

DNH2

Fifth Edition
Fantasy

Part Two of the
Haunting of Hastur Series

The Buried Zikurat - Book of Lore

by L. Kevin Watson

An Adventure for Characters Levels 6-8



The Buried Zikurat is an adventure for 3-7 characters level 6-8 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 7.



Dark Naga Adventures
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DNH2: The Buried Zikurat - Book of Lore

Dark Naga Adventures

Written: L. Kevin Watson

Illustrated: Rick Hershey, Z. Man Zilla, Adam Schmidt, Jeremy Corff, and Mark Lyons

Cartography: Rick Hershey

Production and Layout: L. Kevin Watson

Playtesting: Door Kicking Death Dealers

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The Book of Lore

This book contains player handouts that correspond to journals, letters, notes and other documents found in the Nexus during the party's exploration of the Nexus.

The twenty handouts within were written by the following authors:

- Ismael Alvarez
- Kalyna Conrad
- Troy Daniels
- Jennifer R. Povey
- Matt Roth

A brief summary of the content is included in the adventure for the DM. The handouts are much more enjoyable.

This book does not make sense to distribute as a print book, since printing on demand is easier.

Any of this content can be rewritten to better align with your campaign world.



This entry corresponds to information found at Area 1

Journal of Genniver Challey

The glory of the Nexus is that it allows for transportation and trade from below the surface to those above, protecting the Formene from invasion or intrusion by unwanted creatures. I, Annan Challey, have been assigned as an administrator of the Cafeld Nexus. Those who wish to trade must work through me and my agents in order to do so.

The upper four levels of the Nexus are available to the surface dwellers at all times. We allow them to enter and leave in relative peace, yet at the same time it provides us some form of protection should they become unruly. Unless they know the proper command words for the teleporter platforms, they cannot enter the lower portions of the Nexus. Fortunately, those command words are kept secret. Select individuals have been allowed into the lower levels, but only while escorted.

Due to the loose lips of one of the merchants we have recently had to change the command word for the teleporter from my office to the level below. Formerly "unyetta" the command word is now "denaketya". I am noting it here on my official journal as part of my administrative duties. The merchant that revealed the previous command word has been punished accordingly.

Genniver Challey Surface Administrator 01 25 0505

This entry corresponds to information found at Area 2

Incident Report 02

Trade Date 03 01 0505

I was disturbed while working late by suspicious sounds that appeared to come from the far side of the wall. This is the wall my office shares with the main vault. I left my room and discovered that the door was closed and locked. Opening it, things at first appeared to be normal, then I realized that there was a disturbance.

A number of items were missing, mostly gems of some value, but the worst of which was a set of metal stamps that administrators had stored in the vault. These stamps are used on bills of lading to validate when they came into the Nexus. Needless to say, if the existence of this loss got out, it would cause severe issues with some of our trading partners.

I still have no idea how the thieves got into the vault - again, the door was still closed and locked when I investigated, and there is no sign of a tunnel. The missing items were not that far into the vault, and light enough to have been easily moved by a single thief. A single set of tracks proved to be visible in the dust on closer inspection. From the size of the feet, I suspect a halfling or a small woman.

I fear that somebody may have used either teleportation to enter the vault, or illusion to fool me into thinking there was somebody in there and then invisibility to sneak past when I opened the door. Thus, I am willing to accept responsibility for this incident, and offer my resignation if necessary.

Breda

Security Admin

This entry corresponds to information found in Area 6

Trade Date 3 03 0505

The Nexus is now fully under lockdown. We should have done this weeks ago. Mankind has given in to the cult, and they bow to them. We will not let it spread to the Formene.

Thanks to the drills we've done in the past, everything went relatively smoothly. Those of us who have volunteered to stay on the surface side are worried, but we have plans. The teleporters are properly locked down, and none of us know the exact sequence to unlock them from up here.

Still should have done it faster. I'm worried that some people from the surface might have sneaked through during the period of time when it was clear there was going to be conflict and the paths were still open. If they were not caught, and entered the Formene, they won't last long. If everything we have been told about the Formene is true, they won't last a day. We don't need them...and we need even less the contamination they might bring. But some people were hesitant. I understand not wanting to lock down trade but still..

But when trade is likely to bring death with it - they feel that they can all manage without their surface delicacies for a while.

