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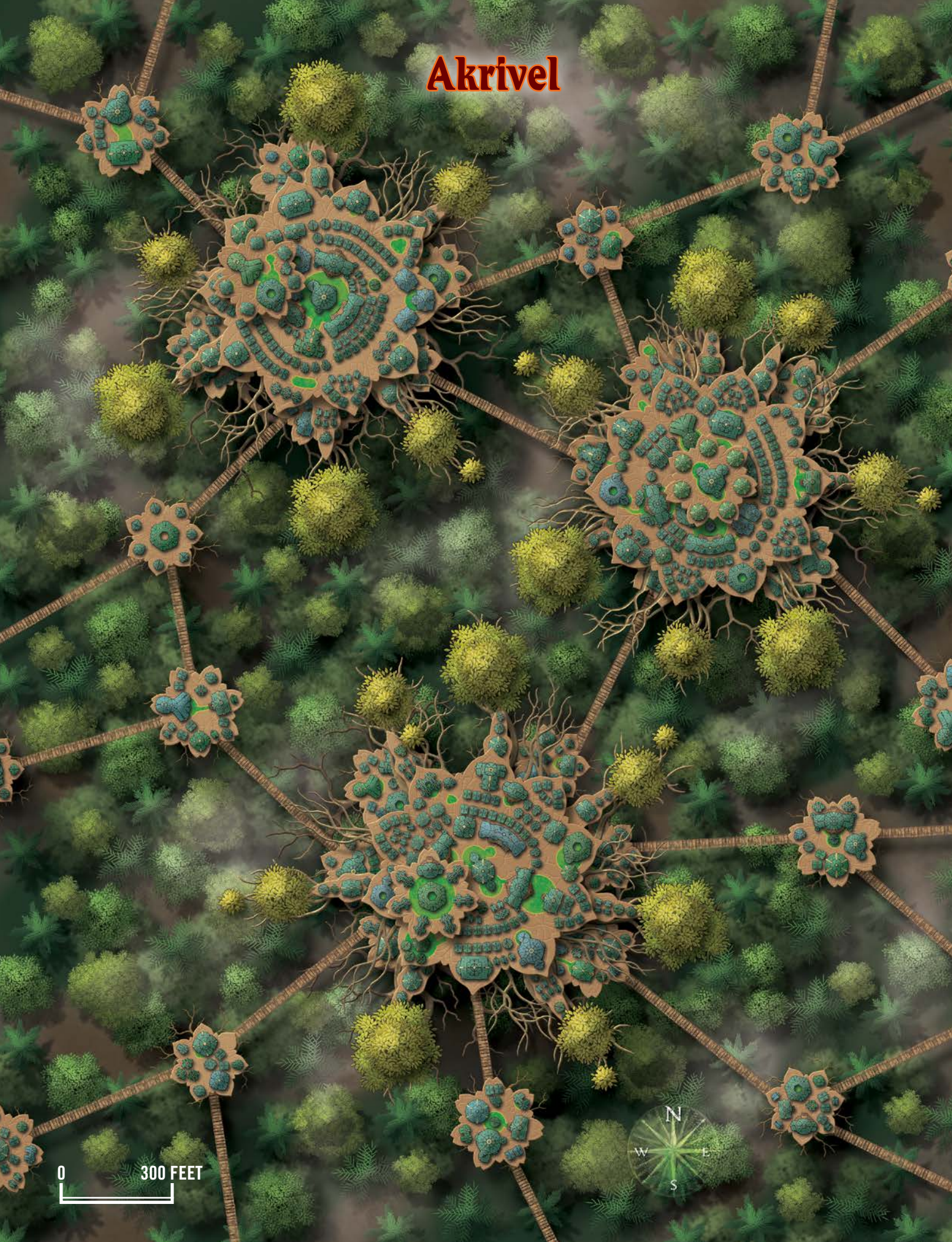


AGE OF ASHES
ADVENTURE PATH

CULT OF CINDERS

By Eleanor Ferron

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PATHFINDER

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ON THE COVER

In this lush cover illustration by Leonardo Borazio, Seoni and Valeros fight off a jungle drake guarding a temple to the dragon god Dahak deep in the depths of the sweltering Mwangi Jungle.



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CULT OF CINDERS

Chapter 1: Children of the Godslayers 4

Following the cult that attacked their town, the heroes emerge into a foreign landscape watched over by a group of elves called the Ekujae, who have their own connections, past and present, to the current troubles.

Chapter 2: Pillars of Ruin 26

The heroes set out into the hot and humid Mwangi Jungle, searching for a set of magical dragon pillars that the Cinderclaws have enchanted to focus and spread the foul influence of their patron god, Dahak.

Chapter 3: Blood for Gold 44

While searching for one of the Cinderclaws' nefarious dragon pillars, the heroes discover a hidden mining operation: cultists pulling poisonous gold from the mud and shipping it to a mysterious group of foreigners with unknown intentions.

Chapter 4: Legacy of Ash and Bone 54

With the dragon pillars in ruins, the heroes finally have the chance to assault the Cinderclaws in their main fortress, venturing into the fossilized remains of an ancient dragon to end the threat of the cult once and for all!

ADVANCEMENT TRACK

"Cult of Cinders" is designed for four characters.

- 5** The PCs should begin this adventure at 5th level.
- 6** The PCs should be 6th level by the time they begin exploring the Mwangi Jungle in Chapter 2.
- 7** The PCs should be 7th level by the time they have destroyed half of the Cinderclaws' dragon pillars.
- 8** The PCs should be 8th level when they begin their assault on Belmazog's encampment in Chapter 4.

The PCs should reach 9th level by the time they complete the adventure.

SCARLET TRIAD GOALS

The Scarlet Triad is using the Cinderclaws as pawns in its own sinister plot to utilize Dahak's trapped manifestation. Their leader, Uri Zandivar, knows full well of Mengkare's history with the *Orb of Gold Dragonkind*. Over the past several years, the Scarlet Triad has been secretly gathering up every shard of the destroyed artifact they can find in the hope of rebuilding it—or at least a lesser version of it—so they can turn the tables on Mengkare and control the dragon. But repairing an artifact is no easy task.

The key to these repairs, Uri and his allies discovered, lies in harnessing motes of energy drawn from Dahak's manifestation. By extracting the influence Dahak left in the contaminated gold, the Scarlet Triad is on their way toward partially repairing the *Orb of Gold Dragonkind*.

The Cinderclaws (and thus the PCs) know none of this information, of course, but as *Age of Ashes* progresses, the PCs will begin to uncover more and more of this Scarlet Triad plot.



CHAPTER 1: CHILDREN OF THE GODSLAYERS

Many theologians espouse the popular belief that the gods do not directly interfere in mortal affairs upon Golarion. Such direct action would invite meddling from rival gods, the conventional wisdom goes, which could quickly devolve into a deific war. Yet though the potential risks of such an act are very true, the thought that the gods are in any way barred from taking action is a lie. From Sarenrae striking a city from the face of the earth to Zon-Kuthon's involvement with the nation of Nidal, the divine powers of Golarion have acted before to directly mark the world in countless ways since its creation. Some of these acts have been prominently recorded, and even lauded, by priests and religious scholars. Others have long been forgotten, their records lost in disasters, or their memory blotted from history by those who wish to maintain the illusion of a stable future that cannot be shattered by the whim of a malevolent god.

Few know of the time when a dragon god of destruction spread his wings over the skies of Golarion. When Earthfall nearly brought about the world's end, Dahak could not help but take note. Amid the overwhelming devastation on both physical and spiritual levels, with both continents and gods being destroyed, Dahak's nature could not resist the pull toward the planet. Dahak explored the metaphysical boundaries separating his realm in Hell and the world of Golarion, and eventually he discovered a flaw in Huntergate, one of the *aiudara* of Alseta's Ring. Using this flaw, Dahak was able to shift his essence through the boundaries of reality, manifesting an incredibly powerful incarnation of himself in the post-apocalyptic world. This incarnation ravaged the surrounding Mwangi Expanse—and had he caught Apsu's attention, they likely would have triggered a godly war that would damage the already horribly

wounded Golarion enough to finish the job that Earthfall started. But Dahak had taken care to limit his presence just enough to escape Apsu's notice, and thus he was able to revel in the ruins for many years.

Golarion's salvation came not from the gods, but from the Ekujae elves who lived in the lands around Huntergate, where Dahak's rampage began. With their nation under siege, the Ekujae fought Dahak's manifestation, confronting the dragon with the force and fury of every elf who was strong enough to carry a spear. The power to fight back was bought with a terrible price—the only way for their mortal weapons to wound the god's manifestation was via a powerful ritual known as the *anima invocation*, which required the noblest of the Ekujae to willingly sacrifice themselves so that their spirits could bolster the remaining Ekujae warriors. With this powerful magic, they were able to confront Dahak's manifestation and strike him down. Yet even defeated, Dahak's wounds continued to heal. Unable to truly kill him, the Ekujae used their soul-empowered weaponry to cast the manifestation's spiritual energy out of his body and back into the same flaw in Huntergate that had allowed Dahak to appear in the first place. The magic of the ritual and the power of Dahak's manifestation overloaded the energies of Alseta's Ring in a backlash that destroyed the way station held within Huntergate, while simultaneously trapping the manifestation in a remote dimension between *aiudara* portals. This backlash of power coursing through Alseta's Ring also destroyed the portal to Kyonin, cutting Alseta's Ring off from the *aiudara* network forever.

Over the next several thousand years, the Ekujae preserved this great battle in oral tradition, even as the rest of the world moved on and forgot. Dahak himself moved on as well, abandoning his manifestation in the in-between within Huntergate and leaving the physical remains of his body to slowly fossilize in the forgotten swamp in which they lay. Yet the manifestation himself did not forget, and even over the course of ages, he never relented in his efforts to escape from his prison. Though these efforts haven't achieved their primary goal, his influence has reached out to a number of creatures over the centuries. Hundreds of cults have risen and built monuments to the dragon god in the Mwangi Jungle around Huntergate, only to be found and wiped out by the Ekujae. The half-dragon boggard Belmazog is only the latest cultist to rise to prominence in the area, and she's formed a large cult of Dahak worshippers called the Cinderclaws. But while Belmazog has been scheming to release Dahak's manifestation for much of her life, she never had the magical power to perform the required rituals—until now. Recently, members of a mysterious organization known as the Scarlet Triad contacted her, lending a number of powerful wizards to allow the Dahak cultist to take advantage of the influence that has infected much of the nearby jungles over the centuries.

Using an imprisoned red dragon and the fossilized remains of Dahak's manifestation as a focus for these rituals, Belmazog strengthened Dahak's ambient power over the land by raising a series of magical dragon pillars devoted to the deity. This power allowed Belmazog to bolster the strength of her faithful followers, who then attacked the local Ekujae clans, captured the land surrounding Huntergate, stole the magical key to that portal, and then used the key to open Huntergate in an attempt to release Dahak's manifestation. A fresh wave of divine power infused the Cinderclaws' dragon pillars, but the manifestation itself didn't emerge. Frustrated, Belmazog sent some of her Cinderclaws through the portal

CHAPTER 1 SYNOPSIS

The PCs restore Huntergate to working order, only to discover that passage through the portal presents its own dangers—the manifestation of Dahak still haunts the space in between. Emerging from the other side in the Mwangi Expanse, the PCs encounter the Ekujae elves and are brought back to their jungle settlement of Akrikel, where a great feast gives the PCs a chance to make new friends and learn more about the Cinderclaw cult—worshippers of Dahak who have long been enemies of the elves.

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to investigate (along with an invisible and undetected woman named Renali). Their passage into Alseta's Ring disrupted Huntergate's energies again and rendered the *aiudara* inert once more, trapping many Cinderclaws on a different continent.

This unexpected loss of resources, combined with a fresh attack by emboldened Ekujae warriors, drove the Cinderclaws from the region. Belmazog retreated to her congregation's camp to the east, seething and plotting her next steps, but for the moment the Ekujae once again control the lands around Huntergate. Even this control is tenuous, however, as Belmazog used the dragon pillars' bolstered magic to curse her enemies so they would be blinded if they approached too closely to the cult's headquarters.

And so, for now, the Ekujae elves and the Cinderclaws are locked in a dangerous stalemate—one that the PCs are destined to find themselves caught within as soon as they repair Huntergate and step through.

Getting Started

To a certain extent, "Cult of Cinders" relies on the PCs to be self-motivated in seeking out the rest of the Cinderclaws and thus propel the plot of Age of Ashes forward, but if they seem lost or hesitant to proceed, you can use any of the NPCs they've met and befriended in "Hellknight Hill" to suggest ways forward. Once the PCs move through Huntergate and contact the Ekujae, they'll have plenty of reasons to go forward with exploring the jungle, but it might be difficult to convince some parties to take that initial step through Huntergate. Some possible NPCs or events that could get things started are listed below.

Bumblebrashers: The goblin tribe was chased out of their home by the Cinderclaws, and they'll need a new place to live. Helba, the tribe's chieftain, eagerly accepts an invitation from the PCs to reclaim a wing of the dungeon below, but she is just as happy to relocate out into the nearby wilderness. Regardless of her choice, though, she and the other goblins remain worried that more Cinderclaws might come through Huntergate at any moment, and they push the PCs to investigate the portal and make sure that whatever cultists still remain on the far side of the portal have no plans to continue their invasion through Alseta's Ring.

Town Councilors: Breachill's leaders are equally worried about the potential for more cultists to invade the region via Alseta's Ring, and any of them can encourage the PCs to investigate what lies beyond the portal. Unlike the goblins, the town councilors can offer the PCs rewards to help sweeten the deal—you should customize the town's offers to match specific needs for the PCs at your table. An offer of a 7th- or 8th-level

permanent item, or a flat payment of around 200 gp per character, should be enough to motivate most groups!

Voz's Notes: While Voz is unlikely to have survived the previous adventure, the notes and letters she left behind should intrigue the PCs. The mysterious mention of the "Scarlet Triad" and the name "Laslunn" are clues that will be followed up on in more detail in the next adventure, "Tomorrow Must Burn," but the fact that both Voz and the Scarlet Triad were eager to learn more about where the other portals of Alseta's Ring lead should be enough to spark the PCs' curiosity as well.

A HELPFUL GUIDE

If the PCs met and befriended the anadi woman Renali near the end of the prior adventure, she makes the best NPC to compel them forward. Renali knows that there are many more Cinderclaws in the Mwangi Expanse than those who were led through Huntergate, but she earnestly wants to return to her home. She cannot do so without the PCs' help, and so she promises them her aid in return for their assistance. If the PCs can get Huntergate functional and then open the portal, Renali agrees to travel with them and serve as a guide in the dangerous jungles the PCs will soon find themselves in. She can certainly warn the PCs that beyond Huntergate lies a land they might not be prepared for, and she can give them some advance warning of some of the dangers they'll face—though as it works out, the PCs will have allies on the other side of Huntergate soon enough!

Should the PCs accept Renali's offer of help, she can provide many useful benefits during Chapter 2 of this adventure. Each day she's traveling with the PCs, they can ask her to aid them in one of the following ways.

- **Gather Supplies:** As she is familiar with the area, Renali can automatically scavenge enough fruit and fresh water to feed and hydrate the PCs for a day.
- **Construct Shelter:** Renali can use her skill at weaving to craft an excellent shelter for the PCs to spend the night in. Each day she uses this action, she attempts a Crafting check (her modifier is +14) to determine the effectiveness of the woven shelter when using the Camp in the Mwangi Jungle downtime activity (she still gains a +2 circumstance bonus if she uses Ekujae mosquito netting).
- **Scout:** She can independently scout an adjacent hex to the PCs, reporting back in the evening to let them know if a site of interest lies within the area.
- **Encounter Support:** While Renali doesn't enjoy combat, she'll certainly aid the PCs in battle as best she can. When providing encounter support, Renali

can also serve as a translator for the PCs. If the PCs ask her to help create a camp after a day in which she's provided encounter support, she doesn't have time to spin silk to augment the shelter and thus uses her basic Crafting modifier of +10 to resolve the activity.

RECLAIMING CITADEL ALTAEREIN

When "Cult of Cinders" begins, the PCs should have not only finished clearing the monsters and cultists out of Citadel Altaerein but also recovered the castle's deed! The PCs are now the proud owners of an entire castle, even if said castle is in a sorry state of repairs. You should encourage the PCs to take ownership of the castle and begin working toward repairing it, restoring it, and administrating it—see Ruling Citadel Altaerein on pages 72–75 of this book, for general advice and rules for how the PCs can spend their downtime attending to the citadel's needs. Certainly, the town elders of Breachill encourage the PCs to settle in to Citadel Altaerein, for having an increasingly powerful band of heroes located so close to town is a significant boon. Working with the people of Breachill gives both the PCs and the townsfolk ample opportunities to cooperate and build up the fortress to something perhaps even greater than it was initially.

In time, during the final adventure of Age of Ashes, the PCs will be called upon to defend their home and Breachill from the manifestation of Dahak itself, but for now, this place should work as a centralized location for the PCs to retreat to as often as they wish during the rest of this Adventure Path's installments. While at times the events in specific adventures might seem to be pressing, the machinations of the Scarlet Triad have been going on for years, and they aren't on a particular rush toward their end game. You should make sure the players have plenty of time to return to their home base, particularly between adventures, to rest, recover, and rebuild.

REPAIRING HUNTERGATE MODERATE 5

During "Hellknight Hill," the PCs discovered the elf gate nexus of Alseta's Ring and ended the threat of the Cinderclaws cult—but only for now. An unknown number of cultists await on the other side of the portal, however, and until the PCs investigate further, they have no way of knowing whether the Cinderclaws plan another assault. Both the Breachill town council and the Bumblebrashers goblin tribe are concerned that

they might be attacked again. If the PCs want to keep the town safe from future dangers that might come through Huntergate, they'll need to travel into the mysterious portal themselves and assess the situation is on the other side.

This adventure assumes the PCs have already examined the *aiudara* in Alseta's Ring. They'll have no way to determine where the five elf gates lead to, but they should know what they are and that activating them requires touching a specific item, called a portal key, to the *aiudara*. They should also already possess the portal key to Huntergate: a magical trinket known as a *hunter's arrowhead*.

Investigating Huntergate:

When the *hunter's arrowhead* is touched to Huntergate, the stone within the elf gate's arch shimmers and flashes with fiery radiance before returning to solid stone. A successful DC 20 skill check to

Identify Magic confirms that the gate is malfunctioning, but that it could be repaired, as detailed below.

Repairing Huntergate: Physically, Huntergate is intact, but the magic that courses through the stone has been put slightly askew by some form of powerful magic that seems to be emanating from within the portal itself. This is due to the presence of Dahak's trapped manifestation—if a PC examining Huntergate succeeds at a DC 27 skill check to Identify Magic, they note that whatever is causing the damage seems to be a part of the magic within the portal and not the portal itself, but this doesn't reveal the true nature of that magic. The PCs can take the Repair Huntergate activity to attempt to fix the structure.

REPAIR HUNTERGATE

EXPLORATION MANIPULATE

Prerequisites trained in Crafting or Thievery

Requirement You have the Huntergate portal key (*hunter's arrowhead*).

You use the *hunter's arrowhead* to guide the misaligned magic of Huntergate back into the proper pathways through the stone's intricate carvings and decorations. You must attempt either a Crafting check to Repair (in which case the *hunter's arrowhead* serves as the repair kit needed for this activity) or a Thievery check to Pick a Lock (in which case the *hunter's arrowhead* serves as the thieves' tools needed for this activity). Regardless of the skill used, the activity takes an hour to perform, and the DC of the check is 24, with the following effects.



Renali

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PORTAL ACCESS

To come and go with ease via Alseta's Ring, the PCs must retain possession of the various portal keys, like the *hunter's arrowhead*. But it's not impossible that a portal key could be lost or destroyed. The PC carrying the key might fall off a cliff beyond the other characters' reach or get carried away by a monster, or the key itself might be stolen or otherwise lost.

If something like this occurs, you have a few options. You can shift the focus of the game for a short time to a new quest to recover the stolen key, if that makes sense for your campaign. Or you can allow the PCs to craft a replacement key, explaining that their previous exposure to the *aiudara's* energies was enough to grant them the capacity to create replacements. You could even rule that once the PCs pass through one of the *aiudara*, they become keys themselves and can use the elf gates at will without the portal key. Choose whatever option works best for your campaign—after all, the point of Alseta's Ring in Age of Ashes is to allow the PCs to move back and forth to the various locations with ease, not to struggle with it.

Critical Success Huntergate is repaired, and the vision of Dahak hazard (page 10) inside of the Huntergate way station is reduced in power; reduce all of the hazard's modifiers and DCs by 2.

Success Huntergate is repaired.

Failure Huntergate is not repaired, and the character who attempted the repair becomes clumsy 2 for 1 hour as an orange arc of magical energy lances painfully through their body. A new attempt to repair the portal cannot be made again for 24 hours.

Critical Failure As failure, but the magical backlash also deals 6d6 fire damage to the character attempting the repairs.

If the PCs are unable to repair Huntergate themselves, a successful DC 12 Society check is enough to Recall stonemasons from Breachill who can be hired to aid in the work—see the inside back cover for details on the town's two options. In this case, either Amera Lang or Rorsk Axebane will agree to do the task for a payment of 100 gp (which a character can negotiate down by half with a successful DC 20 Diplomacy check), and they are automatically successful at the repair (they automatically avoid the failure and critical failure possibilities, but they can never achieve a critical success). Of course, both NPCs have their own agendas and interests, and the ramifications of letting

one or both of them know about Alseta's Ring or the interior layout of Citadel Altaerein is left to you as the GM to determine.

Activating Huntergate: Once Huntergate is repaired, touching the *hunter's arrowhead* to the portal causes it to activate. The stone within the *aiudara* arch turns into a churning curtain of gold-and-silver mist, at which point any creature can simply step through the mist to enter the way station beyond. Attempts to physically clear the mist to view what lies beyond before stepping through fail. Powerful divination magic like *true seeing* would allow someone to peer through the mist, but such magic is likely beyond the reach of PCs at this time. Once activated, the portal remains open on the side at which it was activated for 10 minutes before closing. During this time, travelers can exit the other side of the portal, but they can't re-enter without activating the portal again via the touch of the *hunter's arrowhead*.

XP Award: Once the PCs manage to repair Huntergate, grant each PC 80 XP.

HUNTERGATE WAY STATION SEVERE 5

Unlike most portals (including the more advanced *aiudara* portals active elsewhere on Golarion), travel through the *aiudara* of Alseta's Ring is not instantaneous. When Candlaron created these “first drafts,” he created small complexes of rooms attached to each portal to serve as way stations—areas where travelers from one region to another could rest, pray, prepare for what awaited them on the other side, or otherwise gather their resources. When each portal became active, these way stations were swept up out of the Material Plane and became tiny demiplanes contained wholly within the portal itself. When a creature enters one of the portals, either from Alseta's Ring or from the destination portal, they appear in that portal's corresponding way station, where they can linger at their leisure or simply move to the small complex's far side and step out to the portal's actual destination.

The way stations within Dreamgate, Duskgate, Jewelgate, and Vengegate all still exist and are detailed in the adventures to come.

When the Ekujae trapped Dahak in the in-between of Huntergate, the potent energy devastated Huntergate's way station, burning it out and turning it into a simple passageway akin to a lava tube. The backlash of magic that spewed out of the far end struck Lotusgate and destroyed that *aiudara* from the outside. The explosion caused the Lotusgate's way station to phase back into the Material Plane, only to be similarly blasted by the magic of the trapped dragon god. The PCs encountered

the ruined remains of Lotusgate's way station in the prior adventure.

As the PCs step through the reactivated Huntergate, read or paraphrase the following.

The mists of the magical portal fade, revealing a twenty-foot-wide passageway stretching off to the distance. The walls of the tunnel seem to be made of hardened lava, long ago scorched and melted. Tiny cracks and fissures line the walls, within which an orange glow flickers, giving the tunnel a soft, fiery illumination. The wall of gold-and-silver mist from the portal glows from behind, while a similar faint glow beckons about a hundred feet ahead. The air is almost uncomfortably warm and smells of smoke.

This scorched, hollowed lava tube is all that remains of the Huntergate way station—a 20-foot-wide passageway that extends in a straight line for a hundred feet between the 10-foot-wide archways at both the Alseta's Ring side of the portal and the Mwangi Expanse side. No map of this area is provided, as it's a simple location to depict on a blank Pathfinder Flip-Mat or another blank grid. The stone walls, floor, and ceiling of this tunnel are uncomfortably warm to the touch, and the temperature is about 100° F (mild heat). The walls are stone, but nothing exists outside of the tunnel—this small demiplane is limited to what is visible, and any attempt to dig into the surrounding stone reveals only more stone. Attempts to teleport out of this tunnel fail unless the effect has the capacity for interplanar travel.

The far end of the tunnel ends at a second archway identical in appearance to the one the PCs step through. Passing through this archway transports the party to an abandoned Ketephsian temple in the Mwangi Expanse (see The Temple of Ketephs on page 10). Time passes normally within the way station, and creatures within can remain here as long as they wish. The exits to Alseta's Ring and the temple of Ketephs both remain open from within the way station at all times, but once a creature steps through to either side, the portal is closed to them and must be reactivated via the *hunter's arrowhead* to be used once more.

Hazard: The passage of the Cinderclaws through Huntergate at the start of this adventure overtaxed the hidden flaw in the portal. After the cultists arrived

in Alseta's Ring, the trapped manifestation of Dahak drew the portal's magic out of alignment. Even after the PCs repair the portal, this unholy presence remains active within Huntergate's way station as a deadly hazard—a phantasmagorical inferno in the form of a vision of Dahak himself. This dangerous magical threat is the most Dahak's manifestation can currently do to threaten the PCs, but in time (during the concluding adventure of Age of Ashes) it will finally be able to break free. It is this imprisoned aspect of the draconic god that gives the Huntergate way station its sweltering temperature.

The vision of Dahak manifests once all of the PCs have stepped through the portal, or on the round the first PC attempts to exit the far end of the way station into the Mwangi Expanse. The vision of Dahak continues to threaten travelers of Huntergate until it is destroyed or disabled. At your option, if the PCs take

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Vision of Dahak



a particularly long time to complete Age of Ashes, the passage of time (measured in years) could be enough to let Dahak's influence build up again to the point where a disabled vision might manifest once more within this ruined way station.

VISION OF DAHAK

HAZARD 8

RARE

COMPLEX

FIRE

MAGICAL

TRAP

Stealth +16 (expert)

Description Blasts of fire and smoke pour out of the tunnel walls to coalesce into the burning form of Dahak himself; a PC who succeeds at a DC 20 Religion check to Recall Knowledge notes that the fiery dragon closely resembles classical depictions of the draconic god of destruction.

Disable Religion DC 26 (expert) to utter prayers to a non-evil deity to counteract Dahak's presence (prayers to Apsu allow this check to be made if the character is merely trained in Religion), Thievery DC 30 (expert) to divert the hazard's energies back upon themselves, or a successful *dispel magic* (4th level; counteract DC 26).



AC 27; **Fort** +17; **Ref** +13

HP 130; **Immunities** critical hits, fire, object immunities, precision damage; **Weaknesses** cold 10

Manifest  **Trigger** A creature is within the way station.

Effect The vision of Dahak appears in a 15-foot space adjacent to that creature and rolls initiative.

Routine (2 actions) The vision of Dahak manifests next to the creature that is closest to the center of the way station, then uses its Breath Weapon in a direction that catches the most possible targets in its area.

Breath Weapon   (divine, evocation, fire) The vision of Dahak unleashes a blast of fire from its burning maw, creating a 60-foot cone that deals 6d6 fire damage to all creatures within (DC 26 basic Reflex save).

Reset The vision of Dahak deactivates and resets automatically once no creatures remain within the Huntergate way station.

THE TEMPLE OF KETEPHYS EXTREME 5

The Mwangi Expanse side of Huntergate was once a marvelous, open-air temple devoted to the elven god Ketephys. A ring of stone arches surrounded a magical garden filled with animate plant guardians and enchanted wildflower hazards meant to protect the *aiudara*. When the Cinderclaws attacked the site, shortly before this Adventure Path began, their first act was to destroy all of the plants and burn the garden to the ground. Read or paraphrase the following as the PCs step out of Huntergate into the ruined temple.

Cloying heat and humidity hangs heavy in the atmosphere of this open-air temple, its surrounding stone arches

smear black with soot. Charred branches and clumps of roots mark the shape of the garden that once stood here, but the plants and flowers have been ripped up and burned. In the middle of the ring of stone arches, in the center of a cold pit of charcoal, a half-complete wooden pillar once capped with a dragon's visage stands near a pile of carved rocks and a small sack of cloth. Only one section of the ring of stone arches is solid—a section of wall that bears an exact duplicate of Huntergate as it appeared in the wall below Citadel Altaerein. Beyond the open archways elsewhere sprawls a verdant expanse of a tropical jungle.

This temple was where the ancient Ekujae elves banished Dahak's incarnation after Earthfall, but in so doing, they corrupted both the temple grounds and Huntergate. The Ekujae have traditionally guarded the area ever since, in part due to the remaining danger and in part to honor the sacrifice their ancestors made. The Ekujae have been even more vigilant since the Cinderclaws' recent attack on Huntergate, which forced the elven guards to retreat just long enough for the cultists to open the gate and send a contingent through to the other side. Ekujae guardians reclaimed control soon thereafter and drove the remaining Cinderclaw cultists off, but the elves remain on edge due to their failure. When they notice Huntergate opening, they initially believe it to be the Cinderclaw forces returning from the other side.

Creatures: When the PCs exit the portal, they find themselves surrounded by a force of 20 elven warriors, all holding bows at the ready. A PC who succeeds at a DC 20 Society check recognizes these elves as Ekujae, jungle-dwelling elves who keep to themselves and dislike trespassers on their territory.

This is meant to be a tense social encounter, rather than a combat. The elves aren't malicious, and they can tell immediately that the PCs aren't the same cultists they fought earlier. They won't strike first, and if the PCs jump to conclusions and attack, the elves do their best to capture the PCs alive. If the PCs insist on violence, the rest of this adventure will be difficult to complete, but not impossible—the PCs can learn about the Cinderclaws and the dangers they pose by interrogating a captive Ekujae, but they'll need to be self-motivated to continue exploring the region and may well find themselves in over their heads. This adventure assumes the PCs adopt a less combative approach, quickly attempting to explain the situation while under threat.

A successful DC 15 Diplomacy check is enough to defuse the situation (provided the PC attempting the

check speaks Elven or Mwangi), but if the PCs don't attack or attempt to explain themselves, one of the elves steps forward to address them in Common. This is Jahsi, and his greeting to the PCs and conversation is presented under "Speaking with Jahsi" on page 12.

EKUJAE GUARDIANS (19)

CREATURE 2

CG MEDIUM ELF HUMANOID

Perception +8; low-light vision

Languages Elven, Mwangi

Skills Acrobatics +7, Athletics +7, Nature +6, Stealth +7, Survival +6

Str +3, **Dex** +3, **Con** +0, **Int** +1, **Wis** +2, **Cha** +0

Items black adder venom (6), cold iron dagger, silver dagger, longbow (20 arrows), studded leather

AC 19; **Fort** +6, **Ref** +9, **Will** +6

HP 26

Speed 30 feet

Melee ♦ cold iron or silver dagger +11 (agile, versatile S), **Damage** 1d4+3 piercing

Ranged ♦ longbow +11 (deadly d10, range increment 100 feet, reload 0, volley 30 feet), **Damage** 1d8 piercing plus black adder venom

Ranged ♦ cold iron or silver dagger +11 (agile, thrown 10 feet, versatile S), **Damage** 1d4+3 piercing

Double Slice ♦♦ The Ekujae guardian makes two Strikes against the same target, one with each of their daggers. The guardian combines the damage of any attacks that hit and applies precision damage, resistance, and weaknesses only once. Both attacks count toward the guardian's multiple attack penalty, but the penalty increases only after both attacks.

Primal Innate Spells DC 16; **Cantrips (1st)** *dancing lights, detect magic, disrupt undead, tanglefoot*

Sneak Attack (precision) 1d6

Woodland Stride The Ekujae guardian ignores difficult terrain from plants.



JAHSI

CREATURE 8

UNIQUE NG MEDIUM ELF HUMANOID

Male elf hero

Perception +14; low-light vision

Languages Common, Elven, Mwangi

Skills Athletics +14, Diplomacy +17, Nature +14, Religion +16, Survival +14

Str +4, **Dex** +4, **Con** +1, **Int** +1, **Wis** +2, **Cha** +3

Items +1 disrupting cold iron dagger, +1 striking silver dagger, gold jewelry (worth 20 gp), +1 longbow (20 arrows), splint mail

AC 28; **Fort** +16, **Ref** +17, **Will** +15

HP 135

Glimpse of Redemption ♦ **Trigger** An enemy damages one of Jahsi's allies within 15 feet of him. **Effect** The foe must choose one: The ally is unharmed by the triggering damage, or the ally gains resistance 10 against the triggering damage, and the enemy is enfeebled 2 until the end of its next turn.

Divine Providence ♦ **Trigger** Jahsi rolls a success on a Will save against an enemy's effect. **Effect** Jahsi gets a critical success instead.

Speed 30 feet

Melee ♦ disrupting cold iron dagger +19 (agile, magical, versatile S), **Damage** 1d4+7 piercing plus 1d6 positive to undead

Melee ♦ silver dagger +19 (agile, magical, versatile S), **Damage** 2d4+7 piercing

Ranged ♦ longbow +19 (deadly d10, magical, range increment 100 feet, reload 0, volley 30 feet), **Damage** 1d8+3 piercing

Ranged ♦ disrupting cold iron dagger +19 (agile, magical, thrown 10 feet, versatile S), **Damage** 1d4+7 piercing plus 1d6 positive to undead

Ranged ♦ silver dagger +19 (agile, magical, thrown 10 feet, versatile S), **Damage** 2d4+7 piercing

Champion Devotion Spells DC 25; **4th** (2 Focus Points) *lay on hands* (Pathfinder Core Rulebook 387), *litany against wrath* (Pathfinder Core Rulebook 388)

Primal Innate Spells DC 24; **Cantrips (4th)** *dancing lights, detect magic, disrupt undead, tanglefoot*

Woodland Stride As Ekujae guardian.

Treasure: Once the PCs have calmed the elves and convinced the guardians that the party poses no threat, they have an opportunity to examine the curious objects in the center of the ruined temple. Even a cursory examination of the broken pillar is enough to reveal that it was originally intended to be crowned with a wooden carving of a dragon's head that has been bleached white. A PC who succeeds at a DC 20 Religion check recognizes the dragon depicted as none other than Dahak. The cloth

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sack at the pillar's base contains a thin gold bar worth 10 gp—but this gold is contaminated with arsenic (see Tainted Gold on page 13 for more information).

This pillar was originally intended to be one of the dragon pillars the Cinderclaws have erected throughout the nearby jungle, but the cultists were driven off by the Ekujae before they could even begin the ritual magic to empower it. Though the statue is both broken and incomplete, a PC who succeeds at a DC 22 Arcana, Occultism, or Religion check to Identify Magic can discern a vague impression of what the pillar was meant to do: amplify divine power and channel it back to an unknown focus, while also directing an unknown magical effect at any creature with local Ekujae heritage.

SPEAKING WITH JAHSI

Once the PCs defuse or otherwise resolve the situation (or fail to do so and are captured), Jahsi puts his weapons away and approaches. If the PCs were aggressive, he interrogates them about their intrusion into Ekujae lands; otherwise, read or paraphrase the following.

One of the elves, a man set apart from the others by his gold jewelry and bracers, steps forward into the ruined temple, holding his palms open at his sides to show he is unarmed. The rest of the elves relax the draw of their bowstrings and put their weapons at rest, though their arrows remained nocked, ready to fire quickly.

The elf in gold jewelry stops a respectful distance away and gives a very slight bow. "I am Jahsi, of the Leopard Clan," he says, speaking in accented Taldane. "My mother is of the River Clan."

Jahsi is a wiry Ekujae champion of the elven goddess of magic, Yuelral. He wears armor made from iron and wooden plates that have been wrapped in colorful swatches of cloth. The sides of his head are shaved, and the rest of his hair is woven into long, thin braids. He still bears some of the injuries from a recent Cinderclaw attack, most notably a heavily bandaged wound on his neck. He expects the PCs to return introductions as a basic courtesy, but he doesn't expect them to follow the traditional Ekujae method of doing so. Due to his position of authority among the Ekujae warriors, Jahsi puts on an air of stoic resolve, but he is kind at heart and often can't contain his curiosity or smiles.

Though Jahsi shares his people's resistance to outside interference, he recognizes the PCs as potential allies against the Cinderclaws and the looming threat of Dahak's manifestation. He invites the PCs back to the Ekujae settlement of Akrivel, home of the Leopard Clan, as guests to further discuss the situation and

meet with the clan's leaders and linguists. He is also willing to answer any questions the PCs have to the best of his ability. Likely questions and his answers are given below.

You speak our language? "Some! My daughter taught me!" The elf gives a bright grin.

Where are we? "You are in Ekujae lands, some distance east of the Lirgeni coast." A PC who succeeds at a DC 15 Society check recognizes this as being in the northwestern reach of the Mwangi Jungle.

Why are you guarding this site? "We always guard the temple, to keep Huntergate from opening. We failed."

What was that dragon thing in the gate? "That is the Great Darkness. We... what is the word? We hurt it, long ago. But we did not kill it."

What happened here? "We were attacked. Charaukas and boggards—the Cinderclaws—but they were so much stronger, with claws and scales and breath of fire... but that is no excuse." Jahsi holds his arms stiffly to the side, his muscles straining. "I ordered us to run. We returned and fought them off, but not before they opened Huntergate and sent some of their kin through."

Where are the cultists' bodies? "We drove them off. Those who remained, we cut to pieces. Fed them to the jungle."

Did the cultists have anything useful or suspicious on them? "They brought that pillar." The elf jerks his head toward the broken pillar standing unfinished on the temple grounds. "Past that, weapons, magic for healing. We took all of those."

Why didn't you follow the cultists through Huntergate? "The Darkness is still within. Did you not see it, when you walked through? I do not think it has forgotten the Ekujae, in the time it has spent in there." The elf gives a grim smile.

Is the Darkness Dahak? "The Darkness is a story for our linguist to speak of. Not me."

What happened to your neck? "Charau-kas." Jahsi runs a thumb across his bandages with a sheepish smirk. "I need to be more careful."

Why are you the only person wearing gold jewelry? "I am *keledi*." Jahsi turns his head to the side, embarrassed. "It is a... gift? An honor, given." (A PC who succeeds at a DC 18 Society check knows *keledi* is an Ekujae word for someone of great purity who cannot be debased by corruption; it is often applied to heroes and champions.)

Can you help us find the cult? "I will take you to my daughter. She will help; I know she will! She is our linguist, and she knows much of the world beyond this jungle."

XP Award: If the PCs peacefully defuse the standoff with the Ekujae, award them each 40 XP. If they learn more about the cultists or Jahsi himself by speaking to him, award each PC an additional 40 XP.

TAINTED GOLD

At several points in this adventure, the PCs will discover gold from the Cinderclaw mine (see Chapter 3), which is laced with arsenic. This contamination has a subtler but more insidious effect than a dose of pure arsenic (as detailed on page 550 of the *Pathfinder Core Rulebook*). A successful DC 22 Perception check is enough for someone to notice a strange sheen to the gold, after which someone who succeeds at a DC 25 Crafting check to Identify Alchemy confirms that the gold is polluted with poison. Removing the poison from a single gold object can be done over 10 minutes with a successful DC 25 Crafting check. This requires alchemist's tools.

Without proper precautions (such as handling the gold with gloves), anyone who handles or carries contaminated gold might be exposed to the arsenic. Keep track of which PCs handle or carry the poisoned gold—the next time the PCs eat, have those characters attempt DC 22 Fortitude saving throws to resist the effects of arsenic poisoning (*Pathfinder Core Rulebook* 550). Characters who suffer ill effects might not know what's causing the affliction, but someone who succeeds at a DC 22 Nature check (or a Crafting check, if the character has the Alchemical Crafting feat) identifies the effects as arsenic poisoning, while a critical success reveals slight discoloration on the victim's fingers, suggesting the exposure came from something they handled recently.

