Talos is well lit, stable, and has natural air recirculation. The Formene Elves do not ask for the items back; they assume the party will need them to explore the Formene and to return home someday.

After being taken to a guest area consisting of four bedrooms connected by a common area, the characters are given a chance to rest, stow their adventuring gear, and refresh themselves. There are guards at the entrance to the building, but no guards on the party's doors. The group that greets the characters invites them to rest for a day before being given a tour of the city and an audience with the elders. The characters are advised they have little to no need for weapons while in Talos, but are not disarmed, and no one tuts or brings attention to any weapons the characters choose to carry while in Talos.

When the team is rested, a few of the greeters take the party on a tour of the city. The residents are as interested in the surface visitors and their impression of Talos as the party is in the city. However, the Formene Elves are too reserved to mob the characters; in fact, only a few ask them any questions. Most look for a moment, then get back to their day. When the tour reaches a residential loop, the reception changes tone as inquisitive kids gather at a respectful distance and watch with wonder.

The elders of Talos invite the party to sit with them and get to know each other. The elders are Estor, Finore, Arwel, Nerwenye, and Irien. They represent the five values of elven society: Harmony, Knowledge, Grace, Privacy, and Efficiency. (See the Ecology of the Formene Elves.) The first two are male elves; the latter three are female elves. The elders focus on a small number of key external issues:

- Ensuring Hastur is confronted at his every effort to establish a toehold on Tumunzar
- Ensuring the Formene is safe from exploitation
- Connecting with their surface brethren
- Connecting with the other citizens of the Second Age of Man

The audience lasts until the party finishes discussing these issues. Re-opening the nexuses, and trading the rare metals and minerals of the Formene are for a different day, and are addressed in the adventure book. The elves are not opposed to these items; however, they are items for a different group to discuss, and the elders want to leave those discussions to the experts on trade.

After the audience, the party is free to explore the city as it wishes. They are advised that Formene Elves close their doors when they want privacy and open them to welcome visitors. Knocking before entering an open door is a welcome courtesy. Knocking on a closed door, beyond dire issues, is considered extremely rude. If the party insists on intruding on closed doors, the elders will assign an escort or expel them from the Formene permanently.

Stone Giants

Powerful and ponderous in action and thought, stone giants are strong enough to keep all but the most magically powerful foes at bay. These creatures dig enormous quarries for their homes, and they can work wonders with their chosen medium.

Few in number, stone giants leave other folk alone for the most part, and expect the same courtesy from anyone passing through their lands. The most powerful stone giant realm is the kingdom of Cairnstead, beneath the Alithis Mountains. In the Batun Formene, they number under 10,000 strong across three large quarries: Ulukthar, Zarathar, and Gabthar.

The stone giants were the first to join the Formene Elves as a member nation of the confederation. They suffered horribly when man initially came to the Formene to seek mithril.

The guards at the visitor estate are warm and will help the party find anything in the Formene it desires. While they will not follow the characters as they move through the city, they provide directions, aid, and as much guidance as a hunter-warrior on guard duty can provide. Talos has no military; the hunters train as warriors and can be called to repel any threat that might arise.

The City of Talos—Overview

The city of Talos is the capital of the Batun Mountain Range Formene. Six other cities support Talos in the Batun region. It is home to over 40,000 elves. Talos is dominated by its Grand Dome, which is 200' high at the crest, with a main floor of about 1200' x 1800'. Talos is well lit with magical light—not quite daylight, but bright enough that the characters will not need augmented sight and elves keep their inner eyelids closed.

The Grand Dome is split equally between four quarters. Most buildings are twelve floors tall; the central building of each quarter is twenty floors tall. The dome's center building, the Council Chamber, is a single story and about 100' square. The remainder of the buildings, particularly the ones near the center, are also shorter, at six to eight floors each. The quarters balance green space with buildings of stone that tower to the top of the dome.

Administration, Agriculture, Knowledge, and Trade are the focal points of the four respective quarters. Administration manages high level management of the Batun Formene. Six elven towns provide support by handling the day to day administration, including relationship management with the denizens, elf community affairs, and record keeping. Agriculture receives, processes, stores, and distributes foodstuffs from the farms. Knowledge contains the vast libraries, many research labs, schools, and other areas dedicated to the collection, preservation, and dissemination of knowledge. The Trade Quarter focuses on business relationships with the other civilizations of the Formene. Each quarter employs about 5000 citizens who work inside the city, with the remaining 5000 working adults working in the farm domes or as emissaries to the other Formene civilizations. The remaining citizens are

homemakers, educators, children, or juveniles, and spend most of their days in the residential tunnels or the green spaces.

Surrounding the main dome are suburban residential areas. These residence loops cover about two million square feet, including the tunnels. Most of the residents live in clusters. Each cluster holds three families connected by a common room where they gather in the evenings before retiring to their more private family areas. Over 4000 clusters are connected to the Grand Dome by twelve tunnels. The tunnels' loops connect to the Grand Dome on both ends.

The farms are connected by a vast tunnel network below the Grand Dome. The Formene Elves manage about 200 domes where they farm various crops. Each cave is a circular dome with over four acres of crops. Since the nexuses were closed, the Formene Elves have developed techniques to grow some surface crops in the Formene. Most of the domes grow mushroom varieties. A small number hold subterranean livestock. Meat is currently a minor part of a Formene Elf's diet; dairy and blood replace most meat consumption.

Deeper in the roots of the Batun Mountains, the Formene have mines where mithril and adamantium deposits lie. These mines are not managed by the Formene Elves anymore. When active, the mines were managed and excavated by the dehava. The mines have been idle for centuries due to the lack of trade with the surface.

Denizens of the Middle Formene

The Middle Formene lies between two and eight miles beneath the surface of Barestir. Most larger cities of Formene Elves and duergar are in the Middle Formene.

Formene Elves

Formene Elves probably have the most significant presence in the Middle Formene. Their cities and strongholds are numerous, wealthy, and well suited for defense, and the Formene Elves themselves are organized and well connected. Talos and Erran, the capital of the Alithis Formene, are the most famous of Formene Elves' cities.

Government Structure

The Formene Elves are guided by five principles: Harmony, Knowledge, Grace, Privacy, and Efficiency. Every aspect of their lives is aligned with one or more of them. As a people of harmony, these principles are reflected in their government as well.

The tribe called the Formene Elves was known as Elonde when its members were forest creatures of the surface. Interestingly, their culture and government structure changed only in superficial ways as they moved from the surface to be wardens of the Formene. The ruling authorities are the king or queen and the council.