Only key personnel have the instructions to get past the various puzzle locks - at least I hope so. I'm worried some of the merchants might have spread things further than we intended, the ones insistent that they needed to be able to retrieve their stock in trade.

We have far too many people here who put money before safety...

Hune

Majordomo

This entry corresponds to information found in Area 7

-War Vets Journal-

2 06 0505

Me n Matt have been trying to get into the Formene fer days now. Damn undergrounders won't let us pass, preventing us from our quest and glory. No matter what we do they turn us away. Bribes, threats, pleas, all are meaningless as they just keep tellin us that surface people are banned and turning us back. But me and Matt haven't given up yet, we've been discussin using some side tunnels that we learned about from n old man at the inn we are staying at to try and work our way past these wretched undergrounders and be the first humans to see the fabled city of Talos. We would be famous n who knows what this city of legend would hold. Also, if the stories we keep hearing around this Nexus about a lost caravan laden with treasure and riches are true, then we aim to find it. Sure it could be just a story, but what's the harm n looking if were going down there anyway? We plan on trying the side tunnels after laying low for a few days, let the guards forget about us a bit before we make our attempt. While we keep hearing about the dangers of the Formene, Matt n me have been through thick and thin together and there isn't anything this Formene can throw at us we can't handle.

Jeff

This entry corresponds to information found in Area 10

Note to self:

Writing this down before I forget it. They're threatening to lock down the Nexus, and I won't be caught without my stock. Of course, I might be safer down there with the weird elves. Maybe. I don't know anymore. Besides they won't let us down.

Either way, still writing this down. I'm not sure the guy was supposed to be talking about it. Reguy, that is, the gem merchant. But he's as concerned as I am. A woman's got to make a living, you know. And war is usually good for business, but not this time. Not the way everyone seems determined to lock their doors and batten down their hatches. And not so much of a profit to be made selling to the cult, from what I hear.

From what I hear, they...

Okay, here's what I heard Reguy Mynge say to that kid of his. There's a puzzle lock to their office. You have to position everything just right or it will literally blow up in your face. The center disc goes to the arrow symbol, the middle disc goes arrow, rose, star and back to arrow. Then the outer disc is turned three times counter clockwise.

Simple enough as long as you don't forget the arrow, rose, star, arrow stuff. That's what I need to write down. This way I can get back in if I need to.

Or want to.

Running seems like a smart idea, but I'm not sure where to run to.

This entry corresponds to information found in Area 15

4 09 0505

Journal Entry of Roguy Mynge

Today's sales were quite profitable if I do say so myself. I sold three small diamonds, one amethyst and I was finally able to move the pair of large tourmalines that had been sitting in the side case for over a year now. The customer remarked during our transaction that, while I had an impressive collection on display, it was a shame that I didn't have any tanzanite. Would that I had some of that precious gem, tanzanite is a rare find given that it is unique to the Batun mountain region and quite a valuable gem at that. Sadly, I have not even samples of the stone in my stores, but the locals of the Nexus tell a story of a cavern full of the precious gems that is mined on a quota down in the Formene. If only I could learn the location of this tanzanite cavern, with my connections and know how I would strip the cave of as much of the tanzanite as I could and become rich beyond my wildest dreams. With but a few of these gems I could make a very sizable profit, with access to a cavern of them I would become wealthy enough to retire and live in luxury for the rest of my days if I so chose. However, since they do not allow surface people into the Formene it is unlikely that this will come to pass. But I know a caravan merchant or two who travel to the Nexus from the City of Talos. Perhaps I can strike a deal with one of them to get me and some of the diggers I know down there to find it.

This entry corresponds to information found in Area 17

Larissa,

I am tired of waiting for you and the rest of your group to arrive. I grew tired of waiting over a month ago when I finally decided that I did not need you or your team to help me with a simple acquisition. Therefore, I took it upon myself to review the contents of the Administrator's Vault and help myself to what was inside.

Allow me to give you an idea as to what you missed out on:

4 bars of mithril (approximate value 5,000gp each)

2 statues of unknown creatures. They were however made of gold and the gems in the eyes will fetch quite a price.

One metal ladder. Unsure as to what it was until I read the words on the side of it. It then became small enough to fit into my pocket. That's where it currently is.

23 calibration gems. These are used for the teleporters. I left them alone as we need the teleporters in order to maintain business.

7 chests. These chests all contained various valuables, both magical and mundane. I took my pick of what I wanted.