XP Award: The first time the PCs manage to remove the arsenic from at least one golden treasure in this adventure, award 40 XP.

Akrivel

Should the PCs agree to follow Jahsi back to Akrivel, the elf whistles a signal into the forest that is echoed by the nearby birds, and then quickly escorts the PCs north through the jungle to where Akrivel is located—a 10-mile journey that likely leaves characters unaccustomed to the jungle's humidity ready for a rest. Though the woven-branch buildings of the Ekujae blend into the surrounding forest, the architecture is unmistakable once pointed out. Read or paraphrase the following as the PCs arrive.

Woven tree branches form the foundations and buildings of this large treetop Ekujae town. Bridges made of sturdy vines spread out through the rainforest canopy, allowing

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WE AREN'T IN AVISTAN ANYMORE

Half-orc, half-elf, and goblin PCs might be accustomed to certain prejudices from their upbringing in Avistan, but on a new continent, the PCs face a new set of cultural stereotypes. Non-Ekujae elves are received cordially, if with some curiosity. Half-elves find a warm welcome by the Ekujae, who have heard that many Avistani half-elves have issues finding belonging and so wish to provide a welcoming environment to their foreign kin. Orcs and half-orcs in the Mwangi Jungle are well known as demon-hunters, and so the Ekujae greet any such PCs with respect. Goblins are not common in the Mwangi Jungle, and the Ekujae view them with curiosity. In contrast, Chelaxian PCs, dragon-associated characters, and worshippers of Abadar or fiends (particularly Asmodeus) are viewed with quiet suspicion.

rapid travel through the jungle for miles around. Dozens, if not hundreds, of trunks of massive trees, each over ten feet wide, support a wide weaving of branches that in turn supports the city above, and each is decorated with twisted roots and shoots that have been painstakingly arranged to form images of elephants and leopards. Further up the trunks, amid beautiful meshes of branches that have grown together to form wide platforms overhead, a staggering array of grafted fruit trees and earth-filled terrace gardens creates a spectacular display.

An Ekujae half-elf waits at the base of one of the trees, balancing lightly on a mass of protruding roots. In one hand she holds a brass staff topped with a sculpture of a leopard grasping a sword in its jaws and pinning a prone human. Her other arm seems to be made not of flesh, but of twisted wooden branches and bone. "I am Nketiah, of the Leopard Clan," she greets. "My mother was of the Stargazer Clan. You are guests of the Ekujae tonight. Welcome to our lands."

Nketiah is one of the linguists of the Leopard Clan, serving a position in the clan somewhere between diplomat, storyteller, and royal vizier. She is also Jahsi's daughter, and she has come to meet the PCs at her father's request. Though she and her father have not yet been able to discuss the PCs' arrival, Nketiah rapidly assesses the situation as soon as she sees the PCs, and like her father, she hopes that they might act as allies against the Cinderclaws. For the moment, however, Nketiah has declared that the PCs are guests of the Ekujae, and the elves are preparing a celebratory feast in the spirit of hospitality.

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Once all greetings and pleasantries have been exchanged, Jahsi and Nketiah rapidly vanish into the treetops; Jahsi nimbly runs and climbs up the branches, while Nketiah's wooden arm unravels and extends to allow her to hoist herself into the canopy. Any PC who wishes to follow the pair must succeed at a DC 15 Acrobatics or Athletics check, with failure resulting in the PC stumbling back down to the forest floor. The elves happily lower a rope ladder or pulley elevator to anyone who asks for it, but they otherwise watch in amusement as the PCs try to climb up the trees. If they note any PCs growing frustrated or angry, though, they curb their amusement at once and lower elevators and ladders to aid them, offering apologies.

Despite the welcoming overtures, most of the Ekujae are both busy with preparations for the feast and cautious of outsiders in general, leaving the PCs mostly to their own devices. Curious PCs can attempt to chat with nearby Ekujae (provided they can overcome the language barrier), but even then most of the elves stick to superficial topics and direct the PCs back to Nketiah for important matters. Nketiah herself is willing to answer some of the PCs' questions while preparations for the feast are taking place (see Speaking with Nketiah on page 24), but she wishes to leave the heavy business of the Cinderclaws until after the PCs have been properly welcomed according to Ekujae customs. She also deflects requests for an explanation of the Darkness within the portal until after the feast, saying, "I will be telling that story before the whole clan tonight. Don't steal my thunder!"

In addition to making idle conversation, the PCs can explore Akrivel. A number of events are presented on the following pages, which the PCs can use to both entertain themselves and win friends among the elves. The Ekujae settlement is home to several hundred elves, but unlike many other cities, their community is not traditionally set up to support trade. There are no merchants in Akrivel for the PCs to shop with, and no one is particularly interested in buying things from the PCs. A trip back to Breachill via Huntergate is the best solution for PCs who want to buy or sell items. There are several Ekujae clerics and healers in the city, though, and at your discretion, they'll provide healing with spells of up to 3rd level free of charge to the PCs, as long as the PCs are on good terms with the elves. Likewise, if the PCs need mundane gear to aid in their exploration of the Mwangi Jungle, the elves can provide such items free of charge (again, at your discretion).

A map of the settlement of Akrivel appears on the inside front cover of this book. You can use this map to help the players orient themselves during this chapter, but you shouldn't need it for combat or other

tactical events. Akrivel is a level 5 settlement, for the purposes of Earn Income downtime activities.

BEFRIENDING THE EKUJAE

The Ekujae elves play a major role in both the past and present events of this adventure, and their relationship with the PCs holds great roleplaying potential.

Elves are known to be slow to form friendships, and the Ekujae are more interested in actions than words. Because of this, using Diplomacy checks to improve their attitude can make them friendlier in the short term but has less effect on their long-term opinions. This section outlines a system to measure the PCs' lasting influence with the Leopard Clan, and details three important Ekujae NPCs and the best ways to get in their good graces (Jahsi and Nketiah, whom the PCs have already met, as well as the hunter Akosa, whom they will meet in Event 3 on page 18).

Various actions the PCs take affect the general opinion of the Ekujae elves, who witness or hear word about their actions. Their status is measured through Influence Points (IP). As a general rule, an Ekujae elf must be aware of an action for that action to affect the elf's opinion—an Ekujae cannot be outraged or impressed by something they don't know about, though the GM should assume the elves talk among themselves. The GM is the ultimate arbiter over what actions might gain or lose Influence Points; offensive or rude behavior always causes the offender to lose Influence Points.

The Ekujae NPCs with roles to play in this adventure (and potentially beyond) are presented on pages 15–16 under Leopard Clan Allies. Improving their attitudes can lead to gaining IP, XP, and gifts. The PCs have only limited interactions with the twin leaders of Akrivel, and so they are not listed separately.

Additional Influence Points can be earned during the remainder of this adventure, as indicated in the Influence Award entries within various encounters.

If tracking Influence Points seems like too much additional effort, threatens to stymie your players' creativity, or does not appeal to you or your players, feel free to ignore this system in place of roleplaying. The goal of the information included here is to provide roleplaying suggestions and an interesting dynamic to the PCs' interactions with the Ekujae, not to place a straitjacket on NPC interactions or to reduce the various characters in this adventure to a series of numbers and points.

THE LEOPARD CLAN

This clan is tasked with guarding Huntergate, where the elves banished a Great Darkness thousands of years ago.

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Influence Points To gain the full favor of the Leopard Clan, the PCs must gain a total of 25 Influence Points. The Leopard Clan has seen many fools, liars, and conquerors over the centuries, and its members are cautious about growing too comfortable around outsiders. Going against the clan's wishes can reduce the point total, even to a negative value.

Ways to gain or lose Influence Points are listed throughout the adventure. Here are some notable ones:

- **+4 IP** for defeating Belmazog.
- **+2-3 IP** for turning notable Leopard Clan NPCs into allies.
- **+2 IP** per pillar for destroying the Cinderclaws' dragon pillars.
- **-2 IP** for allowing 5 days to pass without destroying a dragon pillar.
- **-2 IP** for irresponsible use of fire.
- **-2 IP** for killing an animal for reasons other than survival.

Gifts The Leopard Clan bestows gifts of goodwill upon the PCs at certain Influence Point thresholds. PCs who later fall back below these levels keep items they've already gained, but no longer receive the benefits of any ongoing services.

5 IP The elves provide survival supplies to the PCs, replenishing rations, waterskins, and camping supplies any time the PCs visit.

15 IP Ekujae guardians pass scouting reports they receive from their allies on to the PCs, typically using *animal messenger*. Once every 3 or 4 days, provide the PCs a hint about what might be in a certain hex on the map (page 30).

25 IP The elves offer the PCs a copper *ring of fire resistance* in the shape of a leopard, with the clan's twin leaders wryly noting that it will likely serve the PCs well in the days to come.

XP Award If the PCs reach 25 IP with the Leopard Clan, award them 80 XP.

Leopard Clan Allies

The PCs have the chance to make lasting alliances with three prominent NPCs whose opinions matter greatly to the clan as a whole. However, these resolute veterans aren't easy to sway with simple Diplomacy, and require the PCs to demonstrate their worth through action.

The information here includes entries for the various NPCs' likes and dislikes. Likes represent actions that impress that NPC, and dislikes represent actions that an NPC finds abhorrent or frustrating. At the end of a scene featuring any of these NPCs, or when information gets back to the clan about the PCs' exploits, improve an NPC's attitude one step if the PCs acted in ways the NPC likes, worsen it one step for

dislikes, or leave the NPC's attitude unchanged if their actions are irrelevant or roughly evenly split among likes and dislikes.

A PC can uncover a like or dislike while interacting with an NPC with a successful DC 20 Perception check, though a PC can attempt this Perception check only once per day (of course, a player might also learn of a like or dislike through roleplaying, if you take care to convey these preferences as part of play).

An NPC whose attitude improves to helpful gives the PCs a gift, increases their Influence Points with the Leopard Clan, and grants XP. The Ekujae have a tradition of giving gifts as a symbol of friendship and trust, though they do not give these gifts to outsiders lightly. A helpful NPC gives their gift to the most appropriate PC as soon as the opportunity arises.

AKOSA

An Ekujae scout and former freedom fighter. See page 18 for additional details.

Starting Attitude Unfriendly. Akosa has no real grudge against the PCs, but he has suffered tremendously in the past and instinctively keeps his guard up around strangers.

Likes Showing great prowess with ranged attacks, coming up with creative insults or sassy comments, gifts of cute items or sweet food, extreme bluntness.

Dislikes Animating or otherwise defiling a corpse, magically or mundanely forcing a creature to act against its own will, insulting Jahsi, unsolicited advice, or excessive sympathy.

Gift If the PCs shift Akosa's attitude to helpful, he presents the PCs with a *+1 striking longbow*, grinning as he explains that he swore on the bow to kill every Aspis Consortium member at Whitebridge. In passing it on to the PCs, Akosa suggests that they could swear the same vow to eliminate all of the Cinderclaws.

Story Awards If the PCs successfully shift Akosa's attitude to helpful, award them 60 XP and 3 Influence Points.

JAHSI

An Ekujae guardian, considered a paragon among his people. He is also Nketiah's father. See page 11 for additional details.

Starting Attitude Friendly (unless the initial meeting with the PCs went badly). Jahsi attempts indifference and plays his feelings close to his chest, but he has a strong sense of camaraderie and is less cautious toward outsiders than most of his kin.

Likes Knowing about a topic in great depth and sharing such information, crafting magic items or weapons, defending an ally from physical harm, nonviolently resolving threatening situations.



TROUBLEMAKING PCS

Cult of Cinders assumes that the PCs are interested in allying with the Ekujae elves against the Cinderclaws. It is possible, however, that a group of PCs may have little interest in the Leopard Clan or even deliberately antagonize the elves with inexcusable actions such as violent attacks, murdering beloved animals, or committing arson. While the Ekujae's ancestral duty to protect the world against Dahak means they are willing to suffer troublesome allies in pursuit of their goal, they will not abide PCs who cross certain lines. GMs who feel that the PCs have soured their relationship with the Ekujae beyond reconciliation should not be afraid to have the Ekujae eject these characters from their city. While the Ekujae are a valuable source of experience, treasure, and information in the Age of Ashes Adventure Path, their aid is only strictly necessary in a few portions of the adventure. If the PCs end up making enemies of the Ekujae, the only thing you'll need to adjust is the method by which they gain *Eclipse*, the magical starknife that is the portal key they'll need at the start of the next adventure. In this case, the best solution here is to have *Eclipse* be part of the cult's treasure in Chapter 4.

Dislikes Committing evil acts, wasting food or equipment, interrupting someone who is speaking, demanding a reward, or showing displeasure with a reward given.

Gift If the PCs shift Jahsi's attitude to helpful, he offers the PCs a red, white, and black *spellguard shield*, explaining he received the shield in a distant land as an honor for killing an evil necromancer. Jahsi rarely uses the shield, however, and gifts it to the PCs to keep them safe.

Story Awards If the PCs successfully shift Jahsi's attitude to helpful, award them 40 XP and 2 Influence Points.

NKETIAH

A linguist of the Leopard Clan, and Jahsi's daughter. See page 78 for additional details.

Starting Attitude Indifferent. Nketiah desperately hopes that the PCs will prove themselves friends, but she knows her reputation and people will suffer if she trusts too naively.

Likes Finding success through diplomatic means, making clever puns or plays on words, sharing new gossip about other PCs, successfully playing a harmless prank.

Dislikes Failing a task due to ignoring sound advice, patronizing language, attempting to correct someone by

providing incorrect information, taking another person's illness lightly.

Gift If the PCs shift Nketiah's attitude to helpful, she offers them a *dragon's eye charm* (page 71), explaining that it was given to her years ago by a friend when Nketiah faced a dangerous mission. She tells the PCs what the pendant can do, and just as her friend wished her good fortune, she wishes the PCs, her newest friends, the same good luck.

Story Awards If the PCs successfully shift Nketiah's attitude to helpful, award them 50 XP and 2 Influence Points.

Before the Feast

The following events are most likely to occur before the welcoming feast begins, though several could also occur during the feast, at your discretion. You should feel free to play out or omit as many of these events as you see fit, but if you do so, remember to adjust experience awards as necessary, based on which encounters best engage the attention of the PCs. Ultimately, the PCs should earn enough XP during this portion of the adventure to reach 6th level before they head into the wilds of the Mwangi Jungle.

Throughout all of the events, you can assume that Nketiah remains with the PCs to act as a translator and guide.

EVENT 1. A DANCING GAME

A pair of tall Ekujae girls, both curious and looking for an excuse to avoid helping with food preparation, boldly approach when the PCs are otherwise unoccupied. Asking Nketiah to act as translator, the two girls (named Mauuko and Senyo) challenge the PCs to a dancing game known as daikada. The game involves each player wearing a pair of copper anklets; each set of anklets is designed to make chimes that are distinct from the other pairs when struck. The goal of the game is to dance along with the beat of a song, while at the same time using fancy footwork to strike the opposing player's anklets and make them chime. The player that makes her opponent's anklets chime the most is the winner, but stumbling and missing the beat results in losing points or even outright losing the game. The girls try to convince as many PCs into joining the game as possible, offering to form teams if more than two PCs want to play, though they also accept PCs offering to perform the music for the game or serve as scorekeepers.

If the PCs agree, Nketiah summons a group of musicians (unless a PC wishes to serve in that role), and the would-be dancers square off against each other in a 1-on-1 dance contest. Run the game of daikada in two phases, continuing until at least one

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player has 5 points, at which time the game ends and the player with the most points is declared the winner.

Phase 1. Each dancer makes an unarmed attack roll against their opponent's AC with a -4 circumstance penalty (due to aiming only for the opponent's anklets). A successful hit gains the dancer 1 point, a critical hit allows the dancer to strike both anklets for 2 points, and a critical failure applies a -2 penalty to that dancer's roll in the second phase of the game.

Phase 2: Each dancer must succeed at a DC 15 Acrobatics or Performance check to keep up with the beat of the music. A critical success here grants a +2 circumstance bonus to the dancer's AC for the next round, failure removes 1 point from the dancer's total, and a critical failure removes 3 points. A player who critically fails and has fewer than 3 total points is disqualified from the game. A dancer can also accept a -4 penalty to their Acrobatics or Performance check to gain a +2 circumstance bonus to her next attack roll while playing the game.

Mauuko and Senyo both have an AC of 18, an unarmed attack modifier of +11, and Performance +13. If they beat the PCs, they are willing to participate in up to two rematches. If the PCs beat the girls in any of the games, the spectacle of the game draws the attention of other elves, two of whom also challenge the PCs to a new round. These adults, Kadija and Kuakae, are more challenging foes, with AC 22, attack modifier +17, and Performance +15.

Influence Awards: The elves are mostly concerned with whether the PCs show good sportsmanship, rather than whether the PCs actually win or not, and playing at least one round of the dancing game earns the PCs 1 IP. Beating Kadija and Kuakae at the game nonetheless impresses the Ekujae, gaining 1 additional IP; the spectating elves laugh and cheer for the winners and joke around with the elves who were out-danced. Finally, if a PC provided music for the dance, the PCs gain 1 IP, or 3 IP if the PC musician succeeds at a DC 22 Performance check.

XP Award: If the PCs defeat Mauuko and Senyo in the dancing game, grant them 40 XP each. If the PCs defeat Kadija and Kuakae in the dancing game, grant them each an additional 40 XP.

EVENT 2. HARRIET'S APPROVAL

PCs who explore the edges of the Ekujae treetop city eventually come across an unusual sight—a slightly pudgy lioness lying on one of the higher branches and

watching the PCs intently. Any PC who succeeds at a DC 15 Nature check to Recall Knowledge knows that lions are not usually jungle animals, nor are they known for living in trees. Asking the Ekujae about the lion reveals that the animal is called "Harriet," though inquiring why a lioness has taken to climbing trees in the jungle simply results in the Ekujae shrugging and replying, "She thinks she is a leopard!" Nketiah can offer a more detailed explanation (see page 25 for more), but ultimately, the elves have simply accepted the lion's odd habits and no longer question it.

It is obvious that the elves are very fond of Harriet, and they watch closely to gauge the lion's opinion of the PCs. Much like the Ekujae themselves, Harriet is wary of strangers in her territory, and she is currently on alert for any suspicious behavior. A PC who has expert proficiency in Nature can attempt a DC 20 Nature check to alter their body language to put the lioness at ease, which causes Harriet to become bored and slump down, half-asleep; the Ekujae

Harriet

consider this a sign of winning Harriet's approval. Failing the check, however, results in Harriet leaving in a huff, earning a few chuckles from the Ekujae.

Once the lioness is at ease, a PC can attempt a DC 25 Nature check to get closer to Harriet; success means that the PC can pet the lion or otherwise visibly befriend the big cat, which leaves the Ekujae highly impressed. Failure results in Harriet waking up and attempting to bite the offending PC before angrily stalking off, which causes the PCs to lose 2 Influence Points for such reckless actions. Using spells to charm the lioness likewise causes the PCs to lose 2 Influence Points.



Akosa

Harriet usually returns 1d6 hours after she leaves, though she immediately leaves again if someone she previously attempted to bite comes near.

HARRIET

CREATURE 3

Female lion (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 52)

Initiative Perception +7

Influence Awards: Earning Harriet's approval earns the PCs 1 IP with the Leopard Clan. If a PC manages to visibly befriend her, they earn an additional 2 IP. Each time Harriet tries to bite a PC, they lose 2 IP. Should the PCs attack Harriet, they lose an additional 2 IP with the Leopard Clan; if the PCs kill her, their IP total with the Leopard Clan drops to 0, and the attitudes of other NPCs likely worsen as well.

XP Award: If the PCs manage to win Harriet's approval, grant them each 40 XP.

EVENT 3. HUNTING FOR DINNER

Though the Ekujae usually eat fish when they eat meat at all, fish is not traditionally considered appropriate meat for guests. When the PCs arrive in Akrivel, a hunting party is already preparing for a hunt to bring back game meat for the PCs. Even if the PCs choose not to approach the hunting group, they can spot the hunt leader, Akosa (CN male elf ranger), staring at them throughout the early hours of the evening. An elf with striking hazel eyes and twists of dense curly hair that falls around his head like a lion's mane, Akosa has trouble relaxing around strangers and is in a terrible mood due to the fact that his friend Jahsi was badly injured when retaking Huntergate. This combination of wariness and turmoil results in Akosa watching the PCs with a sour look on his face, though a PC who succeeds at a DC 18 Perception check to Sense Motive can tell that the elf isn't acting out of malice. If no PC takes the initiative to approach him, Nketiah might encourage the PCs to do so, suggesting that they talk to him about joining the hunt to ensure that they catch something the PCs find appetizing, but she warns them that Akosa takes some time to warm up to strangers and that they should be patient with him. (In truth, Nketiah wants the PCs to get to know Akosa so that they can later help with her matchmaking scheme—see page 21 for more).

When the PCs approach Akosa, he pretends not to speak Common for a bit before admitting he knows the language and was being purposefully difficult. If the PCs have earned at least 10 IP with the Leopard Clan before speaking to him, he dispenses with this tactic and greets them in Common from the start.

A PC who confronts Akosa over his staring and apparently antisocial behavior cause him to become viciously defensive, and if that PC fails a DC 15 Diplomacy check, Akosa becomes annoyed (see Influence Awards below). Regardless, he'll invite any PC who seems interested to join his hunting group before the feast. Alternatively, should the PCs as a whole request that the Ekujae not hunt any animals for the feast—due to dietary, religious, or moral reasons—Akosa seems surprised, but smiles and promises to hunt up some nuts, tubers, and fruit for the PCs instead. Akosa can also answer a few general questions the PCs might have.

Who are you? “Akosa, of the Hawk Clan. My mother is of the River Clan.”

You aren't from the Leopard Clan? “I'm staying here with Jahsi while I sort some things out.”

What are you doing? “Preparing for a hunt. If you want any say in what you eat tonight, you can come along.”

What game is around here? “Your best bets are the red river hogs and the waterbucks. Otherwise, there's river turtles and bats, if you like to work for your food. Or crocodiles, if you like fighting to see who gets to bite first.”

Why do you keep staring at us? “You're all just too pretty to take my eyes off you,” the elf says dryly.

Do you have some kind of problem with us? “Doesn't matter. Jahsi brought you here and Nketiah says you're a guest, so you could come straight from Hell and I'd still have to feed you.”

You speak our language? “You learn fast when your jailers keep screaming orders in it.”

Who imprisoned you? “Ever heard of Whitebridge Station? If not, don't bother asking. I don't feel like talking about it.” A PC who succeeds at a DC 20 Society check recognizes Whitebridge Station as a former Aspis Consortium outpost that enslaved Ekujae elves to mine gold in brutal conditions and desecrated the elves' corpses by turning them into zombies, until the Ekujae finally overcame the outpost's defenses and massacred every Aspis member inside.

Should we leave you alone? “Too late for that, isn't it?” Akosa huffs in exasperation, but points to a white symbol painted on his cheek. “If I'm wearing this, I'm in a good enough mood to talk. Just don't use it as an excuse to bother me unless you have something useful to say.”

Do you know anything about the Cinderclaws? “I know Jahsi got his fool neck cut open fighting them.” Akosa stares for a moment, then sharply shakes his head. “But an attack force that large? We should have

AGE OF ASHES

ADVENTURE PATH

WHERE'S THE ACTION?

This first chapter of “Cult of Cinders” deliberately avoids presenting the party with any combat encounters, giving them plenty of time to roleplay, develop their characters, and let other types of solutions shine. While there's plenty of fighting ahead in Chapters 2–4, if you know your players get bored when it's been too long since a fight, consider replacing one or two of the events in Chapter 1 with more combat-focused encounters of your design. Perhaps rather than play out the hunt as downtime, you could present it as a more visceral and classic tooth-and-nail fight against some crocodiles. Or, though this is somewhat out-of-keeping with Ekujae tradition, perhaps during the feast several Ekujae guardians challenge the PCs to a mock combat. You could even have the elves ask the PCs to go into the nearby woods to help them deal with a dangerous local predator. As long as the PCs earn enough experience to start Chapter 2 at 6th level, how they get there is up to you.

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seen them coming. Maybe we missed them. Maybe someone was helping the cult. Couldn't say who.”

Do you know Jahsi and Nketiah? “Jahsi's more than a brother to me. I spent the whole of my youth trying to keep him from getting his stupid, self-sacrificing self killed. It wasn't easy.” Akosa gives a bitter, breathy laugh. “Nketiah's just as much trouble as her father when she wants to be, and don't let her tell you otherwise, but she's brilliant like her mother. No one was surprised when the Leopard Clan asked her to be a linguist.”

JOINING THE HUNT

If the PCs wish to join the hunt, the elves take them along without argument. The hunt takes place in the wilds surrounding Akrivel, and involves three phases that play out in exploration mode: seeking, positioning, and hunting. The hunt itself takes 3 hours to complete, so any PC involved in the hunt won't be able to participate in any other events that PCs take part in back in Akrivel. If more than one PC joins the hunt, a PC decides whether to roll or help another PC with their roll. If multiple PCs roll, use the worst roll to determine the result of the activity. Any PC who chooses to help instead rolls against the same DC, using the Aid action.

SEEK THE ANIMALS

EXPLORATION

You help the elven hunters look for signs of animals. Attempt a DC 17 Nature or Perception check.

Critical Success You make an impressive and potentially dangerous find, such as a large pack of particularly healthy (and thus cranky) red river boars or a large waterbuck with razor-sharp horns. You also find signs of animals that are safer to hunt than your impressive and delicious find.

Success You discover signs of animals that are safe to hunt.

Failure Your efforts have scared away the best game, and the hunting party must set their sights on river turtles and bats.

Critical Failure Your efforts have scared away too many animals, leaving the hunting party with a sparse amount of game to catch. The party loses 2 IP.

POSITION THE HUNTERS

EXPLORATION

With the target game animals located, you must move to an advantageous position without startling the prey. Attempt a Stealth check. Against an impressive and dangerous find, the DC is 25. Against standard game, it's DC 20. Against river turtles, bats, and lesser game, it's DC 15.

Critical Success The animals have no indication that they are in danger, and you gain a +2 circumstance bonus to rolls made during the hunting phase.

Success You position yourself well and take no penalty when Hunting.

Failure Your loud and clumsy movements alert the animals to your presence, and you take a -2 circumstance penalty to rolls made during the hunting phase.

Critical Failure You stumble loudly and startle the majority of the animals, which escape and leave the party with very few animals to catch. The party loses 2 IP.

HUNT THE ANIMALS

EXPLORATION

When the hunt begins, the Ekujae elves and the PCs work together to bring down the game. Against an impressive find, each PC actively participating (and not just Aiding) attempts a DC 25 Survival check. Against standard game, the DC is 20. No check is needed to hunt river turtles or bats—hunting such game is automatically successful (but can never be a critical success).

Critical Success You help take down the animals quickly and relatively painlessly, showing them mercy.

Success Your participation in the hunt helps the hunting party take down the animals quickly.

Failure Your involvement complicates the hunt—one or two animals even escape uninjured. Each PC takes 2d6 damage from animal attacks (or 4d6 if the animals were an impressive find).

Critical Failure Several of the animals die poorly, and many escape with mortal wounds. Barely enough animals are caught for the feast, but the fact that they died in pain or escaped with injuries shames the Ekujae—the party loses 2 IP. Each PC takes 2d6+6 damage from animal attacks (or 4d6+12 if the animals were an impressive find).

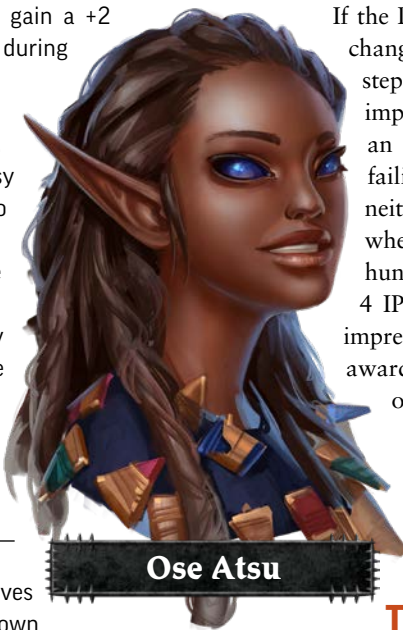


Ose Panin

Influence Awards: A PC who annoys Akosa by confronting his antisocial behavior in an undiplomatic way makes his attitude worse by 1 step, and loses 1 IP with the Leopard Clan. If the PCs ask him to hunt for fruits, nuts, and vegetables for the feast rather than animals, they improve his attitude by one step.

If the PCs join the hunt, they automatically change Akosa's attitude: reducing it by one step if they critically failed at any activity, improving it two steps if they caught an impressive find without critically failing, or improving it by one step if neither of those applies. They gain 2 IP when they return to the settlement if the hunt brought back river turtles and bats, 4 IP for a standard find, or 6 IP for an impressive find. This is in addition to any IP awards and penalties from the three phases of the hunt itself.

XP Award: For returning with food for a feast, each PC earn 60 XP; if they return with impressive finds, they instead earn 120 XP.



Ose Atsu

EVENT 4. THE TWIN LEOPARDS

At some point, the PCs might ask Nketiah to meet the ruler or leader of the Leopard Clan, but even if not, the rulers of the Leopard Clan are highly interested in meeting the PCs. An hour before the feast begins, the identical twin rulers of the Leopard Clan send a message to Nketiah to escort the PCs to them for a

meeting. The rulers have no fancy throne room for this audience, simply occupying an empty platform made from woven tree branches. Once the PCs arrive, the rulers introduce themselves by saying “We are Ose Panin and Ose Atsu of the Leopard Clan. Our mother is of the Heart Clan.” Ose Panin wears a patterned green dress and copper jewelry studded with uncut gems, while Ose Atsu wears a dark blue tunic covered with amulets wrapped in copper and green cloth. Both twins wear black leather sandals decorated with copper amulets and have long hair arranged in thick locks.

Though the rulers are curious about what lies on the far side of Huntergate and the events that brought the PCs here, they are mostly looking to judge the PCs for themselves, asking questions and carefully listening to the PCs’ responses. Among other inquiries, the rulers ask about the PCs’ friends and families, their occupations, what they consider important, and what they are most proud of about themselves. Once all of the PCs have answered, Ose Panin requests that each PC demonstrates one of the skills they claimed to be proud of or claimed as part of their occupation. Ose Panin throws a clay target with an AC of 19 for PCs who wish to demonstrate combat prowess, while PCs who wish to show off skills can attempt a DC 17 skill check. Success causes the elves to nod in satisfaction, but a critical success especially impresses the twin rulers.

Should a PC critically succeed while demonstrating their combat maneuvers or skills, Ose Atsu challenges that PC to a friendly competition—either inviting the PC to attempt to strike Ose Atsu, or attempt to match skills with Ose Panin. PCs attempting to hit Ose Atsu are offered nonlethal practice weapons for the challenge and have one chance to succeed at a Strike against Ose Atsu’s AC of 25; PCs who wish to best Ose Panin at their chosen skill must succeed at a DC 25 skill check. If a PC manages to win this friendly competition, the rulers are duly impressed, and their opinion ripples out to the other Ekujae elves.

If the PCs offer the rulers a gift, Ose Atsu and Ose Panin seem surprised, but after a brief explanation of non-Ekujae gift-giving traditions from the linguists, the rulers graciously accept anything given in good faith. The exception to this is gifts of gold—the rulers recoil from such metal, while Nketiah quickly explains the significance of gold to the offending gift-giver (as described on page 25).

Treasure: If at least one PC manages to win a friendly competition with one of the twin rulers, the leaders honor the PCs’ skills by gifting them with a +1 shifting striking cold iron dagger.

Influence Awards: If at least one PC impresses the twin rulers with a critical success while showing off their martial prowess or skills, the PCs earn 1 IP. Failures (critical or otherwise) do not penalize the PCs, but if even one PC refuses to show off their skills, that insult to the leaders costs the party 2 IP. If at least one PC is challenged to a competition against one of the leaders and wins, the party earns another 2 IP, and Nketiah, Jahsi, and Akosa all like this development. If the PCs gifted the leaders with something worth more than 80 gp, they earn 1 IP, unless the offering was gold, which is worth no IP. Offering the poisoned gold bar from the Temple of Ketephys (page 12) causes the PCs to lose 2 Influence Points.

XP Award: If one or more PCs critically succeed when demonstrating their skills, grant each PC 60 XP. If one or more PCs manage to beat Ose Atsu or Ose Panin in a friendly challenge, grant each PC an additional 60 XP.

During the Feast

After 2 hours of preparation following the return of the hunting party, the Ekujae bring out food and palm wine for the celebration, including anything the PCs might have caught in the hunt. The following events are most likely to occur during the welcoming feast, along with any events the PCs did not have an opportunity to encounter in the time before the feast.

EVENT 5. MATCHMAKERS

While Nketiah arranged this feast as a welcome to the PCs, she also has other plans for the festive atmosphere. So long as she has an indifferent or better attitude toward the PCs, she either mentions her plans should they approach her during the feast or seeks out the PC who has shown the most social skills at some point during the evening and asks them for a favor. Read or paraphrase the following.

“See my father and his friend Akosa over there?” Nketiah gestures her staff toward where the two elves are speaking quietly to each other. “They’re both clueless. They have been friends since childhood and been in love for the past ten years, ever since my father helped Akosa recover from his time with the Aspis Consortium and Akosa helped my father recover from my mother’s death. And neither of them will do anything about it! They both have too many concerns invented in their own minds, and they both worry what my mother would think. I know precisely what my mother would think, she would also think they are both being clueless!”

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"I have let them dance around each other for years, but today I have decided that life is too short, even for elves. Maybe even especially for elves." Nketiah seems pensive for a moment, before she shakes her head and scoffs slightly. "The elders here always say it isn't our place to interfere in other people's personal lives, but I am a half-elf, so I don't care about that! Why don't you help me turn this festive atmosphere into a romantic one to see if those two can catch a hint?"

This is an open-ended social encounter, and should the PCs agree to the risky endeavor of getting involved in other people's relationships, they can attempt a wide variety of approaches. The GM should allow the PCs to employ any creative ideas they might imagine, using the example approaches listed below as a guideline for the DCs of any skill checks. As a rule of thumb, any approach that expends a limited resource (such as a spell or a talisman) should grant a bonus on the skill check or even an automatic success; however, critically failing a skill check or loudly confronting the couple about their feelings annoys the two elves, and three such blunders results in Jahsi and Akosa retreating from the party. If the PCs succeed at three checks (not including checks to assess the situation), they convince the two elves to discuss their feelings and relationship, though different approaches might lower or raise the number of successful checks needed, as described below.

Some likely approaches the PCs might attempt are listed below.

Assessing the Situation: PCs who engage either Jahsi or Akosa in conversation about the other can attempt to get a sense of their feelings and potential hang-ups about the situation. Succeeding at a DC 22 Perception check to Sense Motive while assessing Jahsi reveals that the warrior is uncertain of his current feelings due to his long friendship with Akosa and still has reservations due to feeling unfaithful to his deceased wife Hiruth. Succeeding at a DC 18 Perception check while assessing Akosa reveals that the elf still has emotional turmoil from his capture that leaves him reluctant to pursue happiness, and that he is convinced Jahsi sees them only as friends due to the difference in how Jahsi treats Akosa compared to how he treated Hiruth.

Should the PCs succeed at assessing one of the two elves, they gain a +2 circumstance bonus to a skill check of their choice while attempting to matchmake.

Reasonable Discussion: In the event the PCs want to take a straightforward approach to the situation, they can attempt to simply convince either Jahsi or

Akosa to talk the situation out. A PC can Request either NPC to at least consider their words provided the NPC is friendly; the DC to convince Jahsi is 17, but convincing Akosa is DC 22.

Romantic Atmosphere: PCs who hope to provide a more romantic atmosphere than the boisterous chatter of the feast can volunteer to Perform for the Ekujae as a whole, which causes the elves to quiet down to listen. A PC who succeeds at a DC 20 Performance check can create a passionate or sentimental ambience, swaying Jahsi and Akosa into a more affectionate mood and giving a +1 circumstance bonus to all checks to influence the two men throughout the scene.

Seduction and Jealousy: PCs might attempt to seduce one of the elves to provoke the other into becoming jealous. This most likely requires a successful DC 22 Diplomacy check, but PCs might attempt different checks with similar DCs, such as a Dexterity check to impress Akosa with their archery skills or a Lore skill to engage Jahsi's curiosity. This approach carries a risk; however, a critical failure results in the impressed elf becoming too distracted by the PC, imposing a -2 circumstance penalty on all further checks to resolve the relationship quandary.

An especially direct PC can attempt a DC 30 Diplomacy check to invite both of the elves to join the PC in a group romantic encounter; if the PC is successful, this does manage to establish a bond between the two elves—but if the PC critically fails, both Jahsi and Akosa leave the party, embarrassed.

White Lies: PCs who manage to get one of the elves alone can attempt to deceive one of the pair about the other in an attempt to provoke them into action. A PC who succeeds at a DC 22 Deception check can convince one of the elves of a falsehood about the other, such as claiming that the PC overheard one of the elves confessing his love.

Influence Awards: If the PCs force Jahsi and Akosa to leave the party (typically by blundering three times) or if an attempt to invoke jealousy backfires, lower the attitudes of Jahsi, Akosa, and Nketiah by one step. If a PC critically succeeds at a performance to create a romantic atmosphere, the party earns 1 IP. Convincing the two elves to confess their feelings improves the attitudes of Jahsi, Akosa, and Nketiah by one step.

XP Award: If the PCs convince Jahsi and Akosa to acknowledge their feelings, grant each PC 120 XP.

EVENT 6. PEPPER-EATING CONTEST

Early into the feast, three younger elves approach the PCs, a smirking Nketiah in tow. The children

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claim they have heard that northerners can't handle anything with spice. If the PCs dispute this or claim ignorance, the elves produce a number of brightly colored peppers that they offer to share with the PCs—they brag that they've been growing some of the best, most delicious, and spiciest peppers in the city, and challenge the PCs to compete alongside the children to see who among them can eat the hottest one. Nketiah neither discourages nor encourages the PCs to participate, but watches carefully to make sure that no one cheats, and she laughs hysterically every time a participant is overcome by a pepper's heat.

Should one or more PCs agree to the challenge, the children set out the peppers in order of mildest to spiciest. Anyone who eats a pepper must attempt a Fortitude save; on a failure, the character is sickened 1, and on a critical failure, they are sickened 4. If they attempt to recover from being sickened, they must attempt a Deception check at the same DC to keep their composure. A character who can't recover fully from being sickened within 5 rounds is out of the contest. Losing their composure doesn't eliminate them, but does draw laughs from the crowd. The first pepper the children offer requires a DC 15 check; the second DC 19; the third DC 22; the fourth DC 24; and the fifth DC 28. The first child drops out after the second pepper, and the other child after the fourth pepper.

Treasure: If at least one PC manages to eat all of the peppers, the young elves offer that PC four bottles of hot pepper oil that have been specially distilled from their garden. Each bottle of this substance acts as *salve of antiparalysis*, though the creature the salve is used on experiences some blazingly spicy aftereffects in addition to its magical effects.

Influence Awards: Should at least one PC eat all of the peppers (whether or not they failed any of the saves or masked their pain), the youths are impressed at the foreigner's dedication to suffering, earning the PCs 1 IP. Should a PC manage to eat all of the peppers without visibly losing their composure, the Ekujae are impressed despite themselves, and the PCs instead gain 2 IP, and both Nketiah and Akosa like this turn of events.

XP Award: If at least one PC eats all five peppers, award each PC 40 XP. If at least one PC manages to keep their composure through all five peppers, award the PCs an additional 40 XP each.