Royalty

The royal title is hereditary, passed down to the oldest and closest living offspring, regardless of gender. Most rulers abdicate after around 250 years of rule, mostly to enjoy a peaceful retirement of contemplation and study. After abdication, a former king or queen is known as a King Father or Queen Mother. Often they serve as advisors to the monarch; while respected, they have no power. To abdicate is to fully relinquish all direct participation in the government. They become normal citizens who may be consulted by anyone who desires their input. Tradition prevents them from giving unsolicited advice. For Elonde, this was a way to ensure that a monarch who abdicates doesn't undermine the authority of the next monarch. This concern never manifested; however, the Formene see the wisdom in the theory and observe it as tradition. The royal family and their protocol for succession is well documented. The ten closest relatives are known as being 'royal successors'. The king or queen's spouse takes the title of royal consort to avoid confusion; additionally, they hold no other position of authority, such as being on the council. A few royal consorts have served as ambassadors to other Formene citizens, and one was a farmer.

Currently, Queen Minye is the ruler. The monarch is not an absolute authority. Her role is to adjudicate disputes, supervise the enforcement of laws, and ensure justice is tempered. The council maintains the full authority to author, rescind, and modify all laws.

Minye is the thirteenth monarch since the tribe moved to the Formene. Her royal consort is Dironwe, a councilman for Efficiency before stepping down at her ascendancy. He was thought a wise member, known for his lively discussions within his aspect and at council meetings. They have two children, both male, Ohin and Enelror. Both work as ambassadors to other Formene civilizations. Ohin works with the deep dwarves, and Enelror works with one of the two tribes of pech. Minye is one of the youngest queens. Her father, Penlorfin, took the crown late in life, after a long life as an ambassador deep in the Formene. He was recalled to assume the crown when his brother died unexpectedly. Needing heirs,



Queen Minye and Her Royal Consort, Dironwe. Artist: Adam Schmidt

Penlorfin started a family after his coronation. Minye was born early in Penlorfin's rule. She married Dironwe when she was 108 years old. Due to age, Penlorfin abdicated on her 115th birthday. At present, Minye has ruled Talos for 196 years. Gossip swirls around the question of whether she will abdicate after 250 years of rule, or wait until she is nearer the average age of abdication, 518.

Council

Each of the five aspects has three members on the council. One of the three is the senior councilman or councilwoman (Elvish has more elegant terms); the others are associates. All three have equal votes in council matters. The senior council members do most of the talking, and they retain the right to bring new matters to the attention of the council for discussion. Most matters that come before the council rarely affect only one aspect. The members of an aspect focus on how the issue interacts with their aspect when discussing an issue. Elven wisdom understands that often aspects can be in opposition; the council members are seasoned, wise orators and explore matters with detachment, but are fastidious in their examination. Most votes exceed the 60% majority required for approval by being unanimous.

Council members typically serve 100 years on the council before stepping down and allowing others to govern. The concerns, ideas, and will of the people are significant influences on their process. Formene leaders do their best to avoid operating in a vacuum. Meetings are held weekly to discuss and debate issues. A grand meeting is held monthly to take those discussions into action.

Efficiency

This aspect concentrates on ensuring waste is minimized and that returns on consumed resources are maximized. Both seem simple on the surface, but are complicated when examined in detail. Moving from the surface into the Formene required revamping most aspects of elven life. Processes are still being optimized today, after over 3000 years of living in the Formene.

Grace

Being graceful is a well-known elven trait. Maintaining grace takes effort, even for an elf. Adapting to the Formene required many changes to elven culture and mannerisms. Finding a way to restore and later maintain grace through these changes and ongoing challenges developed into a distinct aspect of their world.

Harmony

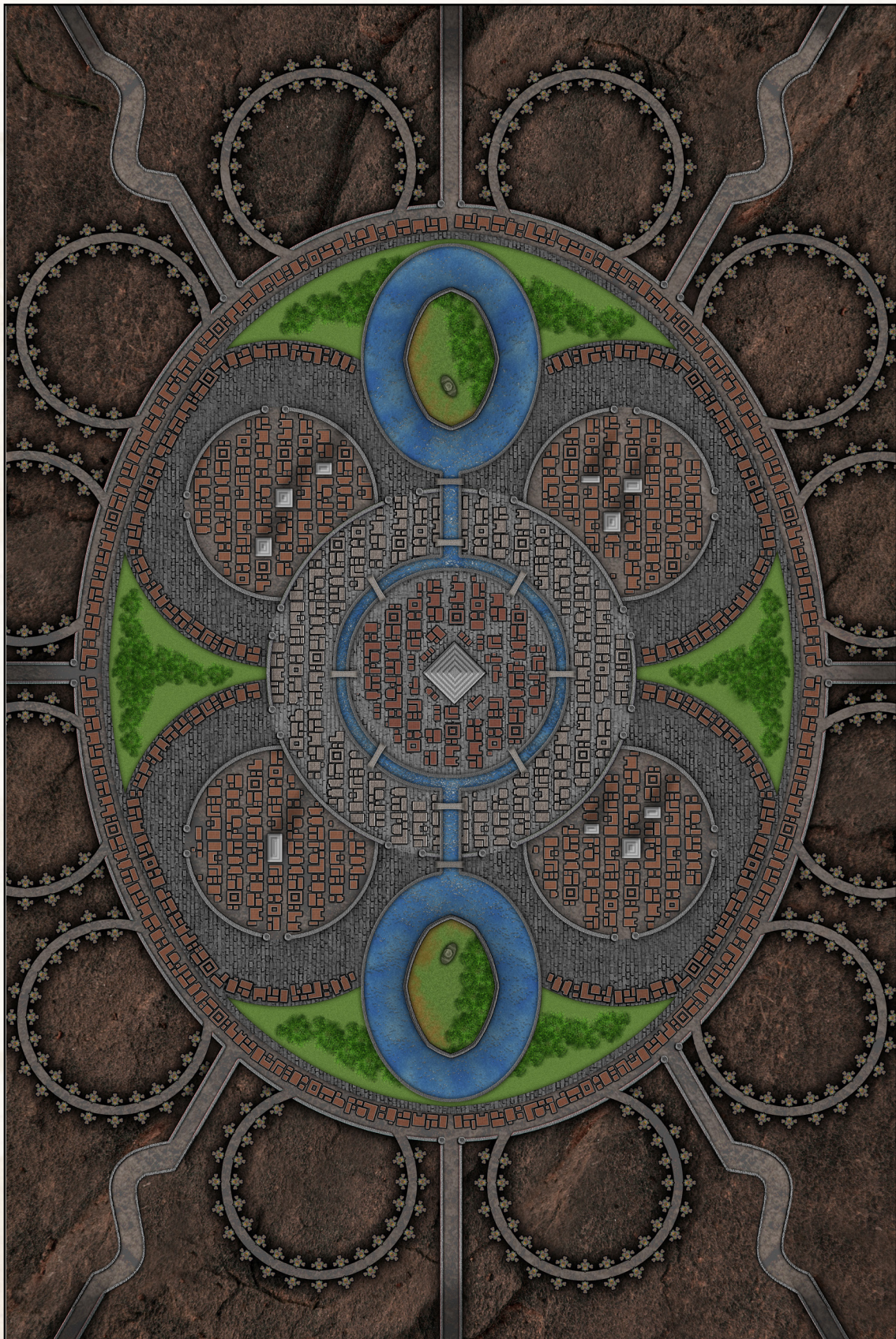
Living in harmony with their environment and their fellow subterranean denizens weighs heavily on the elven collective conscience. Having their fellow Formene citizens live in harmony after centuries to millennia of conflict and warfare is an even more challenging task. Conflict over resources, territory, ideology, and fear of exploitation are the key sources of disharmony. The Formene Elf places harmony among the residents as second only to preventing surface [read human] exploitation of the Formene.