I am well off now, Larissa, and honestly don't need the retainer that I paid you.

But... I am a businessman. An honest one after a fashion. Therefore, I must insist that you return the 1,000gp retainer that I paid you to accomplish a task that I had to do myself due to your inability to complete the assignment.

Please note... I have more than enough coin now to send people after the retainer and still maintain an amazing profit potential. It's a matter of principle now.

You have my principal. I want it back.

Francis

This entry corresponds to information found in Area 21

My dearest Chara, Three days!

It took them three days to get the Nexus working normally again. All because one of the strange elf folks below decided it was time to test their lockdown mechanisms.

Well, Chara, let me tell you—they work!

Too damned well, if you ask me. Seems like they never really meant for the lockdown to be released! I'm not proud to say I started in on my own supply as the second day dragged on. Ha! Small comfort it was. Trapped between four walls, heavy locks and magical wards sealing us in. Hours upon hours without being able to step outside and taste the fresh air... how do these Formene elves stand it for lifetimes? If they hadn't fixed the coupling alignment, or the damaged gemstones, or the looping-whatever-it-is built into the base of the teleporter, I think I'd have started to claw my way out of this tomb by the end of the third night.

But that is not the best part, dear. Would you ever believe why we spent three days locked in a tomb of elven design? A lizard!

During the lockdown procedure, one of their little lightless lizards crawled into the mechanisms below the teleportation platforms, easily bypassing all the alarms for 'intruders', started gnawing through all the magical bits, and completely 'threw the loop out,' I've been told. Left it sparking and sizzling with all sorts of magic that no one wanted to touch.

Three days to get the proper wizard to repair the damages. It really was fortunate that I had just brought in a load of stock. Got to sit around sipping on the good stuff while business slammed to a halt. Alvrice, from the stall beside mine, made for good company in our drunken prison.

Then, just like that, the teleporters came back online. The fizzled stones keeping them aligned to the proper locations were all replaced with fresh ones, and business came back like it hadn't ever stopped. Beyond me what those elves were doing while we sat here with our thumbs up our rumps, but they looked no worse for wear. Like they hadn't lost a minute.

Stay home, Chara.

You're not missing anything here. I think I may rejoin you after unloading the rest of my stock. I'm just not sure this place's too-frequent peculiarities are worth the reward anymore.

Your love,

Ernard

This entry corresponds to information found in Area 24

To my beloved Kiria,

I am not sure about having you and the children join me here. Truth is, I haven't seen the sun in some time, and the strange, magical light of the zikurat becomes tiring at times. The Formene elves prefer their deeper levels, and getting one of them to meet outside, even at night, is impossible. Their money is good, though. Raising livestock in the Formene is apparently challenging. On the other hand, regarding some of the mushrooms, I find one particular pink variety to be quite excellent with beef.

About the Formene elves - they're nothing like the elves I've dealt with before. It's not just their appearance - pale skin and large, dark eyes. It's the fact that they seem to have little concern for the surface world. They're more concerned with managing trade between us and what are apparently even stranger folk below. Most elves can see in the dark — these, I swear, can see in pitch blackness with no light at all. Every time I meet with them I have to dim the light to a place where I'm squinting. But I did manage to get one of them, Mori...well, he has some long elven name, but I can't pronounce it...to wax about the ecosystem down there and their lives. It's a strange and beautiful world, apparently, but I'd rather see the sun every now and then. I'm not sure they know what the sun looks like. I'd also rather see you.

As good as the money is I don't know that I'm going to stay here much longer, especially with some of the rumors circulating... Expect me to return within a few weeks.

Waltom Intes

This entry corresponds to information found in Area 39

Dear Alstron,

I hope this finds you well, and I hope you managed to get the mining rights you were negotiating.

I managed to be highly privileged today - I was allowed in the lower part of the Nexus, normally reserved for the Formene elves. You would think we would understand them better than surface elves, but they are not like us. Or them. They are not like any other people I've met. Adapted to the underworld, most definitely. Large eyes, pale skin, long fingers. But they are not as interested in the rock as they are in what lives on it.

They pointed out life forms I would not even have noticed. Again, I think this is an honor. Mostly, we talked about mushrooms, that being one of their staples and major exports, but then we got onto the topic of art.

The Formene elves are fond of sculptures, likely because they can be enjoyed by touch in places too dark for even their adapted eyes. And they are particularly fond of work in wood, which they don't appear to have in their strangely lit caves.