EVENT 7. THE STORYTELLER'S CIRCLE

Once everyone has had plenty of time to eat, drink, socialize, and listen to music, Nketiah interrupts the

festivities by striking her staff against the floor. As part of their tradition for welcoming guests, the Ekujae swap stories with their visitors in a storyteller's circle. Nketiah intends to speak first, telling the story of the Great Darkness that the Ekujae defeated in ages long ago, which has now become relevant to both the Leopard Clan and the PCs. Read or paraphrase the following.

"Come, children of the Leopard Clan!" Nketiah's voice calls out, clear and strong above the sounds of the festivities. "Dusk has fallen! Let us call a moth to tell us a story!" As one, the Ekujae stand and hold their hands cupped in front of them, each conjuring a ball of light into their palms.

"I have caught a little moth!" Nketiah says, dramatically clutching the air in front of her. "It has a story to tell. It is a story of a Great Darkness."

"We will listen," the others reply.

"There was once a time of anguish. A time of destruction. A time of night so dark that even moths refused to fly. From a hole in this night came a Great Darkness, who saw the world suffer, and thought only that it wanted to see more suffering. The Darkness sought to burn all that remained, until there was nothing left but ashes.


"The first people that the Darkness found were a brave people, who stood before the Darkness with their weapons and did not run. The Darkness sought to destroy them, saying, 'You shall fall before me, for I am Death and I am Fire.' But the people were not afraid, and replied, 'You shall not break us, for we are the guardians of this land, who stayed to defend it when all others fled.'

"Oh, what a terrible battle it was! The people shattered their spears against the Darkness again and again, but no living being could pierce its hide. At last, the greatest among the people, the kindest, the most righteous, gave their lives to forge their souls into weapons for the people to wield. Oh, how their souls burned, like bright coals in the night! The people took up the souls of those they had most loved, and in wrath split the skin of the Darkness. They spilled the blood of the Darkness across the whole of their lands. They broke the horn and teeth from the Darkness and flung them into the sea. Yet still the Darkness would not die!

"The people forced the Darkness back into the place from whence it had emerged. The people trapped it in the space between spaces. The people swore they would stand guard so that the Darkness could never escape to threaten the land again.

"Could the people imprison the Darkness forever, when even the best among them could not defeat it? Was it foolish to expect them to try?" Nketiah pauses, then says, "That is the story that we have been given."

"We will remember," the other Ekujae reply.



Once Nketiah has finished, she asks the PCs to share some of their own stories. The elves have no preference regarding the kind of story the PCs might tell, as long as the story is not offensive and is told well. The GM can grant the PCs an automatic success or even a critical success on a Performance check if the players actually act out telling a story to the table. If the players are shy or otherwise disinterested in this facet of roleplaying, however, they can instead attempt a DC 20 Performance check to tell the story well.

Influence Award: If the PCs tell a story well, they gain 1 IP, while a critical success (be it from a roll or a particularly well-told story at your table) earns the PCs 2 IP instead.

EVENT 8. SPEAKING WITH NKETIAH

Once the storyteller's circle is over, Nketiah can explain the story of the Ekujae's battle with the Darkness in clearer terms, if needed. She also has a proposition for the PCs, once they're finished with their questions. Read or paraphrase the following when the players are ready to move on to the next part of the adventure.

"You are trying to track down the cultists who invaded your lands, yes? They've tormented us as well, and if you can find them and defeat them, we will all prosper. I think I can give you a place to start. Shortly after we drove the cultists away from the temple of Ketephys, we sent scouts east to track them as they fled. Yet these scouts swiftly came to a spot in the forest they could not enter without being struck blind. They said it was as if the air had turned to embers and ashes, and they could not breathe or see—as if they were somehow caught in that terrible battle our people fought against the Darkness, thousands of years ago.

"When I studied the broken pillar that the Cinderclaws left behind in the temple after we drove them off, I could tell that some of it was meant to channel power against my people in particular. The Darkness has a grudge against us, and I think the Cinderclaws are using the power of that grudge to keep the Ekujae from striking back against them where it matters most: at the seat of their power. So, what would you say if I asked you to investigate the jungle to the east? If I am wrong and you end up blind, I promise to heal you—free of charge!"



Nketiah can also answer any questions the PCs didn't have answered during the feast, as well as any questions about Ekujae culture that the PCs might be curious about. Some answers to questions the PCs are likely to ask over the course of the evening are listed below. (Note that additional information about Nketiah appears on page 78.)

What do you do? "I am a linguist, a master of knowledge, custom, and the spoken word. If the rulers speak to someone who does not know our language, I translate. If the rulers do not know of a foreign custom, I enlighten them. If the rulers must make a decision, I advise them. And if the rulers make a bad decision, it is my fault." Nketiah snorts, then laughs hysterically at her own joke, regaining her composure a moment later. "They say there are no bad rulers, only bad linguists."

What happened to your arm? "What happened to your manners?"

What does your staff mean? "It is a sign of my station, as a linguist of the clan. Every linguist's staff represents a clever saying or parable from our tales. Mine means, 'It is better not to strike at all than to strike and only wound.'"

Do we really have time for a feast? "You do if you want our help. Trust me when I say, I understand your need to make haste, but many in the clan are already worried about asking outsiders to help with our own affairs—refusing our hospitality is saying you do not trust us, and that we shouldn't trust you in return."

Why are the Ekujae so unfriendly? "Who are these other Ekujae you have been speaking to? Not us, so how am I meant to answer that?" Nketiah laughs. "Foreigners come into our nation without permission, kill the animals, steal from the land, and trespass upon our forbidden grounds, yet they always wonder why we do not like them! But we have invited you here today, so you should have no such problems, yes?"

Does Akosa have a problem with us? Nketiah sighs. "His clan fought with a group of foreigners called the Aspis Consortium, who were enslaving our people. They captured him during a raid, and they were not kind. Please understand, he is not blaming you for this. It is simply a reflex. He cannot feel safe unless he knows where you are. So... don't make a scene out of it, all right? Fake a smile!"

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Why is there a lion in the trees? “Ha! That is Harriet. We named her after the explorer who brought her to us. This poor woman had rescued a baby lion from a smuggler, and she was convinced the cub needed to go back to the jungle where it belonged! Oh, we laughed at her for weeks afterward! But Harriet had the last laugh on us—we found that lion a pride that would accept her and left her out on the plains to live with her people, only to find six months later that the lion had come back to the jungle! Shows what we know! I’m not sure how Harriet eats without any spots to hide her hide in the forest, but she’s certainly fat enough for a lion, so who am I to argue?”

Why don’t the Ekujae like gold?/Why does Jahsi wear gold? “Our legends have always said that gold is the cooled blood and breath of the Darkness, spilled across our land when we fought it. Gold is a tainted metal, corrupted by the greed and violence of its progenitor. Only those who are truly pure of soul wear it, as a symbol that even the Darkness cannot lead them astray. We call those people *keledi*. It is the highest honor we can give.”

How did the Ekujae defeat the Darkness? “There was once a ritual among our people, the *anima invocation*, that allowed a truly virtuous person to give up her life and split her soul apart into different spirits. The power of that sacrifice and the integrity of those spirits bolstered our warriors’ weapons, allowing them to fight back against the Darkness. But we no longer know the secrets of the *anima invocation*, and so should the Darkness escape, our people would be defenseless—and the first to suffer.”

Who is the Darkness/Is the Darkness Dahak? “You will win no friends speaking that name here—don’t you know nothing fades while its name is still spoken? In any case, you are the ones who stepped through the portal and saw the Darkness within, yes? You likely know better than I.”

What do you know about the cultists? “Almost nothing.” Nketiah pauses. “What? If we had known about them before the attack, we would have dealt with them before they became a problem! We do know that they call themselves the Cinderclaws, and they seem to be mostly made up of boggards and charau-kas. Some of them seem to have taken draconic features into their flesh, but through what means, I cannot say. There have always been cults like them in our lands, but those cults are usually small and disorganized and easy to dispatch. I’ve never seen one spring up out of nowhere like this, certainly never one so large and organized. And they have far more magical power than I would have expected. One thing that seems certain is that their base of operations lies somewhere

to the southeast—I can sketch out the area we believe they’ve claimed, for this region roughly corresponds to the portion of the jungle my people cannot enter.” At this point, you can provide the PCs a rough sketch of the jungle region depicted on page 30 if you wish.

Where would the cult have gotten the portal key for Huntergate? “That *aiudara* key was something we protected in the temple for countless generations—as our legends of the Darkness within Huntergate compelled us to do—but we never used it. The cult stole it from us in their initial surprise attack and used it to send their minions through the portal.”

Is there anyone else who could help us? “We have sent messengers to the other Ekujae clans, but I fear they will fall prey to the same magic that plagues us. Beyond that, there have been arguments on whether to speak to the mages of the Magaambya academy in Nantambu, but they are quite some distance away. Many of us are reluctant to call upon outsiders for internal affairs, for fear the mages might use it as an invitation to take our sovereignty from us.”

PARTING GIFTS

Once the PCs finish speaking to Nketiah, she thanks the PCs for volunteering their aid and informs them that she has some gifts to aid them in their explorations of the jungle.

Treasure: Nketiah’s offer comes on behalf of the Leopard Clan, and depends on the PCs’ Influence Points. These are cumulative:

1 IP: Two pup tents, five full waterskins, 4 weeks’ worth of rations, mosquito netting, healer’s tools, 6 vials of lesser antiplague, 3 lesser elixirs of life, and 5 *vine arrows*.

5 IP: Six more vials of lesser antiplague, 4 *lesser potions of healing*, and 5 more *vine arrows*.

10 IP: *Boots of elvenkind*.

If Nketiah is indifferent or better, she additionally has a small selection of additional items to give to the PCs—magical treasures that should be of specific use to each PC. She gives one item if indifferent, two if friendly, and one per PC if helpful.

Use this opportunity to give each PC a notable permanent magic item that would particularly suit their character. A good fallback is to give a PC a *+1 striking cold iron weapon* or a magical staff that works well with a spellcasting PC’s themes, but any 6th-level worn or held magic item works well so long as it fits the theme of its new owner. This first chapter is relatively light on treasure, after all, and you want the players to feel like they’ve earned a significant reward for befriendng the Ekujae.



CHAPTER 2: PILLARS OF RUIN

Once the festivities are over, the PCs have time to plan and prepare before venturing into an unknown jungle. Nketiah and the other Ekujae cannot safely travel far with the PCs due to the threat of being blinded (see page 28 for information on the dragon pillars), but they invite the PCs to return to Akrivel as often as they wish—healing and opportunities to rest and recover safely will be important during the arduous exploration and deadly conflicts that the PCs will soon face!

Into the Jungle

Once the PCs have finished any remaining business in Akrivel, they should be ready to begin their exploration of the Mwangi Jungle. Nketiah outlines a large region of mostly trackless jungle to the east and south, represented on the Mwangi Jungle hex map on page 30, so the PCs can focus their explorations on this area. Consider preparing a blank hex map for the

PCs to use and fill in as they explore. Nketiah indicates the position of Akrivel, the temple of Ketyphys (and thus Huntergate), the river's path through the area, and the location of the village of the Elephant People (area A4). Nketiah warns the PCs that the humans in this small settlement are very quick to anger, similar to the elephants they idolize, but that if the PCs can approach their village in a nonthreatening manner, the Elephant People may be able to tell the PCs more about the Cinderclaws. She gravely warns the PCs that the jungle is quite dangerous. Feel free to use Nketiah to warn the PCs about some of the specific dangers they may face, but the fact that the Ekujae elves don't travel through this area much means they aren't entirely sure what sorts of perils await the PCs.

Most of the travel through the jungle takes place in exploration mode—see pages 479–480 of the *Pathfinder Core Rulebook* for more information. Each

hex on the map is 10 miles across, but the dense jungle is difficult terrain, halving the characters' travel speed.

If the party does nothing but travel, or use exploration activities that place no limit on their travel Speed, they can move through 2 hexes in a day, but they will not come across any encounters in the hexes they pass through unless the encounter specifically indicates in its description that it cannot be missed.

If the party chooses to utilize an exploration tactic that limits their Speed (like Avoid Notice, Defend, or Investigate), they can move through 1 hex in a day. As long as at least one PC uses Investigate, Scout, or Search, the party automatically discovers a specific encounter in the hex.

As the PCs explore, you might choose to include random encounters with jungle denizens. Random encounters are an excellent way to liven up dull stretches of play, give the PCs a chance to earn a bit more XP, or simply keep the players on their toes, but be careful not to overdo them, as too many wandering monsters can slow progression through the adventure to a frustrating crawl. You can use the encounters presented on the following pages as inspiration for random ones, or simply have the PCs stumble across a jungle predator of your choice.

This region of the Mwangi Jungle is far from safe, but the most subtle danger to the PCs comes in the form of the jungle's insects, heat, and near-constant rain; use the Camping in the Mwangi Jungle downtime activity (on page 71) each time the PCs must camp in the jungle. At your option, if the PCs camp in a hex that contains a set encounter they haven't yet cleared or defeated, the creatures in that encounter might come to investigate the camp at some point during the night.

XP Award: The first time the party achieves a success at camping in the jungle, award them each 40 XP.

BELMAZOG'S RITUAL

The leader of the Cinderclaws, Belmazog, learned a powerful ritual from her Scarlet Triad sponsors: the *nul-acrumi vazghul*, which translates roughly from Necril as "Dead Lord's Wrath." Originally designed to invoke the latent anger and power of a slain warlord, when cast over the fossilized physical remains of Dahak's long-imprisoned manifestation—and using a captive red dragon impaled by a shard of the *Orb of Gold Dragonkind* as a living focus—the *nul-acrumi vazghul* had much greater effects. Not only did the ritual infuse the land between the Cinderclaw's fortress and the Ekujae settlement of Akrivel with a potent energy that blinds all Ekujae who come within 50 miles of the fossilized remains, but it also enhanced nine carvings of Dahak's visage, allowing the Cinderclaws to erect potent dragon pillars throughout the jungle as additional protections. One of these nine (what was to be a white dragon pillar near Huntergate) was never completed, but the other eight remain active (see Dragon Pillars on page 28 for more). In return for the gift of the *nul-acrumi vazghul*, Belmazog pledged to supply the Scarlet Triad with all the gold her cult could mine for the foreseeable future.

As long as the red dragon Kyrion remains bound before Dahak's skull (see area C9), the effects of the *nul-acrumi vazghul* persist. Any Ekujae (including a half-elf of Ekujae descent) who comes within 50 miles of the Fortress of Sorrow (area A13) is immediately blinded. When a blinded Ekujae leaves the area, their vision returns after 24 hours, but this effectively renders the elves unable to directly oppose the Cinderclaws.

CHAPTER 2 SYNOPSIS

A fell magical influence blinds Ekujae elves who travel too far east into the jungle, so it falls to the PCs to explore the trackless wilderness. As they explore, they discover more clues to the nature of the Cinderclaws' plans for the region, including the creation of numerous powerful dragon pillars that help to power a deadly defence over their base of operations. Other allies and wondrous treasures await discovery within the jungle, as do ample opportunities for disease and death.

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It is possible that one or more of the player characters is an Ekujae elf or half-elf, making it difficult for those characters to participate given the effects of the *nul-acrumi vazghul*. Should this be an issue in your campaign, allow exposure to Alseta's Ring to provide a measure of protection from Belmazog's ritual and Dahak's manifestation, allowing any Ekujae PCs to interact normally with the challenges outlined in this adventure (though the character still feels a sense of great unease and catches glimpses of illusionary ash storms whenever they are near a dragon pillar). This protection does not extend to the Leopard Clan Ekujae unless they can be convinced to pass through Huntergate to be exposed

to Alseta's Ring—something the resident Ekujae are unwilling to risk due to the vengeful presence of the Darkness within Huntergate itself.

DRAGON PILLARS

With the aid of a potent ritual taught to her by the Scarlet Triad, Belmazog has seen to the creation of eight dragon pillars throughout the jungle (a ninth pillar, intended to have been erected near Huntergate, was never completed). As the PCs explore, they'll stumble across these pillars and also encounter NPCs who can tell more about them. All eight pillars are roughly similar in size and shape, 10 feet tall and made of wood, but each has its own unique attack, functioning as a complex hazard. In addition, as long as all eight pillars are active, the magical shield that surrounds the Cinderclaw fortress (see Chapter 4) remains active. To safely assault the Cinderclaw fortress, the PCs should destroy as many of the pillars as they can. Simply breaking a pillar by reducing its Hit Points below its Broken Threshold keeps a pillar from actively attacking, but it doesn't weaken the shield surrounding the Cinderclaw fortress.

When the first pillar is fully destroyed, the ward surrounding the Cinderclaw fortress visibly weakens, and the Cinderclaws stationed there take notice. A patrol of four boggard warriors led by a charau-ka dragon priest (page 59) is sent to the location of the destroyed dragon pillar to investigate the site. The patrol moves from area A13 at a rate of 2 hexes per day. Once they reach the destroyed pillar, they begin Tracking the PCs (the patrol has Survival +13 for the purpose of seeking out the PCs). As soon as the patrol moves into a hex occupied by the PCs, they attack. A new patrol is sent out when a third pillar is destroyed, and then again when a fifth and a seventh are destroyed.

Each dragon pillar has the following statistics.

DRAGON PILLAR

HAZARD 6

RARE	COMPLEX	MAGICAL	TRAP
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Stealth +0 or *detect magic*

Perception +16, darkvision 60 feet

Recognize Ally A dragon pillar can see through its empty eye sockets, and it can recognize Cinderclaws and their allies. A character disguised as a Cinderclaw can trick a dragon pillar into perceiving it as a Cinderclaw ally by using Deception to Impersonate. A dragon pillar always uses Perception for initiative.

Description A 10-foot-tall wooden pole topped by a wooden carving of Dahak's head. Each dragon pillar's head has been treated with something to give it a distinct color, as indicated in the specific


Dragon Pillar

encounter, but regardless of color, plumes of smoke waft up from the mouth.


Disable Athletics DC 26 (expert) to push the pillar over, or Thievery DC 26 (expert) on the pillar to erase the magic runes that power it, or *dispel magic* (4th level; counteract DC 22) to dispel the pillar's magic.

AC 24; **Fort** +17, **Ref** +8

Hardness 14, **HP** 56 (BT 28); **Immunities** critical hits, fire, object immunities, precision damage

Dragon Pillar Glance  **Trigger** The dragon pillar sees a creature within 120 feet who isn't a recognized Cinderclaw or Cinderclaw ally. **Effect** The dragon pillar makes an eye beam Strike against the triggering creature, then rolls initiative.

Routine (1 action) On its initiative, the dragon pillar fires an eye beam at the closest target within 120 feet.

Ranged  eye beam +20 (divine, evocation, range 120 feet),

Effect The target is subjected to an effect determined by the pillar's color and summarized below. On a critical hit, the target's save result is one degree worse.

- **Black Eye Beam (area A5)** (incapacitation) DC 24 Fortitude save.

Critical Success The target is unaffected.

Success The target is blinded for 1 round.

Failure The target is blinded for 1 hour.

Critical Failure The target is blinded for 24 hours.

- **Blue Eye Beam (area A7)** (incapacitation) DC 24 Fortitude save.

Critical Success The target is unaffected.

Success The target is petrified for 1 round.

Failure The target is petrified for 1 hour.

Critical Failure The target is petrified permanently.

- **Green Eye Beam (area A8)** (poison) 6d6 poison damage (DC 24 basic Reflex save).

- **Indigo Eye Beam (area A9)** (incapacitation) DC 24 Will save.

Critical Success The target is unaffected.

Success The target is slowed 1 for 1 round.

Failure The target is confused for 1 round.

Critical Failure The target is controlled by the dragon pillar and remains within 60 feet of it at all times, defending the dragon pillar from all non-Cinderclaws. While a target is controlled, it is treated as a Cinderclaw ally by the dragon pillar. The dragon pillar can control up to 3 targets at a time; any targets in excess who critically fail this saving throw are instead confused for 1d4+1 rounds. A controlled creature can attempt a new Will save once every 24 hours to escape control, but doing so automatically causes the dragon pillar to attack it with a new eye beam to attempt to re-establish control. The control ends if the pillar is destroyed.

- **Yellow Eye Beam (area A12)** (electricity) 6d6 electricity damage (DC 24 basic Reflex save).

- **Orange Eye Beam (area A15)** (acid) 6d6 acid damage (DC 24 basic Reflex save).

- **Red Eye Beam (area A16)** (fire) 6d6 fire damage (DC 24 basic Reflex save).

- **Violet Eye Beam (area B11)** (incapacitation) DC 24 Will save.

Critical Success The target is unaffected.

Success The target is stunned 1.

Failure The target is stunned 3.

Critical Failure The target is stunned 7.

Reset The dragon pillar deactivates and resets as soon as it perceives no appropriate targets in range.

Jungle Encounters

The map of the Leopard Clan's territory in the Mwangi Jungle is marked with several set encounters, each described in detail on the following pages. Most of these encounters can be discovered automatically if at least one PC uses an appropriate exploration activity (as noted on page 27), but a few are impossible to miss. Feel free to adjust or even relocate these encounters as you wish to fit your group's travels and adventures.

The Jungle Encounters map on page 32 depicts six different locations for you to use in this chapter when running encounters. The two jungle clearing maps and the swamp map can be used multiple times, as you see fit. The burned village map is used for area A4, the overgrown temple map for area A10, and the ruined temple map for area A16. Of course, you can also design jungle maps of your own for use in these encounters, or use any one of the many jungle- and forest-themed Pathfinder Flip-Mats and Pathfinder Flip-Tiles produced by Paizo.

Note that most of the encounters presented on the following pages are categorized as severe threats, since it's likely that the PCs won't face more than one such encounter per day.

TAKING THE RIVER

The region of jungle the PCs explore in "Cult of Cinders" is located well north of Nantambu and west of Lake Ocota. The river that flows through this portion of jungle is an unnamed, slow-moving tributary of the much larger Vanji River—the river flows from the east downstream to the southwest. The river has an average depth of 30 feet and its width varies from 200 feet to half a mile. The PCs can most easily cross the river using magic like *fly* or *water walk*, but they can also Swim or construct a raft to navigate the waters. Swimming across the river is a DC 13 Athletics check. You can usually allow a character who is trained in Athletics to lead allies across without a check, if those allies use the Follow the Expert exploration activity.

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Building a serviceable raft for the party requires spending a day of downtime and succeeding at a DC 15 Crafting check. Once they have a raft, the PCs can cross the river in that hex without needing to swim. Taking a raft upriver or downriver allows the PCs to move east and west more quickly—the river’s current is slow enough that it doesn’t speed travel downstream or impede travel upstream. Traveling on a raft allows the PCs to move at their normal travel speed (twice as quickly as they can through the jungle itself).

XP Award: The first time the PCs successfully use a more efficient means of navigating the jungle, they gain 30 XP.

A1. AKRIVEL

This is the site of the Ekujae settlement of Akrivel, presented in detail in Chapter 1.

A2. TEMPLE OF KETEPHYS

This ruined open-air temple houses the Mwangi side of Huntergate. The area is presented in detail on page 10.

A3. KOBOLD MINERS

Several huge, rotting trees lie in various states of decomposition here, vibrantly decorated with colorful mushrooms and moss. The deadfall is shaped in a rough “C”, making a fifteen-foot-wide sheltered area within. An exceptional number of insects scuttle and scurry across the dead trees and other detritus on the jungle floor below.

The most notable inhabitants of this area are a small group of kobolds hiding in the hollowed-out stumps. The kobolds have set up a trap to dissuade intruders, but they are not intentionally looking to harm the PCs.

Hazard: The kobolds installed a simple but effective trap to frighten off dangerous animals, monsters, and—most importantly—Cinderclaws who they fear might come looking for them. This trap is similar to a scythe blades trap, utilizing mining picks and metal shards on a hidden branch connected to a trip wire that runs across the entrance to their hideout. While the kobolds have no specific wish for the PCs to trigger the trap, they don’t warn the PCs about the hazard

unless they have already been spotted, as they fear doing so will give their hiding place away.

SCYTHE BLADES

HAZARD 4

Pathfinder Core Rulebook 523

Stealth DC 23 (trained)

Creatures: These eight kobolds once worked in the Cinderclaws' gold mine (described in Chapter 3) before they slowly began to succumb to arsenic poisoning from the contaminated gold. When their complaints to the cultists in charge resulted in the kobolds being ordered back to work at spearpoint, the kobolds decided to escape; however, their flight through the jungle left them exhausted and unable to fight off the effects of the poison. All of the kobolds are fatigued and currently have arsenic poisoning at stage 3, which a PC can recognize with a successful DC 15 Crafting check to Identify Alchemy or a DC 17 Medicine check. The kobolds are delirious and paranoid, and while intellectually they know they are poisoned, they've begun to believe the Ekujae have cursed them in revenge for stealing the elven gold.

The kobolds remain hidden in hollows within the deadfall and attempt to evade notice when the PCs approach, hoping their trap either finishes the PCs off or forces them to flee. If the PCs spot the kobolds, the pitiful creatures beg for their lives, too weak to even fight in self-defense. At this point, if their trap hasn't yet been sprung, they'll warn the PCs about it. The PCs can talk the kobolds into coming out into the open with a successful DC 15 Diplomacy or Intimidation check; the kobolds speak Draconic and Mwangi. Informing the kobolds that the PCs are working with the Ekujae grants a +2 status bonus to Intimidation checks, but imparts a -2 penalty to Diplomacy checks.

If the PCs successfully talk or scare the kobolds into cooperating, the kobolds offer a few snippets of information. They can tell the PCs the general direction of the gold mine (though the kobolds' hurried flight and illness means they can't offer any more detailed instructions), and they can tell the PCs that the mine is guarded by cultists and "giant vulture-people." Should the PCs ask, they can confirm one of the cult's dragon pillars is at the mine. They can also inform the PCs that the cult is shipping gold to a group of strange foreigners in payment for helping the cult's leader, Belmazog. Finally, they mention that the leader of the mining operation is one of them—a kobold named Hezle, whom the kobolds insist is "not bad like the others."

If the PCs leave the kobolds to fend for themselves, they eventually die, having pushed themselves to the limit trying to escape the gold mine. If the PCs help the kobolds recover from the arsenic poisoning, the little creatures are still too weak to help the PCs beyond offering what information they can, but they tell the PCs the "secret name" of their original tribe (the Thornscales), and mention that if they speak this tribe name to Hezle at the Cinderclaw mine as proof that the PCs helped her kin, she might help them in return.

KOBOLD SCOUTS (8)

CREATURE 1

Pathfinder Bestiary 212

Initiative Stealth +4 (includes -3 from sickened)

NPC Attitude: If the PCs save the kobold miners from the poison, Akosa is pleased.

XP Award: If the PCs ally with the kobolds and learn what they know about the Cinderclaws and the gold mine, grant them each 80 XP.



Sick Kobold

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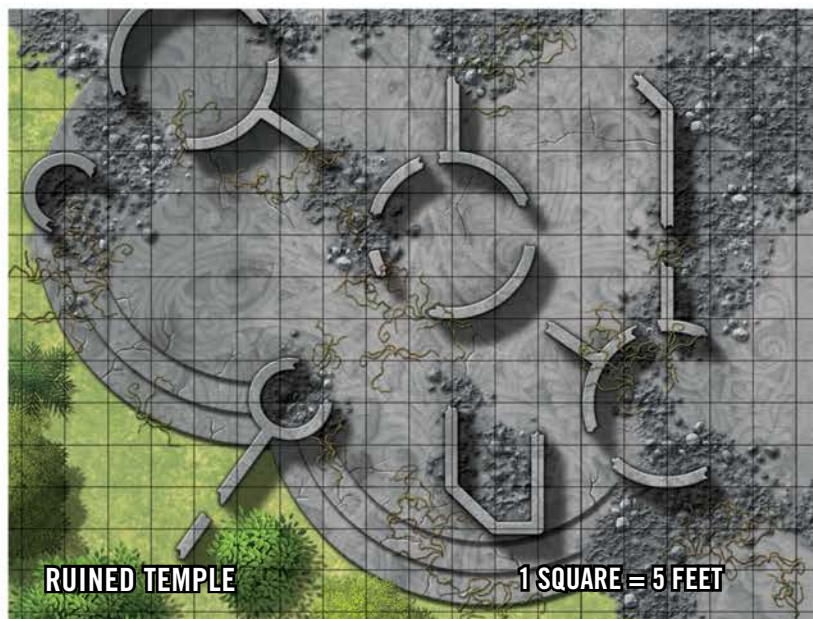
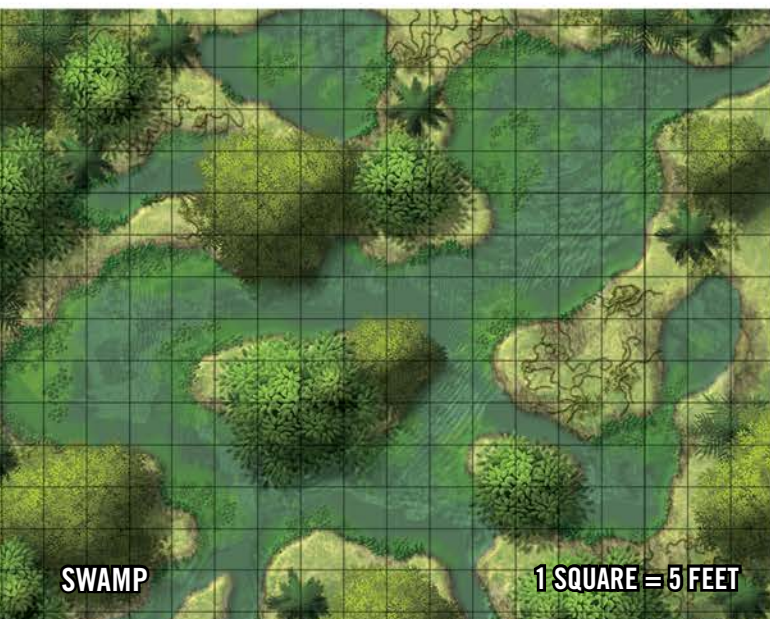
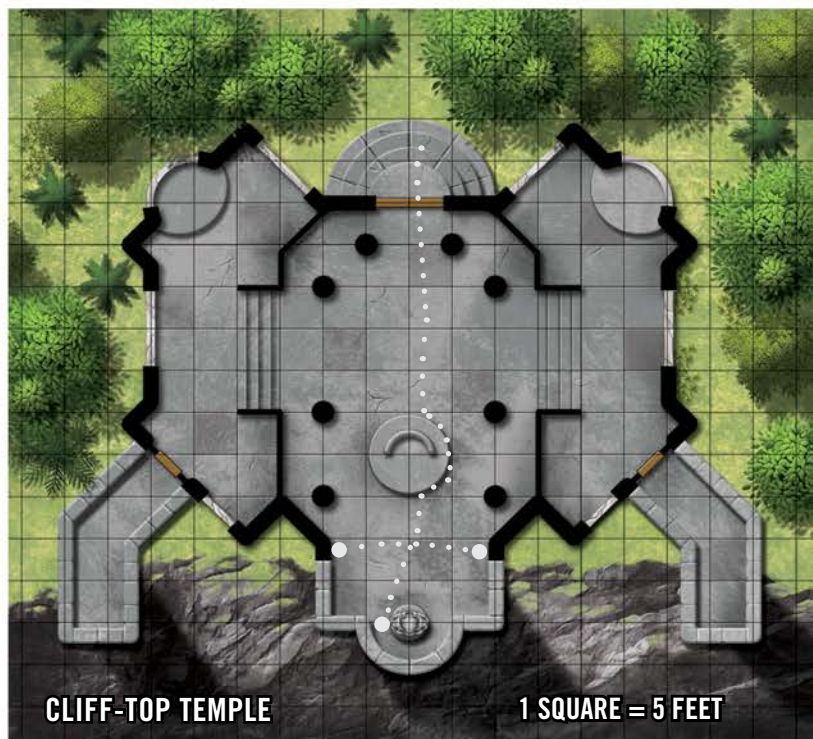
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A4. THE ELEPHANT PEOPLE SEVERE 6

The forest here bears the scorch marks of a vicious fire. Charred bark scars the roots of the trees, and small patches of undergrowth have been reduced to twigs. The focus of the fire seems to have been several small houses in a large clearing—all of these structures have burnt to the ground, leaving only charred timbers behind. A single stone well stands in the middle of the burned-out village. Near the well lie two almost unrecognizable corpses that appear to have been trampled by a large creature.

These burned houses were the seasonal shelters for a group of humans known as the Elephant People, who travel alongside herds of jungle elephants and treat the animals as family. The Cinderclaws recently attacked the shelters, attempting to capture a number of elephants to use the animals as labor for their mining operation (see area A14). The elephant herd trampled the Cinderclaw agents instead, and the surviving cultists set fire to the village out of spite as they retreated. The bodies on the ground are two Cinderclaw boggards, smashed to a pulp by angry elephants.

Creatures: While most of the humans who once lived here fled to the south many days ago, the elephant herd remains in the area, aggressively defending the site from anyone who comes near—unfortunately including the PCs. Should the party approach the charred houses, they are confronted by a pair of mother elephants, both flapping their ears in an obvious threat display.

While the PCs could simply retreat, anyone who succeeds at a DC 15 Perception check hears cries for help from the building furthest from the PCs' initial position. Calling out to the voice only agitates the elephants further, causing the animals to start making mock charges, but it also confirms that someone needs aid—a voice calling out in Mwangi for rescue. This voice comes from an elderly man named Edka, who returned alone to the ruined village after the Elephant People fled south. Edka had intended to determine if the village was fit to repair, but he dislodged a heavy log while searching the ruins of his home. His leg has been pinned under the heavy timber for over a day, and he is in desperate need of rescue. Unfortunately, he has no means to make the elephants less aggressive toward the PCs, as his cries of pain have only further upset the animals.

A PC can soothe the elephants with a successful DC 28 Nature check to Command an Animal, but a critical failure on this check results in one of the elephants charging and attempting to Trample the offending PC before retreating once more. A PC with wild empathy

can use Diplomacy as normal (DC 23). Alternatively, the PCs can attempt to bypass the elephants to reach Edka and demonstrate their good intentions. A PC can Sneak to creep past the elephants, though failure results in one of the elephants attempting to Trample the PC until that PC retreats. Approaching Edka's position via flight also allows the PCs to avoid angering the elephants. Other solutions may work as well, as you see fit.

Once the PCs reach the Edka's position, a successful DC 22 Athletics check is enough to lift the heavy timber from his leg. As Edka cries out in relief, the two elephants thunder dangerously close, but a few moments later his words and body language are enough to calm the elephants down and they retreat to the edge of the clearing. They make no further aggressive acts unless Edka is harmed.

ELEPHANTS (2)

CREATURE 7

Pathfinder Bestiary 154

Initiative Perception +13

Influence Award: Though the elephants are aggressive, the Ekujae are horrified if the PCs kill the animals; such an action subtracts 3 IP, and all the NPCs look unfavorably upon it. Word reaches the Leopard Clan in about a week unless the PCs take pains to hide the evidence of their actions.

XP Award: If the PCs manage to calm or otherwise bypass the elephants, award them XP as if they had defeated the elephants in combat. If they rescue Edka, grant the PCs an additional 40 XP each.

A5. BLACK PILLAR

SEVERE 6

A one-person campsite occupies a small clearing in this narrow valley. A smoldering bonfire is at one side of the camp, while a ten-foot-tall wooden pillar topped with a carved dragon head looms over the other. The dragon head and pillar have been stained black with pitch, and thin wisps of smoke rise from the head's open mouth.

Creature: When Belmazog performed the *nul-acrumi vazghul*, several charau-kas in close proximity to Dahak's skull were infused with draconic features and powers; one of these charau-kas volunteered for the honor of protecting the dragon pillar located here. The Cinderclaws call these draconic charau-kas the "Spawn of Dahak," and this one, Racharak, is convinced that she is destined to become the new Cinderclaws leader once Belmazog is gone. Her fervor keeps her from directly acting against the cult's current leader, so instead she waits patiently for her chance, knowing that life is often short for members of the cult.

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If Racharak hears the PCs approaching, she hides behind the dragon pillar and waits for it to begin blinding intruders before she emerges to ambush the PCs. The charau-ka fights to the death.

RACHARAK

CREATURE 8

UNIQUE CE SMALL CHARAU-KA DRAGON FIRE HUMANOID

Female charau-ka guardian

Perception +16; darkvision, scent (imprecise) 30 feet

Languages Draconic, Mwangi

Skills Arcana +12, Athletics +18, Crafting +10, Intimidation +17, Religion +14, Stealth +15, Survival +14

Str +6, **Dex** +3, **Con** +5, **Int** +0, **Wis** +4, **Cha** +1

AC 27; **Fort** +19, **Ref** +13, **Will** +16

HP 135; **Immunities** fire, paralyzed, sleep

Tail Swipe ➤ **Trigger** A creature within reach of Racharak's tail uses a move action or leaves a square during a move action it's using. **Effect** Racharak makes a tail Strike at the creature with a -2 penalty. If it hits, she disrupts the creature's action.

Speed 30 feet, climb 30 feet

Melee ♦ jaws +20, **Damage** 2d8+9 piercing plus 2d4 fire

Melee ♦ claw +20 (agile), **Damage** 2d8+9 slashing

Melee ♦ tail +20 (reach 10 feet), **Damage** 2d8+9 slashing

Ranged ♦ thrown rock +17 (deadly 1d6, thrown 20 feet), **Damage** 2d6+9 bludgeoning

Breath Weapon ♦♦ (divine, evocation, fire) Racharak breathes flames that deals 9d6 fire damage to all creatures in a 30-foot cone (DC 26 basic Reflex save). She can't use Breath Weapon again for 1d4 rounds.

Draconic Frenzy ♦♦ Racharak makes two claw Strikes and one bite Strike in any order.

Shrieking Frenzy As charau-ka warrior (page 84).

Thrown Weapon Mastery As charau-ka warrior (page 84).

Hazard: The black dragon pillar is one of the eight dragon pillars that ward the region. Destroying it removes the black layer of protective shell surrounding the Cinderclaw fortress (see Dahak's Shell on page 54).

BLACK DRAGON PILLAR

HAZARD 6

Page 28

Perception +16

A6. EARTHBOUND ANGEL MODERATE 6

Smears of blood and the signs of struggle mar the nearby jungle foliage, leaving a trail of broken branches leading further into the trees.

Creatures: This area was recently the site of a battle between a conjured angel and a foul monster known as a kishi. Though the angel saw through the kishi's disguise, the kishi caught and subdued the angel through brute force.

Keeping the angel just barely alive, the kishi wrapped the angel up in a cloth sack and began dragging them back to his lair, intending to devour the celestial messenger. PCs who discover the site of the battle can follow the trail the kishi left behind with a successful DC 20 Perception check or a DC 15 Survival check to Track.

Racharak

The kishi, Itoro, is surprised if the PCs discover him, pretending to only speak Mwangi in an attempt to avoid scrutiny. He smoothly lies if questioned about his actions or motives. If asked about the signs of struggle or the bloody cloth sack he is holding, Itoro claims that he was hunting a large jungle bird. If asked to present proof, Itoro displays a fluorescent, red-orange feather. Any PC who succeeds at a DC 30 Religion check recognizes the feather as belonging to a celestial, not a bird. Alternatively, a PC who succeeds at a DC 15 Nature check knows it's not a bird feather; on a critical success, they also recognize it as belonging to a celestial. Itoro refuses to open the cloth sack, claiming his prize might escape, and he acts as though the PCs are in the wrong to demand such a thing. If the PCs manage to open the sack using magic, stealth, or other clever ideas and reveal the angel inside, Itoro attempts to tempt the PCs into eating the angel's flesh as a last-ditch effort, promising all kinds of magical benefits if the PCs do so. Itoro would prefer to keep talking until he can escape with his prisoner, but if he thinks he can't fool the PCs into letting him go without a fight, he attempts to lure the PCs into an advantageous position via Deception before attacking. Once such a fight begins, Itoro abandons the sack and focuses entirely on the PCs, fighting to the death.