Knowledge

The elven appreciation for knowledge is well known. The Formene have a duty to preserve and acquire knowledge. In the libraries of Talos, countless tomes of knowledge from the First Age of Man have been preserved. Additionally, the Formene Elves have recorded the history and knowledge of the Formene denizens they have encountered. The surface fell into a dark age when the First Age of Man collapsed. These libraries could be the key to recovering much of that lost knowledge and history.

Privacy

Many Formene Elves value privacy most. The privacy concern is often the one in opposition with the others. The aspect of Privacy stays very busy due to this shared concern, both within the tribe and for its neighbors. The leaders of Privacy are among the most skilled orators and debate opponents known to elvenkind. Always careful to offer solutions, not roadblocks, the Privacy aspect is well respected by even its fiercest political opponents.



The City of Talos. Cartographer: Justin Andrew Mason

Trade

The elves moved into the Formene to be wardens and shield it from the thirst of man for its resources. They found small isolated cultures, mostly small tribes bickering and warring when not struggling to find enough food to survive. After securing the Formene from the surface dwellers, the elves started their quest to establish diplomatic relations with the denizens of the Formene. Being a peaceful tribe, the wardens sought peace and unity. They brought peace through trade, diplomacy, and education. Some isolated tribes reconnected and became larger tribes and later nations, neighbors settled border and resource disputes, and peace spread, slowly, but very surely. Today, tensions remain, but conflict rarely extends beyond a single skirmish of hours, before diplomacy restores peace. In three millennia of stewardship, peace has been truly broken less than a score of occasions, none of which lasted more than ten days.

Early in this process of peace, the tribe realized that keeping the peace with the surface was also necessary. Trade was determined to be the mechanism. Working with the various denizens of the Formene, the trade leaders established sustainable quotas for export of exotic goods to the surface. The most valued of these was mithril. It was exported only as finished goods, initially. The tribe did not want to share the techniques for working mithril. Over time, this position softened, and ore and the knowledge of how to work the metal into armor was exported. This sated the surface throughout the First Age of Man. Because ores and minerals are such an important part of the commercial balance, mining is controlled by the Trade Quarter. For about 1500 years, mining of metals and minerals was a very important aspect of trade. When the Nexus Network was closed, mining became largely dormant.

To accomplish trade with the surface, several trading nexuses were built to focus the trade while providing security. A total of ten were built to support trade with the Batun Mountain Range Formene zone. The elves brought a wide range of surface goods into the Formene for the denizens to sample, and from there developed trade relationships. The nexuses were staffed by

only Formene Elves on the Formene side. The surface side of the nexuses in Batun were primarily operated by humans. Some of the other nexus regions were staffed by dwarves and humans cooperatively.

Trade records run back to the earliest trades. The tribe keeps meticulous records and commits a good deal of effort maintaining them. With surface trade suspended for about two millennia, trade between the Formene regions has become their focus. Trade within the region creates efficiencies for basic needs where a group trades what it can produce easily for what it struggles to produce. While there is a market for luxury goods, art, etc., it is a minor fraction of all trade. The Formene Elves treat all the tribes as equals (even if they are paternalistic toward their shorter-lived neighbors), and use trade to develop and maintain interdependencies. The interdependencies also slowly led to a reduction in tensions and started the path to peace between the bickering groups. Within a few hundred years, the groups all had what could be called diplomatic relationships, all of which sprang from their strong trade relationships.

In the Formene, trade has also led to a shift from city-states to nations and then into a confederation. Not all the members of a species belong to a single nation, but most do. Many of the denizens were storytellers. When the Formene Elves began asking to collect their stories, legends, and myths as a record of the Formene's tribes, the denizens that had no written language, over time, adopted the elven alphabet, developed a written language, and transitioned to include written histories over a few centuries. Elvish, over time, became the Lingua Franca of the Formene. From these advancements, works of art developed. Initially, most of the art was retelling their legends, but they developed abstract and fine art over time. The trade efficiencies allowed a growing portion of each tribe to devote their time to intellectual pursuits beyond the basics of survival. Some tribes did not develop as fast or much at all. Not every denizen of the Formene is capable of these types of thought. However, most were. Cultural exchanges followed and peace became the norm in the Formene.

From simple trade, civilizations advanced and peace became the norm. Understanding, even

appreciation, followed. All denizens of the Formene began to thrive. Soon the trade leaders absorbed a diplomatic corps, and the ambassadors from the tribe advised on more than just trade. Most groups of denizens have some form of ambassadors with their nearest five to ten neighbors. The Formene Elves maintain an ambassador with every identified group of denizens. They maintain neutrality, seeking to elevate all sentient beings in the Formene through peace, trade, and diplomacy, while favoring none.

Trade today is organized into critical goods and luxury goods. Critical goods include food and other essentials for day to day living, and are always given priority in transit, and in the event of a problem, recovery. Various regions of the Formene are more hospitable to certain food stocks. For example, the deep goblins, who live exclusively in the Upper Formene (the first two miles of the crust), have cooler caves than the deeper layers. These cooler caves are ideal for mushroom wine and several mushroom species that prefer cooler temps. The angulians (a Formene cousin of the sahuagin) live in the Deep Formene, where the ambient temperature is much higher. In this subterranean, near tropical environment, the mushrooms that grow take on a flavor and texture that resembles beef cattle when prepared properly. Meanwhile, duergar in the Middle Formene harvest fish from vast underground lakes that have developed into huge fisheries. The trade network makes these available to denizens from all zones.

The foundation of trade, and by extension agriculture and domestication, has enabled the denizens of the Formene to find peace, explore the written word, experience population and territory expansions without warfare, and opened the door for the denizens to advance well beyond their near-subsistence living and violent struggles to exist. While the Formene might seem like a utopia, and thousands of years of peace and improved quality would seem to support that conclusion, the Formene remains a dangerous place. There are tribes that are not part of the confederation who raid regularly and a significant quantity of wild life that nests, hunts, and roams the Formene. A dynamic environment of floods, bad air, and muck adds to the threat from hostile creatures. Also, there

is still conflict and even violence from time to time.

So many generations have passed for the non-elfen portion of the Formene Confederation, that they no longer pine for the goods of the surface. Only the elves remember; for them, it has been five generations—not fifty. Trade with the surface is welcomed by the traders of the Formene, elf and non-elf alike. The elves miss the surface goods, the non-elves, having seen the benefits of trade, are looking forward to new markets for their goods. Few have any ambitions to trade directly with the surface in a nexus, and even fewer desire to visit the surface.