But their own work is mostly in stone, and they encourage...it is the strangest thing. I know elves like living art, but art that grows on rock? Not to mention...they are devoted to their lives down there.

Nothing could get them to come to the surface, I am sure of it. Maybe that helps you understand a little more what I'm dealing with here?

Yours,

Beortio

This entry corresponds to information found in Area 42

Journal Entry 005

Trade Date 01 22 0505

I'm not happy with some of the rumors I've heard from the outside. Seems the Hastur cult is spreading. I'm having to raise my prices which, in turn, is not making my customers happy. I'm pretty sure the elves have something else to make bread with down there, but whatever it is, it isn't grain.

Then again, they've made noises about being fine without us. So they must have something. Some sort of fungus, probably. That seems to be most of what grows down there. Sometimes I get a bit tired of being in the Nexus.

While I'm at it I'm going to write this down. The command word to send the southeast quadrant to the Formene levels is Hindra. It probably means something in their variant of elvish. One of the surface trade masters got it wrong enough times this week that he got quite the lecture for setting off the alarms. And a lecture about how it's not that hard to pronounce. Heen-dra.

At least it's been working, unlike the southwest quadrant, which has been acting erratically lately. It needs whatever they do to maintain a teleporter. I don't know and I don't want to know. I'll leave that kind of thing to the experts.

I'm also trying to work out what to do if trade gets worse. The way things are going I'm not sure I'll be able to get enough grain to meet commitments with my regular customers...

Kater Arnet

This entry corresponds to information found in Area 46

It is in Elvish

Dear Nellaser,

I got the news about the Nexus being closed soon. I hope this still gets through to you.

I also hope you will come back to us. Staying there with the Hastur Cult getting closer seems foolish. From what you've said, there's no way the Formene elves will leave the Nexuses open with this threat taking over the kingdoms of men. I don't like the thought of my only son falling into the cult's hands, though. That's far more important than the mushroom trade.

Please come back to me before things get any worse. I know they'll reopen them once the Hastur are dealt with, but you can wait for that here, and what if they can't be? What if this isn't temporary? There is always the option to trade within the Formene.

I know they assured you it was temporary, but these are dark times we're talking about, and you know what an elf's idea of temporary is. I really don't like the idea of you sitting there making no money.

I sent money that should be enough for you to hire an escort - I know the lack of trade hit you hard, but we're doing fine here. Let me help you out. You can always go back if things improve. I hope they will - I know you like it in the Nexus and I know that when things were good you were making a lot of money. Not to mention the last case you sent us was quite delicious and I would love to have more. But it's clear to me this isn't going to be a matter of a few days or even a few weeks.

Please come home.

Your Dearest Mother Aseria

This entry corresponds to information found in Area 52

Dear Recipient,

I write for you this letter to inform you that we are changing the terms of the contract, as the current one is no longer satisfactory. Though we have had some middling success in trading food for food, we have run into some annoyances that have brought to light the inequalities inherent in this trading method. You have priced your food precipitously high, and it is not evenly appraised by our accounting. In addition, the materials that we exchange for strange fruit and tasteless grains are of the utmost quality. The most egregious example of this inadequate trade is the exchange of wine, which seems most disparate given the esteemed nature of our drink over yours. Though we desire to continue receiving your commodities, we will be trading in gold instead, as you seem to have a better sense the worth of coin. We need only to decide on a rate and...

(Note: The letter appears to be unfinished.)

This entry corresponds to information found in Area 53

It is in Elvish

Teleporter Operations Log // Findire, Entry #182 Recalibration, Again

Since our last test the humans have been antsy every time we want to test the Nexus's lockdown procedure. From resistance to outright refusal, our trading partners try my patience. Lockdown is a simple matter and takes only a few hours to undo.

Or it should, if the other teleportation operator could perform their jobs properly. I'm certain it's the ones on the human side of the Nexus that remain stubbornly ignorant of the proper calibrations required to realign the teleportation matrices. I keep trying to explain that their haste in trying to reopen the trading floors is bound to get someone killed when they materialize between two walls.

I've gone over the procedure with them countless times: the gemstones inset into the platform must be charged and aligned at the correct angles to the core teleportation magics. It takes no wizardry to identify the flow of energy from one stone to the next. A simpleton should be able to do it! If the loop is incomplete, then the teleporter will fail at best or send its users entirely off target at worst. Gods know where a misaligned teleportation platform would send one of those overeager humans. And if they are not calibrated to the right levels, they might not even be in one piece upon arrival!