Opening the sack reveals a human-sized choral angel with ebony skin, a perfectly bald head, and fluorescent red-orange wings and dress. The angel, Chioma, is unconscious due to their wounds, though they regain awareness if they benefit from any amount of healing. Eating the angel grants no boon to the PCs or Itoro alike, despite the kishi's claims, but it is an evil act.

If the PCs rescue the angel from the kishi and revive them, Chioma thanks the PCs for the timely intervention. Chioma then explains that they have an urgent mission that they must immediately return to. If questioned, Chioma admits they were summoned by a wizard from the Magaambya who needed several rare flowers within Ekujae territory to break a deadly curse placed on a student, but who had mortally offended the Ekujae in the past. The wizard had little time to attempt a reconciliation with the Ekujae under such pressing circumstances, and so conjured Chioma in the hopes that the elves would not trouble such a virtuous being. Chioma offers to

cast beneficial spells on the PCs as they request but cannot linger long, as they must hurry to collect the plants needed to save the student. Chioma does have time to scout up to 3 hexes of the PCs' choice, if the party asks them to—the hexes chosen must be within 2 hexes of this one, and as long as the PCs camp in this area, the angel can return the next morning to deliver their scouting report before flying back south to the Magaambya.

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Chioma

ITORO

Male kishi (page 88)

Initiative Deception +20

CREATURE 8

CHIOMA

Nonbinary choral angel (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 17)

Initiative Perception +14

CREATURE 6

Influence Award: If the Ekujae learn that the PCs ate an angel, the PCs lose 5 IP, and the attitudes of all the Ekujae NPCs worsen by two steps.

XP Award: If the PCs rescue Chioma, grant them XP as if they had defeated the angel in combat.

A7. BLUE PILLAR

MODERATE 6

A recent battle seems to have taken place in this clearing. A dozen dead baboon-like humanoids lie sprawled on the ground around an area of disturbed earth that looks like it may have recently held some sort of post rising from the ground. A half-dozen stone statues of human explorers stand in the area in dramatic poses, their presence incongruous and unusual, to say the least.

Creature: One of the dragon pillars once stood in this location, until it was discovered in the area by a foreign explorer. Gerhard Pendergrast—a Taldan describing himself as an archaeologist—encountered the blue dragon pillar along with his hired entourage. The group dispatched the Cinderclaw charau-ka guards posted around the pillar, and Gerhard decided to take the pillar back with him to display in a museum, but not before the pillar's magic turned the rest of his expedition members to stone.

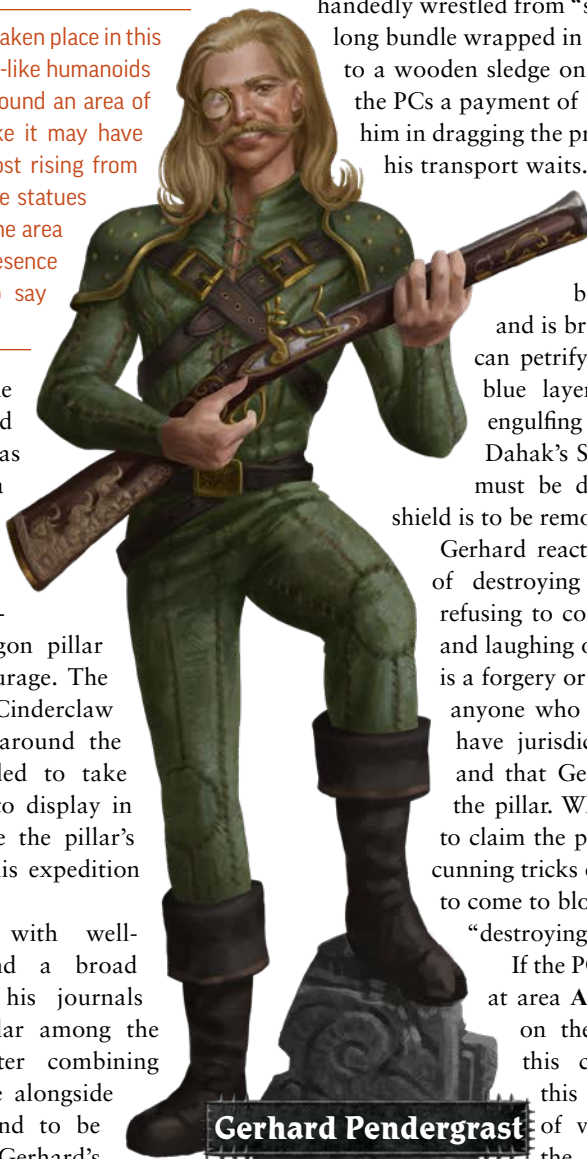
Tall and handsome, with well-groomed blond hair and a broad mustache, Gerhard and his journals are both extremely popular among the Taldan nobility, the latter combining tales of exciting adventure alongside academic theories that tend to be void of factual merit. Gerhard's latest target for exploration is the

Mwangi Jungle, where he intends to have a grand adventure while publishing histories of the resident Mwangi people. While the Ekujae would have normally thrown Gerhard out of the forest by now, their focus on the Cinderclaws and Huntergate has allowed the explorer to slip through uncontested. Gerhard doesn't mourn the loss of his six assistants, and he dismisses their petrified fates as little more than an annoyance: "They knew they'd signed up for hazardous work!" Nevertheless, the PCs' arrival boosts his spirits, as he sees them as free labor. He greets the PCs with a broad grin and a bombastic voice, informing them of their good fortune to have stumbled across an important archeological find—a "jungle totem" that Gerhard claims to have single-handedly wrestled from "savage apes." He indicates a long bundle wrapped in sheets of canvas and lashed to a wooden sledge on the ground, then promises the PCs a payment of 10 gp apiece if they will aid him in dragging the prize south to the river where his transport waits.

The "jungle totem" is, of course, the toppled blue dragon pillar. It has been reduced to 24 Hit Points and is broken, but while it no longer can petrify victims, it still powers the blue layer of the protective shield engulfing the Cinderclaw fortress (see Dahak's Shell on page 54). The pillar must be destroyed completely if the shield is to be removed.

Gerhard reacts poorly to any suggestion of destroying his archaeological prize, refusing to compromise or listen to logic and laughing off any claims that the pillar is a forgery or cursed. He likewise ignores anyone who points out that the Ekujae have jurisdiction over their own land and that Gerhard has no right to take the pillar. While the PCs might manage to claim the pillar from Gerhard through cunning tricks or magic, Gerhard is willing to come to blows to prevent the PCs from "destroying an archaeological treasure."

If the PCs haven't run into Gerhard at area A10 yet (see We Meet Again on the next page for advice in this case), he backs down in this encounter at the first sign of violence from the PCs. As the PCs begin to destroy the pillar, he shakes his fist and



Gerhard Pendergrast

promises them, “You haven’t seen the last of Gerhard Pendergrast, you vile ruffians!” before fleeing into the jungle—but if the PCs encounter him again at area **A10**, he won’t abandon his discovery there without a fight.

GERHARD PENDERGRAST

CREATURE 8

UNIQUE LE MEDIUM HUMAN HUMANOID

Male human explorer

Perception +19

Languages Azlanti, Common


Skills Azlanti Lore +14, Deception +18, Diplomacy +12, Engineering Lore +14, Intimidation +18, Nature +16, Performance +16, Survival +18

Str +3, **Dex** +4, **Con** +5, **Int** +0, **Wis** -1, **Cha** +6

Items *bag of holding type I* (containing three kegs of black powder he intends to use at area **A10**, or empty if the PCs already confronted him at **A10**; see that area for more details), shoddy blunderbuss, daggers (10), grapeshot (10), gunpowder (10), +1 *leather armor*, monocle, tindertwigs (5), +1 *striking whip*


AC 26; **Fort** +17, **Ref** +16, **Will** +11


HP 135


Whiplash  **Trigger** A creature within 10 feet of Gerhard uses an action with the move trait to leave a square.


Effect Gerhard attempts to Trip the triggering creature. On a success, the creature also takes damage as if Gerhard hit with his whip Strike, and if the creature was flying, it falls 30 feet.

Speed 30 feet


Melee  *whip* +19 (disarm, finesse, nonlethal, magical, reach 10 feet, trip), **Damage** 2d4+6 slashing

Melee  *fist* (agile, finesse) +18, **Damage** 1d4+6 bludgeoning plus manly left hook

Melee  *dagger* +18 (agile, finesse, versatile S), **Damage** 1d4+6 piercing


Ranged  *dagger* +18 (agile, thrown 10 feet, versatile S), **Damage** 1d4+6 piercing

Manly Left Hook A creature struck by Gerhard's punch must succeed at a DC 23 Fortitude save or be stunned 1 (or stunned 3 on a critical failure).

Shoddy Blunderbuss  Gerhard fires an explosive shot from his blunderbuss that deals 4d6 bludgeoning damage plus 2d10 fire damage to all creatures in a 30-foot cone (DC 26 basic Reflex).

When firing the blunderbuss, Gerhard must succeed at a DC 20 Crafting or Engineering Lore check or the weapon explodes, damaging him for the same amount as the creatures in the cone and destroying itself. If someone other than Gerhard uses the weapon, they must critically succeed at the check. A successful DC 22 Crafting check is enough to confirm the weapon's unstable nature if someone examines it beforehand.

Reloading the blunderbuss takes 3 Interact actions: adding 1 dose of gunpowder, adding 1 grapeshot canister, and packing the contents.

Whip Swing  (move) **Requirement** Gerhard is in a jungle, dense forest, or an area with numerous overhead beams. **Effect** Gerhard uses his whip to lash upward to wrap around an overhanging tree branch; he then swings up to 30 feet in a straight line, and must end the movement on solid ground or fall.

We Meet Again: Gerhard is something of a recurring antagonist. The PCs may have already encountered him in area **A10**, in which case his reaction to them should be appropriate to how the prior encounter resolved. The man himself is a pompous, egotistical buffoon interested only in his own glory, and his personality is likely to grate upon the PCs quickly.

If the PCs already met Gerhard at area **A10**, he stands his ground here to protect his prize, but he flees south to his boat at the river if brought below 20 Hit Points.

The PCs may have defeated Gerhard at area **A10** in a way that left no potential for his survival; in this case, Gerhard is replaced in this encounter by his identical twin Erhard, who is just as invested in taking the pillar and claims that his brother has always stolen Erhard's rightful fame. Despite this rivalry, if he becomes aware the PCs killed Gerhard, Erhard attacks the PCs to avenge his brother.

Treasure: Gerhard has left a boat on the riverbank to the south. This boat can be used as a raft to navigate the river (see page 30 for more information on using a raft on the river) if the PCs find it. More importantly, the boat contains a small bundle stuffed up in the bow that contains some of Gerhard's prior discoveries on his expedition, items scavenged from local ruins. This bundle includes several golden idols of jungle animals (six idols in all, each worth 25 gp), +1 *striking handwraps of mighty blows*, a *lesser thurible of revelation*, and a *jade serpent wondrous figurine*, along with a few of Gerhard's exploration journals that not only make it apparent that the boat and its contents belong to Gerhard, but also suggest that he intends to destroy an ancient temple (located at area **A10**) that clashes with his own personal claims about the history of the Mwangi Expanse.

XP Award: If the PCs drive off Gerhard, award them half the XP they would have earned if they had defeated him in combat. If they later confront and defeat him at area **A10**, award them the remaining half of his XP for that defeat.

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A8. GREEN PILLAR

SEVERE 6

This unassuming forest clearing seems empty save for a single pillar topped with a green dragon's visage.

Creatures: While the Cinderclaws originally left a group of guards behind to watch over the green dragon pillar, it wasn't long before the pillar attracted the attention of a group of jungle drakes. The two drakes ambushed the cultists, devoured half of them, and hung the remainder in a tree for a later meal. Although the jungle drakes were not the intended guardians for the dragon pillar, they fill that role rather admirably, and the dragon pillar, which channels the draconic power of Dahak, has accepted the drakes as allies. When the jungle drakes spot the PCs, they scramble among the surrounding tree branches like curious cats before leaping down to pounce on the PCs.

JUNGLE DRAKES (2)

CREATURE 6

Pathfinder Bestiary 132

Initiative Perception +13

Hazard: The green dragon pillar is one of the eight dragon pillars that ward the region. Destroying it removes the green layer of the protective shell surrounding the Cinderclaw fortress (see Dahak's Shell on page 54).

GREEN DRAGON PILLAR

HAZARD 6

Page 28

Perception +16

Treasure: A search of the area and a successful DC 15 Perception check reveals the remnants of a pair of Cinderclaw cultists (one boggard and one charau-ka) hung up in the trees. One of the two bodies still carries three doses of giant wasp venom, while the other wears a deep-red suit of +1 *resilient leather armor*.

A9. INDIGO PILLAR

SEVERE 6

A sinister pall seems to hang over this area of the forest. Where jungle birds, frogs, and insects once sang in an deafening cacophony, there is now only a menacing silence. Ahead, an ominous pillar topped with an indigo carving of a dragon's head looms in the middle of a tangled clearing.

Creatures: When the leaders of a tribe of froglike griplis (page 86) sensed strange disruptions to the jungle ecosystem south of their lands, they sent one of their greenspeakers and a trio of archers to investigate. What the griplis found was something they were

woefully unprepared for—one of the Cinderclaw dragon pillars. The griplis tried to destroy the dragon pillar, but they were overwhelmed by its magic and instead became the pillar's mind-controlled guardians. The four griplis now linger in the area, killing anything that comes too close to their beloved "master." If the griplis hear the PCs coming, they hide in the surrounding trees and attempt to ambush the PCs when they arrive; otherwise, they immediately and viciously attack upon spotting the PCs. The Sense Motive DC to recognize that the griplis are under the effects of mind-control magic is only DC 10, as the griplis' eyes have the same glowing sheen as the color of the pillar they protect.

If the pillar is destroyed, the affected griplis are immediately freed from its control; they drop their weapons and surrender or flee, ending the combat. If the PCs killed any of the griplis during the combat, the remaining griplis flee once they're free from the dragon pillar's control. Otherwise, they thank the PCs profusely for saving them before fleeing back to the north.

GRIPLI ARCHERS (3)

CREATURE 3

Page 87

Initiative Perception +10 or Stealth +11 (+13 in forests)

GRIPLI GREENSPEAKER

CREATURE 5

Page 87

Initiative Perception +13 or Stealth +11

Hazard: The indigo dragon pillar is one of the eight dragon pillars that ward the region. Destroying it removes the indigo layer of the protective shell surrounding the Cinderclaw fortress (see Dahak's Shell on page 54).

INDIGO DRAGON PILLAR

HAZARD 6

Page 28

Perception +16

NPC Attitude: Rescuing all four of the griplis is viewed favorably by Akosa, Jahsi, and Nketiah, once word from the griplis tribes reaches Akrikel.

XP Award: Award the PCs XP for any griplis rescued, as if they had been defeated in combat. If the PCs rescue all four griplis, award each PC an additional 40 XP.

A10. AN INCONVENIENT RUIN SEVERE 6

An overgrown ridgeline rises up from the jungle here, presenting a craggy stone face to the south. Perched atop the forty-foot-tall cliff is a mostly overgrown stone temple.

A trio of stone balconies extend from the temple's southern facade over the cliff's edge, while several triangular openings in the stone walls that may once have held windows are now filled in with packed clay. The building's walls are adorned with badly damaged carvings that may have once been androgynous, butterfly-winged figures swimming in the sea and flying through the sky.

This temple was once an ancient pilgrimage site for several human communities until an attack from a rival faith wiped out those who once worshipped here. If the PCs investigate the site, see Investigating the Ruin (page 40) for what the PCs can learn, but chances are good that the man who beat them to the location confronts them first.

Creature: The Taldan explorer Gerhard Pendergrast—the same self-proclaimed famous scholar described in area A7 (if the PCs have already met Gerhard, see We Meet Again, below)—has already arrived at this site by the time the PCs first visit. Gerhard sought out this ruin after hearing rumors of it, and he was shocked upon his arrival to find the rumors to be true. Unfortunately for Gerhard, the presence of this temple completely contradicts an enormous treatise on Mwangi history that the archaeologist authored before even leaving Taldor. Undaunted by the minor fact that reality contradicts his theories, Gerhard has decided that this temple is an obvious forgery by other unscrupulous academics and has decided to blow it up to correct the “mistake.” He’s already explored the temple, and upon noting the unstable nature of the cliffside the structure is perched upon, he set a few well-placed kegs of black powder (reserves he’d intended to use for his blunderbuss) to facilitate the temple’s destruction.

As the PCs arrive, Gerhard has just finished preparing for the temple’s destruction. He’s calculated that his charges will cause the bulk of the temple to topple down the cliff but no further, and he arrogantly stands only 10 feet north of the temple, hands on his hips as he takes in the sight of the inconvenient ruin for a few moments. A line of black powder runs from his feet directly south, into the temple, then splits into three lines each leading up to one of three kegs of black powder, as indicated on the map.

If the PCs are stealthy, they have a chance to ambush Gerhard before he lights the black powder fuse. If they call out to him or if he notices their approach, he starts visibly before calling out, “I’d stand back if I were you! I’ve rigged this whole place to blow!”

If the PCs ask what Gerhard is doing, he proudly explains his plans to them, stating that he knows the temple is a forgery due to his extensive education on

the subject. A PC who succeeds at a DC 21 Perception check to Sense Motive notes the quaver in Gerhard’s voice that indicates he’s shaken by the temple’s contradiction to his claims, while a PC who recognizes the temple for what it is with a successful DC 24 Society check (see Investigating the Ruin below) knows that what he claims is completely incorrect. If called out on his presumptions, the explorer becomes extremely condescending, explaining his flawless credentials and scolding the PCs for attempting to correct someone who is clearly far more knowledgeable.

If the PCs confront him, Gerhard takes an action to light a tindertwig and drops it onto the black powder fuse. He then focuses his actions on preventing the PCs from putting out the fuse (see Hazards on page 40 for methods by which the PCs can stop the explosives). If the PCs manage to put out the fuse, Gerhard enters the temple and uses his blunderbuss to trigger the central keg—he must be within 40 feet of the keg, and thus at least 10 feet into the temple, to do so, which puts him in danger when the temple explodes. If the PCs haven’t encountered him in area A7 yet, the PCs might lose track of him in the explosion and be unable to find his body (at which point and at your option, the PCs might be able to use Survival to Track his trail, which should eventually lead them to area A7).

Should the PCs manage to stop the explosives entirely and they haven’t yet confronted Gerhard at area A7, he attempts to escape to that location.

We Meet Again: If the PCs already met Gerhard, the explorer’s attitude toward them reflects their previous meeting, most likely resulting in Gerhard yelling at the PCs for being archaeological vandals. He ignores any accusations of hypocrisy leveled at him by the PCs.

If they parted on ill terms, he curses the PCs and brags that this time they are too late to interfere, then lights the fuse to the explosives with a tindertwig.

If Gerhard has been confronted before, he fights to the death here—unless you’d like to preserve him as a recurring villain. If the PCs managed to kill Gerhard in area A7 in a way that left no potential for survival, Gerhard is replaced in this encounter by his identical twin Erhard, who claims that his brother has always stolen Erhard’s rightful fame. Despite this rivalry, if he becomes aware the PCs killed Gerhard, Erhard will attack the PCs to avenge his brother.

GERHARD PENDERGRAST

CREATURE 8

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Initiative Perception +19

Hazards: Gerhard has set up three kegs of black powder in the temple at the locations indicated on

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the map and linked them with a trail of black powder on the ground. He intends to light the explosives from what he thinks is a safe vantage point outside. Quick-thinking PCs can sweep away a portion of the black powder fuse to prevent the bombs from being triggered, of course, but this does little to prevent a desperate Gerhard from manually setting the bomb off with his blunderbuss.

If Gerhard lights the black powder fuse, it burns at a speed of 10 feet each round; when the fuse reaches a keg 6 rounds later, the black powder bomb explodes. The bomb explodes immediately if he shoots a barrel with his blunderbuss.

BLACK POWDER BOMB

HAZARD 6

UNCOMMON MECHANICAL TRAP

Stealth DC 15 (The three powder kegs aren't particularly well hidden, but they are out of sight to casual observation.)

Description Three bulky kegs of black powder placed at key locations in the temple are triggered to explode in unison, causing the entire structure to collapse into rubble and slide partially down the cliff face.

Disable No special skills are required to disable this manually activated trap. As an Interact action, a PC can sweep aside some black powder to interrupt the fuse line, but this doesn't prevent Gerhard from activating a keg via blunderbuss. A keg that is removed from its position (either by being thrown over the cliff or merely carried away) retains its explosive potential, but as long as one of the three kegs are removed they no longer have the precise placement required to trigger a collapse—an explosion at this point merely inflicts fire damage in the appropriate areas but does not particularly damage the temple structure itself.

A keg's contents can be dispersed by scattering the gunpowder to the wind (most efficiently by pouring it over the cliff side) as a 2-action activity, or rendered permanently inert by pouring a gallon of water into the powder, inhibiting its explosive qualities. The kegs themselves can be destroyed with damage (note that the AC listed below for each keg takes into account the fact that Gerhard has wedged the kegs into nooks in the temple's stone flooring and walls), but note that any fire damage (including incidental fire damage from area effects like a *fireball* or Gerhard's blunderbuss) causes them to explode. At your option, other actions may be similarly effective at disabling this hazard.

AC 26; **Fort** +17, **Ref** +8

Hidden Keg Hardness 5; **Hidden Keg HP** 20 (BT 10);

Immunities critical hits, object immunities, precision damage; **Weakness** fire automatically penetrates hardness

Destructive Explosion ⤵ (fire); **Trigger** One of the three kegs takes any fire damage, including damage caused

by a line of black powder burning up to a keg. **Effect** The keg explodes, causing 5d6 fire damage (DC 24 basic Reflex) in a 20-foot emanation; this can cause an instantaneous chain reaction if either of the other kegs are in this area (note that as positioned, all three kegs are in range to trigger a chain reaction). Fire damage in overlapping areas isn't cumulative, but if all three kegs are in their initial positions when the explosion occurs, the temple itself collapses, causing 8d6 bludgeoning damage to all creatures in the temple (DC 24 basic Reflex).

Investigating the Ruin: A successful DC 22 Society check by anyone who observes the carvings on the temple walls notices that the style evokes that of the Bonuwat people, who today dwell far to the west along the Mwangi coastline. Any character who is has expert proficiency in Society can learn this automatically after studying the site for 10 minutes. With a successful DC 17 Religion check, a character surmises that the temple seems to be devoted to the deities Desna and Gozreh, but that it combines their depictions into a singular entity. A critical success reveals something more—that this temple was devoted not to a combination of the two gods, but to a sort of “mini-panththeon” composed of both of them, named Shimye-Magalla. The Bonuwat have long admired and worshiped the two deities as equals. The age of this temple, combined with its inland location, suggests that the Bonuwat were more widespread long ago. To Gerhard, both of these revelations threaten some of his own (ill-informed) theories about Bonuwat history and Shimye-Magalla (who he has always believed to be an actual merging of the two deities rather than a pantheon composed of the two), and in his mind, the destruction of this temple will support his prior publications.

If the temple is destroyed, this information is much more difficult to learn, requiring 2d6 days of research sifting through the rubble followed by a successful DC 35 Society check and a DC 32 Religion check that requires expert proficiency.

While news of the temple would be of great interest to Taldor's scholars, to the Bonuwat themselves it is no revelation (they continue to worship Desna and Gozreh today as the Shimye-Magalla, after all, and their histories preserve lore of how their ancestors were driven from their inland homes long ago by a now-dead demon lord of bats and darkness). At your option, a PC who spreads information of this discovery to Taldan scholars (or other regional institutions) might be further rewarded from scholastic institutions for the “discovery.”

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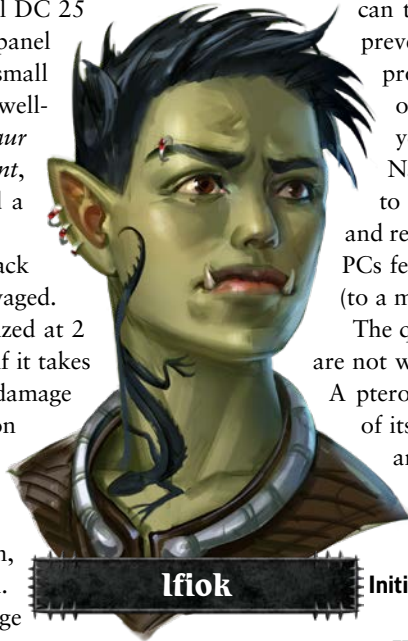
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Treasure: If the temple remains intact, a search of the statue of Shimye-Magalla on the central balcony to the south, along with a successful DC 25 Perception check, reveals a hidden panel between the statue's feet. Within is a small hollow containing three amazingly well-preserved scrolls (a *scroll of dinosaur form*, a *scroll of freedom of movement*, and a *scroll of remove disease*) and a *ring of fire resistance*.

If the PCs manage to preserve the black powder, the three kegs can be salvaged. Each keg is heavy and awkwardly sized at 2 Bulk. A black powder keg explodes if it takes any fire damage, inflicting 5d6 fire damage on all creatures in a 20-foot emanation (DC 24 basic Reflex save).

Influence Award: If the PCs allow the temple to be destroyed, they lose 2 IP with the Leopard Clan, and Nketiah is disappointed in them.

XP Award: If the PCs manage to prevent the temple from being destroyed, grant them each 40 XP. In they recognize the history and significance of the ancient temple, grant them an additional 40 XP each. If the PCs drive off Gerhard, award them half the XP they would have earned if they had defeated him in combat. If they later confront and defeat him at area A7, award them the remaining half at that point.



Ifiok

meal. A PC who succeeds at a DC 15 Nature check realizes that the two pterosaurs are hungry. The PCs can throw rations to a quetzalcoatlus to prevent it from attacking for a round, provided nothing has attacked or otherwise harmed that quetzalcoatlus yet. A PC can also attempt a DC 24 Nature check to Command an Animal to make a quetzalcoatlus lose interest and retreat; each day's worth of rations the PCs feed the creature reduces the DC by 1 (to a minimum of DC 20).

The quetzalcoatlus are merely hungry and are not willing to risk their lives over a meal. A pterosaur reduced to less than one-third of its Hit Points withdraws from combat and attempts to fly away.

QUETZALCOATLUS (2) CREATURE 7

Pathfinder Bestiary 272

Initiative Perception +15

Half-Orc Hunters: The half-orcs who inadvertently attracted the two quetzalcoatlus fled the camp when they first noticed the creatures approach. They have been hiding in the foliage about a hundred feet away from their camp. Once the PCs defeat the pterosaurs, the half-orcs approach them warily from the direction opposite the one from which the PCs arrived.

This trio of half-orcs risked trespassing into Ekujae lands in pursuit of a dangerous monster: the kishi Itoro (see area A6). While most of the pursuing orcs turned back rather than enter elven territory, the leader of this hunting group—a tattooed half-orc named Ifiok—swore an oath of revenge after the kishi mauled her nephew, and she refuses to return home until the monster is dead. The fact that they have yet to encounter an Ekujae patrol has tipped the half-orcs off to the fact that something is wrong with the elves, and the half-orcs are on edge as a result.


Though the half-orcs are wary at finding strangers in the forest, they have no interest in starting a fight that could jeopardize their mission—especially against a group they just watched take care of a pair of enormous predators! A PC who succeeds at a DC 18 Diplomacy check or shows proof that they are working with the Ekujae can persuade the half-orcs to relax, at which point the half-orcs begin to repair and rebuild their camp and invite the PCs to join them for a meal and to explain their goals. While Ifiok is uncomfortable with trespassing into Ekujae territory, she hopes that the elves will acknowledge

A11. RAINKIN DEMON HUNTERS SEVERE 6

The jungle canopy clears a bit here, giving way to a swampy area of murky pools and twisting creek beds. A demolished campsite sprawls across an island in the shallow bog.

Creatures: Three half-orc hunters, hailing from an orc tribe from the Lake Ocota region to the east, made camp in this swampy reach of the jungle recently, but unfortunately, they aren't used to the typical fauna of Ekujae lands and accidentally attracted some of the larger predators of this swampland—a pair of hungry quetzalcoatlus.

These giraffe-sized pterosaurs were initially attracted by the tapirs the half-orcs were roasting, and they've already torn the campsite apart and are squabbling over what small morsels they can find, but each remains in search of a heartier meal. When they notice the PCs, the immense creatures approach them with a cautious but ultimately ravenous intent. While the quetzalcoatlus would happily gulp down an entire adventuring party, they can be distracted by an easier



the worthiness of her quest and either help her or leave her to it.

If the PCs have already found and killed Itoro, Ifiok is disappointed she couldn't kill the kishi herself but is otherwise grateful (see Treasure, below). If the PCs have yet to find the kishi and they offer to work with the half-orcs to kill it, grant the PCs a +2 circumstance bonus to attack and damage rolls against the kishi in the fight to represent the half-orcs Aiding the PCs (there's no need to track the half-orcs' actual attacks in battle, but each is relatively low-level with similar capabilities to a ranger). The PCs might instead simply tell the half-orcs the location of the kishi and allow the hunters to take care of the matter themselves, but this results in the kishi murdering all of the half-orcs.

Treasure: The half-orcs are not carrying much they can spare, but if the PCs choose to camp with them, they can offer the PCs up to 2 weeks' worth of rations. If the PCs kill the kishi—or have already done so—Ifiok offers them a flask of an extremely potent alcohol known as ogoro out of gratitude, as well as her +1 *striking spear*; she says it would have been her nephew's, but his injuries will prevent him from ever using it.

Camping: If the half-orc camp is rebuilt, and the PCs choose to rest there, they automatically succeed at any checks to camp that night (see page 71).

XP Award: If the PCs kill Itoro, or have already done so, they gain 30 XP for enacting Ifiok's revenge.

A12. THE YELLOW PILLAR SEVERE 6

The rain, nearly constant within the jungle, comes down in sheets between the broken gaps of the forest canopy here, the clouds above almost black and flashing with lightning. Several of the trees in the area are split open, with jagged wounds along their bark, their insides smoldering red as they burn from the inside out.

This storm-wracked glade is the resting place of one of the Cinderclaws' dragon pillars, one of the first that was crafted and among the most powerful. Its fell power has resulted in a perpetual storm in the skies above, with sheets of rain and lightning strikes punctuated by ominous blasts of thunder that turn the area into a dangerous trial. Though many of the trees have been blasted open by lightning, the canopy remains mostly intact, providing cover for creatures hiding or flying among the tops of the trees.

Creatures: A small group of bat-like sabosans (page 91) roost here in the undamaged trees, serving as guardians to the dragon pillar. These sabosans were impressed by the power of Belmazog and her patron Dahak and were easily recruited into the

Cinderclaws. Although the sabosans' flight and nightvision capabilities would be incredible assets to the cult if used properly, Belmazog's limited imagination and poor tactical mind has resulted in the creatures being used here as simple guards. The magic of the pillar does not electrocute the trees where the sabosans are roosting, but the sabosans have little love of being wet and emerge to attack only if the PCs approach the pillar.

Although they respect the Cinderclaws' power, the sabosans are not willing to die for the cult, and a sabosan reduced below one-quarter of its Hit Points flees back to the main Cinderclaw encampment (see Chapter 4). This can give the PCs a hint as to the direction to travel, but any sabosans who escape in this manner will be healed and present at the Cinderclaw encampment when the PCs reach the fortress, likely stationed on the fort's encircling wall. If the PCs manage to capture and question a sabosan, communication may be difficult, as these sabosans speak only Abyssal. The sabosans aren't intelligent enough to know the answers to most of the PCs' questions, but they can point the PCs toward the main Cinderclaw encampment, and they do not need to be convinced to do so because they hope that the PCs run afoul of Belmazog and are killed by the cult leader.

SABOSANS (3)

CREATURE 5

Page 91

Initiative Perception +10

Hazard: The yellow dragon pillar is one of the eight dragon pillars that ward the region. Destroying it removes the yellow layer of the protective shell surrounding the Cinderclaw fortress (see Dahak's Shell on page 54).

YELLOW DRAGON PILLAR

HAZARD 6

Page 28

Perception +16

A13. THE FORTRESS OF SORROW

This is the site of the Fortress of Sorrow. See Chapter 4 for more details.

A14. CINDERCLAW MINE

This is the site of the Cinderclaw gold mine. See Chapter 3 for more details.

A15. THE ORANGE PILLAR SEVERE 6

The terrain in this area gives way to thick, cloying mud and swampy ground. Shallow puddles lie scattered across the

oversaturated earth, the water rising up to fill footsteps and other indentations left in the soil. Droplets slide from leaf to leaf before falling into the puddles, causing the pools to froth and boil. Soft bells sound intermittently between the patter of rain.

This soaked jungle grove has been transformed into a pseudo-marshland by the power of one of the Cinderclaws' dragon pillars, which is slowly infusing the rainforest water with acid. Swaying bells have been strung randomly on trip wires and among the branches of the nearby trees, resulting in a -4 circumstance penalty to all Stealth checks attempted in the area.

Creatures: A group of crocodile-snouted creatures known as bilokos have been recruited by the Cinderclaws to protect the orange dragon pillar they erected here. These biloko veterans are currently taking shelter within a hollowed-out tree, but they attack the PCs as soon as the party approaches the pillar, and they fight to the death.

BILOKO VETERANS (4)

CREATURE 4

Page 83

Initiative Perception +11

Hazard: The orange dragon pillar is one of the eight dragon pillars that ward the region. Destroying it removes the orange layer of the protective shell surrounding the Cinderclaw fortress (see Dahak's Shell on page 54).

ORANGE DRAGON PILLAR

HAZARD 6

Page 28

Perception +16

Treasure: Hidden within the bilokos' tree hollow is a peculiar piece of fruit that acts as *primeval mistletoe* and a magic bell that acts as a *chime of opening*.

A16. THE RED PILLAR

SEVERE 6

A crumbling stone temple juts out from where the forest has grown around it. Sinister towers, partially collapsed but once carved in the shapes of grimacing dragons, provide support for the cracked walls. A flickering red light pulsates within the hollow of the central ruined tower.

Creature: This site was once a temple of Dahak, built by a cult of worshippers before the Ekujae destroyed it generations ago. When the Cinderclaws encountered the ruins, they assembled one of the

dragon pillars here in honor of their divine patron and their predecessors in worship—it's this pillar that gives the central tower its eerie internal red glow. In doing so, they woke an ancient draconic guardian that was formerly bound to this temple: a Mwangi dragon associated with wealth and sacrifice known as a bida. The cultists consider the bida to be a sign of favor from Dahak and left the dragon to guard the cult's dragon pillar from the elves. That the bida ate several cultists before they fled simply counts as proper sacrifice in Belmazog's eyes.

Though the bida is an intelligent guardian and alert for any trespassers, it makes little effort to ambush the PCs when they approach. The bida instead displays itself in all of its terrifying glory, attempting to frighten the PCs before attacking. If the PCs attempt to negotiate with the bida instead of fighting, the dragon tempts the PCs with wealth, promising to cease their attempts to hinder the Cinderclaws as well as 3,000 gp, if the PCs turn over their Ekujae allies to be devoured. The dragon refuses to give the PCs these gold pieces (and indeed owns nowhere near that much treasure) until the Ekujae are slaughtered and the PCs leave the region through Huntergate, at which point the bida destroys the surrounding temple and buries Huntergate under tons of rubble. While this won't necessarily mean an automatic end to the Age of Ashes campaign, you'll likely need to engineer another way for the PCs to earn *Eclipse*, the key to the next portal. More likely, the PCs deny the dragon, in which case it attacks and fights to the death.

BIDA

CREATURE 8

Page 81

Initiative Perception +15

Hazard: The red dragon pillar is one of the eight dragon pillars that ward the region. Destroying it removes the red layer of the protective shell surrounding the Cinderclaw fortress (see Dahak's Shell on page 54).

RED DRAGON PILLAR

HAZARD 6

Page 28

Perception +16

Treasure: The dragon pillar contains a pair of black fire opals, worth 200 gp each, that serve as the idol's eyes. The bida itself keeps a sizable treasure hoard of its own piled just west of the dragon pillar, consisting of 310 gp, 2,400 sp, 8,500 cp, a pair of *healer's gloves*, a *spined shield*, and a *wand of widening* (*lightning bolt*).

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CHAPTER 3: BLOOD FOR GOLD

For as long as the Ekujae have lived in the Mwangi Jungle, they have forbidden almost all mining on their mineral-rich land, both because they associate gold with Dahak and due to the damage that mining does to the environment. To the Cinderclaws, who worship both Dahak and destruction, this made the prospect of a gold mine a tantalizing one, and so as soon as the dragon pillars were erected, the Cinderclaws began breaking ground throughout the region in search of gold. Belmazog used these gold nuggets to pay the mysterious Scarlet Triad, who had provided the Cinderclaws with aid in building the dragon pillars. At the time, the Scarlet Triad accepted the gold with patronizing amusement, but a few weeks later, the Scarlet Triad contacted Belmazog again. The organization had found that the old Ekujae legends were more accurate than the Scarlet Triad had initially believed, and the Mwangi gold had some unusual

property that seemed to resonate with draconic power. The Scarlet Triad requested that Belmazog turn over all gold of a certain magical purity in exchange for promises of future favors; Belmazog happily agreed.

The Cinderclaws lacked one critical piece of information about the Ekujae aversion to local gold—it's heavily tainted with arsenic. While the Cinderclaws' mining efforts started out strong, guarded by demons and organized by kobolds, the workers soon started falling ill. Wrath demons proved to be unsympathetic taskmasters, and when the kobolds began to protest further mining efforts, the demons forced work to continue under threat of death. Eventually the kobolds fled (making their way to area A3 in the jungle), and took all pretense of organization with them. The mine has been left in an uneasy standstill between the demons and the remaining workers, with resentment slowly building among all of the mortal cultists.

The Cinderclaw Mine

When the PCs approach the Cinderclaw Mine, either as a result of hints and rumors from others in the area or simply stumbling upon it on their own, their route takes them along a winding footpath. Following the footpath out of the hex the mine is located in (area **A14** on the Mwangi Jungle map on page 30) leads toward the creek to the east, while following the path away from the creek leads the PCs in a broad curve that eventually leads to the mine's clearing, approaching area **B1** from the west. The assumption is that the PC's initial approach to the mine is from this path to the west, and thus area **B1** below details their approach to the camp. At your option, the PCs may instead approach from any direction of your (or their) preference. The nature of the initial threats the PCs face will vary depending on the direction of their approach, so you should be familiar with all of the locations in the mine before starting any of the encounters here.

As the PCs draw near the camp, a successful DC 12 Perception check is all that's needed to notice a plume of smoke rising in the air and the acrid odor of the firepit itself at area **B6**. A PC who succeeds at a DC 20 Nature (trained) check notes something more unusual—that no wild animals seem to be present near the mine (this is a result of the vrock's presence at area **B2**).

CINDERCLAWS ON ALERT

The encounters on the following pages present the mine assuming it's not in a state of raised alertness, and as long as the alarm isn't raised, all charaukas and boggards in the area are distracted and take a -4 circumstance penalty to Perception checks. Though the Cinderclaws respond violently to intruders, internal schisms among the ranks have left the defenses at the mine disorganized. Since their primary enslaved kobold workforce abandoned the mine several days ago (see area **A3**), the task of physical labor has fallen to increasingly frustrated charau-ka warriors. There is no love lost between the charau-kas and the boggards, and neither responds quickly to the other being attacked, nor do they rush to the defense of other guardians posted at the mine's periphery.

Further complicating matters is the fact that the mine's cultists live in fear of the mine's boss, Hezle (see area **B8**), who in turn fears the wrath of Belmazog, the cult's leader. Having endured cruel punishment from Belmazog for small failures in the past, Hezle is hesitant to report multiple attacks on the mine, a much greater failure. The escape of her kobold minions has further eroded Hezle's commitment to the Cinderclaws, and she's been increasingly short-tempered and quick to use her fire to punish and torment the mine workers for any perceived slight (real or imagined).