Duergar

The Middle Formene is home to the largest and most powerful gray dwarf realms. The duergar have no use for Eldszar and do not worry about ages-old vendettas against the surface world; they came down to the Middle Formene because the lower one descends into the earth, the more rare and wondrous minerals one can find. If the Lower Formene were not so completely inhospitable, the gray dwarves would pursue their veins of ore and gemstones all the way to the roots of the world. The lower reaches of the Middle Formene represent the deepest depths at which large cities can be easily sustained.

Duergar cities are less numerous than those of the Formene Elves, but any given gray dwarf city is likely to be a strong, wealthy, and martially inclined realm, quite powerful enough to deter the attacks of its hostile neighbor, such as the shroom. The cities of Gundabiz, Sheledzund, Zaddushur, and Bunala are good examples of duergar large cities. Barukthur is their capital.

Grimlocks

Grimlocks are powerfully built, neutral evil humanoids in the northern and central reaches of the Middle Formene. Grimlocks have thick, scaly, gray skin and long, black, filthy hair. Their teeth are white and extremely sharp, and their eyes are blank white orbs. Tales speak of tribes of primitive humans who have dwelt overlong in the tunnels of the Formene, and grimlocks are said to be their descendants.

Grimlocks are tireless hunters and raiders, and they often range dozens of miles from their lairs in search of food. Like the goblins and orcs of the higher levels, grimlocks are frequently enslaved by other races (particularly shrooms) and can be found almost anywhere.

The grimlocks long ago laid claim to the cavern complex called Orgol. Within it, the village of Alcmeg is a sprawling sea of tents and stone fences surround a central clearing. The other nation, Gorga, makes its main home in the Cavern of Heads. The Cavern of Heads has hundreds of small caves where the grimlocks make their homes and a large central cavern where they socialize.

The Knowledge Quarter

This area of Talos is more than mere bookshelves stuffed with dusty tomes, scrolls, and scraps of parchment. The pursuit of knowledge is a noble task to the Formene Elves. There are some thirty thousand books in the Talos library. The quarter also serves as a university, stores trade records, hosts agricultural research, plans, and practices, as well as magical research, and holds much of the knowledge published during the First Age of Man.

Active records remain in the quarter where they are used. When the Agricultural, Trade, and Administrative Quarters archive records, they transfer them to the Knowledge Quarter. These records are a small portion of the library. Research, magical and non-magical, occupies a significant portion of the library. However, the predominant share of the collection is books copied from the surface world and translated to Elvish.

The quarter employs a little over 5000 people, most of whom work within the quarter. A tenth of the workers travel from tribe to tribe in the Formene collecting stories, histories, and other information. About half of the workers are research librarians specializing in specific collections. The balance is split between maintaining and creating new works.

The research librarians maintain a good grasp of what is in each tome within their collection. Two or three people are assigned to each collection and work together to maintain a body of living knowledge to aid visitors in finding tomes, scrolls, and parchments relevant to their study.

The work to maintain the tomes within can range from using magic, such as the **Mending** cantrip, to dusting and other maintenance tasks to repair or replace severely damaged tomes. Those who maintain the books also maintain the catalog and organize the books.

Many new books are created each year. Research, trade, composing poems, writing tales, and other academic efforts lead to over a hundred books per year. Additionally, about four dozen books are added to the library from the other nations of the Formene. Once a decade, the five Formene regions

exchange new books.

The workers who create tomes have been actively organizing and converting scrolls and loose parchments into tomes. At peak, there were over a million loose scrolls and parchment pages. Today, that number is less than two hundred thousand. This pace indicates the project will conclude in about five hundred years. However, this is not true; it is the product of linear thinking. The bulk of the work is organizing the material into tomes, deciding if it will be in more than one, and determining the order within the tome. With only a fifth of the material remaining, the sorting portion is greatly reduced in scale, and the work will take closer to a hundred years to complete. This is well beyond the knowledge of any but the most knowledgeable sages.

Six Things to know about the Knowledge Quarter

- 1—New books from the surface – The elves who create new works look forward to receiving new books from the surface. Since the Trading Nexus Network closed, they have focused exclusively on converting the scrolls and loose parchment into tomes. They look forward to absorbing the books made by man since the nexus closed. Sadly, while there are about two thousand written books that could be obtained as a backlog, the intake of new books will likely number under seven hundred, significantly lower than the eleven to thirteen hundred they hope to buy or copy.
- 2—Maintaining old books – The elves who maintain the books spend more time copying them into new books than any other task. They spend their off time researching new forms of parchment that resists the ravages of time better, ritual magic that elevates **Mending** from one square foot to much larger volumes, and preservation techniques or magics. These areas of exploration are focused on one thing, minimizing the books they must replace each year due to the ravages of time. This could be an epic exploration quest for a party inclined to search for non-traditional treasures and rewards.

- 3—Trading knowledge with the surface – In the past, the knowledge created by the Formene Elves was traded for little in return. Most leaders in the quarter oppose continuing this trend. The remainder of the leaders do not share this concern. They see a future where the elves are mentors to man, and in their vision, man will value the archives of the Formene greatly.
- 4—Trove of new magic – Over the centuries, the Formene Elves have developed several spells. Many of them, the elves feel, have little use to those who live their lives on the surface. How to value these spells for the Trade Quarter to manage is a concern. These spells range from simple cantrips to high level spells. The spells that maintain the protections on the Formene from intruders are not available for trade or for training. One spell, **Destroy Stone**, could be found in DNH2.
- 5—The elves of the Knowledge Quarter do not know how they will find the staffing to meet the demand for copying books of lost surface knowledge for the expected demand. This is the driving force behind their plan to limit the release to a manageable number and set up a contract where the numbers will likely decrease each year.
- 6—A few centuries ago, a researcher had a spell backfire. The resulting explosion and fires destroyed about three hundred volumes of translated human knowledge. The names of the tomes reside in the library records. An adventurous party might be inclined to search the lands, including dusty monasteries and rebuilt cities and ruins, to help restore the collection. The rewards might be substantial.

The Agriculture Quarter

The Agricultural Quarter manages the workforce, plans the crop cycles, manages livestock for the farms, and collects, processes, and distributes the harvest. Most of the quarter consists of storage for harvests. Between the farms and the administration, the quarter is responsible for ensuring all harvests are collected, processed, and preserved while also ensuring that shares are distributed regularly. Crops grown for trade are transferred to the Trade Quarter instead of stored.

The quarter employs about 8000 people in total. About half work in the 200 or so farms managed by this quarter. The remainder of the staff work to move harvests into the quarter or work within the quarter.