Alas, my words fall constantly on deaf ears. They are afraid of being locked in, I've been told. I ask, is that not the purpose of a lockdown? But it is no matter to them—something about an incident with a lizard inside the teleportation platform. Typical that such an error would occur under human supervision, and then somehow I am the one to blame. They'd rather blunder through the very safeguards we've installed than learn to calibrate things properly!

I must remember to discuss an increase in lockdown drill frequency with the Administrator, if only to avoid such mishaps in the future.

This entry corresponds with information found in Area 54

This entry is in Elvish

To my esteemed business partners,

We have them at a disadvantage, my friends. The sun worshipping surface dwellers would sell the food out of their children's mouths for a scrap of mithril, let alone a handsomely crafted weapon wrought by our prestigious forges. The elders limit us to exporting only about a gross of these things a year, for fear that our own weapons may turn against us; it is our way to fear such eventualities. However, as we sell them weapons with which to kill their fellow surface worlders, we grow rich and powerful on their coin. We may increase trade at some point, depending on what we see come out of their dealings in Talos, but I don't see an issue with things staying as they are for now. For as long as they lack the ingenuity to make these wonderful items, we should fuel their wars and empty their coffers. That, my friends, is diplomacy. I hope that we can convene soon, as we have ample budgets to discuss.

With Sincerest Respect, Alarfil

This entry corresponds to information found in Area 59

This entry is in Elvish

Shipping Manifest

Indicating underground-origin goods to be shipped to Torvald. The shipper is warned to be particularly careful with the box of stones, which our gem master was unable to identify. There is a concern they may be eggs or seeds of some kind. Still, they might fit the interest you had in unusual stones? I got some of the other gems you requested. It's not my normal stock in trade, but it's not hard to find gems here, especially semi-precious. The ingots are Formene metal, which has some unusual properties compared to that found in surface mines.

I also threw in the mushrooms you requested in the quantity you requested — has that daughter of yours become addicted to them?

1 anvil-marked steel ingot

1 box containing six mithril ingots

5 boxes containing twelve copper ingots each. All ingots are locally stamped.

A sample box containing small pieces of gold, silver, copper, adamantium and mithril.

A box of mithril “scraps” and shavings.

1 box of glass-like faceted gems labeled “glow rocks.”

1 box of semi-precious stones of unknown origin.

3 bags of gems, assorted

1 chest of blanks, to test coin molds

6 boxes of pink oyster mushrooms

1 silver necklace with the pendant in the form of a dagger

1 pair of gold hoop earrings

Irdas

Rare Metal Goods

This entry corresponds to information found in Area 62

This entry is in Elvish

My Thoughts.

Almon of Antiquities, Date 02 20 0505

As always, just when I'd begun to fear for her life and my livelihood, Elrani returned. As victorious as ever, the brave fortune hunter strode onto the trading floor with a pack lizard loaded with glittering treasures. We sat over a cup of surface wine (for I like to impress my seekers of the exotic with a bit of exoticism of my own), discussing her adventures.

In another life, perhaps I'd have been born with her courage. Fortunately, this is not that life. I rest easily at the Nexus, brokering deals of whatever esoteric, forgotten paraphernalia the humans above find curious. I am fortunate that Elrani has no mind for business—brokering these deals is not half as hard as I make it out to be. Humans are impressed by the simplest of things, and Elrani brings me anything but the simplest of things.

Perhaps that is why I pay her so well!

A worthwhile investment. Elrani told me of her greatest find yet—an ancient and forgotten city. So ancient she could not identify its origin! My curiosity ran rampant. It could be a city of ghostly elves, the first of our kind to brave the Formene. Or it could be older still, one of the great civilizations from beyond the Formene that rose and fell before history itself was penned.

Elrani insisted upon the latter. She laid her blade across the table as proof (“not for sale,” she'd laughed). The incredible weapon was unlike any metal I'd ever laid eyes upon. It took no mystic to see its inlaid runic magic. She could keep that weapon. I had no intention of arming any foolhardy human with it.

In time we processed her whole haul, a collection of less dangerous, more salable artefacts. Over the last of my wine did we exchange goods, trading platinum chalices for provisions more practical.