As such, the cultists have no standard response to intruders, and it often doesn't occur to them to retreat or regroup. This is fortunate for the PCs, for were the cultists here to mount a coordinated defense, they would be much more dangerous. The PCs can make as many attempts against the mine as they wish, chipping away at the Cinderclaws here and retreating when things get too dangerous. Individual creatures might abandon their post over time, as indicated in the text, but the PCs won't need to fear potential reinforcements unless they take so long to wipe out the mine that Belmazog happens to make one of her rare visits (the timing of which is left entirely to you to determine).

The Cinderclaw mine goes on alert as soon as the PCs are spotted (after which point the cultists no longer take the -4 circumstance

CHAPTER 3 SYNOPSIS

The PCs discover a large-scale mining operation in the middle of the jungle, a strip-mine the Cinderclaws are using to extract tainted gold from the ground. Disrupting the Cinderclaw mining operation will help to weaken the defenses at their headquarters, but could also provide the PCs with valuable clues about the nature of their still-mysterious enemies, the Scarlet Triad.

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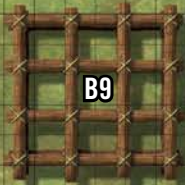
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THE CINDERCLAW MINE



B2



B9

B10

B12

B1

B7

B8

B11

B6

B3

B4

B5

1 SQUARE = 5 FEET

penalty to Perception for being distracted), but the inhabitants aren't paying particular attention to the camp's perimeter (with the exception of the guardian vrock, whose reaction to intruders has its own special effects on the mine's alarm; see area **B2** for details). Once the PCs attract the attention of any of the cultists at the specific encounter areas—such as by attacking them, approaching within 60 feet of an occupied location without successfully Sneaking, or performing a similarly obvious action—the mine's alarm is raised. "Alarm Reaction" entries in each encounter describe how the occupants of that area react to the alarm.

CINDERCLAW RUMORS

A PC who successfully Sneaks into the mine to eavesdrop on the cultists and succeeds at a DC 17 Perception check learns a random rumor from the table below, assuming that PC can understand either Draconic or Mwangi.

Cinderclaw Rumors	
d6	Rumor
1	"Those kobolds abandoned the mine because they wanted special treatment and didn't get it. No matter. Once they found out what Belmazog did to their beloved dragon, they would have either run off or turned on us anyway."
2	"Why do we have to keep grubbing around in the muck to pay the Scarlet Triad? Who are they anyway? Have you ever seen one of them? Why can't we keep the gold for ourselves?"
3	"This gold is cursed. Belmazog might have kept the elves out, but they know we've stolen from them. Now they've cursed us to all die slowly!"
4	"Those demons are stuffing our dead into the firepit, and I don't think they're always waiting for our dead to actually be dead. I don't care if they're Dahak's servants, the elves can take them, and I won't lift a claw to help."
5	"Boss Hezle's turned on us since the other kobolds left. I know she's been hoarding her potions in her lab instead of giving them to us."
6	"That pillar down by the pond is too powerful. It's calling things in on its own now. We've all seen those ghost worms, but I saw something bigger come through and hide itself in the water."

B1. APPROACHING THE CAMP

A large pit has been dug into the ground at the center of this clearing, coating everything nearby with yellowish mud. A rough camp has been assembled around the mine.

The footpath into the mine encampment twists through the jungle where enough foliage remains to provide shelter from the rain. Creatures who hide among the trees can gain standard cover and remain concealed, though forested areas are difficult terrain. Once the path reaches the clearing, it widens and no longer provides cover. The creatures in the camp itself generally don't keep an eye on the perimeter, though, leaving that duty to the demon who nests in the trees just to the north. Unless the PCs are attempting to be stealthy, the vrock dwelling there automatically notices their approach and attacks as detailed in area **B2**.

B2. VROCK NEST

MODERATE 7

A particularly dense tangle of trees here seems to have been chosen as the lair of a particularly horrific and cruel creature, for amid the tangled branches above is an awful nest made of bones, scraps of animal hides, bits of rotting flesh, and mud.

Creature: This awful nest is the home of a vrock demon conjured in via the magic circle at area **B7**. The demon is enjoying its stay in the area, for it's been given leave to catch, torment, and otherwise savage any intruders. The demon has decided this allowance includes wild animals in the area, and its exuberance has already had an impact on the local fauna.

The vrock is restless and overconfident, and it is easily lured away from the mines by the prospect of a fight. Additionally, since the vrock routinely torments jungle animals and creatures for fun, the cultists tend to dismiss the sounds of combat at the clearing edge as yet another instance of the vrock entertaining itself.

VROCK

CREATURE 9

Pathfinder Bestiary 78

Initiative Perception +18

Alarm Reaction: None of the mortal cultists in the camp itself are willing to help the vrock. The PCs can use this to their advantage to pick off the vrock without the risk of reinforcements. If the alarm is raised elsewhere, the vrock swoops into the sky to fly in circles above the mine, then flies down to attack any intruders it spots. This causes any cultists in a fight with the PCs to scatter in fear, and they don't attack the PCs again until the vrock is defeated.

B3. SABOSAN CAMP

TRIVIAL 7

A carpet of small animal bones, along with a few larger bones from bipedal prey, lies scattered across the forest

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floor here, while the branches above is a tangle of nest-like platforms that obscure the sunlight even more than the jungle canopy itself.

Creature: The wide swath of nest-platforms above are the homes of a small clan of sabosans, three of whom are currently out guarding the yellow dragon pillar at area **A12**. Normally only a single sabosan remains in the nest above, but any who escaped from a fight at area **A12** retreat here and join in a fight against the PCs. If only one sabosan is present, it is roosting in the nest above, lightly dozing. It takes a –4 status penalty to Perception checks due to being unconscious, but should it detect the PCs below, it lets out an ear-piercing shriek. A lone sabosan attacks the PCs only once reinforcements have arrived or if the PCs find and attack the sabosan first, but if others are here, they all attack on sight.

SABOSAN

CREATURE 5

Page 91

Initiative Perception +10



Boggard Swampseer

Alarm Reaction: A sabosan's shriek is enough to set off the mine's alarm, but none of the cultists come to investigate this area if the alarm is raised. If the alarm is raised elsewhere, the sabosans in this area take to the air and circle in the sky above the mine before swooping down to attack any intruders they notice.

B4. SICK BEDS

Low 7

A half dozen filthy reed mats, encrusted with slime and sweat, line the ground outside of a slumped wooden building.

This improvised hospital is the only comfort provided to those Cinderclaw miners who have contracted arsenic poisoning. As a cult of destruction, the Cinderclaws have little empathy or interest in medicine—as a result, they have little inclination to offer the afflicted much beyond a quiet place to rest and eventually die.

Creatures: The gold mined here is contaminated with arsenic. The effects of these trace amounts are not immediately obvious, but over time, the cultists toiling within the mine grow sickly. Those who are too ill to work are brought here to rest and recover, where they are watched over by a half dozen boggard swampseers. Cultists that the swampseers deem to be too far gone are given over to the vrock in area **B2**. Currently, four boggards and two charau-kas, all of whom are too sick to do much more than groan and writhe, lie on the mats here. The six boggard swampseers who watch over them are equally interested in watching the sick cultists recover naturally or watching them perish, and thus they haven't provided much aid. The boggards are lazy and don't respond to camp alarms, but they do rise up to attack any intruders who approach the sick beds or the bunk house. In this case, they fight to the death.

BOGGARD SWAMPSEERS (6)

CREATURE 3

Pathfinder Bestiary 45

Initiative Perception +7 (+11 if on alert)

Alarm Reaction: These swampseers remain here to protect the sick, but they move to attack any intruders who threaten them. The cultists in areas **B5** and **B6** and Hezle in area **B8** begin to make their way here to aid the swampseers at the start of the second round.

B5. BUNK HOUSE

TRIVIAL 7

This rough wooden lodge appears run-down at first glance, but a closer look reveals the sturdy and watertight construction. Thick, gnarled trees packed with reeds and mud form the walls, while piles of rattan create an insulating roof.

This muggy building was built to house the charau-ka cultists working in the mine, as the boggard Cinderclaws prefer to sleep outside in the rain. The house contains a number of sleeping mats neatly spaced around the room. The room is dry and smells heavily of musk, fur, and smoked meat.

The walls of the bunkhouse are 10 feet tall, 2 feet thick, and made of wood. The house has no windows and a single wooden door that doesn't close properly at the entrance. Due to the constant rain and the thick hardwood used in its construction, the building is remarkably resistant to being set on fire, and attempting to smoke out the inhabitants from the outside has little effect.

Creatures: A group of seven off-shift charau-ka warriors are relaxing in this room, attempting to clean the mud from their fur before they're forced to return to work. They are currently unarmed and unarmored, thus they can't make weapon Strikes without first spending an Interact action to grab a weapon. Their AC is 16 unless they take 5 minutes to don their armor, and they can pick up improvised shields to improve their AC. Should the charau-kas hear the sounds of combat or otherwise become aware of intruders, however, they rapidly equip their gear and ready actions to attack any non-allied creatures that enter the house.

CHARAU-KA WARRIORS (7)

CREATURE 1

Page 84

Initiative Perception +2 (+6 if on alert)

AC 16

Alarm Reaction: Once the alarm is raised, the butchers in area **B6** and Hezle in area **B8** begin to make their way here to aid the warriors at the start of the second round.

B6. FIREPIT

MODERATE 7

This large charcoal pit is filled with smoking coals and smells of roasted flesh. To the side, a bamboo trapdoor covers another large pit dug into the ground.

The cult uses this firepit to smoke meat for better preservation. Currently, five red river hogs are being

cooked beneath the coals, watched by a trio of impatient charau-ka butchers who otherwise enjoy the easy work. The bamboo trapdoor leads to a shallow pit in the ground used to store more smoked meat, mashed yams, and pots of uncontaminated drinking water.

Creatures that step into the firepit take 2d6 fire damage each round they remain on the hot coals.

Creatures: The three charau-ka butchers sit around the firepit, trading boasts and periodically prodding the coals with fire-hardened sticks out of boredom. If they sense the PCs, they attack at once, intending to shove the PCs into the firepit to cook.

CHARAU-KA BUTCHERS (3)

CREATURE 6

Page 85

Initiative Perception +7 (+11 if on alert)

Alarm Reaction: Once the alarm is raised, the charau-kas in area **B5** and Hezle in area **B8** begin to make their way here to aid the butchers at the start of the second round.

B7. SORTING STATION

A wooden hut stands at the eastern edge of the mining pit, wafts of smoke rising from a single chimney in its north wall. West of the hut is a wooden table, on which several objects lie obscured under a leather covering. A bin of rocky refuse sits beside the table. South of the hut, a fifteen-foot-diameter magical circle has been dug into the ground, the grooves filled with dull gray metal and adorned at each point with stubs of burnt-out black candles.

The objects under the covering on the table are a high-quality scale and weights used for measuring gold. The summoning circle to the south was crafted by pouring molten lead into shallow grooves dug into the earth. The circle itself radiates lingering magic, and a PC who succeeds at a DC 25 check to Identify Magic (or DC 23 if using Religion) while examining the circle can tell it was used some time in the past to cast a ritual to conjure a demon (Belmazog used it to conjure the vrock at area **B2** several weeks ago), but that it is now inert.

Treasure: During the day, a small leather pouch on the table holds a dozen gold nuggets (each worth 50 gp, and each laced with arsenic). After dark, this pouch can instead be found in area **B8**. The weights are relatively worthless, but the scale is made of silver, and despite its ungainly shape (it has 2 Bulk) is worth 100 gp for the artistry of its craftsmanship.

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B8. HEZLE'S LAB

Low 7

This cozy hut contains a table filled with bottles and glass distillers, a small chair, and a dry linen bed. Potions bubble over magical flames, and a chemical smell lingers in the air.

This hut serves as Hezle's bedroom and alchemist's lab. The lab interior is a 6 feet tall, with no windows, and a single unlocked door for an entrance. Due to the constant rain and the thick hardwood used in its construction, the building is resistant to being set on fire.

Creature: The mine's current boss is an alchemist named Hezle. She can be found here at all hours, either examining a sample of gold for its arsenic content, performing alchemical experiments, or relaxing. A small kobold with cobalt-blue scales, Hezle originally joined the Cinderclaws out of reverence for Dahak and the Cinderclaws' figurehead dragon, Kyrion (page 61). Hezle's work at the mine has begun to wear down her respect for the cult, however. While she didn't abandon the cult with the other kobolds due to her position of power, the conditions since the other kobolds left have been terrible enough that Hezle is entertaining mutinous thoughts. Her continued loyalty to the Cinderclaws is mainly based on her fear of the Ekujae elves and worries about Kyrion's fate.

Hezle's attitude leaves her in an awkward position once the PCs attack. At first, she joins the other cultists in defending the mine, using her *staff of fire* and bombs to blast the PCs from afar. She tries not to catch cultists in the areas, but she doesn't worry too much about collateral damage. Should it become apparent that the PCs are significant threats, or as soon as she's reduced to fewer than half her Hit Points, Hezle abandons the fight and flees to area B9 to try to release the mokelembembe there as a last-ditch effort against the PCs. If she takes any more damage after this, or if the mokelembembe is slain, she tries to flee into the jungle.

In the off chance that the PCs manage to confront Hezle here without setting off any alarms, the kobold is shocked at their arrival, giving the PCs a brief moment to Coerce or Request her to not raise the alarm or attack. If the PCs succeed, or if she's captured alive, Hezle makes any bargain she can to save her life. An offer of safety from the Ekujae (or a threat to turn her over to the elves) with a successful Diplomacy or Intimidation check can certainly work—alternatively, if the PCs saved the kobolds in area A3, they can inform Hezle of this to earn the kobold's cooperation. If they mention that the group revealed their tribal name of "Thornscales" to the PCs, no skill check is needed to secure her aid. Hezle has no intention of joining the PCs directly to fight the cult, but she is certainly

willing to give them the following information before she abandons the mine and sneaks off into the jungle.

If the PCs convince her to help, Hezle informs them of the Scarlet Triad and their interest in the Ekujae's gold due to its resonance with ancient draconic magic. Hezle's job at the mine was to determine the "divine purity" of the gold and send it on to the main Cinderclaw camp for eventual transport to Scarlet Triad contacts. Hezle has had no personal contact with the Scarlet Triad, but she can point the PCs toward the Cinderclaw fortress, though she warns the PCs that the cult's dragon pillars are protecting the camp, and that the PCs should not approach the camp without first destroying the pillars. Finally, she knows the locations of all the dragon pillars and can mark them on a map for the PCs.

HEZLE

CREATURE 8

UNIQUE CN SMALL HUMANOID KOBOLD

Female kobold researcher

Perception +14; darkvision

Languages Common, Draconic, Mwangi

Skills Arcana +18, Crafting +16, Mining Lore +16, Nature +12, Stealth +16, Survival +12

Str -1, **Dex** +4, **Con** +2, **Int** +6, **Wis** +2, **Cha** +3

Items greater antidote, +1 crossbow (16 regular bolts and 4 wyvern poisoned bolts), +1 dagger, moderate healing potions (2), infused reagents (5), leather armor, greater staff of fire

AC 27; **Fort** +14, **Ref** +18, **Will** +16

HP 122; **Immunities** poison

Speed 25 feet

Melee ♦ *dagger* +19 (agile, finesse, magical, versatile S), **Damage** 1d4+2 piercing

Melee ♦ *staff of fire* +13 (magical, two-hand d8), **Damage** 1d4-1 bludgeoning

Ranged ♦ *crossbow* +20 (magical, range increment 120 feet, reload 1), **Damage** 1d6+3 piercing (plus wyvern poison on first four shots)

Ranged ♦ *dagger* +19 (agile, magical, thrown 10 feet, versatile S), **Damage** 1d4+2 piercing

Kobold Explosives ♦♦ (alchemical, fire, interact); **Cost** 1 batch of infused reagents. **Effect** Hezle quickly cobbles together an explosive bomb and lobs it up to 30 feet. All creatures in a 5-foot burst take 5d6 fire damage (DC 26 basic Reflex save).

Smoky Retreat ♦♦ (manipulate); **Cost** 1 batch of infused reagents. **Requirements** Hezle must be adjacent to at least one enemy. **Effect** Hezle throws a mix of special powders centered on a corner of her space, creating a plume of smoke filling a 5-foot burst until the end of her turn that causes her to be hidden. She then immediately Sneaks, but must end her movement in a space that's not adjacent to any enemies.

All creatures other than Hezle in the smoke cloud must attempt a DC 26 Fortitude save.

Critical Success The creature is unaffected.

Success The creature is sickened 1.

Failure The creature is sickened 2.

Critical Failure The creature is sickened 3 and stunned 1.

Sneak Attack (precision) 2d6

Staff Mastery Although Hezle does not cast spells, her obsession with fire and long hours of practice allow her to cast spells from her *staff of fire* as if she had the spells on her spell list and could cast them. She still must expend charges from the staff normally; when she prepares the staff each morning, she is capable of placing 4 charges in the staff.

Alarm Reaction: Once the alarm is raised, Hezle peers out of the door of her hut to try to determine the cause of the ruckus. As soon as she spots the PCs or realizes the mine is under attack, she moves to the fight to aid in the defense, as detailed in each area.

Treasure: A search of the alchemical workstation in this building turns up four greater antidotes, two *young white dragon's breath potions*, three lesser elixirs of life, a *grim trophy*, a *striking snare*, and a *traveler's any-tool*. A leather pouch filled with 20 nuggets of arsenic-laced gold lies nearby—each gold nugget is worth 50 gp. Finally, if the PCs don't learn the locations of the Cinderclaw fortress and all of the dragon pillars by speaking to Hezle, they should find a map among the documents in her laboratory that shows these locations.

XP Award: If the PCs gain Hezle's cooperation, grant them experience as if they had defeated her in combat.

B9. BEAST PEN MODERATE 7

This solid-looking pen is made from thick logs lashed together with lengths of vines. Though the cage is crudely made, the sheer mass and weight of the logs gives the pen solid support. The western side of the pen is attached to a half dozen vines connected to counterweights and a wheel that, if turned, would open the entire side.

The west side of this pen can be opened by a single creature turning the wheel to raise the wall, which is a 3-action activity that has the manipulate trait.

Creature: This pen contains a foul-tempered behemoth: a mokele-mbembe the cult captured with the aid of a tranquilizing poison brewed up by Hezle. They used the beast periodically for brute labor to clear mud away from the mine, but each time, the creature grows more foul-tempered and difficult to

control. The creature's attitude is quite poor now, and if its cage is opened, it storms out to attack anyone in sight. Canny PCs might be able to use the monster against the cultists, particularly if they can soothe it with magic or a successful DC 27 Nature check to Command an Animal. Otherwise, the PCs rile the beast up even more than usual, and it can attempt a DC 35 Athletics check each round to break free of its cage and rampage.

MOKELE-MBEMBE

CREATURE 9

Page 90

Initiative Perception +15

Alarm Reaction: The mokele-mbembe thrashes and roars in its cage if the alarm is raised. It attempts to break free if a fight takes place within 60 feet of its cage.



Hezle

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If Hezle flees to open the cage, the monster rampages out to attack PCs and cultists alike (other than Hezle, whom it has learned to fear for her mastery of fire). If the mokele-mbembe aids the PCs, you can run a combat between the creature and cultists, or simply assume that it kills four or five cultists before it is itself defeated.

Influence Award: If the PCs manage to befriend the mokele-mbembe and they release it from captivity, they earn 2 IP with the Leopard Clan.

XP Award: If the PCs release this creature and secure its aid in fighting the cult, award them XP as if they'd defeated it in combat.

B10. INFESTED SPOILS MODERATE 7

A giant pile of yellowish clay and mud has been dumped here: an immense spoil pile from the nearby mine.

The spoil pile is difficult terrain. In addition, the mud here is soaked with arsenic-poisoned water—any creature that falls prone here is exposed to the arsenic.

Creatures: Three mud spiders, a local variation of giant tarantula, have burrowed lairs into the north side of the mud pile. The cultists haven't yet figured the best way out to handle these spiders. As soon as they detect the PCs, the spiders emerge from their holes and attack.

MUD SPIDERS (3)

CREATURE 6

Variant giant tarantula (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 307)

Initiative Perception +14

Speed 30 feet, climb 30 feet; mudwalking

Mudwalking The mud spiders ignore difficult terrain from mud.

Alarm Reaction: If a fight breaks out here between the PCs and the spiders, Hezle watches from hiding in area B7 and makes sure the cultists from areas B5 and B6 are ready to attack once the spiders are defeated.

Treasure: The spiders recently encountered and killed a hapless adventurer who had gotten lost in the jungles. While there is little left of the actual adventurer, a search of the spider den uncovers a mud-coated suit of +1 *full plate*, though it takes 10 minutes to dig all of the pieces out of the cloying mud, and participating PCs are exposed to the arsenic in the mud.

B11. GOLD MINE

SEVERE 7

The walls of this strip mine sink deep into the earth. The exposed earth is yellowish and heavy, soaked through with water from the sluices and the jungle rain. To the north of the sunken area is a large pond of muddy water, while fifteen feet south of the pond looms a dragon-headed pillar.

The mine is 50 feet deep, and the path into the mine is perilously steep, with 25-foot-tall walls. Although the mine's walls are a sheer drop, the mud is soaked through with water, allowing creatures to dig their hands into the walls as makeshift handholds, making it a DC 13 Athletics check to Climb.

Creatures: The current workforce toiling here consists of four charau-ka warriors and six boggard warriors, all overseen by a trio of snickering, abusive charau-ka butchers. The miners themselves are all exhausted and sickened 1 from exposure to the arsenic-contaminated soil they work in. Once they notice the PCs, the butchers order the miners to attack, and they do the best they can in a massed charge against the PCs. The warriors are likely not much of a threat, but the butchers don't wait long to join the battle themselves.

While the violet dragon pillar's eye beams (see Hazard below) already complicate battles here, an unusual side effect of this pillar is that it has worn

Mud Spider

thin the boundaries between the Material Plane and the chaotic neutral plane known as the Maelstrom. A half dozen voidworm proteans have slithered through this thin planar breach, and they constantly swarm through the air around the pillar. They do not attack the PCs unless they are attacked first, and they are not targeted by the pillar's eye beams.

As soon as one of the charau-ka butchers is slain, the other two move toward the edge of the pond to splash the water there, hoping to rile up the proteans they know are lurking under the surface (see area **B12**).

BOGGARD WARRIORS (6) CREATURE 2

Pathfinder Bestiary 44

Initiative Perception +4 (+8 if on alert, includes -1 from sickened)

CHARAU-KA BUTCHERS (3) CREATURE 6

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Initiative Perception +7 (+11 if on alert, includes -1 from sickened)

CHARAU-KA WARRIORS (4) CREATURE 1

Page 84

Initiative Perception +1 (+5 if on alert, includes -1 from sickened)

VOIDWORMS (6) CREATURE 1

Pathfinder Bestiary 266

Initiative Perception +4

Hazard: The violet dragon pillar is one of the eight dragon pillars that ward the region. Destroying it removes the violet layer of the protective shell surrounding the Cinderclaw fortress (see Dahak's Shell on page 54). If the dragon pillar is damaged or tinkered with, the two naunets living in area **B12** panic—they think this pillar is the key to their home and slither out of the pond to attack anyone they think is harming the pillar.

VIOLET DRAGON PILLAR HAZARD 6

Page 28

Perception +16

Alarm Reaction: If the alarm is raised, the butchers gather the warriors in a defensive circle and keep an eye on the mine's perimeter. Once they spot PCs approaching, they race up the ramp to attack, but they do not leave the mine to join fights in the surrounding area. If the PCs reach this area without alerting the mine, the creatures here raise the alarm. The cultists in area **B5** and **B6**, along with Hezle from area **B8**, arrive as soon as possible.

B12. RUNOFF POND

MODERATE 7

The waters of this large, muddy pond are still, but a sickly sheen of oil glistens on its surface.

The cultists dumped gallons of water into this area of the mine to provide water for the sluices. The water is only 2 feet deep within 10 feet of the shore, but the bottom drops to a depth of 10 feet toward the center. The water is contaminated with the mineral runoff from the mine; any creature that drinks the water or swims in it is exposed to arsenic.

Creatures: Along with the clutch of voidworms that slithered onto the Material Plane due to the distortions in reality around the violet dragon pillar, a pair of naunet proteans invaded the region. The two serpentine monsters have settled into the runoff pond here, where at first they simply enjoyed the novelty of their "vacation" out of the Maelstrom. In the past few days, however, they've gotten frustrated and miss their home. Their protean anatomy has interacted strangely with the energies of the dragon pillar, and as a result they're immune to the arsenic in the water. The proteans have been entertaining themselves by idly changing shape into various aquatic creatures, but immense, spiny jungle eels have become a favorite. They snap and bite at anything that splashes too deep in what they've come to view as "their" pool. Once something attacks them, they revert to their true forms and fight to the death. They also attack anyone they think is trying to damage the violet dragon pillar, as they hope that the longer this pillar remains standing, the thinner the barriers between reality will get and that some day soon they'll be able to return home.

NAUNETS (2) CREATURE 7

Pathfinder Bestiary 267

Initiative Stealth +14

Alarm Reaction: The naunets don't bother with reacting to an alarm, other than to peek out of the pool now and then to watch the fighting.

Treasure: A PC who succeeds at a DC 17 Perception check near the two sluices along the pool's southern shore can spot three gold nuggets within the pool—the cultists accidentally dropped these nuggets and were too afraid of the creatures lurking in the water to retrieve them. Each nugget is worth 50 gp. On a critical success on that Perception check, a character notices something further out in the pool that looks like a dead body. This is the savaged corpse of a charau-ka priest who got too close to the naunets; the body still clutches its *holy prayer beads* to its chest.

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CHAPTER 4: LEGACY OF ASH AND BONE

Ever since she realized she had the blood of dragons in her veins, the boggard Belmazog had admired stories and legends of Dahak. So when Belmazog began to dream of her deity calling to her from a deep swamp, she took heed. And when she stumbled across the fossilized remains of Dahak's manifestation, Belmazog was astounded. As word of her discovery spread, it attracted a flock of new believers. Dahak's bones served as a meeting place for years. After the Scarlet Triad contacted Belmazog and provided her with the ritual to raise the dragon pillars, the boggard found herself wanting to raise an even greater monument to her power. The Scarlet Triad aided her here as well—in exchange for her promise of Mwangi gold, the Scarlet Triad offered the use of golems and other aid as needed. Belmazog never questioned the reasons behind the Scarlet Triad's interest in her cult and named her new stronghold "The Fortress of Sorrow" in honor of Sorrowmaker, one of Dahak's titles.

The Fortress of Sorrow

The Fortress of Sorrow stands in the middle of a swamp, built of hardened red clay atop a massive slab of granite thrust up from the swampy jungle floor.

DAHAK'S SHELL

EXTREME 8

A ring of eight dragon pillar replicas define the border of an ovoid shell of magical energy that encircles the entire compound. As dragon pillars are destroyed, their representative colors fade from Dahak's shell. Had the Cinderclaws been able to establish a ninth pillar at Huntergate, the dragon pillars themselves would have become almost invulnerable, but since the Ekujae elves disrupted that final step in the ritual, the PCs have the opportunity to take down Dahak's shell one color at a time. Belmazog can lower or raise Dahak's shell from within area C9, and she does so whenever cultists need to come or go from the site.

While burrowing under the shell is impossible (its energies extend below as well as above), canny PCs might be able to engineer tricky methods of passing through it. Teleportation effects work perfectly well, since the shell affects only those who physically pass through it. At your option, other methods could work as well.

DAHAK'S SHELL

HAZARD 12

UNIQUE MAGICAL TRAP

Stealth +0 or *detect magic*

Description A ring of eight dragon pillar replicas mark the border of a dome of magical prismatic energy that entirely contains the Fortress of Sorrow.

Disable Each dragon pillar that is destroyed removes the corresponding color's effect from Dahak's shell; as long as even one color remains active, the pillars marking the shell's border cannot be damaged themselves, but a successful DC 32 Thievery (master) check or a successful *dispel magic* (6th level; counteract DC 30) against one of the eight pillars can cause a randomly determined active color in the shell defense (below) to become deactivated for 1d4 rounds.

Prismatic Beam (abjuration, divine, light); **Trigger** a creature attempts and fails to disable one of the shell colors via Thievery or *dispel magic*; **Effect** Dahak's shell Strikes the triggering creature with a random eye beam. Roll 1d8 to determine the color (1-red, 2-orange, 3-yellow, 4-green, 5-blue, 6-indigo, 7-violet, 8-black).

Ranged ♦ eye beam +20 (range 120 feet), **Effect** The target suffers an effect corresponding to the eye beam's color, as described on page 29, but with a save DC of 32. On a critical hit, the target's save result is one degree worse.

Shell Defense (abjuration, divine, light) When a creature physically passes through the shell, the creature is affected simultaneously by all colors of energy currently active in the shell; apply these effects in the following order: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet, black. These effects are the same as that of the eye beams described on page 29, but with a save DC of 32. Each effect requires its own save.

XP Award: If the PCs find an unexpected method of passing through Dahak's shell, award them XP as if they had destroyed all remaining dragon pillars instead. The PCs should gain no further experience if they later go back and destroy a pillar.

The first time the PCs manage to get beyond the shell, grant them an additional 120 XP for reaching the heart of Cinderclaw territory.

C1. THE APPROACH

SEVERE 8

The following description assumes Dahak's shell has been deactivated.

Thick roots of gnarled trees crisscross this portion of the jungle, as the sodden earth gives way to the waters of a darkened swamp. A squat fortress made of red clay rises out of the murky water, surrounded by towering dragon-shaped pillars topped with blazing bonfires.

The swamp water surrounding the fortress is 5 feet deep. To reach the fortress, the PCs must Swim, Fly, or take a boat, and must Avoid Notice as they approach if they want to keep from being detected. If the PCs are using a boat, only the creature piloting it must Avoid Notice. Swimming or flying PCs must attempt checks individually.

The fortress palisades surround the central building like a ledge, rising 15 feet out of the water. Several 30-foot-high watchtowers break up

CHAPTER 4 SYNOPSIS

The Cinderclaws have made their headquarters in the shadow of an ancient skeleton—the fossilized remains of Dahak's manifestation, slain thousands of years ago by the powerful magic of the Ekujae elves. In order for the PCs to defeat the cult and save both the elves and themselves from further danger, the cult's leader must be defeated. In doing so, the PCs gain the potential friendship of a red dragon who may have seen the error of his ways—or at the very least has lost interest in serving a god who has betrayed him.

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this palisade ledge. The central building is 20 feet tall and flat-roofed, save for area C9, which rises another 20 feet in height with a domed ceiling. The fortress walls are made of hard-packed clay that's 3 feet thick but relatively easy to hack through, with Hardness 8 and 32 HP (16 BT) per 5-foot section. The clay walls are rough and have periodic handholds, requiring a DC 17 Athletics check to Climb. The interior rooms have 10-foot-high ceilings and are lit by magical pools of molten lava or smokeless braziers hung on ceiling hooks. Doors are little more than thick wooden slabs with no locks. The portions of the building composed of Dahak's fossilized remains are the strongest parts of the structure and are effectively invulnerable to damage.

There's only one traditional entrance into the fortress—a pair of clay-reinforced timber gates at its southern end, which open into area C2. These gates are large and heavy but can't be locked. The gates can be Forced Open with a successful DC 20 Athletics check; alternatively, a character can spend their entire turn to tug one of the heavy gates open 5 feet.

Creatures: A deinonychus named Sweettooth lingers in the waters around the fortress. The primeval crocodile has learned to avoid moving through Dahak's shell and stays outside the perimeter as long as the shell is active. The Cinderclaws have a malicious fondness for the deinonychus, but they do not feed the beast often. If Sweettooth detects the PCs, it approaches and attacks, alerting the boggards standing guard on the fort's palisades. Sweettooth attempts to capsize any boat the PCs utilize, but if reduced below half its Hit Points, it flees into the surrounding swamp.

Inside the radius protected by Dahak's shell, a half-dozen boggard cultists are stationed as guards, spread out along the central building's palisades. These boggards are undisciplined, bored, and accustomed to noises from the swamp (including brief sounds of violence, due to Sweettooth). If the boggards notice the PCs, they scramble and hop along the roof to attack the party, their loud and distinctive croaking more than enough to alert the cultists inside of intruders.

SWEETTOOTH **CREATURE 9**

Deinonychus (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 67)

Initiative Stealth +20

ELITE BOGGARD SWAMPSEERS (6) **CREATURE 4**

Pathfinder Bestiary 6, 45

Initiative Perception +13

Influence Award: If the PCs avoid or spare Sweettooth, they gain 1 IP with the Leopard Clan. It takes about a week for word to get to the clan.

C2. MAIN HALLWAY

MODERATE 8

The interior walls of this hallway are covered with six-inch wooden spikes carved to resemble dragon's teeth. Along the north wall stand four wooden doors, and a statue of a humanoid dragon stands in the center of the room.

The spikes on the wall are ominous but decorative.

Creature: A clay golem in the shape of a draconic humanoid has been placed in this hallway, a gift from the Scarlet Triad in exchange for Belmazog's gold. While the golem usually serves as decoration, it is also under orders to destroy any intruders that are not part of the Cinderclaws. A PC disguised as a charau-ka or boggard cultist could potentially prevent the golem from attacking by using Deception to Impersonate a cultist, although even then the golem attacks such a character at once if they attack it first.

CLAY GOLEM

CREATURE 10

Pathfinder Bestiary 186

Initiative Perception +16

C3. DORMITORY

MODERATE 8

Several luxurious woven mats and blankets lie in heaps along the walls of this long chamber.

Creatures: Six cultists are currently resting in this area, eating, cleaning their gear, or playing games of darts and mancala. They are currently unarmed and unarmored, so they can't make weapon Strikes without first spending an Interact action to grab a weapon, and the charau-kas have AC 21 unless they gather improvised shields or spend 5 minutes donning their armor. Should the cultists hear the sounds of combat or otherwise become aware of intruders, however, they rapidly equip their gear and move to join the battle.

ELITE BOGGARD SWAMPSEERS (4) **CREATURE 4**

Pathfinder Bestiary 6, 45

Initiative Perception +13

CHARAU-KA BUTCHERS (2) **CREATURE 6**

Page 85

Initiative Perception +11

AC 21

C4. THE FORGE

MODERATE 8

Chunks of iron are scattered around this room, while a trench filled with molten rock bubbles along the base of

the western wall. Anvils and forging equipment lie here and there near the trench.

Creatures: A pair of draconic charau-kas—spawn of Dahak like Racharak (see area A5)—work the forge in this room. Should they become aware of intruders within the fortress, they heat their warhammers in the trench before running to join the battle (see Hazard, below, for information on this tactic). If confronted here, they attempt to Shove PCs into the trench of molten rock using their warhammers.

SPAWN OF DAHAK (2)

CREATURE 8

Page 34 (Racharak)

Initiative Perception +16

Items +1 striking warhammer

Melee warhammer +21 (shove), **Damage** 2d8+9 bludgeoning (plus 1d6 fire if red-hot)

Hazard: The molten rock in the trench along the west side of the room is maintained by the magic of Dahak's remains. It's only a foot deep but deals 5d6 fire damage to any creature that enters it. A metal weapon heated in the lava for a minute glows red-hot and deals an additional 1d6 fire damage on a hit, but has its Hardness and HP halved; this effect lasts for 10 minutes.

C5. KITCHEN

MODERATE 8

Smoked meat and roasted fish hang on hooks embedded in the walls, while clay jars on the floor are packed full of yams in various stages of fermentation. A heavy metal cooking grate covers a glowing pit in the floor.

Creature: A Nessian warhound named Izolith currently occupies the kitchen. The irritable beast spends most of her time here, aiming to pester cultists and steal their food, but has little interest in coming to the aid of any cultist other than Belmazog.

A PC who tries to parlay with Izolith must succeed at a DC 26 Diplomacy or Intimidate check to prevent the warhound from immediately attacking. Izolith can't speak, but if the PCs find some way to communicate with her, she wishes to be free of her duties to the cult and agrees not to bother the PCs so long as they promise to kill Belmazog. If the PCs agree to free Izolith and fail to live up to their end of the bargain, the warhound stalks the PCs and attempts to kill them when they are most vulnerable.

IZOLITH

CREATURE 10

Elite Nessian warhound (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 6, 205)

Initiative Perception +21

Hazard: This back room serves as the Cinderclaws' kitchen, and contains a similar molten furnace to the one found in area C4, save that this one is used for cooking, not forging weapons.

C6. SANCTUM ENTRANCE MODERATE 8

A pair of immense, fossilized vertebrae run along the central ceiling of this room. The walls are carved with images of huge, spiny dragons ravaging jungle landscapes and burning entire cities to the ground. Sleeping mats have been placed along the walls to the south.

A PC who succeeds at a DC 20 Religion check recognizes the carvings as depictions of Dahak. A PC who examines the fossilized vertebrae (or any other bones belonging to the skeleton) and succeeds at a DC 20 Arcana check realizes they're from an immense dragon.

Hazard: The rooms beyond this chamber are considered to be the most sacred of those the Cinderclaws possess, and only the highest-ranking members of the cult are allowed further into the fortress. While this is partially an affectation to appeal to Belmazog's pride, the ritual chamber is a major source of Belmazog's power, and so she has set up divine wards to ensure that only the worthy can proceed. Any non-worshipper of Dahak who so much as touches the northern doors to area C7 is struck with a vision of Dahak in all his destructive glory—a sight that can cause mortals to drop dead from the shock of seeing the divine. Both doors must be broken before the trap deactivates, if the PCs opt for such a tactic.

WRATH OF THE DESTROYER

HAZARD 10

COMPLEX MAGICAL TRAP

Stealth +22 (expert) to notice subtle vapors of magical energy seething across the doors

Description These heavy doors, carved with an image of Dahak, echo with a hatred so powerful that it can kill anyone who comes nearby, manifesting a vision of Dahak's head emerging from the doors to strike at a foe.

Disable Thievery DC 29 (expert) to disrupt the divine magic, Religion DC 29 (expert) to placate the wrathful energies, or *dispel magic* (5th level; counteract DC 26).

AC 30; **Fort** +22, **Ref** +14

Door Hardness 18; **Door HP** 72 (BT 36); **Immunities** critical hits, fire, object immunities, precision damage

Expunge **Trigger** A non-worshipper of Dahak touches either door leading to C7; **Effect** The hazard targets the creature with Face of the Fatal Divine, then rolls initiative.

Routine (1 action) On its initiative, the wrath of the destroyer targets the closest target in area C6 with Face of the Fatal Divine.