Farming is not a typical habit for elves. The Formene Elves adapted quickly but also used magic to find ways to make farming suitable for them. Over a dozen spells have been developed to manage irrigation, till, plant, tend, harvest, and load crops, along with analogs for livestock husbandry, birthing, feeding, tending, cleaning, and wrangling. Slaughter and preservation is done by workers in the quarter.

Five things to know about the Agriculture Quarter

- 1— Water – They tap a Lower Formene artesian well (starting eleven miles below the surface) for the water for all farms and the city. The water is pumped via magic to the various wells and cisterns. In the farms, the cisterns are above the farm, the natural seepage providing the water; spells manage the seepage so it is not continuous. There is a font in the Agricultural Quarter that is linked to the aquifer, and cisterns collect the waste water. The waste water is purified weekly and returned to the aquifer. Their calculations show they are losing about 0.1% of the water per year. Each century at some point, a portal to the Plane of Water is opened to replenish the aquifers.
- 2—Contention between agriculture and

livestock – A story as old as civilization, livestock and farmers live at some level of contention. Livestock need a lot of resources. About forty percent of crops goes to feed the livestock. The livestock consume twice as much water as the crops. While these tensions are nowhere near the range wars sometimes seen on the surface, there are tensions. Most of the discussions concerning the contention for resources start civil, give into bickering, and a minority end only when the shouting starts. The leaders feel they understand both perspectives. The workers are not so sure.

- 3—Opinions concerning resuming trade – Most of the members of the Agricultural Quarter look to the possibility of resuming trade with more hope than fear. The big expectation is that when surface dwellers get a taste, specific crops (and livestock) will see increases in production to match those desires, and their goal will be to balance the types of crops (and livestock) between what is needed for surface trade and what is needed, along with imported foodstuffs, for Formene needs. If additional farms are needed, four of the active dehava are committed to making more farms. Wine production is down to a tenth of its peak. Many of the vineyards are 80% storage and 20% vines in a constant rotation to keep the soil fresh.
- 4—Problems – The farmers and ranchers face minor concerns daily. Additionally, they have long term problems that they ponder, seeking to explore options to find the one that provides the best result.

The Formene Elves of the Agriculture Quarter are concerned:

- ◇ that human greed will never allow the Formene to be opened to surface peoples (other than some exceptional individuals)
- ◇ that a water issue will develop and be blamed on the herds and possibly the carnivores
- ◇ that the tensions between farmers and ranchers will spill over into permanent division

- 5—Hopes – Contemplating problems is not what occupies their full attention. Contemplating the paths of hope takes an equal share too.

The Formene Elves of the Agricultural Quarter are optimistic:

- ◇ that their produce, wines, and cuts of meat will be very popular, which will make the workers too busy to bicker and argue
- ◇ that the increase in demand will lead to an increase in profit shares for all
- ◇ that interaction with the surface will create opportunities to explore the plants and animals of the surface for possible widening of the crops

Villains of the Middle Formene

Shroom

This creature is about the size and stature of a gnome but for the enormous mushroom cap atop a cylindrical head. Two sinister, drilling dark eyes pierce from beneath flaring eyebrows on an otherwise featureless face.

After the Formene Elves, the shrooms are probably the most powerful of the Formene's peoples. Sinister and notorious, shroom cities tend to be quite small by the standards of other races—few of them number more than 500 shrooms. However, since shrooms are uniquely well suited to hold great numbers of slaves and thralls, shroom cities may have ten times as many slaves as shrooms. Shroom thralls are compelled to absolute loyalty and zeal in the service of their horrid masters. The shrooms can field entire armies of thralls whenever they wish and hurl them into battle without concern for their loyalty or fighting spirit.

The shrooms prefer the lower reaches of the Middle Formene, but they also have numerous communities in the Lower Formene. The mighty city of Aggar is the most famous of their realms.

They are not part of the Formene Confederation, and are hostile to all they encounter. They capture and convert most of their foes into thralls rather than kill them. They are the greatest threat to all Formene nations.

The Trade Quarter

The Trade Quarter manages all trade relationships, fees, and transportation of trade goods between the settlements of the Formene. Previously they also managed the Trade Nexus Network, but for the last millennium and a half, it has been dormant. The quarter has kept records of every trade they have overseen since first contact with each of the settlements and nations. The Trade Quarter also warehouses goods coming in and out of Talos for transportation and for internal distribution.

The quarter employs about 5000 people. About ten percent work outside of Talos in transport and oversight roles. Before the Trade Nexus Network went dormant, the quarter employed more than 6000 people with twenty percent working outside the quarter. About a quarter of the Trade staff focuses on record keeping and trend analysis.

While elves find haggling over price to be petty and annoying, they recognize that trade leads to peace. They engage in trade with all the settlements of the Formene that will engage with them to improve communication and understanding. Trade also introduces interdependencies that help make open conflict undesirable.

Trade has been the largest contributor to the peace, stability, and growth of the Formene civilizations.

Four Things to know about the Trade Quarter:

- 1—Surface Contact – The Trade Quarter is a key proponent of resuming contact with the surface. Their goal is to reopen the Nexus Trade Network and grow to their previous position of prominence in Talos. Many Formene residents had favorite delicacies and goods from the surface world. Keeping these goods flowing greatly enhanced the status of the Trade staff. While about five generations have come and gone while the network was dormant, the current generation wants to return to those days and enjoy the status upgrade.
- 2—Reopening the network – The quarter has

insufficient staff for a full restoration of surface trade. They will need to find a way to add about one thousand people to their teams to return to their glory days (at least as they see it). Many in the Trade Quarter expect to see a call for between six and eight hundred families to have a third child to help with this issue. Most of the homes in the residential loops are setup for a four-member nuclear family; however, families with one adult child could have another child without needing to expand the residential quarters. The Agricultural Quarter has already figured this out and is making plans to be able to feed so many new residents.

- 3—A step too far? – The trade between the settlements is overly specialized. Their unseen interdependencies run so deep that anything more than a skirmish could lead to famine and strife. Some elves feel this is a great thing; other elves and some of the other nations, if they were aware, would see it as a threat.
- 4—Inferiority complex – The staff of the Trade Quarter feel inferior to the Agricultural Quarter. This is a perception, not actually true. But with the Trade Nexus Network closed, they feel Agriculture has gained standing lost by Trade. The Trade Quarter's efforts have been focused on bringing Trade back to par with the other quarters in preparation to be top dog again when the nexuses reopen.

Svirfneblin

A dark-skinned, deep-dwelling breed of gnome, often referred to as deep gnomes, svirfneblin live in hidden caves and secretive strongholds throughout all three layers of the Formene, though today most dwell in the Middle Formene. Deep gnomes avoid trouble by simply staying well clear of it, and few strangers even blunder across svirfneblin towns. However, they maintain three sites in the open: Cothorp, Beothorp, and Cuthorp, sites where they trade, host diplomats, and receive visitors. The remainder of their strongholds and caves are not known to any outside their nation. This practice is a point of contention between the svirfneblin and the Formene Elves, but not to the point of conflict or action.