Her lizard disencumbered and my stock restored, Elrani departed. Seeker of the unknowable, she is satisfied only in digging deeper, further beyond the edges of the world. Adventure runs in her blood, as trade in mine.

In the end, that curiosity will be her undoing. She will return as she always does, I am sure—but I will not be surprised on the day she does not.

Poorer, perhaps melancholic, but never surprised.

This entry corresponds to information found in Area 67

This entry is in Elvish

Zuennethir,

It is fortunate you came to me about the teleporter situation and not one of the operators.

They've grown increasingly difficult as the lockdown drills have grown more frequent. If I didn't know better, I'd say they were preparing for a permanent lockdown. May we be fortunate enough not to see that anytime soon. I've come to enjoy my time here in the Nexus, even if there are some nagging quibbles about it. (I name no names, mind you.)

In any case, the teleportation platforms have had their command words changed once again. It is of dire import that you do not use the wrong word on the wrong platform. I've heard Findire speaking with a few of the merchants on the trade floor about initializing a lockdown if the wrong word is used at the wrong platform too often within a given period. I have no idea if he managed to get such a measure approved by the Administrator, but it might explain why we've had more frequent lockdowns in the past few weeks.

Just remember that the command word to and from the trade floor is always in old elvish. Supposedly they do that to keep humans from poking about on our side of the Nexus, but I think the teleport operators simply like feeling superior to someone. Enjoying their authority, a bit too much, probably. It's currently "alvaris faricila". Some pun on 'market square,' or some such.

The command word between levels 2 and 3 is only marginally easier to remember. It's almost always some arbitrary numerical code. No idea where they come up with the exact numbers. Right now, it's "sarum floe arguis".

And, by all the good graces of the gods, don't let the higher ups find you with this letter. I fully expect you to eat it before they confiscate it.

Your Friend, Tyfri

This entry corresponds to information found in Area 70

This entry is in Elvish

Exodus and Rebirth: The Histories of the Formene Elves by Salaendral Lorrallian

Though this tome is lengthy and prone to rambling tangents, a few passages stand out as actually pertaining to the book's title.

...Thusly, hidden from the sun's slow bite, did the elves of the surface turn to become the elves of the Formene. The first years within the cold embrace of the earth were more troubling than any previously spent upon the surface. To hide from one evil, only to find the ground filled with as many and more—all in an unbroken night. Here, in the Formene, where hour made no difference to day, and day made no difference to night, did our people grow to see beyond sight. The process was slow, at first, and the strange turning of the eye was thought to be a malignancy.

As legends go, there is only one truly worthy of entry into these Histories, pertaining to the first to truly become Formene. A mere youth among us, yet weighted with the responsibility of scouting through the lightless unknowns surrounding us. Deep in the tunnels of the Formene, cut off from his companions, trapped, and alone, this youngling cowered behind the pitiful candlelight that warded him from utter darkness. Mustering courage as the flame died, he found his uniquely large eyes—thought diseased by the Formene itself—did not fail him. Instead, he saw sights he hadn't seen before, visions of shapes and forms once invisible in candlelight. He made haste, now able to navigate the umbral maze with near-perfect sight, only to find an ambush of predators lurking in shadow before his home. He slayed the mightiest of them with but a single blow and returned victorious. In time he led others, their eyes as malformed as his own, to enter into a world none of them had dreamed of seeing.

This story—though undoubtedly a mere bedtime story told to comfort young Formene as they undergo the Rebirth near to their third decade—has long been the standard for understanding what it is to be Formene. It is the slow and subtle changes in the skin, paling as though sucked by an unseen leech, and the expansive growth of the eye, practically bulbous by surface standards. But most agree, it is the turning of the eye—the prominent, inverse reaction to light. Indeed, here I sit, recording these Histories in sheer darkness...

This entry corresponds to information found in Area 71

This entry is in Elvish

Note to self:

Don't call the administrator Sir again. He doesn't like it. He's going to insist on Administrator Challey despite the ridiculous number of syllables. Hopefully he won't find this. Anyway.

Introduce as Administrator Challey, don't use the first name unless he specifies. Absolutely no sugar in his tea - I wonder if that's a real taste or an echo of his rather penny-pinching ways. No sugar, no milk, just "Black, the way nature intended it."

Don't forget how to operate the teleporter. Three turns to the right to circle to the Surface Administrator's Assistant, one to the right then three to the left for circle to the Formene Administrator, and the command word for the Surface Administrator's Assistant is Siregion. I know I'm not supposed to write it down, but there's no way I'll remember it otherwise. Never was good at that. It's fine, nobody will ever find this.