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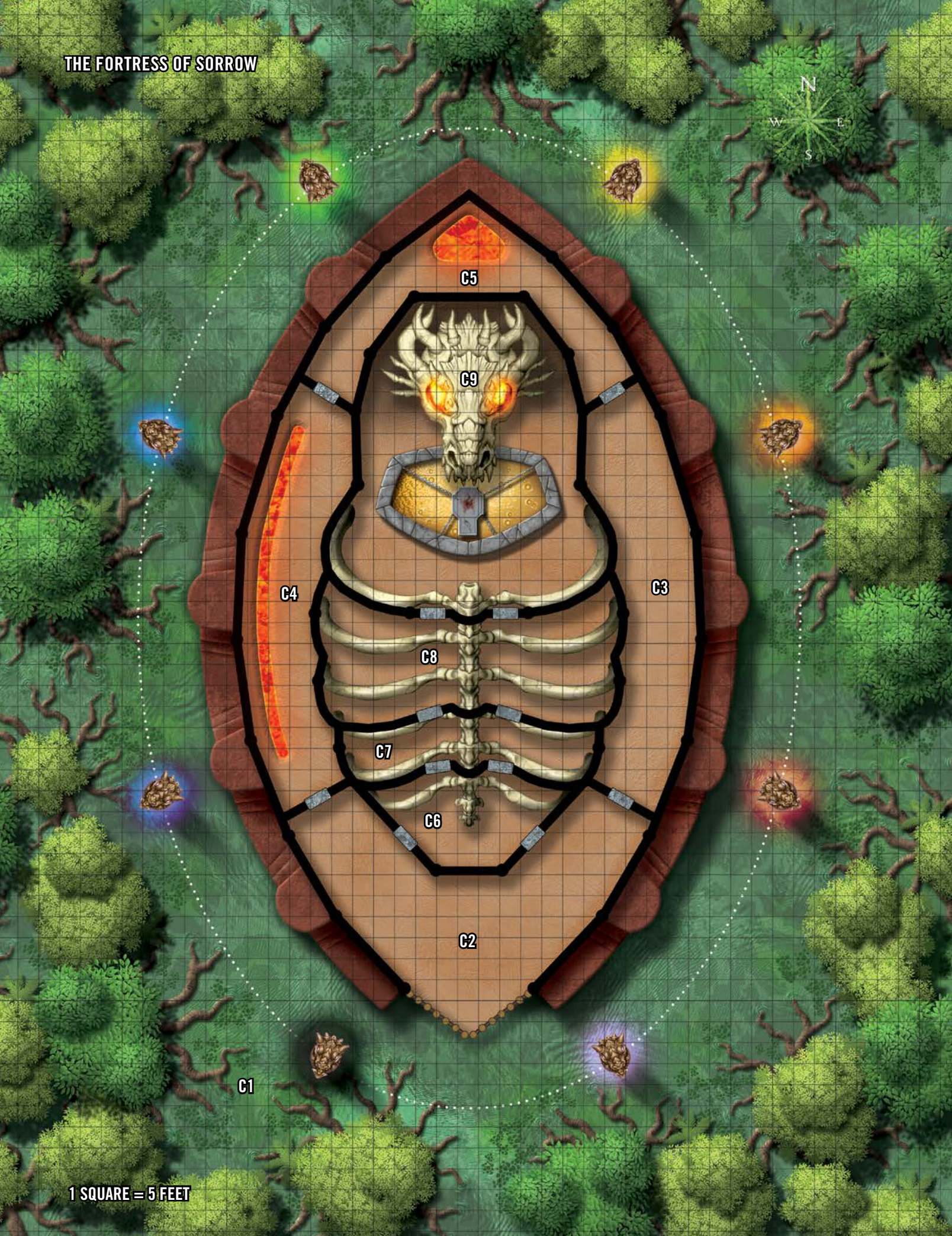
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THE FORTRESS OF SORROW



1 SQUARE = 5 FEET

Face of the Fatal Divine ♦ (death, divine, emotion, fear, illusion, mental) The creature beholds the face of Dahak as it emerges to bite with its burning jaws, targeting the creature with *phantasmal killer* (5th level, Will DC 29).

Reset The trap deactivates and resets if 1 minute passes without any creature being in range.

C7. GATHERING ROOM MODERATE 8

The fossilized ribs of a massive creature support the ceiling above, while the walls are carved with reliefs of an immense dragon burning cities and eating other dragons.

Creatures: Two elokos who were painstakingly recruited by the Cinderclaws currently reside in this room, alongside a charau-ka dragon priest—one of the highest-ranking members of the cult and one of those fortunate few to have been infused with Dahak's draconic influence. The elokos dislike residing within the fortress, and they remain only due to bribes of humanoid meat. They spend most of their time listening to stories of Dahak in the gathering room, which the Cinderclaw priests are happy enough to regale them with.

The dragon priest expects the golem and the other Cinderclaws to stop any intruders, so he continues his services even if he hears combat. Should any intruders enter the gathering room, however, the priest attacks at once, fighting to the death alongside the elokos.

CHARAU-KA DRAGON PRIEST CREATURE 6

UNCOMMON CE SMALL CHARAU-KA DRAGON FIRE HUMANOID

Male charau-ka priest

Perception +15; darkvision, scent (imprecise) 30 feet

Languages Abyssal, Draconic, Mwangi

Skills Acrobatics +12, Athletics +13, Intimidation +15, Religion +15, Survival +13

Str +4, **Dex** +3, **Con** +2, **Int** +0, **Wis** +5, **Cha** +3

Items leather armor, +1 striking longsword

AC 23; **Fort** +14, **Ref** +12, **Will** +15

HP 90; **Immunities** fire, paralyzed, sleep

Twisting Tail ➤ **Trigger** A creature within reach of the priest's tail uses a move action or leaves a square during a move action it's using. **Effect** The priest makes a tail Strike at the creature with a -2 penalty. If it hits, it disrupts the creature's action.

Speed 25 feet, climb 25 feet

Melee ♦ longsword (magical, versatile P) +17, **Damage** 2d8+6 slashing

Melee ♦ bite +16, **Damage** 1d10+6 piercing plus 1d6 fire

Melee ♦ claw +16 (agile), **Damage** 1d10+6 slashing

Melee ♦ tail +16 (reach 10 feet), **Damage** 1d8+6 slashing

Ranged ♦ thrown rock +15 (deadly d6, thrown 20 feet), **Damage** 2d6+6 bludgeoning

Divine Prepared Spells DC 25, attack +17; **3rd** fireball, vampiric touch; **2nd** flaming sphere, heal; **1st** burning hands (×2), ray of enfeeblement; **Cantrips (3rd)** daze, divine lance, produce flame, shield

Breath Weapon ♦♦ (divine, evocation, fire) The priest breathes fire that deals 7d6 fire damage in a 30-foot cone (DC 23 basic Reflex save). It can't use Breath Weapon again for 1d4 rounds.

Shrieking Frenzy As charau-ka warrior (page 84).

Thrown Weapon Mastery As charau-ka warrior (page 84).

Volcanic Eruption ♦♦♦ (divine, evocation, fire) **Requirement** The priest is standing on the ground. **Effect** The priest slams his fists into the ground, causing fire to erupt from the earth. Each non-worshipper of Dahak standing on the ground in a 15-foot emanation must succeed at a DC 25 Reflex save or fall prone and take 1d6 bludgeoning damage and 2d6 fire damage.

ELOKOS (2)

CREATURE 7

Page 83

Initiative Perception +15

C8. KYRION'S ROOM MODERATE 8

This room is more elegant than any of the others within the fortress, covered with fine inscriptions, geometric patterns, and exquisite calligraphy.

Though most of the decoration in the room was arranged by the cult, the calligraphy belongs to Kyrion, who once dwelt here. These markings are prayers to Dahak, but if a person who can read Draconic studies the carvings for a minute and succeeds at a DC 26 Religion check to Decipher Writing, they notice unusual variations in the prayers, indicating that the writer had increasingly found the Cinderclaws (particularly the boggards) to be faulty worshippers of the god.

Creatures: After Kyrion's rebellion, the Scarlet Triad provided Belmazog a pair of chimeras out of supposed sympathy. The chimeras recognize only Belmazog and a few of her most trusted priests, and they attack anyone else who enters the room.

CHIMERAS (2)

CREATURE 8

Pathfinder Bestiary 63

Initiative Perception +16

C9. RITUAL CHAMBER SEVERE 8

The immense skull of a fossilized dragon looms from the northern wall of this smoky, dome-ceilinged ritual chamber, its hollow eyes flickering with fiery light. Molten gold pours from the dragon's mouth into an immense stone bowl below,

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an offering basin made from the monstrous dragon's collar bones and shoulder blades. A raised stone slab sits in the center of the boiling metal: a pedestal to offer sacrifices to a dark god. Ribs rise up in the southern portion of the room to support the ceiling, while the hollow space under the skull to the north of the bowl seems to have been furnished as a personal shrine, study, and sleeping nook.

This ritual room was built around the fossilized skull of Dahak's manifestation and is the heart of the Cinderclaws' power. Belmazog initially drew upon Dahak's bones as the sole focus of latent draconic power spread throughout the Mwangi Jungle, though she has since shifted to using a living red dragon to augment this power. This

dragon, Kyrion, has been chained to the stone altar in the center of the chamber's golden pool for weeks, kept captive and barely alive while Belmazog forces divine power through his body. The six chains binding Kyrion to the stone slab are made of iron infused with divine power (Hardness 10, HP 40, BT 20, immune to fire) and forged in place with no latches or locks.

Dahak's skull extends from the wall and ceiling on the north side of the room, protruding from the northern wall of the dome and looming out and over the room itself. There's about 8 feet of room between the skull's underside and the floor below. The gold pouring from the skull that fills the bowl is constantly molten, an impressive manifestation of Dahak's power, but it cannot exist beyond the confines of the bowl or the constant drooling stream from the skull itself.

Creatures: Belmazog, a half-dragon boggard and the leader of the Cinderclaws, can be found in this chamber with two of her dragon priests. The cult leader is infuriated by the PCs' success, as well as the cult's inability to stop the PCs or to reclaim any of their conquered territory from the Ekujae. Under more and more pressure from the Cinderclaws' constant failures, Belmazog has fallen back on the tactic that has served her for all of her life—brute force. The boggard is currently building up divine power for a massive strike, hoping that by properly sacrificing the dragon Kyrion, she can invoke a supernatural volcano to erupt below Akrivel, obliterate the Ekujae, and tear Huntergate open to release Dahak's spirit. Fortunately for both the PCs and the elves, this desperate plan is destined to fail, but unfortunately for Kyrion, Belmazog won't learn this until after the dragon's wasted sacrifice. The timing of this failed ritual should correspond to the PCs' arrival in area C9 such that a character who succeeds at a DC 24 Religion check while observing the ritual can discern its goal (with a critical success confirming that it's unlikely for the ritual, which amounts to little more than a desperate prayer, to actually work unless Dahak himself takes pity on Belmazog's plight—a very unlikely development given the dragon god's personality).

Once she notices the PCs have managed to reach the ritual chamber, Belmazog seems dumbfounded, yelling out, "What? What are these outsiders doing here? Are you really all this pathetic?"

The cultists take pains not to harm Kyrion during the battle, as they hope to use the dragon to channel Dahak's profane power. Belmazog often acts first and thinks later, however, so it is possible that she may accidentally harm Kyrion when using spells or other area effects. The dragon himself is near death but conscious—desperate for help, he calls out to



Dragon Priest

the PCs, promising them aid if they can save him. Currently, Kyrion is drained 4, enfeebled 4, fatigued, wounded 2, and at 60 Hit Points from his weeks of torment on Dahak's altar. Until the PCs manage to free him from his chains, he's unable to act, but can speak.

Should a PC approach Kyrion, they may be surprised to discover that, despite a cavernous gold-filled fissure in the creature's chest, the dragon is alive and conscious. Should a PC move within 10 feet of him, Kyrion weakly lifts his head, hollowly begging, "Help me." To free the dragon, all six chains binding him to the stone slab must be destroyed—should the PCs succeed while the battle still rages, Kyrion joins the fight, rampaging through the battlefield in a furious fit of revenge (though his injuries make him far less effective than typical for his kind).

Belmazog is frenzied in battle and doesn't notice her wounds until they're mortal, inadvertently causing her to fight to the death. If the PCs kill both the dragon priests, reduce Belmazog below one-third her Hit Points, and then force her to see that she's lost the battle (either by rendering her unable to act on her turn or by succeeding at a Diplomacy or Intimidation check against her Will DC), Belmazog surrenders instead.

BELMAZOG

CREATURE 9

Page 76

Initiative Perception +18

CHARAU-KA DRAGON PRIESTS (2)

CREATURE 6

Page 59

Initiative Perception +15

KYRION

CREATURE 10

CN young red dragon (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 112)

Initiative Perception +20

HP 210 (currently 60)

Hazard: The molten gold is maintained by the magic of Dahak's fossilized remains. Within the stone bowl it is 3 feet deep. The molten gold deals 4d6 fire damage to any creature that moves into it, but it fades away to noxious mist if removed from the bowl.

The eyes of Dahak's skull smolder with fiery energy and are more than capable of defending themselves or aiding Belmazog in a fight. If Dahak's skull is completely destroyed (not just disabled), the molten gold pouring from the skull's jaws fades to smoke, the chains holding Kyrion crumble to rust, and any remaining dragon pillars in the region (and all magical effects they support, including the aura of blindness that strikes at Ekujae who come too near) immediately end. At this point, Dahak's fossil becomes brittle and crumbles in a matter of days, destroying the Fortress of Sorrow.

DAHAK'S SKULL

HAZARD 6

UNIQUE **C**OMPLEX **F**IRE **M**AGICAL **T**RAP

Perception +16; darkvision, *see invisibility*

Stealth +0, but DC 24 to notice that the fiery lights within the skull's eye sockets seem to be looking around the room.

Description A pair of magical gems inside the dragon skull's eye sockets act as magical sensors with a 30-foot radius.

Disable Thievery DC 27 (expert) two times to pry the gems embedded deep in the skull's eye sockets without triggering the sensor, or *dispel magic* (4th level, counteract DC 22) twice to dispel both eyes.

AC 24; **Fort** +17, **Ref** +8

Hardness 14, **HP** 56 (BT 28); **Immunities** critical hits, fire, object immunities, precision damage

Dahak's Glance ☞ (divine, evocation, fire); **Trigger** A living creature that is not a member of the Cinderclaws enters area **C9**; **Effect** One of the dragon skull's eye sockets shoots an eye beam at the triggering creature, then the hazard rolls initiative.

Routine (2 actions) On its initiative, Dahak's skull fires up to two eye beams; it must target a different creature with each attack. The eye beams can't target creatures directly below the skull.

Ranged eye beam +20 (divine, evocation, fire, range 150 feet), **Damage** 8d6 fire

Treasure: An investigation of Belmazog's nook reveals several pages of notes spread through various journals, scrolls, and parchments that can reveal much about her plans and personality, as well as a few tidbits about the Scarlet Triad. Sifting through the notes requires 8 hours of work by someone who can read Draconic, but doing so reveals all of the information the PCs could have learned by speaking to Belmazog (see below), along with the fact that her primary contact with the Scarlet Triad was a gnoll named Laslunn. She doesn't know much more about the Scarlet Triad, having assumed (incorrectly) that they are a foreign sect of Dahak worshippers who have come to answer her prayers.

In addition to these valuable notes, the PCs can find treasure that Belmazog's been keeping to herself here (a fair amount of which once belonged to the dragon Kyrion). If the PCs rescue him, he graciously offers all of it to the PCs in thanks before he leaves the region. The treasure consists of 830 gp, 3,950 sp, 7,800 cp, a sack of 20 arsenic-laced gold nuggets worth 50 gp each, a *dragonslayer's shield*, a +2 *striking longbow*, a *rod of wonder*, and a *wand of dimension door*. Consider swapping out some of these magic items for items more thematically appropriate to your group of PCs.

Influence Award: The PCs gain 4 IP with the Leopard Clan for defeating Belmazog.

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SPEAKING TO BELMAZOG

If the PCs can capture Belmazog alive, they can speak to her. Likely questions the PCs might ask of Belmazog and her answers are listed below. Note that some of these answers are followed by information in parenthesis—this is information that a PC can deduce from Belmazog's answers with a successful DC 30 Perception check to Sense Motive.

Who are you? "Belmazog, the chosen of Dahak."

What is this giant dragon skeleton? "Dahak. I heard his voice calling to me and pulled him up from the swamp. One day, I'll set him fully free, and he'll reward me with great power!" (The PC notes that this is a belief born of fanaticism rather than any type of evidence.)

What are you doing? "Summoning Dahak's power to rip open the land with fire, and deal with the Ekujae once and for all! Though... now I suppose that may not work out." (The PC notes that Belmazog has greater doubts about this plan having been viable in the first place, and they suspect she sees it as a last-ditch desperate attempt to defeat the elves.)

Why do you worship Dahak? "Because he chose me. He made me the biggest and strongest, and he gave me magic to crush anyone who got in my way."

If Dahak returns, won't he destroy you too? "Um... no?" (The PC realizes Belmazog honestly believes Dahak values her and would spare her.)

Why is/was there a red dragon chained to the altar? "He thought he was too good for Dahak. He thought he was too good for me. Well, I made him useful."

Why are you mining gold? "Because it's gold. You people like money too, right?"

Why did you keep making your cultists mine gold when it was poisonous? "The gold was poisonous?" (The PC realizes Belmazog honestly didn't know about the arsenic in the gold.)

What is the Scarlet Triad? "Foreigners, but they're helpful. I give them gold, and they give me magic. We, uh... trade, I guess?"

What are the Scarlet Triad's goals? "They were sent by Dahak to aid me. What else matters?" (The PC notes that Belmazog is simply uninterested in what the

Scarlet Triad wants, and knows only that they showed up to help her in her—and Dahak's—time of need.)

Why is such a powerful group like the Scarlet Triad helping you? "What are you suggesting? Are you saying there's some reason they wouldn't?"

SPEAKING TO KYRION

If the red dragon Kyrion survives the battle, the PCs have the opportunity to speak to him once the fight is concluded; if the PCs haven't freed Kyrion before they try talking to him, he begs them for release. Kyrion is a young red dragon with a magical chasm in his chest filled with molten gold and a jutting metal shard—a fragment of an artifact known as the *Orb of Gold Dragonkind*. Over time, and as they uncover more about the Scarlet Triad and their goals, the PCs will

learn more about the purpose of these shards. For now, a character who

succeeds at a DC 40 check to Identify Magic on the shard learns only that it is a fragment from something much more powerful, though on a critical success the PC correctly identifies it as a shard from the *Orb of Gold Dragonkind*.

Kyrion lacks the blatant malevolence of most red dragons—he even expresses dismay if he slaughtered Belmazog and her cultists, despite his justified hatred of them. He likewise appears to be terrified of Dahak and is almost overly eager to help the PCs so long as they treat him decently. Answers to likely questions the PCs might have for Kyrion are listed below.

Who are you? "I am Kyrion. It is your pleasure to—hrrmph. It is... Good. Great. Yes. Well met."

Why were you chained up? "Belmazog and I had an irreconcilable philosophical disagreement. I was of the opinion that she is an idiot. After a persuasive argument on her part, I am forced to amend my argument. She is an idiot with the good fortune to have powerful supporters in the Scarlet Triad."

Are you part of the Cinderclaws? "By default of being nothing else. They raised me. I suppose Belmazog was... the closest thing I had to a mother."

Do you worship Dahak? "No!"

Why are you scared of Dahak? "Belmazog used me. She hoped I would serve as Dahak's avatar, but I served well enough as an unwilling vessel for the Destroyer's power. Do you know what it is to look upon the face



Kyrion

of a god? To know that all of your wrath and hate could burn the whole world clean, and that you would still be nothing more than a dying spark in the face of an inferno?”

Wesaw Dahak in Huntergate. “Then you understand.”

Shouldn’t you ask Apsu to protect you from Dahak? “Apsu.” Kyrion sneers. “The oath breaker. Apsu, who let Dahak slaughter his other children twice over. Apsu, who swore to defend Golarion from his son. Ask the elves of this jungle where Apsu was when Dahak invaded this world during the Age of Darkness. Ask them what price they paid in place of Apsu’s worthless promise. Let me write my prayers on lead and throw them into the sea, if it spares me the shame of them ever reaching Apsu!”

What is that thing in your chest? “A shard of something powerful, a fragment the Scarlet Triad gifted to Belmazog to aid her in the ritual she performed to raise the dragon pillars,” Kyrion replies, looking down at his wound and prodding at it slightly. “The gold around the wound inflicted by the shard is a manifestation of its power, I think. It’s painful, but not agonizing. It’s a complete violation of my personal autonomy, but from an arcane viewpoint, it’s really very interesting. I wish I knew what it is or where it came from.”

Can we have the shard? “I’m reasonably sure taking it out will kill me. So, no.”

Do you know what the Cinderclaws were planning? “To secure the *aiudara* that those elves are guarding. But in the grand scheme of things, Belmazog already got what she claimed she wanted. Huntergate was opened, and its only a matter of time before Dahak tries to force his way out.” Kyrion’s mouth parts in a gruesome smile. “I doubt Belmazog is quite so happy about her success now that her power doesn’t directly benefit from it.”

Do you know what the Scarlet Triad is? “Hmph. An organization of foreigners who seem to delight in meddling with zealots, as far as I can tell. They were using us, certainly—they were too powerful and had too many resources to want us as equals. I suspect they’re using the Cinderclaws to prepare this region for some unknown plans of their own. All of which I told Belmazog repeatedly, but no. Belmazog knows best. Well, we now know where that got her.”

Once the conversation is over, Kyrion would prefer to leave the region to recover from his trauma, but the kindness the PCs have shown him leaves its mark. He promises to return to them in the future to aid and repay them more properly, asking where their home might be so he can visit them. Whether or not the PCs trust the dragon enough to tell him about Breachill is up to them, but Kyrion certainly has a further role to play in coming adventures.

XP Award: Grant the PCs XP for rescuing Kyrion as if they had defeated him in combat. If they learn most or all of the information above, grant them an additional 120 XP each. If there were any dragon pillars remaining, they gain XP as though they had destroyed them.

Concluding the Adventure

With Belmazog defeated and Dahak’s skull destroyed, the Ekujae quickly rout the rest of the Cinderclaws and scatter them back into the jungle. While this most obviously benefits the elves of the Leopard Clan, it also secures Breachill from further assaults through Huntergate, ensuring that the town doesn’t suffer a second invasion of cultists from the Mwangi Expanse.

The PCs may have also made important allies among the Ekujae. So long as the PCs remain on speaking terms with the Leopard Clan, the elves reward the PCs with a gift: a sacred starknife called *Eclipse* (page 72), which the Ekujae explain is a portal key to another *aiudara* found in Alseta’s Ring: Dreamgate, the portal associated with the goddess Desna. The Ekujae have long protected this portal key as well as the *hunter’s arrowhead*, but they do not know where the other portal keys for Alseta’s Ring might lie today. Because the PCs have secured the ring and foiled Belmazog and her minions, the Ekujae gladly entrust the heroes with both magical items.

While the Ekujae no longer possess the other portal keys, they can describe them to the PCs—a magic chisel to open Duskgate, a magical gem to open Jewelgate, a magical piece of amber to open Vengegate, and a magical flower to open Lotusgate. (Of course, the Lotusgate portal is broken—this magical flower plays no part in the Age of Ashes Adventure Path). The PCs’ actions might even open up a trade route between the Ekujae elves and Isger, if the Leopard Clan had a friendly or better attitude toward the PCs. Though the Ekujae will not venture through Huntergate, fearing Dahak’s wrath, a small envoy of elves traveling over land arrives in Breachill a few weeks later, including any friends the PCs may have made among the Ekujae. Over time, these Ekujae allies may be able to provide more boons to the PCs, at your discretion.

Overall, the PCs’ efforts have won Breachill a well-earned and desperately needed respite from the Cinderclaws—but they were not the only group interested in Alseta’s Ring, and the threat of Dahak’s avatar still hangs heavy over the town. The mystery of the Scarlet Triad likewise remains unsolved and seemingly without leads, though the PCs will soon discover that the organization is far closer than they may have expected—agents even now have infiltrated their hometown and are preparing to strike!

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WAYS OF THE EKUJAE

Come, slavers and cowards! Come in thick numbers! We shall string up your people like pigs in a leopard's larder. Your weapons and charms shall be toys for our children. Like poachers who have flung arrows yet failed to strike the killing blow, you have provoked our wrath—every drop of our blood you shed, we shall take back from you tenfold!

Beware!

We are the spears that pierce through the darkness, the nightmares of demons, the wrestlers of serpents! Send all of your armies, and we will destroy them. Let your children send armies, and we will destroy them. Let your grandchildren send armies, and we will destroy them. Send the gods who protect you, and we will throw them down!

—Ekujae warning left at a massacred Aspis outpost

The jungle-dwelling elves known as Ekujae are enigmas to most outsiders and bear many different reputations among the cultures that have come into contact with them. To the masters of the Magaambya in the academic city of Nantambu, Ekujae are an ancient and respected civilization of scholars who sometimes venture from their homes to teach students or to bring rare seeds to the university's libraries. To the scattered tribes of the Mwangi Jungle, Ekujae are mysterious and implacable guardians of the jungles and are viewed with awe and superstition in equal measure. To capitalistic organizations such as the Aspis Consortium, Ekujae are a fearsome foe well known for their furious attacks on Aspis slavers, such as the infamous massacre at Whitebridge Station. Yet to all who know of them, Ekujae are warriors first and foremost, standing ready to fight against an unknown darkness from an ancient time.

Ekujae themselves tend to hold a skeptical view of most foreigners, especially humans. Ekujae lands are rich with gold and other precious treasures, a fact that has inspired generations of fortune seekers to plunder the jungle and give nothing in return. Ekujae's relationship with non-Mwangi peoples is especially sour, due largely to conflicts with colonialist slavers, including a recent violent conflict with the Aspis Consortium that has in turn motivated Ekujae warriors to destroy any slaver outposts they come upon. Ekujae also guard many places of great power or dormant evil—places they have little desire for reckless adventurers or sinister forces to uncover. While Ekujae firmly believe that individuals cannot be judged by the actions of others, they nonetheless view outsiders with caution and are reluctant to form alliances or share their secrets; mortals, in Ekujae's experience, tend to repeat the same mistakes over and over, and while specific groups or rulers might be trustworthy, they die quickly by elven standards and are all too often replaced by individuals eager to exploit Ekujae for their own ambition.

For this reason, Ekujae are quick to confront any trespassers who venture into their lands, though it would be an oversimplification to call them xenophobic or isolationists. They are not authoritarian by nature and leave travelers be so long as they do not appear to be a threat. A simple fruit merchant or virtuous explorer has very little to fear from Ekujae; their scouts will likely follow and watch any such visitors, but this is done as much out of compassion as suspicion, as Ekujae make it a habit to ensure their guests are not attacked by animals or harmed by ancient evils. Even those strangers whom

Ekujae deem less than welcome are usually offered a chance to peacefully leave the forest, though refusal can quickly provoke the militant elves' wrath.

History

The history of Ekujae elves diverges from that of other elves on Golarion at the time of Earthfall. While most elves elected to leave for their ancestral realm of Sovyrian in order to survive the disaster, the Ekujae clans instead decided to stay behind despite the coming devastation. Whether this choice was made out of duty, love, stubbornness, or a sense of things to come, no records survive to say—it is only known that when the earth was shattered and the skies went black, Ekujae were there to defeat the “Great Darkness” that arose from the destruction, sparing the remaining life on Golarion from total extinction. Yet even their greatest warriors and mages could not destroy the Great Darkness permanently, and Ekujae now train in preparation should it ever rise again.

Despite the belief of most scholars that the identity of this Great Darkness is lost to time—or that the whole story is simply a fanciful legend told by the elves—Ekujae know the truth of their ancestral foe, though they never call it by its common name. The Great Darkness that rose in the wake of Earthfall was an incarnation of the dragon god Dahak, who had been lured to Golarion by the death and chaos that wracked the world during that terrible time. Had Dahak been allowed to linger, the consequences would have been catastrophic; the dragon god Apsu was sworn to fight against Dahak, and their cataclysmic struggle would inevitably have invited other gods to interfere as well, until the clash of deities finished the job that Earthfall began and destroyed the entirety of the planet. Instead, Ekujae forces managed to defeat Dahak and drive the god's incarnation into an *aiudara*, or elf gate, known as the Huntergate. This severed the connections between the *aiudara* that make up Alseta's Ring in the instant that Dahak was between one gate and the next. The dragon's incarnation was trapped in a space between realities, with no target for his unquenchable rage other than himself.

However, this victory came at a devastating cost. To pierce the flesh of a god, the most heroic and virtuous Ekujae elves willingly sacrificed themselves so that their spirits could bolster the strength of the remaining Ekujae warriors. These elven souls burned as bright as hot iron in the spiritual realm, and their determination allowed the surviving Ekujae to cut through Dahak's scales. Dahak's golden blood was spilled across the entirety of Ekujae lands, and the

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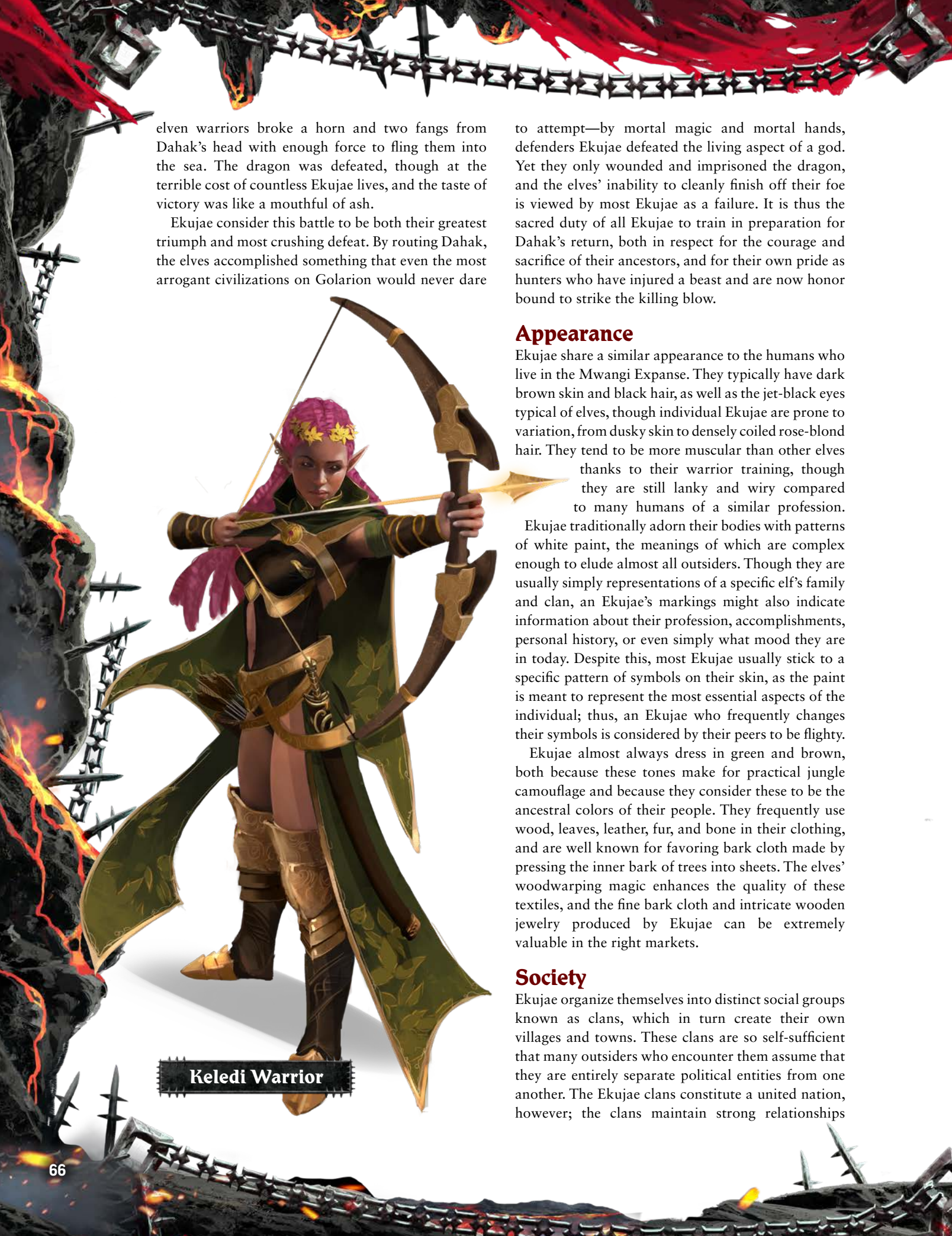
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elven warriors broke a horn and two fangs from Dahak's head with enough force to fling them into the sea. The dragon was defeated, though at the terrible cost of countless Ekujae lives, and the taste of victory was like a mouthful of ash.

Ekujae consider this battle to be both their greatest triumph and most crushing defeat. By routing Dahak, the elves accomplished something that even the most arrogant civilizations on Golarion would never dare

to attempt—by mortal magic and mortal hands, defenders Ekujae defeated the living aspect of a god. Yet they only wounded and imprisoned the dragon, and the elves' inability to cleanly finish off their foe is viewed by most Ekujae as a failure. It is thus the sacred duty of all Ekujae to train in preparation for Dahak's return, both in respect for the courage and sacrifice of their ancestors, and for their own pride as hunters who have injured a beast and are now honor bound to strike the killing blow.

Appearance

Ekujae share a similar appearance to the humans who live in the Mwangi Expanse. They typically have dark brown skin and black hair, as well as the jet-black eyes typical of elves, though individual Ekujae are prone to variation, from dusky skin to densely coiled rose-blond hair. They tend to be more muscular than other elves thanks to their warrior training, though they are still lanky and wiry compared to many humans of a similar profession.

Ekujae traditionally adorn their bodies with patterns of white paint, the meanings of which are complex enough to elude almost all outsiders. Though they are usually simply representations of a specific elf's family and clan, an Ekujae's markings might also indicate information about their profession, accomplishments, personal history, or even simply what mood they are in today. Despite this, most Ekujae usually stick to a specific pattern of symbols on their skin, as the paint is meant to represent the most essential aspects of the individual; thus, an Ekujae who frequently changes their symbols is considered by their peers to be flighty.

Ekujae almost always dress in green and brown, both because these tones make for practical jungle camouflage and because they consider these to be the ancestral colors of their people. They frequently use wood, leaves, leather, fur, and bone in their clothing, and are well known for favoring bark cloth made by pressing the inner bark of trees into sheets. The elves' woodwarping magic enhances the quality of these textiles, and the fine bark cloth and intricate wooden jewelry produced by Ekujae can be extremely valuable in the right markets.

Society

Ekujae organize themselves into distinct social groups known as clans, which in turn create their own villages and towns. These clans are so self-sufficient that many outsiders who encounter them assume that they are entirely separate political entities from one another. The Ekujae clans constitute a united nation, however; the clans maintain strong relationships

Keledi Warrior

with one another, though these ties may not be easily evident to people with shorter life spans than the elves. While this nation technically has a king or queen who is chosen from the leaders of the clans, that position exists mainly in case a central authority is needed to take charge during a time of emergency, rather than to dictate nationwide laws.

Though an Ekujae's immediate relatives are of great importance, most Ekujae believe that clan members should be considered as close as family, and a child of one clan member is treated as a child of the whole clan. An Ekujae's clan also tends to influence their vocation. Though clans happily support their members' individual aspirations, certain ones are known for specializing in various trades or skilled work, either through geographical advantage or long tradition—a clan near ancient ruins, for example, might be famous for their warriors and protective magic, while those close to the Magaambya in Nantambu typically educate diplomats and mages. Ekujae are not born into their clans, though they always consider the clan of their mother to be family as well; they instead choose to join a clan after they have reached adulthood. Ekujae are expected to remain a part of their chosen clan for the entirety of their lives, meaning that joining or leaving a clan is a very serious matter, though few clans will refuse a request for either. Banishment from a clan is a shame reserved for heinous social crimes that Ekujae feel do not warrant capital punishment, such as child abandonment or reckless behavior that results in the death of another person, and is a punishment only slightly less severe than a death sentence.

Ekujae clans nominate and elect rulers and their advisers democratically, with all adults having a say in the final outcome. In particularly contentious elections, clan members may demand a task from the potential ruler to prove their worth. Once a ruler is accepted, the ruler and the clan jointly choose the ruler's advisers. In addition to magical, military, and spiritual advisers, Ekujae highly value advisers known as linguists, who serve simultaneously as diplomats, translators, storytellers, and historians. These linguists are almost always half-elves, who, with their shorter life spans, tend to adapt more easily to changing times and situations that require an immediate solution.

Faith

Ekujae consider the elven deity Yuelral to be their nation's patron, and they believe their role as guardians and scholars pays homage to this goddess of magic. They also worship many of the traditional elven gods: Keteplys, the god of the hunt and the

idealized warrior; Findeladlara, the goddess of the sky; Desna, who is portrayed as a wandering moth and storyteller; and Calistria the wasp, whom Ekujae consider to be a sly trickster figure. Ekujae faith is an extremely personal thing, however; they believe deities can offer inborn gifts or fated destinies to chosen individuals. They hardly consider it unusual for an elf to believe that a divine body has tasked that follower to worship the deity and carry out that deity's agenda, and so worshippers of obscure faiths are not rare among Ekujae clans.

Culture

Ekujae life is a complex web of traditions and customs that both stretches back thousands of years and continues to hold true in the present day-to-day challenges of living in the jungle. Ekujae consider themselves guardians and defenders of their lands, seeing it as their sacred duty to fight against the Great Darkness and any demons, dragons, or other threats that may prey upon their people. They tend to be militant, and Ekujae children are raised with the expectation that they will see violent conflict within their lifetimes. Ekujae are also extremely formal in their dealings, even by elven standards, and they practice many rituals around the swearing of oaths and the forming of bargains.

Ekujae place a high value on art and academia, though their unusual method of keeping records is all but impenetrable to foreign scholars, making it difficult for them to share much of their lore with non-Ekujae. In addition to maintaining strong oral and musical traditions, they also create "record trees"—trees carefully cultivated to grow specific patterns in their trunks and branches, which serve as semi-permanent records of important information and events. This unique system of shape-based writing can also be used to record physical movements and even musical notes. Ekujae learn from a young age how to read and write in this three-dimensional language, and half-elves are particularly adept at translating the shape-speech of their Ekujae forebears or transcribing record trees into other media, such as thin strips of bronze woven into tree-like shapes or a complex, shape-based script for when it is necessary to write in ink.

Ekujae elves believe their bond to the environment to be especially strong, as their ancestors stayed on Golarion through one of its darkest hours and shed their blood to save the planet from ruin. They prefer to build their elegant cities entirely in the canopies of trees, braiding living branches and vines together to form elaborate structures. Ekujae practice a

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HALF-ELVES

The role of half-elves in Ekujae culture is nuanced and not easily understood by outsiders. Many Ekujae half-elves live in entirely half-elf clans, though not because they are unwanted or rejected by full elves, as some foreigners may assume. While many Ekujae do ritually turn their half-elfen offspring over to be raised within half-elf villages, this is done out of a belief that half-elves thrive better among half-elfen peers than among elves, who have dramatically different life spans. For the most part, Ekujae half-elves agree with this policy, though some half-elves still feel excluded from elven culture, and advocate for more integration between elves and half-elves. Despite this tradition of segregation, it is hardly unknown for an Ekujae elf to raise a half-elf child in a predominately elven clan, and half-elves are free to choose their clan upon coming of age, just the same as elves.

The Ekujae half-elf clans are valued as bridges between the elves and the other peoples of the Mwangi Expanse. Half-elves are the most common Ekujae emissaries to neighboring city-states for purposes of trade, cultural exchange, or other negotiations. Ekujae tradition strongly dictates that half-elves serve as a ruler's linguists to ensure that their valuable perspective is heard—especially when making decisions that concern shorter-lived creatures, whom the elves may not necessarily understand.

noninvasive form of agriculture by grafting fruit trees onto the trunks of their cities' largest branches and growing shade-loving crops in the underbrush. Their love of nature extends to the animals that dwell in their lands as well—they often name individual animals they commonly encounter, and it's not unusual for them to chat about the local elephants and leopards in the same way they might gossip about a neighbor.

THE EKUJAE SOUL

Ekujae have an extremely complex and nuanced understanding of the soul. Every living being is believed to have four spirits, which are inherited or given by different aspects of that individual's life. The first, which Ekujae refer to as "what your father gave you," represents the individual's physical form and perception of its physical form; the second, "what your mother gave you," is an individual's heritage and family; the third, "what your heart gave you," is the individual's personality and personal taste. The fourth spirit, known as "what your gods gave you," is the most enigmatic part of an individual's soul, referring

to an intricate tangle of intrinsic gifts and divine destiny that forms a guiding influence on a creature's life—whether it's wanted or not.

These spirits have their own names and personalities, and may not necessarily agree with one another; indeed, a clash between two particular spirits is considered to be a common source of internal turmoil. Despite this, Ekujae do not consider these four spirits to be separate entities—they are intrinsically part of the same soul, just as many complex emotions and thoughts are intrinsically part of a single person. For this reason, Ekujae believe that all of a creature's spirits must be tended to in order for that creature to remain happy, healthy, and moral. When one spirit is consistently neglected, discontent and strife are soon to follow, so introspection and self-care are of utmost importance in Ekujae society.