The Administration Quarter

The Administration Quarter coordinates all activities in the other quarters and manages the diplomatic service. It is supported by six smaller cities in the Batun Mountain Formene. Nearly half of its staff works out in the Formene, not in Talos. Records include information on every settlement in the Formene known to Talos, including basic census data, alliances, and issues. This quarter also manages all requests for expanding settlements for the Batun Formene nations. All requests to have one of the dehava expand a settlement come through this office.

Administration coordinates the activities of others, but does not sit above other groups. They are a peer of the other quarters. They focus on communicating the needs of the confederation, the towns, and Talos to the other quarters, and the quarters manage the tasks without oversight from the Administrative Quarter.

The diplomatic corps falls under the Administrative Quarter; these elves are dispersed throughout the member nations of the Formene Confederation. Some diplomats work alone in small settlements or camps; others work in teams of five or six in the larger cities and capitals of the member nations. A small contingent explores with a detachment of hunter-warriors looking for previously uncontacted denizens. Their goal is to establish contact and gauge their response for establishing official contact.

Six things to know about the Administration Quarter:

- 1—Dehava – The dehava are not slaves to the Formene Elves. They enjoy interacting with others and gladly trade their efforts for the security of their eggs. They largely make their own assignments from the requests and enjoy nearly complete autonomy within the Formene. Being able to explore the Formene without fear of discovery or attack brings joy to them.
- 2—Diplomats – The diplomats maintain small staffs in all the major settlements and visit all settlements regularly. Lingua Franca for the Formene is Elvish. Their Elvish is different enough from Surface Elvish to take a little effort to understand. This is a product of thousands of years of separation. There is no game mechanic effect on the minor divergence of the languages.
- 3—Old Settlements – When separated groups of denizens combine into one city, the abandoned settlement is tracked. If no one claims it, eventually it is turned into a mushroom cave park, ripe for settlement as needs evolve. These caves dot the landscape.
- 4—Military – Talos has about a thousand hunter-warriors, but no standing military. They scout and escort a lot more than they patrol or invade. The biggest threat is the creatures that roam the Formene who lack the intelligence, or will, to join the civilization. Basilisks, behirs, cloaklers, and worms are some of the more common threats that hunter-warriors manage for travelers.
- 5—Contact with the Surface – Most of the Administration Quarter is in favor of resuming contact with the surface. However, they are very cautious and are seen by the other quarters as being opposed to the idea because they are so vocal about their concerns but silent about their interests.
- 6—Missing Diplomats – Not every diplomat is accounted for. The records of missions with a final status of “indeterminate” would provide clues to their destination and mission. These could be investigated by a determined party. Some might be found alive. In all cases, closing the assignment, and providing closure to the families of these diplomats, would be a treasured gift.

Living Areas

High up on the main wall of Talos is a balcony that wraps around the dome, with twin openings at regular intervals (like a clock face) that lead to the twelve residential tunnel loops. Each loop holds hundreds of residential clusters. All residents of Talos live in these clusters.

Talos has 4200 clusters, 350 clusters per loop. Each typical cluster has private residences for three families of four individuals, a typical nuclear family. In addition, a cluster has green space, a common room, a study/library, and a place to bathe. There are other housing cluster designs, but they are the exception, not the rule.

During the day, the children of several clusters meet in the common room of a central cluster for child supervision, education, and other cultural traditions. Often the supervising adults are grandparents to the children they are tending. While grandparents often have an active role in the lives of their grandchildren, their parents also have an active role in the raising of their children. Once children reach age sixteen, their education becomes more advanced and more specialized. Many attend more structured classes in the Knowledge Quarter or apprenticeships in other areas.

Families typically have all their meals together and spend the evenings together. MIDDAY meal is commonly taken in the greenspaces of the main dome. The clusters are organized to put families as close together as possible.

The visitor housing where the party will be housed while visiting Talos is in the Administration Quarter, near the dome wall near the North Grand Entrance. This building has four floors. The ground floor is open and commonly used for meetings. The remaining floors have four rooms attached to a common area. Each room can sleep two people.

Two hunter-warriors provide minor guard duty for the visitor residence to ensure the privacy of visitors. This role is more ceremonial than critical; elves becoming overly exuberant and hounding a visitor is unheard of, but theoretically possible. The second floor is designed for the larger denizens of the federation like minotaurs. The upper two floors are designed for denizens from angulians to deep duergar. They can be entered from the dark diplomatic spaces, and all the light from Talos can be blocked with a single command. The human compatible beds have discreet little steps for smaller members to get into the beds, and chairs suitable to most statures are stacked in supply closets on the 3rd and 4th floors.



Example Formene Housing Cluster. Cartographer: Justin Andrew Mason

Farm Areas

In smaller domes, underneath the floor of the dome of Talos, the Formene Elves maintain over 200 farms. Most of these farms produce crops, the balance, livestock. The main crops are mushrooms. Supplementing them are crops like yams, carrots, radishes, beets, parsnips, salsify, turnips, and rutabagas. These tunnels are not shown on the City of Talos map.

The farms use a thick layer of mulch, peat moss, and other organic compounds to recreate soil. Some of the soil blends produce heat to help the crops grow. They are normally fenced in with stone fences since the soil is built up from the stone floor of the farm dome.

The heat producing soils are the ones that host dehava eggs mixed in with the crops. The heat is sufficient to keep the eggs viable, but in suspended animation, and the eggs have no impact on the yield. This keeps the eggs in accordance with the social contract between the Formene Elves and the dehava.

Livestock are another element of farming in Talos. About 20% of the farms are dedicated to livestock. Rodents, lizards, and larger insects comprise most of the livestock.



Example Formene Farm. Cartographer: Justin Andrew Mason

Denizens of the Lower Formene

No place on Tumunzar is as strange and dangerous as the Lower Formene. This level of the Formene extends from eight miles below the surface to unfathomable depths and features a degree of strangeness that would drive some surface dwellers insane. Few upper-worlders ever descend to the Lower Formene, and few of the Lower Formene's denizens want anything to do with the surface world. Some of the creatures in the Lower Formene—intelligent or otherwise—aren't even aware of a surface world; others have heard of it as a mythical place.

Why would any creature with intelligence or common sense live in such a harsh and barren environment? Some races have lived here for generation upon generation, and the Lower Formene is simply their home. Other creatures settle here to take advantage of the Lower Formene's unique magical properties, rare ores, or shelter from the hated sun. Still others view a sojourn in the Lower Formene as a temporary solution, since the dead magic areas and hostile territory may be a wanted criminal's most expedient means of avoiding capture.

Of course, not everyone is in the Lower Formene by choice. Some unfortunates are here because they neglected to research the destinations of the portals through which they ventured and have made a home in the inescapable Lower Formene. A few of these isolated groups have been discovered and provided escorts to the surface. However, the Lower Formene is too vast for anything beyond incidental discovery. Others feel more comfortable away from communities in the Middle Formene, the Upper Formene, or even the surface world.