Another note, make sure to order Challey more of that blue-veined cheese he was raving about, the one that comes from somewhere east. He does like his surface luxuries, doesn't he? He's developed a fondness for lamb too, but that is starting to get expensive again. He told me to be careful of the budget, but did say he wanted to make sure he had some for his birthday.

Actually, it's starting to get more expensive. Making me wonder what transpires on the surface. Nothing good. Higher prices never mean anything good. But the blue cheese I should be able to get. I think that's very common wherever it's from, and they just want to exchange it for mushrooms.

I'm making myself hungry. I'm going to go get some lunch and tuck this away where it can't be found easily by anyone but me.

Akin

This entry corresponds to information found in Area 73

This entry is in Elvish

Trade Date 04 13 0505

Another long meeting of the merchants today. More talk of sealing the Nexus. Rampant fears have been spreading across Talos, fears that the same cult that once sent us scurrying into the ground now threatens our entire culture. Exploitation. Slavery. Extinction. Emotionally charged words to garner an equally charged response.

I, of course, disagreed with the Administrator's fearmongering. His method was effective, but his reasoning foolish. What do the people of Talos know? We here at the Nexus have had the most exposure to the surface. And I do not fear what I see.

Long have the surface dwellers been our trading partners, and I doubt that any cult could change that. Trade has a knack for kindling alliances where there should be none. And perhaps if this Hastur were the greatest banker in the cosmos I would have reason for concern. But as it stands, the humans will be no more united than they ever were. The whole of humanity choosing piety over profit? The pragmatists among them will see that never happens, just as this pragmatist will see business kept open.

The merchants I oversee had... mixed feelings about my decried 'optimism,' but in the end they stood behind me, as they have week after week. They, too, are easily swayed by the prospect of continued business. The week will undoubtedly be punctuated with yet another meeting, but I will not change my stance without evidence that trade relations stand at the precipice of failure.

After all, is that not my job as Trade Leader?

We knew the risks involved when we first constructed the Nexus. Those risks haven't changed in the slightest. Exchange of goods—exchange of coin—is as compelling a reason to endure that risk as it was the day the Nexus opened. And if it wasn't, we wouldn't have secured the place like the fortress it is. No cult will ever penetrate through its alarms and wards without our notice. The Administrator would have ample time to mount a proper defense while the rest of us ambled our merry way back to Talos, pockets lined with profit.

Overrunning the Formene? Mining her treasures dry? Leaving us in her desiccated corpse? Hah! Let them try first to pass our Nexus.

-Serellye

Location 79

... As I pen these words, it pains me to think of how history has transpired. The elven tribe that came here had such good intentions, or so our history states. The glowing optimism of past events is even now hard to disbelieve, and I find myself re-reading the ancient texts with disappointment. Though we know that many elves take up the cause of nature, our tribe was especially dutiful. We came to these new lands to guard them against human depredation, for we had what humans so often crave, with our veins of precious stone and ore.

So often had we heard that the human race was responsible for despoiling other races in the search for riches. We elves have changed over the plentiful years, and I wonder too if we have not changed our views concerning nature and greed. However, our visitors treat us with enough dignity that we have not doubted our intentions, and perhaps our complacency will undo us.

But we survive where other peoples did not, protected as we were from human machinations. For that I am thankful, but yet I wonder what the future may hold.

-Excerpt from the text "Formene: As It Is, As It Was, As It Shall Be"

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The clay mining operation at Caford has discovered a large step pyramid, or zikurat. This imposing structure was buried completely in the clay sheet they have been mining for decades to make brick and other ceramic products. The local miners see what they think is an obvious entrance, but cannot get past the slab of stone. A call for aid is sent to the capital city of Meawold, and the party is sent to investigate.

Could this be one of the Nexuses that traded goods from the subterranean Land of Night to the surface world?

Places where treasures of the subterranean kingdoms, like mithril weapons, were traded for surface goods. Bastions of trade that were lost during the fall of the First Age of Man. Why has it been dormant for almost two millennia? What lies within? Is it a threat to Caford, or the Kingdom of Meawold as a whole?

If they can get inside, the party will have to navigate millennia old magic locks and security sentinels to find answers to these questions and more within The Buried Zikurat.