JEWELRY AND KELEDI

While Ekujae share the bone-deep elven love of artistry, most of their jewelry tends to be understated and crafted from natural materials. An Ekujae scout, for example, has little use for ostentatious ornaments that might catch on jungle plants or glint in a ray of sunlight. In addition, Ekujae have certain taboos and customs regarding different types of accessories. Gems, for example, are worn only by Ekujae who are capable of casting magic, and these gems are always uncut out of respect for the elven goddess Yuelral. Brass is worn only by half-elves, as Ekujae believe that the alloy represents the connection that half-elves share with both the natural world and the world of humans—half-elf merchants often wear exquisitely crafted brass jewelry all over their bodies as a sign of wealth, and almost every Ekujae half-elf is given a homemade brass ornament by their elven parent when they are born.

By far the most taboo metal in Ekujae culture is gold. Ekujae believe the gold beneath their lands to be the cooled breath and blood of Dahak, spilled in his battle with the elves ages ago, and that all gold is cursed by the wrath of the dragon god's aspect. It is the curse of Dahak that prompts even the kindest of dragons and the noblest of humans to covet gold, and it is the curse of Dahak that ensures blood will always be spilled over the greed that gold inspires. No Ekujae ever willingly wears gold, with a single exception: the *keledi*, elves who have sworn to sacrifice their lives to fight against Dahak should the Great Darkness ever return. These elves wear ritually purified gold as a sign that they are worthy enough that their souls could cut the very flesh of a god, and to mark them as a living sacrifice to the fight against their ancestral foe.

To bear the title of keledi is both the greatest honor and deepest sorrow in Ekujae society.

THE FIGHT AGAINST THE GREAT DARKNESS

For all of their love of scholarship and artistry, Ekujae are a people at war, and much of their society functions around this cold fact. Even should the Great Darkness never arise again, the Mwangi Jungle is still plagued by unnatural menaces, and Ekujae lands host shrines to ancient demons and worse. Though these elves take what precautions they can, they know that isolation will not save them from the dangers of their past or their homeland, and so they prepare for inevitable battles. Demons and dragons are the favored prey of Ekujae warrior-hunters, but countless other dangers lurk in the Mwangi Jungle, from ancient undead to forgotten arcana to primordial evils from an unknown time. Each adult Ekujae always carries a silver knife and a cold iron knife on their person in anticipation of battle against demons or devils. Ekujae warriors also often wear a cold iron “soulguard”—a circular armored disk worn around the abdomen—that provides protection from demonic magic.

Ekujae must remain ever vigilant for any sign of dark influences or corruption, as these elves are curiously susceptible to demonic poisons and corruptions, as well as lycanthropy. It is unknown whether this is simply due to an unusual vulnerability in their constitutions or a more mysterious reason, but it remains a constant worry among Ekujae exposed to such dangers. Centuries of dealing with this particular vulnerability have made Ekujae among the foremost scholars of methods to reverse such magical poisons and transformations, and many seek out Ekujae help to save loved ones who have no other recourse. However, few Ekujae cures are pleasant or simple.

Relations

Ekujae are generally suspicious of outsiders, preferring to keep to their own lands and to deal with others only on their own terms. They have strong ties to the Magaambya academy in Nantambu, but their association is too sporadic to be called an alliance, and they deal with most other people on a case-by-case basis. They often send out linguists or other emissaries to local tribes or cities for trade and news, but usually keep them at arms’ length when it comes to the details of Ekujae affairs. The notable

exception to this rule is that half-elves from other lands are warmly welcomed by Ekujae clans; Ekujae half-elves strive to provide a sense of belonging that they know can often elude their half-elven kin. Ekujae are also unusual among elves in that they bear little to no enmity toward orcs and half-orcs, with whom they often fight alongside against demonic forces in the Mwangi Jungle. Though Ekujae elves do their best to judge individuals by their actions rather than by cultural assumptions, they are likely to approach any half-orcs they meet from a position of respect.

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Ekujae Cleric



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This adventure takes place in the jungle, but the PCs won't have to worry about survival until they head out to explore the region in Chapter 2. The cloying heat and humidity of the Mwangi Jungle hits the PCs in full force as soon as they step out of Huntergate. The temperature in the jungle at the time of this adventure is categorized as normal at night but mild heat during the day. Fatigue sets in during the day after just 4 hours of activity.

See the rules for temperature on page 517 of the Pathfinder Core Rulebook for more information.

Camping in the Jungle

As they explore the Mwangi Jungle, the PCs will need to camp out in order to rest and recover. Use the following exploration activity in this Adventure Path to adjudicate these periods of relative inactivity.

CAMP IN THE MWANGI JUNGLE

EXPLORATION SECRET

Setting up a camp in the Mwangi Jungle takes about an hour and requires one PC to attempt a secret DC 22 Survival check to determine the quality of the campsite. Utilizing Ekujae mosquito netting they provide grants the PC a +2 circumstance bonus to this Survival check. At your option, other precautions taken by the PCs can instead grant this bonus, but multiple tactics are not cumulative. Certain magic spells like *magnificent mansion* or *rope trick*, or magic items like an *instant fortress*, can create shelters that result in an automatic success at camping in dangerous terrain like the Mwangi Jungle, but at this point in their adventuring careers, the PCs are unlikely to have access to this type of magic. This activity assumes the PCs are resting for 8 hours.

Critical Success The camp serves the PCs well, allowing them to rest and make their daily preparations upon waking without difficulty. The camp is also camouflaged or protected, and as a result, there is no chance of a random encounter while the PCs rest.

Success The camp serves the PCs well, allowing them to rest and make their daily preparations upon waking without difficulty.

Failure The camp doesn't effectively prevent insects, rain, and other unpleasant jungle elements from reaching the PCs. The PCs can still rest and make their daily preparations, but each PC is also exposed to dysentery (see sidebar).

Critical Failure The camp is an utter mess. The PCs are exposed to both dysentery and malaria (see sidebar). In addition, they gain no benefit from rest during the time spent camping, and they instead become fatigued.

DISEASES

If the PCs failed or critically failed their Survival check to set up camp, they'll each need to attempt a Fortitude save against one or both of the following diseases, respectively.

Dysentery (disease) **Level 4.**

The victim suffers from violent nausea and gradual dehydration, and can't recover from the sickened condition from dysentery until the disease is cured. **Saving Throw** DC 19 Fortitude; **Onset** 1 day; **Stage 1** sickened 1 (1 day); **Stage 2** fatigued and sickened 1 (1 day).

Malaria (disease); **Level 7.** The victim has a fever and flu-like symptoms, and can't recover from the fatigued condition from malaria until the disease is cured. **Saving Throw** DC 23 Fortitude; **Onset** 1d6+6 days; **Stage 1** fatigued (1 day); **Stage 2** enfeebled 1 (1 day).

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Cult of Cinders Treasures

Two potent treasures await discovery by the PCs in "Cult of Cinders."

DRAGON'S EYE CHARM

ITEM 7

UNCOMMON DIVINATION MAGICAL

Price 360 gp

Usage held in 1 hand; **Bulk** L

This charm, a dragon-shaped pendant worn like a necklace or set into armor or clothing as a decoration, is warm and smooth to the touch. It must be held in one hand to be used (pressing the palm of one's hand to the charm also works, provided that your hand is otherwise empty). It has four distinct powers.

Activate ♦ **Interact**; **Frequency** once per day; **Effect** The *dragon's eye charm* manifests fire for you to wield against your foe. You cast a 5th-level *produce flame* spell with a spell attack roll of +13.

Activate ♦ **Interact**; **Frequency** once per day; **Effect** The charm's pupil becomes plainly visible. You can look through the charm to gain darkvision for as long as you Sustain the Activation, to a maximum of 10 minutes.

Activate ♦ **Interact**; **Frequency** once per day; **Effect** The *dragon's eye charm* shrouds you in a faintly glowing layer of golden energy. You gain fire resistance 5 for 10 minutes.



Activate ♦ Interact; **Frequency** once per day; **Effect** You can speak and understand Draconic as long as you Sustain the Activation, to a maximum of 10 minutes.

ECLIPSE

ITEM 8

UNIQUE EVOCATION LIGHT MAGICAL

Price 450 gp

Usage held in 1 hand; Bulk L

This +1 returning striking cold iron starknife has an ornate central grip that depicts a silver dragon, the neck, wings, and tail of which wrap over and around the handle in knots to support the weapon's four cold iron blades. While the handle is polished to a mirrorlike shine, the blades of *Eclipse* are a flat black and entirely unreflective. *Eclipse* is also the portal key required to activate Dreamgate at Alseta's Ring.

Whenever you score a critical hit with *Eclipse*, the target creature's eyes are plunged into darkness; if that creature doesn't have darkvision, it is blinded for 1 round.

Activate ♦ command; **Frequency** once per day; **Effect** *Eclipse*'s blades glow like starlit night sky, causing it to shed light as a torch until you deactivate it as a single action, which has the concentrate trait.

Activate ↻ envision; **Frequency** three times per day; **Trigger** You attempt a Stealth check to Hide or Sneak, but you haven't rolled yet; **Effect** You absorb light, gaining a +2 status bonus to the Stealth check.

Ruling Citadel Altaerein

When the PCs claim Citadel Altaerein as their own, they can simply start living in the ruined castle, but until they repair the damage that years of neglect and monster raids have done to the structure, they won't be able to enjoy any of the benefits detailed on the following pages or perform downtime activities like long-term rest or retraining.

Work on the citadel is organized into two categories: basic repairs and upgrades. All basic repairs must be seen to before upgrades can be applied. The PCs should also Administer their castle (see below) each week. Failing to Administer the property makes repairing and upgrading Citadel Altaerein much more difficult, and not attempting to Administer the citadel results in an automatic critical failure. You should supply the players with a list of the basic repairs and potential upgrades, so that they can focus their efforts, though creative players might come up with their own ideas for how to improve the citadel, of course.

ADMINISTRATION AND ORGANIZING

To efficiently see to Citadel Altaerein's repairs, upgrades, and general operation, the PCs will need to Administer at the start of each week. They can also Organize Labor to complete repair activities.

ADMINISTER

CONCENTRATE DOWNTIME LINGUISTIC MENTAL

You spend the day attending to administrative needs related to running Citadel Altaerein. The Administer activity can be used to undo poor public relations from the use of Deception or Intimidate to Organize Labor, but it is also used to maintain relations with groups you make contact with over the course of the Age of Ashes campaign.

Only one person can attempt to Administer per day (though others can Aid, as described in the *Core Rulebook*), and once the castle has been Administered, no one else can Administer until after the interval specified in the result. However, the

GM might allow exceptions to this if, for instance, the group is about to go on an adventure and wants to make sure the citadel runs smoothly while they're gone.

If you perform downtime activities involving Citadel Altaerein when it's not successfully Administered, you take a -4 circumstance penalty to your checks.

Administering requires a successful DC 20 Society check (although for special actions later in the Adventure Path, this DC may change). You can pay a seneschal (see Hired Help on page 75) to attend to Citadel Altaerein's administrative needs. As long as the seneschal is paid, the weekly requirement to Administer is automatically a success (but never a critical success).

Critical Success You facilitate the prosperity of the citadel.

The citadel functions smoothly for 1 month. In addition, during this time you gain a +2 circumstance bonus to all checks to Organize Labor.

Success Citadel Altaerein functions smoothly for 1 week.

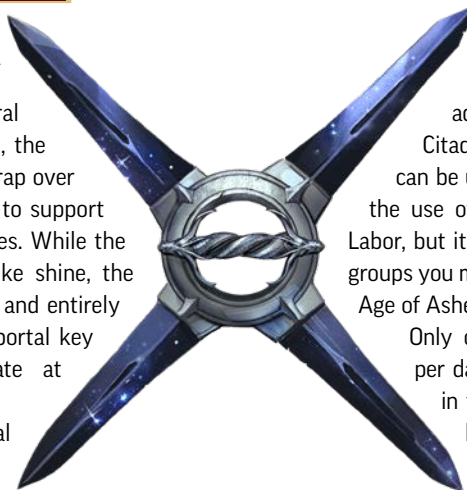
Failure Citadel Altaerein is not Administered, but you can try again the next day.

Critical Failure Citadel Altaerein is not Administered. Botched relations and flared tempers among certain citizens in Breachill prevent you from attempting to Administer again for 1 week.

ORGANIZE LABOR

CONCENTRATE DOWNTIME LINGUISTIC MENTAL

You spend a day in Breachill recruiting workers to aid in a repair or an upgrade at Citadel Altaerein. Attempt a DC 13 Deception, Diplomacy, or Intimidation check to Organize Labor to organize workers, or a DC 18 check for specialists.



If you use Deception or Intimidation for this check, you gain a +2 circumstance bonus, but failure comes with extra risks, as detailed below. Using Diplomacy grants no bonus to the check, but comes without added risk. When you Organize Labor, you must specify one repair or upgrade activity to be undertaken; once you successfully Organize Labor, you must begin that activity within a week.

A force of organized workers costs 1 gp per day, while a force of organized specialists costs 5 gp per day.

Critical Success You organize labor for the full duration of the repair or upgrade activity, and the cost to pay the workers is halved for the duration.

Success You organize labor for the full duration of a repair or upgrade activity.

Failure You organize labor for a single day of a repair or upgrade activity. Unless you used Diplomacy, word of your deceptive or intimidating nature spreads, and you take a -1 circumstance penalty to all future checks to organize labor. This penalty increases with each subsequent failure, to a maximum penalty of -4.

Critical Failure You completely fail to organize labor. If you used Deception or Intimidation, word of your untrustworthiness or cruelty spreads, and you can no longer use that skill to Organize Labor.

BASIC REPAIR ACTIVITIES

Before the PCs can get to the task of upgrading portions of Citadel Altaerein or even comfortably living in the fortress, they must complete the following basic repairs. All location numbers mentioned below refer to locations keyed to the maps of Citadel Altaerein in “Hellknight Hill.” The citadel must be completely Cleaned first, since no repairs can begin until this most basic of basic tasks is completed.

Some repairs have requirements. If a PC with the appropriate training or feat isn’t available to take part in the activities, an NPC must be hired from elsewhere to do the work. See the “Hired Help” on page 75 for more details.

Each of these basic repair downtime activities (except Clean) requires a successful Crafting check. As with Crafting or Earning Income, the PC can continue on with the activity after the roll, continuing to make progress at the same rate and cost. On a critical success, the PCs complete 2 days’ worth of work each day. Each day of repair activities costs 1 gp for supplies, as well as any wages paid to organized workers or specialists (typically 1 gp for a group of laborers or 5 gp for specialists). On a failed check, the day’s costs are wasted. If a hired craftsperson takes the role of leading the repairs rather than a PC, the check is automatically successful (but can never result in a critical success).

CLEAN

DOWNTIME **MANIPULATE**

You spend the day cleaning—hauling out broken furniture, disposing of detritus, and making rooms clear enough to begin repairs. Citadel Altaerein requires 8 days of cleaning before any other basic repair activities can begin. Cleaning does not require a Crafting check, nor does it cost gold.

CLEAR COURTYARD

DOWNTIME **MANIPULATE**

Requirements Crafting (trained) or hired stonemason; organized workers

You work to repair the collapsed northern wall, drain and fill in the flooded sunken area, and clear out weeds. This activity requires 6 days of work and a DC 15 Crafting check.

MAKE GENERAL REPAIRS

DOWNTIME **MANIPULATE**

Requirements Crafting (trained), Specialty Crafting (woodworking), or hired woodworker; organized workers
You make general repairs to the citadel furnishings, replacing or fixing furniture, replacing rotted floorboards, and rehanging doors throughout the structure. This task takes 14 days of work and a DC 15 Crafting check.

REBUILD BATTLEMENTS

DOWNTIME **MANIPULATE**

Requirements Crafting (expert), Specialty Crafting (stonemasonry), or hired stonemason; organized workers
You rebuild and restore the collapsed battlements along the northern section of the central tower. This task takes 28 days of work and a DC 20 Crafting check.

REBUILD COLLAPSED STAIRS

DOWNTIME **MANIPULATE**

Requirements Crafting (expert), Specialty Crafting (stonemasonry), or hired stonemason; organized workers
You work to clear rubble and rebuild the stairs connecting citadel floors, requiring a DC 20 Crafting check. Repairing the stairs from the courtyard to the battlement (connecting areas **A12** and **A22**) takes 4 days. Repairing the stairs from the courtyard to the vault (connecting areas **A12** and **B1**) takes 4 days. Digging out the long flight of stairs down to Alseta’s Ring (connecting areas **B1** and **D7**) takes 8 days.

REPAIR CRUMBLING WALLS

DOWNTIME **MANIPULATE**

Requirements Crafting (expert), Specialty Crafting (stonemasonry), or hired stonemason; organized workers
You work to repair a collapsed wall in either the training hall (area **A8**), the Court of the Nail (area **A13**), or the records room (area **A17**). Each room’s repair takes 8 days of work and a DC 20 Crafting check.

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UPGRADE ACTIVITIES

Upgrading portions of Citadel Altaerein requires all basic repairs to have been completed. Each upgrade activity requires a successful skill check to complete a day's worth of work. On a critical success, the PC's team completes 2 days' worth of work that day. Each upgrade activity costs 10 gp per workday for supplies, as well as any wages paid to organized specialists. If a hired craftsperson takes the role of leading the repairs rather than a PC, the check is automatically successful (but can never result in a critical success).

Note that certain upgrades (building an infirmary, library, training facility, or workshop) must be applied to specific rooms in Citadel Altaerein. Use the encounter areas on the map to determine what areas count for this. Once a room has been given one of these upgrades, it cannot be used for a different upgrade in the future unless the old upgrade is removed. Which room is chosen for which upgrade does not affect the difficulty or cost, and it is primarily an aesthetic choice.

BUILD INFIRMARY

DOWNTIME **MANIPULATE**

Requirements Crafting (master), Medicine (master), or hired medic; organized specialists

Choose a single room in Citadel Altaerein to serve as a dedicated infirmary. Once complete, the infirmary fulfills the healer's tools requirement for Medicine skill actions and grants a +2 circumstance bonus to Medicine checks made on site. This upgrade requires 20 days of work and a DC 25 Crafting or Medicine check.

BUILD LIBRARY

DOWNTIME **MANIPULATE**

Requirements Crafting (master), any Lore (master), or hired bookmaker; organized specialists

Pick a single room in Citadel Altaerein to serve as a library. Once complete, the library grants a +2 circumstance bonus to skill checks made to Borrow an Arcane Spell, Create Forgery, Decipher Writing, Identify Alchemy, Identify Magic, Learn a Spell, or Recall Knowledge as long as the PC performing the action is on site. This upgrade takes 20 days of work and a DC 25 Crafting or Lore check.

BUILD TRAINING FACILITY

DOWNTIME **MANIPULATE**

Requirements expert in the skill listed below or hired trainer; organized specialists

Pick a room in Citadel Altaerein to serve as a training area for a single character class (you can have multiple training facilities, with each one devoted to a different class). Once complete, the training facility fills the role of a teacher when using the Retrain downtime activity for the chosen class, and reduces the time required to retrain a feat or skill increase by 2 days and the time required to retrain a class feature by 1 week. This upgrade takes 40 days of work.

Building the facility requires a DC 25 skill check using a skill depending on the class in question, as listed below. If a class lists multiple skills, the PC can choose whichever one they like (but they must be an expert in the chosen skill, as noted in the Requirements entry above).

Alchemist Crafting

Barbarian Athletics

Bard Occultism or Performance

Champion Religion

Cleric Religion

Druid Nature

Fighter Acrobatics or Athletics

Monk Acrobatics or Athletics

Ranger Athletics, Nature, or Survival

Rogue Acrobatics or Thievery

Sorcerer Arcana, Nature, Occultism, or Religion

Wizard Arcana

BUILD WORKSHOP (CRAFTING)

DOWNTIME **MANIPULATE**

Requirements Crafting (master), Specialty Crafting (any), or any hired specialist; organized specialists

Pick a room in Citadel Altaerein to serve as a crafting area for a specific Crafting skill chosen from one of the crafting specialties listed under the Specialty Crafting feat (*Pathfinder Core Rulebook* 267). You can have multiple workshops, each devoted to its own skill. Use of a workshop grants a +1 circumstance bonus to Crafting checks, or a +3 circumstance bonus to Crafting skill checks associated with that workshop's specialty. This upgrade takes 20 days of work to complete and a DC 25 Crafting check.



Hired Help

Specialty	NPC Name	Source
Acrobatics trainer	Nolly Peltry (halfling adventurer)	"Tomorrow Must Burn"
Arcana trainer	Mialari Docur (elf schoolmistress)	"Tomorrow Must Burn"
Arcana trainer	Trinil Uskwold (human innkeeper)	"Hellknight Hill" 69
Artisan	Tarindlara Vallindel (elf cleric of Shelyn)	"Hellknight Hill" 69
Artisan	Winthrop Finney (human tailor)	"Hellknight Hill" 67
Athletics trainer	Alak Stagram (human Hellknight armiger)	"Hellknight Hill" 19
Bookmaker	Jorell Blacktusk (half-orc librarian)	"Hellknight Hill" 67
Crafting trainer	Renali (anadi explorer)	"Hellknight Hill" 78
Medic	Kellen Carondil (elf cleric of Desna)	"Hellknight Hill" 68
Nature trainer	Nketiah (elf linguist)	Page 78
Occultism trainer	Morta Valaskin (human mortician)	"Hellknight Hill" 68
Performance trainer	Brynnne Taithe (human cleric of Cayden Cailean)	"Hellknight Hill" 67
Religion trainer	Brynnne Taithe (human cleric of Cayden Cailean)	"Hellknight Hill" 67
Religion trainer	Kellen Carondil (elf cleric of Desna)	"Hellknight Hill" 68
Religion trainer	Tarindlara Vallindel (elf cleric of Shelyn)	"Hellknight Hill" 69
Seneschal	Nketiah (Ekujae linguist)	Page 78
Seneschal	Warbal Bumblebrasher (goblin diplomat)	"Hellknight Hill" 82
Stonemason	Amera Lang (human stonemason)	"Hellknight Hill" 68
Stonemason	Rorsk Axebain (dwarf stonemason)	"Hellknight Hill" 69
Survival trainer	Helba (goblin chieftain)	"Hellknight Hill" 28
Thievery trainer	Crink Twiddleton (halfling merchant)	"Hellknight Hill" 68
Thievery trainer	Mialari Docur (elf schoolmistress)	"Tomorrow Must Burn"
Woodworker	Fadelby Vusker (human wainwright)	"Hellknight Hill" 69
Woodworker	Xandel Rynearsohn (human carpenter)	"Hellknight Hill" 67

UPGRADE DEFENSES

DOWNTIME | MANIPULATE

Requirements Crafting (master), Specialty Crafting (stonemasonry), or hired stonemason; organized specialists

You bolster Citadel Altaerein's walls with metal braces, skillful engineering, and other supports. This upgrade takes 40 days of work and a DC 25 Crafting check.

GM Note: The effects of this upgrade come into play when Citadel Altaerein is attacked in the final adventure of Age of Ashes, but until then these upgraded defenses are largely cosmetic. (If you add additional encounters in which the castle is attacked during the next few adventures, be sure to keep any upgraded defenses in mind.)

HIRED HELP

While the PCs can certainly take the lead on all downtime activities at Citadel Altaerein, they can also hire local experts and specialists to aid in both fulfilling requirements for activities or in actually performing the activities themselves. Note that when a downtime ability allows for a hired NPC specialist to run it, the results are always a success, but never a critical success. The list above details the most likely NPC specialists the PCs might hire for help from Breachill—feel free to add to this list with NPCs of your own creation

or drawn from the Breachill gazetteer in "Hellknight Hill" if the PCs want to hire specialists of other types. The inside back cover of each volume of Age of Ashes includes additional personality details for several of these NPCs.

Each NPC must be paid 5 sp per day in wages. If the PCs forge particularly strong bonds with some of these NPCs and get them to become friendly through roleplay and use of Diplomacy, their daily wage is halved. An NPC made helpful will work for free on the first project they're hired to help with (or for up to 1 month, whichever is shorter), and for half wages thereafter.

Once an NPC is hired for a job, they cannot be hired for a different job that takes place at the same time. For example, if the PCs have three jobs that require a master stonemason, they'll either need to put off one of the jobs or do one themselves, since there are only two master stonemasons available for hire in Breachill—unless they encounter another potential stonemason willing to join their staff (such additional NPCs are left to you to introduce as you see fit). Note also that a few of the skill trainers the PCs might eventually hire to aid in building training facilities are NPCs they won't meet until the next adventure, "Tomorrow Must Burn."

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BELMAZOG

Born with the power of dragons within her veins, Belmazog has heard the foul whispers of Dahak since the day she hatched, and she considers herself the Destroyer's chosen.

In Belmazog's mind, she has been Dahak's chosen since before she even had thoughts of her own. A mutant, half-dragon boggard, she believes that she heard the dragon god's voice in her egg, and that the Sorrowmaker's whispers gave her inborn draconic power. Her first major victory was to overthrow her tribe's demon-worshipping priest king, declaring that the tribe would now serve Dahak, triggering a violent schism. Renaming her tribe the "Cinderclaws," Belmazog then sought out other followers of Dahak, as well as ruined places of power that had once been dedicated to the lord of destruction. Not only did she recruit several charau-kas to her cause, but Belmazog also discovered a site of great power—the fossilized remains of Dahak's manifestation, slain long ago in the Age of Darkness. Belmazog soon came to believe that it was from these ancient and powerful bones that her dreams and draconic heritage had come.

Indeed, not long after she moved into the shadow of Dahak's remains and commanded her cult to build their fortress from the fossilized bones, Belmazog began having strange, prophetic dreams. These visions were filled with not just resentment toward Ekujae (who she learned through her dreams had destroyed Dahak's manifestation long ago) but also a growing conviction that Dahak's manifestation had lost only his body. His "soul," as it was, remained trapped nearby, within an ancient temple inside Ekujae lands.

And so Belmazog schemed. Realizing the elves remained a threat to her cult and knowing that any attempt to storm the temple she saw in her dreams would result in ruin, she settled in patiently instead, keeping her cult's activities quiet and avoiding attention from Ekujae. Belmazog intended to build up the mystic and martial power of her cult before taking the Ekujae elves by surprise, but she lacked any true tactical or magical genius, and years passed without any breakthroughs that might serve the cult against their foes. The closest thing Belmazog had to success was the recruitment of the red dragon Kyrion, who she

had raised from a hatchling. Kyrion had grown willful, however, and increasingly held Belmazog in contempt. Belmazog could see her influence over him slipping with each passing month.

Belmazog's salvation came in the form of the Scarlet Triad, a mysterious organization that offered her the services of powerful spellcasters to aid her ambitions. Belmazog agreed without asking any questions, considering the helpful foreigners' arrival to be nothing more than her due as a chosen agent of Dahak. For the small price of granting the Scarlet Triad the first pick of any gold taken from Ekujae lands and a promise to provide them shelter whenever they visited the region in the future, Scarlet Triad agents taught Belmazog an obscure ritual: *nul-acrumi vazghul*, with which she could channel the power of Dahak's fossilized remains and raise dragon pillars throughout the jungle to protect her cult from the elves. It wasn't long after that she led her cult in a bold attack on the temple that haunted her dreams. The Cinderclaws captured the *hunter's arrowhead* from the elven guardians, activated Huntergate, and managed to send a small group of followers through in an attempt to "rescue" Dahak. But when Huntergate closed again and elves launched a counterattack that drove the Cinderclaws back, Belmazog was forced to admit defeat. Now, she and the elves are in a stalemate—the *nul-acrumi vazghul* continues to prevent the elves from invading Cinderclaw territory, but the Cinderclaws aren't yet ready to launch a second attack on Huntergate to try to rescue their missing kin and make a new attempt at freeing Dahak.

Belmazog bears only a passing resemblance to a boggard. Her form is covered with slimy black skin that varies between smooth and scaly. Her draconic head is not froglike at all, instead filled with a grin of needle-like teeth and crowned with a cluster of twisting black horns. Her webbed hands and feet end in long digits tipped with sharp claws. Belmazog rarely thinks deeply about issues and is easily thrown off guard when confronted with questions she can't answer.

Campaign Role

Belmazog's sin is primarily one of ambition, fueled by an intense desire to feel special and respected rather than like a monster in a backwater bog. In her mind, Dahak is the only being in this world on her side, though her long string of failures has weakened her faith in herself and in her worthiness to be Dahak's chosen champion. If the PCs manage to convince Belmazog to surrender, the boggard remains capable of earning redemption. Fully redeeming Belmazog is beyond the scope of this adventure, but the boggard's one virtue is patience, and Belmazog can be convinced to work for the PCs in exchange for promises of eventual power and glory. Though the end result may not be worth the sweat, blood, and tears the PCs will shed to achieve it, Belmazog is a powerful ritualist and a strong combatant, and can offer a number of benefits to PCs willing to give her another chance.

BELMAZOG

CREATURE 9

UNIQUE CE MEDIUM ACID AMPHIBIOUS BOGGARD DRAGON HUMANOID

Perception +18; darkvision, scent (imprecise) 60 feet

Languages Abyssal, Boggard, Common, Draconic, Mwangi

Skills Acrobatics +16, Athletics +18, Deception +19, Intimidation +21, Performance +17, Religion +18, Society +12, Survival +14

Str +5, **Dex** +3, **Con** +3, **Int** -1, **Wis** +3, **Cha** +6

AC 28; **Fort** +18, **Ref** +16, **Will** +18

HP 145; **Immunities** acid, paralyzed, sleep

Speed 40 feet, swim 40 feet

Melee ♦ jaws +20, **Damage** 2d8+11 piercing plus 1d12 acid

Melee ♦ claw +20 (agile), **Damage** 2d8+11 slashing

Melee ♦ tongue +20 (reach 10 feet), **Damage** 2d6+11 acid plus tongue grab

Divine Prepared Spells DC 27, attack +19; **5th** harm; **4th** burning hands (×2), fear, fireball, heal (×2), summon monster; **2nd** ray of enfeeblement, see invisibility; **Cantrips (5th)** detect magic, forbidding ward, produce flame, shield

Rituals nul-acrumi vazghul, planar ally

Breath Weapon ♦♦ (arcane, acid); Belmazog spews a gout of acid that deals 10d6 acid damage in a 30-foot cone (DC 28 basic Reflex save). Belmazog can't use Breath Weapon again for 1d4 rounds.

Drowning Drone 2 (auditory, mental) As boggard swampseer (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 45).

Nul-Acrumi Vazghul Ritual This rare and highly specialized ritual, taught to Belmazog by the Scarlet Triad, allowed her to use the fossilized remains of Dahak to erect powerful defenses in the region in the form of dragon pillars, but the resources and time required to perform the ritual again

are not available to Belmazog during the course of this adventure. As a result, and since there is no way for the PCs to learn or benefit from the ritual, further information beyond the repercussions detailed in the adventure itself are not presented here.

Swamp Stride As boggard scout (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 44).

Terrifying Croak ♦ (auditory, emotion, fear, mental) As boggard scout (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 44) except DC 28.

Tongue Grab As boggard scout (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 44), except AC 25 and 8 HP.

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NKETIAH

A respected diplomat and lorekeeper for one of the most prestigious Ekujae clans, Nketiah carries heavy burdens from both sides of her family: an unpayable debt to her mother, and an unyielding duty from her father.

Nketiah was born to a traveling Lirgeni astrologer and an Ekujae warrior. Her mother, Hiruth, had petitioned and gained access to Ekujae lands in the hope of researching a means of ending the Eye of Abendego's devastation. Her father, Jahsi, was an elven *keledi* who volunteered to accompany Hiruth between the many Ekujae clans. The pair fell into a romantic relationship with one another, and Hiruth eventually discovered she was with child. She assumed that she was simply a dalliance on the part of the elven warrior and offered to raise the child on her own, freeing Jahsi to attend to his own obligations. She was shocked, if elated, to discover that Jahsi was far more devoted to her and his new family than she had given him credit for.

Nketiah spent most of her early life traveling the Mwangi Expanse and northern Garund with her mother, exploring marketplaces and learning new languages while Hiruth spoke with magicians and scholars. Though her father's demon-hunting duties meant he did not travel with them, he visited them both as often as it was safe to do so. Both her mother and her father did their best to include Nketiah in their daily activities, asking her to perform minor tasks for them to ensure that the child never felt unimportant despite her parents' busy lives and demanding responsibilities.

Yet though Nketiah never felt neglected, she had taken too strongly after her mother in some ways, and began to associate her parents' affection with the act of being useful to them. This unfortunate belief came to a head when Nketiah fell violently ill with a demon-tainted disease that swept through the town where she and her mother were staying. Though Jahsi returned with an Ekujae cure in time to save his child and many afflicted villagers, one of Nketiah's arms had to be amputated. Hiruth and Jahsi watched their daughter struggle to process what had happened emotionally, not because of the trauma or the need to adjust to the changes, but because Nketiah was terrified she could no longer help her parents and was undeserving of their love.

Hiruth and Jahsi immediately moved Nketiah back to Ekujae lands, where Nketiah recovered and

thrived—her childhood experiences made her a natural translator and storyteller, and she very quickly picked up Ekujae lore and some aspects of esoteric magic. It surprised no one when Nketiah grew up to become a respected linguist and took a place of pride as an adviser within her father's clan. Her triumph came with a debt and a sorrow, however; Nketiah's mother never returned to her quest to end the Eye of Abendego. Hiruth quietly took a job teaching at the Magaambya, her grand ambitions relegated to a few scholarly discussions between classes, and Nketiah watched helplessly as her mother aged and passed away with her dream unfulfilled.

Nketiah still wonders what Hiruth might have been able to accomplish had she not spent the prime of her life raising her daughter. Nketiah has a driving need to accomplish great things to validate her mother's choices to herself, though the half-elf fears that the opening of Huntergate is the gods' twisted answer to her desires. With her father sworn to fight should Dahak ever rise again, Nketiah cannot help but feel surrounded by a divine tempest forged from both halves of her heritage—the unending hurricane that destroyed her mother's past, and the storm of ash and dragonfire that threatens her father's future.

Nketiah presents as carefree and in command, yet her facade slips when others show genuine interest without an ulterior motive, as she still cannot easily see her worth beyond her usefulness to others. She is a wiry and athletic half-elf, with dark-brown skin and black eyes. Her shoulder-length black hair is twisted into neat dreadlocks gathered together with brass ornaments. The arm that was amputated in her childhood has been replaced with a magical prosthesis made of twisted wooden branches and bone—a gift from a powerful arboreal ally of her mother's who has since moved to other parts of the Mwangi Jungle in pursuit of their own mysterious goals. She proudly wears a necklace of brass beads and uncut gems that her father gave her, and she almost always carries the staff that marks her position as a clan linguist.

Campaign Role

Beyond her role in “Cult of Cinders,” Nketiah acts as the spokesperson for her clan and for other Ekujae allies. Though her duties compel her to help the PCs, she also assesses them on behalf of elves as a whole. Should they be impressed by the PCs, the clan may form a permanent alliance with Breachill, offering an influx of new citizens and a valuable portal to the Mwangi Expanse. Nketiah also watches the PCs individually, and should any particular PCs stand out during the campaign as going above and beyond as an exemplar of morality, her clan might gift them with a truly bittersweet honor near the end of the campaign—the golden jewelry of a *keledi*, signifying the elves believe that character’s soul to be pure enough to cut the flesh of a god, bolstering the honored PCs’ role in defeating Dahak once again as Age of Ashes comes to a close.

NKETIAH

CREATURE 6

UNIQUE CG MEDIUM ELF HUMAN HUMANOID

Perception +12; low-light vision

Languages Celestial, Charau-ka, Common, Draconic, Elven, Mwangi, Sylvan

Skills Arcana +11, Athletics +9 (+13 to Climb), Deception +12, Diplomacy +13, Ekujae Lore +15, Nature +10, Occultism +11, Performance +14, Society +15, Survival +10

Str +1, **Dex** +3, **Con** +0, **Int** +3, **Wis** +2, **Cha** +4

Items black adder venom (2), +1 striking longbow (20 arrows), studded leather, verdant staff

AC 23; **Fort** +8, **Ref** +13, **Will** +12; +1 status to all saves vs. mental

HP 74; **Immunities** sleep

Speed 35 feet, climb 20 feet

Melee ♦ vine lash +15 (agile, finesse, reach 15 feet),

Damage 2d6+4 bludgeoning

Melee ♦ verdant staff +13 (magical, two-hand d8),

Damage 1d4+4 bludgeoning

Ranged ♦ longbow +16 (deadly d10, magical, range increment 100 feet, reload 0, volley 30 feet), **Damage** 2d8+3 piercing plus black adder venom

Occult Spontaneous Spells DC 24, attack +14; **3rd** (3 slots) *circle of protection*, *heroism*, *mind reading*; **2nd** (3 slots) *hideous laughter*, *restore senses*, *see invisibility*; **1st** (3 slots) *fear*, *illusory disguise*, *illusory object*; **Cantrips (3rd)** *ghost sound*, *guidance*, *mage hand*, *message*, *prestidigitation*

Bard Composition Spells DC 24; **3rd** (2 Focus Points) *counter performance* (Pathfinder Core Rulebook 386), *loremaster’s etude* (Pathfinder Core Rulebook 387); **Cantrips (3rd)** *inspire competence* (Pathfinder Core Rulebook 386), *inspire courage* (Pathfinder Core Rulebook 386)

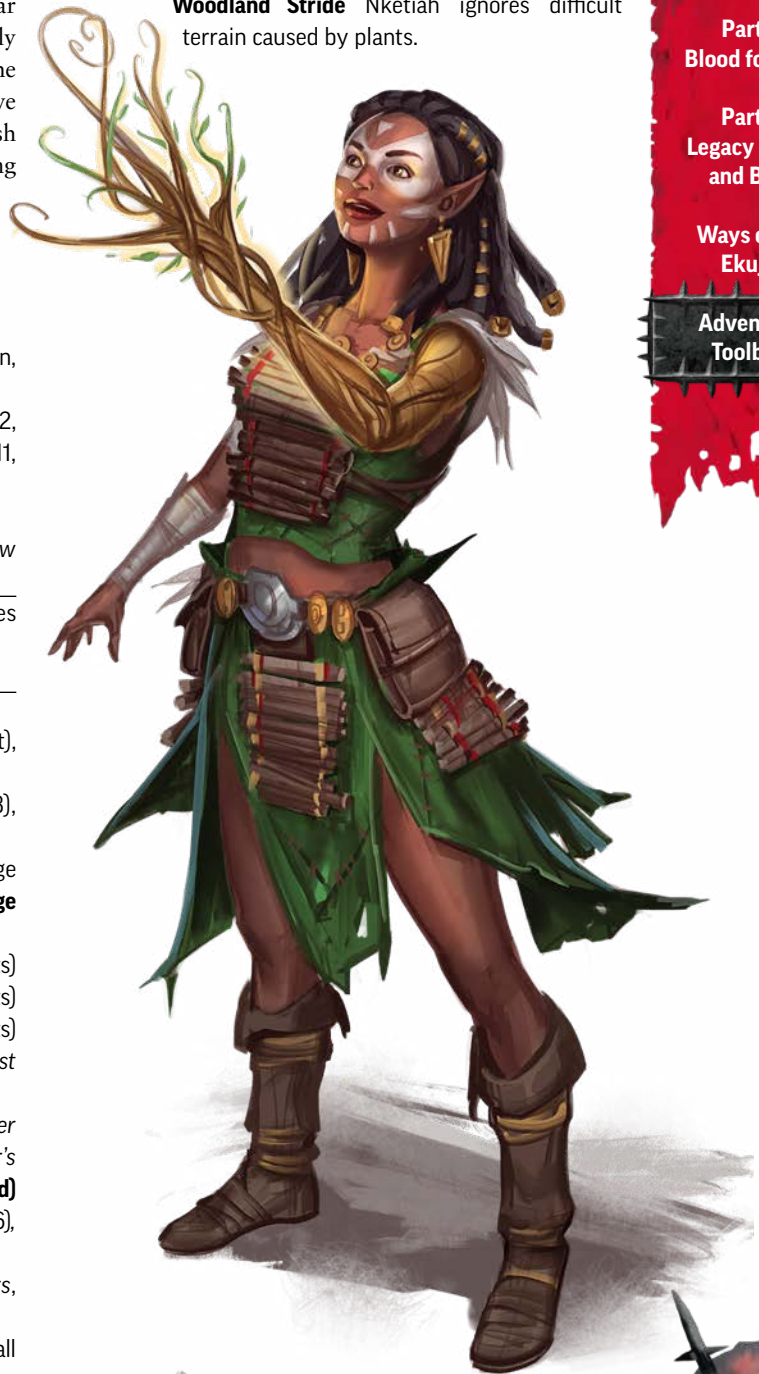
Primal Innate Spells DC 24; **Cantrips (3rd)** *dancing lights*, *detect magic*, *disrupt undead*, *tanglefoot*

Arboreal Arm (primal) This magical limb functions in all

ways as Nketiah’s original arm. The arm can extend a vine to attack in melee, and using the arm, Nketiah has a climb Speed of 20 feet and Climbs as if she had master proficiency in Athletics. Finally, the arm’s primal magic allows her to use the spells from her *verdant staff* as if she had all of those spells on her spell list.