Several Middle Formene races make frequent forays into the Lower Formene. Some do so because of expansionistic desires, others because they need the resources, and a scant few because they have something to prove. Grimlocks often set a coming-of-age trial for their young warriors to mark the passage between adolescence and adulthood. In a typical version of such a trial, the youth is sent into the Lower Formene, sometimes armed only with a dagger, and told to return with a trophy demonstrating his competence and ability to contribute to the community.

Aboleth

An aboleth resembles an enormous, prehistoric fish, measuring some 20 feet in length from snout to tail, with four 10-foot-long tentacles sprouting from behind its massive head. Its rubbery skin is blue-green with regular gray splotches running along its sides. The pink belly of the creature is interrupted by a lamprey-like mouth and four pulsating organs that secrete a foul-smelling gray slime.

Aboleths are both cruel and highly intelligent, making them very dangerous predators. They know many ancient and terrible secrets, for they inherit their parents' knowledge at birth and assimilate the memories of all they consume.

These horrible aberrations lurk in the deepest, blackest waters of the Formene, surrounded by legions of thralls, both water breathing and air

breathing. This gives them servants no matter where they travel. Given their extraordinary intelligence and powerful magical abilities, the aboleths are the unquestioned masters of most Lower Formene lakes and seas. While some aboleth cities are quite large, small outposts of a dozen or so aboleths are much more common.

Angulians

Angulians are deep-dwelling, lawful evil relatives of the sahuagin, resembling a cross between a man and an eel. While most angulians live in the sunless depths of the oceans, a few have made their way into the flooded tunnels of the Formene that open to the seas and the depths of the oceans. These tunnels into the seas are not known to the Formene Elves. However, they are aware that angulians are able to enter and exit the Formene at will.

Deep Duergar

Formerly warlike and cruel, the mutated deep duergar now predominantly live peacefully in the Lower Formene where they enjoy the warmth and Eldsazar radiation. Over the last couple of decades, they have begun hunting in the lower portions of the Middle Formene. However, their presence there is usually short lived, and they have established nothing beyond hunting camps outside of the Lower Formene. The small cities and strongholds of the deep duergar are buried deep in the Lower Formene. Akizdin is their capital, and their bigger strongholds are Zindin, Khatdin, Undin, Gabdin, and Naradin. Nutrition is too scarce in the Lower Formene to support large cities without importing most of their food and water. The deep duergar's slow metabolism makes them more suited for this stratum than most Formene races.

Pech

This small humanoid has the same height and rough build of a dwarf, but with gangly arms and legs. Its hands are broad and its skin is ochre-colored with lighter shades on its palms and feet. Its hair is a mix of reds and light browns. Its large, bulbous eyes are stark white with no apparent pupil or iris.

The pech is a fey creature believed to have its origins on the Elemental Plane of Earth. On the Material Plane, peches dwell deep underground in the Lower Formene, so deep they are rarely encountered outside of their trading posts, except when performing work for another Formene race.

They are unexcelled as stonemasons, a talent that leads to them being employed by other subterranean races for their skill at stone working and carving. Formene nations seeking ornate finishes for the spaces cleared by dehava often employ peches to enhance their spaces. Peches prefer isolation for their lairs and their skill at stone carving lets them blend their dwellings into the natural surroundings so well that few can find their towns. Like svirfneblin, peches maintain an unhidden presence for trade, diplomacy, and other business interactions.

Appendix 1

New Spell:

Destroy Stone

5th-level transmutation

Casting Time: 2+ actions (one to aim, one to execute each cube)

Range: 20 feet (to the first cube. Additional cubes require no movement.)

Components: V, S, M (a small stone and a pinch of rock dust)

Duration: Instantaneous

With the small stone in your dominant hand, and the dust in your other hand, a thin, pale blue beam springs from the stone, framing a 10' cube ahead of you. You move your hand to aim the projection, and when ready, rotate the hand holding the dust until the dust hits the ground at your feet. When the first dust speck touches the ground, a 10' cube of stone disintegrates.

Everything in the 10' cube is gone, except a few grams of stone dust. Any minerals or other materials in the cube that are not magical are destroyed. This includes organic material. However, stone must be the target for the spell to work. The organic material must be incidental.

This spell is most typically used in siege actions, but elves have been known to create tunnels by this method.

At Higher Levels: When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 6th level or higher, an additional 10' cube is destroyed for each level beyond 5 that the spell is cast. These additional cubes are normally behind the initial cube, but can be directed by moving the hand holding the dust to point in the direction of the next cube.

Lore: Legend holds that some wizards and a pair of clerics, all among the most powerful, spent years making a tunnel to connect two large Formene sprawls.

Using their potential, they could clear over half a mile per day. The clerics were part of the party using their divine magic to provide nourishment,

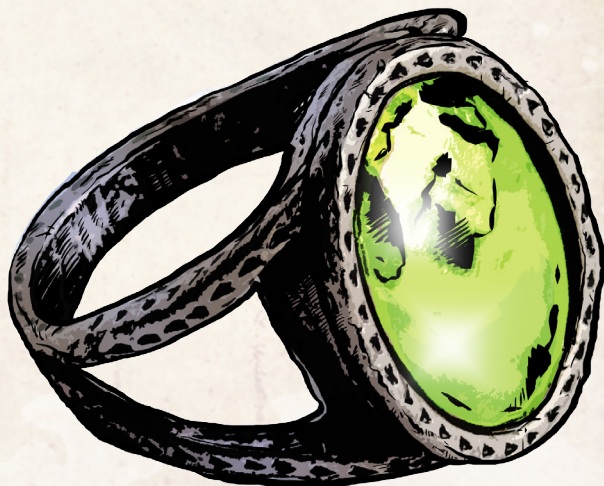
comforts, and emergency healing if needed. They could have cleared 100 miles per year this way.

Reality: Four groups of twenty, fourteen wizards and six clerics (along with servants), made multiple parallel tunnels, all 20' wide, linking the two major and three minor Formene realms. The gaps averaged 1200 miles. The wizards also carved out rest stops at 20 mile intervals. The rest areas are 60' square (36 cubes) and connect to the main tunnel with a 10' wide and 40' long (4 cubes) tunnel.

Each group averaged 80–90 miles per year. While it was uncommon for a wizard to become burned out and quit the project, replacements were scarce, so progress suffered the handful of times this occurred.

The group camped in the nearest rest area, and travelled to the current excavation site in teams of three (two wizards and a cleric) using various magics. Once on site, one wizard would use Destroy Stone to excavate the path while the other stood on the ready to project a **Wall of Force** to protect them if the excavation hit something disruptive. In about an hour, the excavation team could travel to the current site, cast all the spells possible that day, and return to camp. This left about sixteen hours for other endeavors back at camp.

Most of the wizards on the project used the quiet and short work day to study, research, or contemplate philosophical quandaries. On average, each tunnel took thirteen years to complete.



Appendix 2

Magic Items

Wondrous Items, Very Rare, require attunement

Boots of the Formene—This pair of boots connects the wearer with the Formene and allows the wearer to:

- Navigate the Formene like an elf by following hidden signs to reach the destination and avoid known pitfalls.
- Avoid cave-ins through seismic warnings passed through the soles of the boots.
- Derive nutrition from the fungus, animals, and plants of the Formene without vitamin issues.

Cloak of the Formene—This cloak envelops the wearer in a shroud of protection:

- Providing protection from air quality issues, including toxins in the air, lack of oxygen, and breathing underwater. The hood of the cloak has a facemask that protects the wearer from such threats.
- Suppressing all fires within 20' of the wearer to protect from air depletion, toxins, etc.
- Reducing damage from flash floods. In addition to allowing underwater breathing, the cloak gives the wearer protection from damage that might be taken from sudden flooding of caverns. (Advantage on all saves to mitigate damage, and the saves are for half vs. no damage, not full vs. half damage, like the rogue ability Evasion.)

Ring of Elvenkind—This ring grants the wearer a connection with nature. This allows the wearer to:

- Communicate via a form of telepathy with any willing intelligent being in line of sight, including strangers that want to communicate but have no common language or no language at all.
- Maintain a sense of time. The wearer is in tune with the sunrise and sunset on the surface.
- See in the complete darkness of the Formene (Darkvision 60').

None of these items have any effects outside of the Formene. However, they radiate a magic aura.

Villains of the Lower Formene

Undead

Because many undead creatures need no water, food, air, or other sustenance to survive, many of them find the Lower Formene almost hospitable. Liches are particularly suited here, since they have no need to prey on the living and find that the Lower Formene offers blessed solitude for their sinister studies. Some of the mightiest liches eventually found small realms or kingdoms here. Such a kingdom could consist of hundreds or even thousands of mindless undead laborers and soldiers, led by creatures such as mummies, wraiths, and even the occasional vampire (though vampires would fare better in cities full of the living for obvious reasons).



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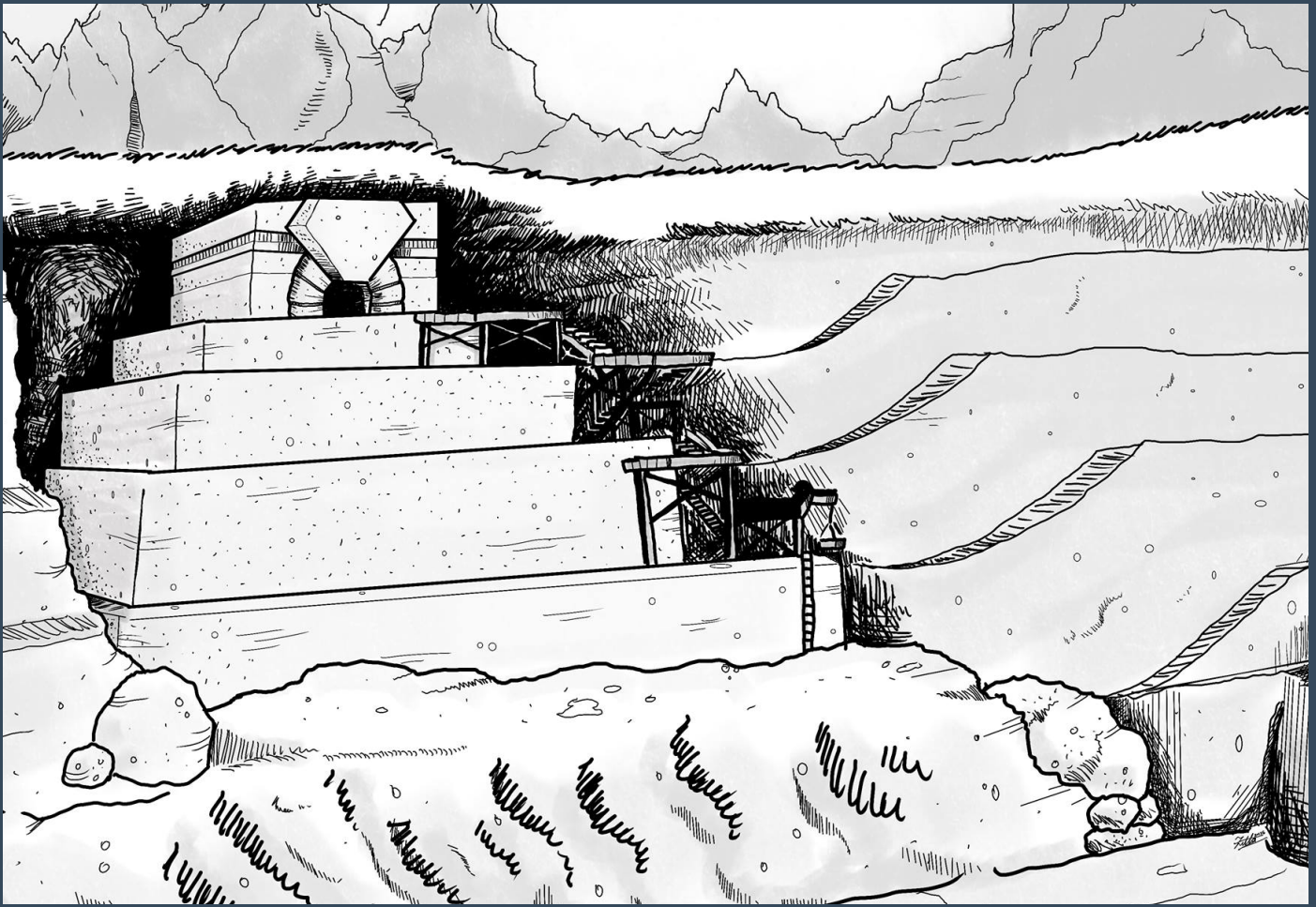
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Talos, a city of legend, focus of tales dating back to the First Age of Man—exotic and forbidden. Buried deep in the Formene, this lone gem of the subterranean realms has legends as tall as the mountains under which it lies. Scholars and sages know more: it is the capital of the Elven race of the subterranean realms, sealed off from the surface world, supported by smaller towns, trading nexuses, and the wealth of knowledge accumulated by the Formene Elves who ward it.

In this Land of Night, dozens of nations, formed from the Formene races, join the elves in a powerful confederation of trade, protection, and mining of the most valued metal—mithril.

Recently, a trading nexus was uncovered and explored. The leaders of Meawold want to restore contact with the Formene Elves and access mithril, other rare Formene metals, and minerals for the first time in two millennia.

The explorers of that trading nexus found letters and journals suggesting a vast, untapped wealth of gems, metal, and minerals, as well as forgotten cities full of treasure, some with magical wealth.

What waits in the Formene? Both the city of Talos and the Formene wilds offer incredible opportunities for adventure and wealth.

And also, incredible dangers.