Woodland Elf Nketiah can move at half her Speed on a successful Climb check and at full Speed on a critical success. She can always Take Cover within forest terrain to gain cover, even if she’s not next to a wall or obstacle.

Woodland Stride Nketiah ignores difficult terrain caused by plants.



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ASANBOSAM TREASURE

The corpse of a dead asanbosam is a treasure in itself. Extracting the creature's cold iron fangs is no easy process and requires either powerful extraction tools or a vat of chemicals to melt the surrounding bone tissue. The payoff, however, can be substantial in the right market.

Asanbosam

Asanbosams are monstrous, hairy humanoids with cold iron fangs and muscular limbs that end in powerful, hooked claws. They hide in treetops and grab prey from above, latching onto their unfortunate victims' necks to drain their blood. Locals in nearby communities tell horror stories of these "bloodsucking tree-folk," and experienced jungle explorers keep a close watch on the treetops in asanbosam territory.

An asanbosam's diet calls for a large amount of iron (typically in the form of blood) to maintain the integrity of its oversized cold iron teeth. When not hunting or mating, an asanbosam spends its waking hours chewing on certain types of rocks to sharpen its teeth.

Some folk tales claim that asanbosams are as old as time and are the original source of cold iron, and that veins of the metal found in the ground are the buried graveyards of ancient asanbosams. Brave (or foolish) poachers often infiltrate asanbosam territory to hunt these monsters in the hope of collecting sacks of their valuable teeth.

ASANBOSAM

CREATURE 6

CE LARGE HUMANOID

Perception +17; darkvision

Languages Mwangi

Skills Acrobatics +14, Athletics +16, Intimidation +15, Stealth +16, Survival +14

Str +5, **Dex** +4, **Con** +2, **Int** -3, **Wis** +1, **Cha** -2

AC 24; **Fort** +15, **Ref** +17, **Will** +10

HP 95

Speed 35 feet, climb 20 feet

Melee ♦ cold iron jaws +17 (deadly 1d8), **Damage** 2d8+7 piercing

Melee ♦ claw +17 (agile, reach 10 feet), **Damage** 2d6+7 slashing plus Grab

Attack from Above ♦♦ If an asanbosam is positioned above a target (usually by using its Climb speed), it can make a claw Strike with its reach increased to 15 feet. This Strike deals an additional 1d6 slashing damage, and if it hits, the asanbosam Grabs the target and pulls it to a space adjacent to the asanbosam. This counts as two attacks when calculating the asanbosam's multiple attack penalty.

Drink Blood ♦ **Requirements** A grabbed, paralyzed, restrained, unconscious, or willing creature is within reach of the asanbosam's jaws. **Effect** The asanbosam sinks its teeth into the creature to drink its blood. If the victim is grabbed, this is automatic; otherwise, the asanbosam must succeed at an Athletics check against the victim's Fortitude DC. The victim becomes drained 1 and the asanbosam regains 10 HP, gaining any excess HP as temporary Hit Points. Drinking Blood from a creature that's already drained increases the victim's drained value by 1, but doesn't restore any HP to the asanbosam.

A victim's drained condition decreases by 1 each week. A blood transfusion, which requires a successful DC 20 Medicine check and a blood donor or sufficient blood, reduces the drained value by 1 after 10 minutes.

Bida

Bidas are black-scaled dragons with long, serpentine bodies and bat-like wings. Their legs and claws are smaller than those of most dragons, but their powerful undulating coils, like those of a boa constrictor, are potent weapons capable of squeezing the life from several unfortunate victims at a time.

A bida uses its impressive intellect and powerful magic to pose as a humanoid and infiltrate a settlement. Over the course of weeks or months, it establishes itself as a key member of the village, and only after it has become invaluable to the community does it reveal the terrible price of its assistance: regular offerings of flesh and gold. From this point on, the bida dwells almost exclusively within its smoggy lair, growing fat off the blood of its sacrificial offerings. To hide its presence from the outside world, a bida conceals its enslaved settlement in a large-scale illusion, leaving only a stand of jungle trees where once a thriving village may have been and ordering the townsfolk to destroy any roads in and out of town.

Bidas begrudgingly tolerate others of their kind, instead preferring the company of their small, tasty thralls. In rare cases, a pair of bidas may join forces to conquer a particularly large settlement, extracting that much more wealth (and blood) from the populace as a result of their partnership.

BIDA

CREATURE 8

UNCOMMON LE HUGE DRAGON

Perception +15; darkvision, scent (imprecise) 30 feet

Languages Common, Draconic, Mwangi

Skills Deception +20, Diplomacy +18, Intimidation +18, Society +16, Stealth +16

Str +6, **Dex** +2, **Con** +3, **Int** +4, **Wis** +3, **Cha** +6

AC 27; **Fort** +18, **Ref** +15, **Will** +18; +2 circumstance to all saves to disbelieve illusions

HP 135; **Immunities** paralyzed, sleep; **Resistances** acid 10, poison 10

Speed 40 feet, climb 20 feet, fly 60 feet

Melee ♦ jaws +20 (reach 15 feet), **Damage** 2d12+9 piercing

Melee ♦ tail +20 (reach 15 feet), **Damage** 2d6+9 bludgeoning plus Improved Grab

Occult Innate Spells DC 26; **3rd** *nondetection*; **2nd** *humanoid form*

Constrict ♦ 1d6+6 bludgeoning, DC 26

Eight Coils A bida can Strike with its tail even while Grabbing creatures with it. The bida can have up to eight Medium or smaller creatures grabbed with its tail at a time; it can also grab Large creatures, but they count as four Medium creatures for this purpose.

Mask Settlement (arcane, illusion) By concentrating for 4 hours, the bida hides a small settlement. This is a 5th-level *hallucinatory terrain* spell, except the area is a 500-foot burst and creatures are invisible while inside structures in the area. The bida can conceal only one settlement at a time, and must concentrate on the effect for 10 minutes at the beginning of each day to maintain the illusion.



BIDA LOCATIONS

Bidas claim thorps, hamlets, and villages as their territories, preferring semi-industrialized settlements that control nearby coal or gold mines they can use as lairs.



BIDA TREASURE

Bidas, like most dragons, are fond of treasure, particularly gold, and their hordes are spectacular to behold. Although the wealth in a bida's cave belongs to the unfortunate villagers the bida has intimidated into servitude, many victims would willingly relinquish their claims to items to convince a party of dragon slayers to eliminate the tyrannical monster.

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GUERRILLA AMBUSHERS

Bilokos prefer to move about in small, stealthy packs in dark, isolated sections of the jungle.

When a band of bilokos finds a suitable hunting ground, it claims the area exclusively, digging pit traps, crafting snares from vines, and building blinds high in trees where the predators can lie in ambush.

Biloko

Bilokos are crocodile-snouted fey who stalk the Mwangi Jungle and feast upon the flesh of humans. As cunning as they are vicious, bilokos employ deadly traps and guerilla hunting tactics to capture prey—typically hapless explorers or occasionally wayward villagers who believe bilokos to be cruel ancestral spirits. The most powerful of these creatures, known as elokos, wield potent transformative magic.

A biloko looks like a slender but wiry humanoid with a head resembling a crocodile's, rust-colored skin, and blood-red eyes. It eats only the meat of humanoids, though it can survive for extended periods of time on a single meal thanks to its snake-like ability to consume a typical Medium humanoid creature whole, which it does by unhinging its jaws and slowly swallowing the victim from head to foot. Thanks to its acidic saliva and sharp teeth, a biloko can masticate its food into an easy-to-digest pulp, grinding flesh and bone into a compact mush, even while swallowing, and does not flinch while devouring meals two or three times its own size. A biloko that has recently fed is easily recognizable by its distended belly, though the fey is no less dangerous then, as it delights in killing and might have hungry comrades hiding among nearby.

BILOKO WARRIOR

Rank-and-file bilokos stalk the jungles in small hunting bands.

BILOKO WARRIOR

CREATURE 1

NE SMALL FEY

Perception +7; low-light vision, scent (imprecise) 30 feet

Languages Mwangi, Sylvan

Skills Athletics +7, Crafting +7, Nature +5, Stealth +6, Survival +6

Str +3, **Dex** +2, **Con** -1, **Int** +0, **Wis** +2, **Cha** +1

Items spear, wooden shield (Hardness 3, 12 HP, BT 6)

AC 16 (18 with shield raised); **Fort** +4, **Ref** +7, **Will** +7
HP 19

Shield Block ⤴

Speed 20 feet

Melee ✦ jaws +8, **Damage** 1d8+3 piercing

Melee ✦ spear +8, **Damage** 1d6+3 piercing

Ranged ✦ spear +7 (thrown 20 feet), **Damage** 1d6+3 piercing

Primal Innate Spells DC 17; 1st *charm*

Inspired Feast (emotion, mental) If a biloko feasts on a human corpse for 1 minute or more, they gain a +1 status bonus to attack rolls and a +2 status bonus to damage rolls for 1 hour.

BILOKO VETERAN

A biloko who has led a sufficient number of successful hunts garners the respect (and fear) of their companions.

BILOKO VETERAN

CREATURE 4

NE SMALL FEY

Perception +11; low-light vision, scent (imprecise) 30 feet

Languages Mwangi, Sylvan

Skills Athletics +10, Crafting +10, Intimidation +12, Nature +9, Stealth +13, Survival +11

Str +4, **Dex** +4, **Con** +0, **Int** +0, **Wis** +3, **Cha** +2

Items longspear, shortbow (20 arrows)

AC 21; **Fort** +8, **Ref** +13, **Will** +11

HP 58

Attack of Opportunity ↻

Speed 20 feet

Melee ♦ jaws +14, **Damage** 2d8+5 piercing

Melee ♦ longspear +14 (reach 10 feet), **Damage** 1d8+5 piercing

Ranged ♦ shortbow +14 (deadly d10, range increment 60 feet, reload 0), **Damage** 1d6+3 piercing

Primal Innate Spells DC 21; **1st** charm

Inspired Feast (emotion, mental) As biloko warrior.

Swipe ♦♦ The veteran makes a melee Strike and compares the attack roll result to the AC of up to two foes, each of whom must be within their melee reach and adjacent to each other. Roll damage only once and apply it to each creature hit. A Swipe counts as two attacks for the veteran's multiple attack penalty.

ELOKO

If a biloko is lucky enough to consume several spellcasters or other creatures with innate magical abilities, it undergoes a subtle transformation over the course of 1 week. Such a fey is known as an eloko, and in addition to their incredible appetite (even by biloko standards), they have the supernatural ability to grow to immense size.

ELOKO

CREATURE 7

NE SMALL FEY

Perception +15; low-light vision, scent (imprecise) 30 feet

Languages Aklo, Mwangi, Sylvan

Skills Athletics +18, Crafting +13, Deception +15, Nature +13, Stealth +16, Survival +13

Str +6, **Dex** +5, **Con** +1, **Int** +0, **Wis** +4, **Cha** +1

Items blowgun (10 poisoned darts), +1 dagger

AC 25; **Fort** +12, **Ref** +18, **Will** +15

HP 115

Speed 20 feet

Melee ♦ jaws +17, **Damage** 2d8+8 piercing

Melee ♦ dagger +18 (agile, magical, versatile S), **Damage** 1d4+8 piercing

Ranged ♦ blowgun +17 (agile, nonlethal, range increment 20 feet, reload 1), **Damage** 1 piercing plus 2d4 persistent poison

Ranged ♦ dagger +18 (agile, magical, thrown 10 feet, versatile S), **Damage** 1d4+8 piercing

Primal Innate Spells DC 22; **1st** charm

Inspired Feast (emotion, mental) As biloko warrior.

Size Alteration ♦♦ (polymorph, primal, transmutation) The eloko is affected by a 4th-level *enlarge* spell. This lasts for 1 minute, and the eloko can Dismiss the Spell.

Sneak Attack (precision) The eloko deals 2d6 extra precision damage to flat-footed creatures.



THE BILOKO CITY

In the jungles north of Lake Ocota, rumors speak of an incredibly powerful eloko who calls himself Emperor Sharptooth and rules over an entire city of bilokos and other fey. While such coordination between the capricious fey is not unheard of, explorers have been unable to verify these stories, as all who attempt to find the biloko settlement are never seen again. Recently, a group of Pathfinders based out of Nantambu has started collecting funds for an expedition to find this mysterious city and return with information (and possibly a wealth of treasure).



CHARMING PREDATORS

Bilokos' connection to the First World grants them a limited ability to supernaturally charm their enemies. Bilokos use this power to lure stragglers away from their adventuring parties or confuse their opponents when a raid goes horribly awry. Large hunting parties of bilokos might charm entire groups of travelers, in which case these bilokos might bring their enchanted quarry back to their tribe to feast on (though they are more likely to simply enjoy the spoils of their efforts alone).

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A FRAGMENTED NATION

Until recently, most charau-kas were united under the rulership of Ruthazek the Gorilla King, a powerful warlord and champion of Angazhan who ruled from the city of Usaro. But when adventurers challenged and defeated Ruthazek, the charau-ka nation fragmented and the clans scattered into the jungle, each led by their own individual warlords.

Charau-ka

Legend holds that charau-kas share ancestry with the demon lord Angazhan, who transformed the bodies of humans who tried to wage war against his cult, causing the dead to rise as the first of the simian humanoids known as a charau-ka. Rumors persist that charau-ka priests have perfected a hideous ritual to force those slain to reincarnate as new charau-kas in honor of this ancient tale. Other stories hold that powerful totems devoted to Angazhan contain this power, and that conducting ritual sacrifices before these magical artifacts causes the spirits of the dead to return to life as violent devotees of Angazhan, the master of those who revel in savagery and destruction.

CHARAU-KA WARRIOR

A charau-ka warrior carries hatchets, daggers, and similar weaponry on their person and usually doesn't worry about running out of thrown weapons when rocks plucked from the ground are just as deadly in their hands.

CHARAU-KA WARRIOR

CREATURE 1

CE SMALL CHARAU-KA HUMANOID

Perception +6; darkvision, scent (imprecise) 30 feet

Languages Draconic, Mwangi

Skills Athletics +6, Religion +4, Stealth +6

Str +3, **Dex** +3, **Con** +2, **Int** -1, **Wis** +1, **Cha** +0

AC 18; **Fort** +7, **Ref** +8, **Will** +4

HP 18

Items dagger, hatchet, hide armor

Speed 25 feet, climb 25 feet

Melee ♦ hatchet +8 (agile, sweep), **Damage** 1d6+3 slashing

Melee ♦ dagger +8 (agile, finesse, versatile S), **Damage** 1d4+3 piercing

Melee ♦ fist +8 (agile, nonlethal), **Damage** 1d4+3 bludgeoning

Ranged ♦ hatchet +8 (agile, deadly d6, sweep, thrown 10 feet), **Damage** 1d6+3 slashing

Ranged ♦ dagger +8 (agile, deadly d6, thrown 10 feet, versatile S), **Damage** 1d4+3 piercing

Ranged ♦ thrown debris +8 (deadly d6, thrown 20 feet), **Damage** 1d6+3 bludgeoning

Shrieking Frenzy ♦ (primal, transmutation); **Trigger**

The charau-ka's turn begins. **Frequency** once per hour; **Effect** The charau-ka is quickened until the end of its turn, and can use the extra action to Stride or Strike. While in the frenzy, the charau-ka can't speak and automatically critically fails Stealth checks, due to its loud wailing.

Thrown Weapon Mastery Any weapon a charau-ka throws gains the deadly d6 weapon trait. Furthermore, when a charau-ka throws an improvised weapon, it does not take the -2 penalty for doing so, nor does it take a penalty for using a thrown improvised weapon with the nonlethal trait to make a lethal attack.

CHARAU-KA ACOLYTE OF ANGAZHAN

Even with the Gorilla King's fall, some charau-kas still worship Angazhan.

CHARAU-KA ACOLYTE OF ANGAZHAN

CREATURE 3

CE SMALL CHARAU-KA HUMANOID

Perception +9; darkvision, scent (imprecise) 30 feet

Languages Abyssal, Draconic, Mwangi

Skills Athletics +7, Intimidation +7, Nature +9, Religion +11, Stealth +7

Str +2, **Dex** +2, **Con** +1, **Int** +0, **Wis** +4, **Cha** +2

AC 19; **Fort** +8, **Ref** +7, **Will** +11

HP 45

Items hide armor, spear

Speed 25 feet, climb 25 feet

Melee ♦ spear +11 (thrown 20 feet), **Damage** 1d6+5 piercing

Melee ♦ fist +11 (agile, nonlethal), **Damage** 1d4+5 bludgeoning

Ranged ♦ spear +11 (deadly d6, thrown 20 feet), **Damage** 1d6+5 piercing

Ranged ♦ thrown debris +11 (deadly d6, thrown 20 feet), **Damage** 1d6+5 bludgeoning

Divine Prepared Spells DC 21, attack +11; **2nd** *entangle*, *sound burst*; **1st** *fear*, *heal*, *ray of enfeeblement*; **Cantrips** (**2nd**) *daze*, *detect magic*, *divine lance*, *guidance*, *message*

Shrieking Frenzy ♦ (primal, transmutation) As charau-ka warrior.

Thrown Weapon Mastery As charau-ka warrior.

CHARAU-KA BUTCHER

While charau-kas are well known for their brutality, some frighten even others of their kind with their obsession with violence.

CHARAU-KA BUTCHER

CREATURE 6

CE SMALL CHARAU-KA HUMANOID

Perception +11; darkvision, scent (imprecise) 30 feet

Languages Draconic, Mwangi

Skills Acrobatics +11, Athletics +15, Intimidation +14, Religion +9, Stealth +13

Str +5, **Dex** +3, **Con** +3, **Int** +0, **Wis** +1, **Cha** +2

Items hide armor, +1 *striking trident*

AC 23; **Fort** +17, **Ref** +11, **Will** +13

HP 95

Attack of Opportunity ↻

Speed 25 feet, climb 25 feet

Melee ♦ *trident* +20 (magical), **Damage** 2d8+8 slashing

Melee ♦ fist +19 (agile, nonlethal), **Damage** 1d4+8 bludgeoning

Ranged ♦ *trident* +18 (deadly d6, magical, thrown 20 feet), **Damage** 2d8+8 piercing

Ranged ♦ thrown debris +17 (deadly d6, thrown 20 feet), **Damage** 2d6+8 bludgeoning

Blood Fury ↻ (manipulate) **Trigger** The charau-ka butcher deals bleed damage to a creature. **Effect** The charau-ka licks blood from its weapon, becoming furious. It regains 5 HP and gains a +1 status bonus to attack rolls until the end of its turn.

Mauler While the charau-ka butcher is raging, its melee Strikes deal 1d4 persistent bleed damage.

Rage ♦ As the barbarian class ability; AC 22, +9 HP, +2 melee damage.

Shrieking Frenzy ♦ (primal, transmutation) As charau-ka warrior.

Thrown Weapon Mastery As charau-ka warrior.



CHARAU-KA TRIBES

Charau-kas generally dwell in small tribes consisting of a few dozen members. They often keep dangerous jungle creatures as pets or guardians, trusting their rangers or animal handlers to keep these deadly beasts under control. It's not uncommon to find a group of charau-kas who cage a wild beast in the midst of their village, sacrificing victims to the imprisoned creature or tormenting it by holding it as a living trophy of sorts. A typical charau-ka village extends from the jungle floor up into the canopy above, and usually includes several treehouse-style structures connected by vines or rope bridges.

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TREASURE FOR TRADE

A gripli's knowledge is often more valuable than any of the handcrafted weapons or goods it carries. However, the most esteemed members of gripli communities—alchemists, greenspeakers, and scouts—often carry alchemical creations, magic items, or valuables meant for trading with members of other jungle civilizations.

Grippli

Frog-like humanoids who make their homes in the treetops of tropical jungles and forests, gripplis are uniquely adapted to their environment. Their oversized eyes give them keen vision in both light and dark, and their large toes allow them to easily scale the trees atop which they reside. Gripplis vary widely in physical appearance, their physiologies largely determined by their surrounding environment; those who live in verdant forests, for example, typically have bright green skin and red eyes. In contrast, gripplis who live in regions of rot and decay have mottled brown coloration, and those who dwell near lakes or streams may bear bright blue and orange stripes. Typical gripplis are just over 2 feet tall and weigh approximately 30 pounds.

Whatever region they come from, gripplis tend to be peaceful hunter-gatherers. Due to their modest understanding of agriculture, gripplis don't raise crops in the traditional sense, although they do cultivate mushroom patches and gather a wide array of fruits from the surrounding wilderness. The jungle also contains rivers and lakes filled with silver-scaled fish, which gripplis harvest in a sustainable manner to ensure their future supply, as well as fatty insects that grow much larger than in other parts of the world.

Some of the most advanced gripli societies capture and breed these insects, nurturing herds of giant dragonflies or beetles that are eventually slaughtered for food for the rest of the village. Particularly enterprising gripplis even seek out and tame huge flying insects to use as mounts during their hunts. The rearing of such massive insects is no easy feat, however, so gripplis who manage to do so are often heralded as local heroes.

The treetop settlements of the gripli are difficult to spot from the forest floor. Gripplis obscure their holdings with broad leaves and thick branches, and they riddle the surrounding forest with labyrinthine trails that only they know how to navigate. Their villages are usually constructed among the densest populations of trees, with thin rope bridges strung between wide wooden platforms built around each trunk.

GRIPPLI SCOUT

The best gripli hunters are chosen for the honorable role of scouts.

GRIPPLI SCOUT

CREATURE 1

N **SMALL** **GRIPPLI** **HUMANOID**

Perception +8; darkvision

Languages Common, Gripli

Skills Acrobatics +7, Athletics +4, Nature +6, Stealth +7 (+9 in forests), Survival +6

Str +1, **Dex** +4, **Con** +2, **Int** +0, **Wis** +3, **Cha** -1

Items dart (5), leather armor, net, sickle

AC 18; **Fort** +7, **Ref** +9, **Will** +6

HP 20

Speed 25 feet, climb 20 feet

Melee ♦ sickle +9 (agile, finesse, trip), **Damage** 1d4+1 slashing

Ranged ♦ dart +9 (agile, thrown 20 feet), **Damage** 1d4+1 piercing
Hurl Net ♦ **Requirement** The gripli is wielding a net in two hands. **Effect** The gripli makes a ranged Strike (with a +9 modifier) against a Medium or smaller creature within 20 feet. On a hit, the target is flat-footed and takes a -10-foot circumstance penalty to its Speeds. On a critical hit, the creature is restrained instead. The DC to Escape the net is 16. A creature adjacent to the target can Interact with the net to remove it.

Jungle Stride A gripli ignores difficult terrain in forests and jungles.

GRIPPLI ARCHER

These sharpshooters are renowned for their patience and their accuracy.

GRIPPLI ARCHER

CREATURE 3

N **SMALL** **GRIPPLI** **HUMANOID**
Perception +10; darkvision
Languages Common, Gripli
Skills Acrobatics +9, Athletics +6, Nature +8, Stealth +11 (+13 in forests), Survival +8
Str +1, **Dex** +4, **Con** +2, **Int** +0, **Wis** +3, **Cha** -1
Items leather armor, shortbow (30 arrows), shortsword
AC 20; **Fort** +9, **Ref** +11, **Will** +10
HP 44
Speed 25 feet, climb 20 feet
Melee ♦ shortsword +11 (agile, finesse, versatile S), **Damage** 1d6+3 piercing
Ranged ♦ shortbow +11 (deadly 1d10, range increment 60 feet, reload 0), **Damage** 1d6+2 piercing
Hail of Arrows ♦♦ The gripli archer makes three ranged Strikes with their shortbow, all against a single target. Combine the damage of any Strikes that hit for the purpose of resistances and weaknesses.
Jungle Stride As gripli scout.

GRIPPLI GREENSPEAKER

The unofficial healers of griplikind are known as greenspeakers.

GRIPPLI GREENSPEAKER

CREATURE 5

N **SMALL** **GRIPPLI** **HUMANOID**
Perception +13; darkvision
Languages Common, Gripli
Skills Acrobatics +11, Athletics +9, Diplomacy +10, Medicine +11, Nature +14, Religion +11, Stealth +11, Survival +11
Str +2, **Dex** +4, **Con** +1, **Int** +1, **Wis** +4, **Cha** +0
Green Empathy The greenspeaker can use Diplomacy to Make an Impression on and make very simple Requests of plants and fungi.
Items dart (4), staff
AC 21; **Fort** +10, **Ref** +13, **Will** +13
HP 71
Speed 25 feet, climb 20 feet
Melee ♦ staff +11 (two-hand d8), **Damage** 1d4+4 bludgeoning
Melee ♦ dart +13 (agile, thrown 20 feet), **Damage** 1d4+4 piercing
Primal Prepared Spells DC 23, attack +13; **3rd** *animal form, summon plants and fungi*; **2nd** *barkskin, entangle, speak with animals*; **1st** *jump, pass without trace, shillelagh*; **Cantrips (3rd)** *acid splash, guidance, know direction, produce flame, tanglefoot*
Jungle Stride As gripli scout.



GRIPPLI MINIONS

Gripplis keep company with few other intelligent species, but their close bond with nature means they may be found alongside giant insects, plant creatures, and other beasts of the jungle.



A HISTORY OF NEUTRALITY

Gripli villages rarely get involved in the concerns of other communities, preferring to focus on maintaining relative peace within their own small societies. Gripli legends explain this attitude with a tale of a gripli champion who dragged his people into a war between humans and charau-kas. The stories differ as to which side the gripplis took, but every version ends with the bloody deaths of the hero and his family. Since that time, village elders claim, gripplis have strove to remain far from the conflicts of others.

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KISHI TREASURE

Kishi dress in fine clothing and flashy jewelry. Although they do not covet wealth for wealth's sake, kishi may steal the belongings of their slain targets in order to make themselves that much more appealing to their next victim.

Kishi

Kishi are duplicitous and murderous fey who dwell on the edges of Golarion's darkest jungles. At first glance, kishi appear to be attractive humans, usually of a local ethnicity, but their full heads of thick hair conceal a second face, that of a snarling hyena. When a kishi lures their prey into a vulnerable situation, their head swivels around, revealing this fearsome visage. In this form, a kishi's powerful jaws are almost impossible to pry loose and can crush a victim's bones in a matter of moments. Kishi are highly varied in their physical features, and their height and weight are as variable as the people whose communities they infiltrate.

Like most fey, a kishi's motives are inscrutable, though to its victims, the kishi's goal seems simple—to revel in the expression of shock, betrayal, and terror on a victim's face. Although kishi can cast *charm* to make unwitting companions complacent, most of these sinister creatures prefer to trick their prey using guile, gifts, and their dashing good looks. Kishi are the ultimate sociopaths, deriving pleasure from the thrill of the hunt as well as the delicious reward at the end. The more uptight, prudish, or haughty a target, the better, for nothing satisfies kishi as much as earning (and destroying) the trust of someone who rarely grants it.

When kishi get their new friends or lovers alone, they choose the most dramatic moments to reveal their true, monstrous forms and clamp their jaws down on their victim. Kishi have no desire to share their true nature with the entire village, so they typically aim for the throats of their victims, who, cut off from air, are unable to cry out for help. Kishi consume every part of their victims' bodies, leaving no trace of the crime—even lapping up any spilled blood and cleaning the murder scene as much as they are able.

KISHI

CREATURE 8

NE MEDIUM FEY

Perception +14; low-light vision

Languages Common, Sylvan

Skills Athletics +20, Deception +20, Diplomacy +19, Society +15, Stealth +18

Str +6, **Dex** +4, **Con** +1, **Int** +1, **Wis** +2, **Cha** +5

AC 25; **Fort** +13, **Ref** +18, **Will** +17

HP 138; **Resistances** piercing 10; **Weaknesses** cold iron 10

Speed 25 feet

Melee ♦ jaws +20, **Damage** 2d10+9 piercing plus Grab

Melee ♦ claw +20 (agile), **Damage** 2d8+9 slashing

Arcane Innate Spells DC 27; 1st *charm* (at will)

Constrict ♦ 1d10+9 piercing, DC 26 (grabbed by jaws only)

Head Spin ♦ The kishi switches between showing its attractive human face and its snarling hyena face. A kishi can use its innate spell and its Deception and Diplomacy skills only when its human face is showing, and it can use its jaws Strike only when its hyena face is showing.

Sudden Charge ♦♦ The kishi Strides twice. If it ends its movement within melee reach of at least one enemy, it can make a melee Strike against that enemy.

Vice-Like Jaws A creature grabbed in the kishi's jaws can't speak, including providing verbal components for spells. In addition, the creature takes a -2 circumstance penalty to Escape.

Living Sap

The tall sharinga trees of the Mwangi Expanse leak golden sap from their swollen, bulbous trunks, which coagulates when exposed to air. The toxic resin, which has a bitter taste, protects the tree from herbivorous insects and other animals, but in rare cases—usually in areas awash in positive energy or the influence of the First World—the sap gains a life of its own. Such “living sap” is a mindless ooze that attempts to smother and engulf just about anything that moves, from the bugs and small beasts that feed on its sharinga tree to larger creatures unlucky enough to stumble upon it. Due to its immunities to most forms of physical damage and its protectiveness of its mother tree, a living ooze is a nuisance to communities that rely on the sap of sharinga trees to make resin, rubber, and glue.

Jungle-dwelling alchemists such as griplis (page 86) cherish the sap of the sharinga tree for its unique adhesive properties. The sap has been used for centuries to create tanglefoot bags, glue, and hard resin. Residue collected from a living sap is even more fascinating from an alchemical standpoint. Though harvesting a living sap is very dangerous, some alchemists will risk death (if not their own, then that of hearty adventurers for hire) in order to procure these easily worked ingredients. To increase the odds of a successful harvest, such employers are often willing to supply offensive aids such as lesser frost vials; living sap hunters learned long ago that cold energy is effective against these creatures and luckily doesn't harm the harvestable reagents.



LIVING SAP TREASURES

The stockpile of weapons, armor, and magic items that accumulate around a living sap's mother sharinga tree can be a tempting treasure trove for daring adventurers. Beyond this, the remains of a defeated living sap are treasure in themselves; a character who succeeds at a DC 20 Crafting check can create four tanglefoot bags from the remains of a single living sap; this takes 1 day of downtime.

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LIVING SAP

CREATURE 6

UNCOMMON N MEDIUM MINDLESS OOZE

Perception +7; motion sense 60 feet, no vision

Skills Athletics +17, Stealth +10

Str +5, **Dex** -3, **Con** +4, **Int** -5, **Wis** -5, **Cha** -5

Motion Sense Living sap can sense nearby motion through vibration and air movement.

AC 13; **Fort** +18, **Ref** +7, **Will** +5

HP 175; **Immunities** critical hits, mental, piercing, precision, slashing, unconscious, visual; **Weaknesses** cold 10

Adhesive Body A creature that Strikes a living sap with a melee weapon must succeed at a DC 24 Reflex save or be disarmed of that weapon. If the creature critically fails, the weapon ends up in the living sap's space. A creature that hits a living sap with an unarmed attack must succeed at a DC 24 Reflex save or become grabbed by the living sap until the end of its next turn.

Speed 10 feet, climb 10 feet

Melee ♦ pseudopod +17, **Damage** 2d8+8 bludgeoning plus entangling residue

Engulf ♦♦ DC 22, 2d6 acid, Escape DC 24, Rupture 10

Entangling Residue A creature hit by a living sap's pseudopod Strike must succeed at a DC 24 Reflex save or become grabbed until the end of the living sap's next turn.





LOCATIONS

Mokele-mbembes live in tropical jungles close to lakes, rivers, and other bodies of water. They take great care to hide themselves from civilization and other large predators, thus it can take many weeks or months of searching to locate even just their footprints. Travelers rarely encounter mokele-mbembes by accident, but those who do so (and live to tell about it) are considered very lucky indeed.

Mokele-Mbembe

Mokele-mbembes are large, reptilian predators found deep within Golarion's jungles. Mwangi view mokele-mbembes as embodiments of nature's strength and majesty, and they consider the sighting of this rare being a sign of favor from the gods and an omen of powerful natural forces.

MOKELE-MBEMBE

CREATURE 9

UNCOMMON N HUGE ANIMAL

Perception +15; darkvision, scent (imprecise) 30 feet

Skills Athletics +20, Stealth +19, Survival +17

Str +7, **Dex** +4, **Con** +6, **Int** -4, **Wis** +2, **Cha** +0

AC 27; **Fort** +21, **Ref** +15, **Will** +17

HP 172

Speed 30 feet, swim 30 feet

Melee ♦ jaws +22 (reach 15 feet), **Damage** 2d12+10 piercing

Melee ♦ tail +22 (reach 20 feet), **Damage** 2d6+10 bludgeoning

Melee ♦ foot +22 (reach 10 feet), **Damage** 2d8+10 bludgeoning

Trample ♦♦♦ Large or smaller, foot, DC 28

Whip Tail ♦♦ (sonic) The mokele-mbembe cracks its tail, creating a sonic boom in a 5-foot burst centered on a corner within reach of its tail Strike. Each creature in the burst's area must attempt a DC 28 Fortitude save. Mokele-mbembes are immune.

Critical Success The creature is unaffected.

Success The creature is stunned 1.

Failure The creature is stunned 2.

Critical Failure The creature is stunned 3.



Sabosan

Sabosans are evil, intelligent, bat-like humanoids who live in warm forests and drink the blood of other creatures, particularly people. They have thin, emaciated torsos and broad, leathery wings that can reach a span of almost 20 feet. Sabosans' heads, necks, shoulders, and upper chests are covered with red or dark-brown fur that barely obscures their stretched-thin flesh. Their ears are large and pointed like a bat's, and indeed they can echolocate to locate prey much like bats can, though their eyes are also capable of seeing in low light.

Some believe that sabosans are distant descendants of humans who were afflicted with vampirism but managed to avoid succumbing to undeath. Others posit they were once a tribe of demon worshippers whose dark rites transformed them into their current forms. No matter their true origins, sabosans have infamous reputations among residents of towns and cities south of the equator. Even mere rumors of sabosans in an area are enough to set off city-wide hunts, and the truly superstitious aren't above setting fires near every grotto, nook, and foxhole they come across in order to smoke out the nocturnal creatures.

Sabosans hunt during the twilight hours or just after dark, when their echolocation gives them a predatory edge over their sleeping prey. They are capable hunters but indiscriminating when it comes to food sources; their rapid metabolisms means sabosans must eat nearly 20 pounds of meat and fruit per day (supplemented, naturally, with copious amounts of blood).



THE SABOSAN KINGDOM

Sabosans were not always so confined to the edges of the wilderness. Once, many of their kind occupied the stone metropolis of Jaytirian in the heart of the Mwangi Jungle and defended it against the bestial forces of the dread Gorilla King. However, over the last few hundred years, some unknown force drove the sabosans out, and now they roam the Mwangi Expanse in dwindling numbers, searching for a new home.

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SABOSAN

CREATURE 5

NE MEDIUM HUMANOID

Perception +10; echolocation 20 feet, low-light vision, scent (imprecise) 30 feet

Languages Abyssal, Mwangi

Skills Acrobatics +16, Athletics +11, Stealth +16

Str +4, **Dex** +5, **Con** +2, **Int** -1, **Wis** +1, **Cha** +0

Items spear

AC 22; **Fort** +11, **Ref** +14, **Will** +10

HP 78

Speed 25 feet, fly 25 feet

Melee ♦ jaws +14, **Damage** 2d8+4 piercing plus 1 persistent bleed

Melee ♦ claw +15 (agile, finesse), **Damage** 2d6+4 slashing plus Grab

Melee ♦ spear +13, **Damage** 1d6+4 piercing

Ranged ♦ spear +14 (thrown 20 feet), **Damage** 1d6+4 piercing

Drain Blood ♦ **Requirement** The sabosan has a creature grabbed.

Effect The sabosan drains blood from the creature. The creature must succeed at a DC 23 Fortitude save or become drained 1. The sabosan gains a number of temporary Hit Points equal to the number of Hit Points lost by the creature.

Fell Shriek ♦♦ (auditory) The sabosan emits a deafening cry in a 30-foot cone. Non-sabosan creatures in this area must each succeed at a DC 23 Fortitude save or be deafened for 1 minute.

Powerful Charge ♦♦ The sabosan Strides up to double its Speed and then makes a claw Strike. If the sabosan moved at least 20 feet, it deals an additional 1d6 damage on a hit.



Next Month

TOMORROW MUST BURN

by Ron Lundeen

A new threat, the slavers of the Scarlet Triad, must be stopped before they rebuild the slave trade in the recently seceded nation of Ravounel.

RAVOUNEL GAZETTEER

by Ron Lundeen

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Rorsk Axebane

The PCs may have earned themselves their own castle, but their new abode is not in the best condition. Before the place can be made livable, they'll need to repair it—and unless one of the PCs happens to be a stonemason, they'll need to hire help to get it done. Rorsk Axebane is a master stonemason and the owner and proprietor of Breachhill's Tuskhead Stoneworking. He is available for consultation or for hire once the PCs start to look into repairing Citadel Altaerein's crumbling walls and collapsed stairwells. Rorsk is a gruff, no-nonsense expert in his field. His work is functional and solid but tends to be somewhat plain in execution.



Amera Lang

Rorsk isn't the only stonemason in town. If the PCs aren't fans of his somewhat bland style, or if they want to speed along repairs by working on multiple repair jobs simultaneously, Amera Lang of Posandi Bros. is also available for hire. While she works more with bricks and mortar than solid stone, which Tuskhead Stoneworking's masons specialize in, she's no less talented and skilled at the work, and the fact that her designs tend to be more aesthetically pleasing could well be a boon to PCs seeking flourishes and a bit of artistry to the job. But Amera Lang has a secret, one that could well come back to bite the PCs if it comes out: she, and many who work at Posandi Bros., are worshippers of Asmodeus. Amera takes pains to hide her faith from the public eye, but associating with devil worshippers may not be something that the PCs want as part of their reputation.



Huntergate

The facade of Huntergate makes clear its association with the elven deity Ketephys, god of forestry, hunting, and the moon. Images of his sacred animal, the hawk, grace the uppermost reaches of this stone archway, while branches of jungle foliage coil up along the pillars on either side, giving hints as to the portal's destination. That the portal within Huntergate and its connection to the Mwangi Expanse far to the south have been damaged by the presence of Dahak's manifestation isn't immediately obvious until someone tries to activate the *aiudara* portal. But an investigation of the imagery carved into the portal should help prepare the PCs for what awaits them on the far side. With a successful DC 20 Religion check to Recall Knowledge, a PC identifies the portal's association with Ketephys, and on a critical success, they also recognize the nature of the carvings are similar to those used by the Ekujae elves of the Mwangi Expanse in their religious artwork. A PC who succeeds at a DC 27 Nature check to Recall Knowledge confirms that the images of foliage, while stylized, seem to depict species of plants native to jungle environments. This information should help the PCs prepare themselves for what awaits them on the far side—a sweltering environment very different from that of Isger!



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