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Rise of the Runelords

SPIRES OF XIN-SHALAST

By Greg A. Vaughan



PATHFINDER™

ADVENTURE PATH ❄ PART 6 of 6

Rise of the Runelords: SPIRES OF XIN-SHALAST



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"Spires of Xin-Shalast" is a *Pathfinder* Adventure Path scenario designed for four 14th-level characters. By the end of this adventure, characters should reach 16th level. This adventure is compliant with the Open Game License (OGL) and is suitable for use with the world's most popular fantasy roleplaying game. The OGL can be found on page 94 of this product.

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GOBLINS TO GIANTS

That was fast.

Seems like just yesterday I was writing the foreword to *Pathfinder* #1, talking about some town named Sandpoint and why you should watch out for goblins. And now, here I am writing the foreword to *Pathfinder* #6, where the PCs finally confront Karzoug and get to explore the ancient city of Xin-Shalast.

Of course, we at Paizo didn't get here alone. We've had folks like Richard Pett, Nicolas Logue, Wolfgang Baur, Stephen S. Greer, and Sean K Reynolds doing most of the heavy lifting, toiling in those word mines under our direction to build this new world up from scratch. And with this issue, we add Greg A. Vaughan to that list.

Greg's first published adventure was "Tammeraut's Fate" in *Dungeon* #106, a nifty trip to a remote island that just happened to be plagued by the drowned undead, but that certainly wasn't the first adventure he ever wrote. Ages ago, he whipped up a neat little adventure set on the Isle of Dread. It was only a few pages long, but that same adventure would serve him (and Paizo) well, since expanding it out ended up

giving us another adventure called "Torrents of Dread." This one was pretty important for a few reasons. First, it appeared in *Dungeon* #114, which was the official Paizo relaunch of the magazine. Second, it gave us an excuse to run a backdrop on the Isle of Dread itself. The third *Dungeon* adventure path, *Savage Tide*, more or less came to be because of that.

What I'm saying is don't throw away anything you write. Ever. You never know which one of your scribbles might catapult you into the big time.

The thing about Greg's adventures that has always impressed me the most is his knack for catching the excitement of discovering something new. Each of his *Dungeon* adventures was set in an exotic but nevertheless iconic location—be it under pyramids on the Isle of Dread, on haunted islands, in cliff dwellings on the edge of a canyon, inside of a primeval lost valley, in a lost temple dedicated to gods from the far side of the world, or even in the Abyssal kingdom of the Prince of Demons.

For "Spires of Xin-Shalast," I asked Greg to design "a lost city, something like Shangri-la, something like Tamoachan,

and something like El Dorado.” That didn’t intimidate him—instead, he just asked words to the effect of, “Okay, but can I throw Leng into the mix?” Yes, Greg. You can.

Another of Greg’s strengths is his gift with maps—his turnovers are works of art in and of themselves. With a single glance at the map of Xin-Shalast, I could tell everything I needed to know about the place: it was located in the mountains, it was ruined, it was immense, it was epic.

Greg’s already hard at work on the adventure for *Pathfinder* #11, and I’ve already seen the map of the ground floor of Castle Scarwall. It’s looking suitably awesome. But until then, check out what he’s wrought for the finale to *Rise of the Runelords*: a dash of Lovecraft, a pinch of cannibalism, a sprinkling of lost cities of gold, a scoop of mountain climbing, and several thousand tons of giants.

BUILDING KARZOUNG

After the demon lords and undead worm gods who served as the big bad guys of the three *Dungeon* adventure paths, I was really looking forward to building a villain who stayed put on the Material Plane. And more to the point, building one who was just a human. As it works out, a 20th-level wizard is kind of more than a human, but still, there’s something refreshing about a campaign that ends in a throw-down fight against something that the PCs themselves could possibly become.

The trick was that this wizard needed to be tough. He needed to be memorable. He needed to be something that could anchor an entire adventure path. The problem was that our world didn’t have any of those yet—at the time, the world didn’t even have a name!

Fortunately, I had my own campaign to scavenge from. Of course, the original version of Karzoug fought with a scythe and ended up being killed by the PCs inside of Baba Yaga’s hut during an attempt to catapult himself into divinity (Baba Yaga herself wasn’t too keen on that, you can bet!), but nevertheless, he was an evil wizard with a classic bad-guy agenda.

The Varisian version of Karzoug then steeped in a broth that included elements of *Curse of the Golden Flower* (Chow Yun Fat should play Karzoug in the *Rise of the Runelords* movie, is all I’m saying), Wayne Reynolds (who almost accidentally designed the Sihedron Rune, which ended up being the most important symbol in this entire adventure path), and the imaginations of a small army of game designers. The end result begins on page 62 of this book—here’s hoping Karzoug winds up being as memorable a villain for your group as he was to design!

OFF TO KORVOSA!

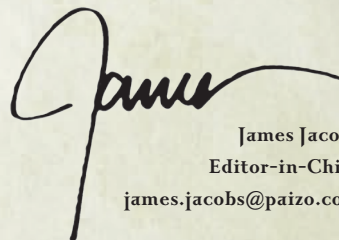
Of course, the end of *Rise of the Runelords* is certainly not the end of *Pathfinder*. In one month, *Pathfinder*’s second adventure path begins with part one of *Curse of the Crimson Throne*—Nicolas Logue’s “Edge of Anarchy.” Although this adventure path certainly has its share of dungeons and wildlands to explore, its overall focus is much more urban in theme than *Rise of the Runelords*. Set in the sprawling city of Korvosa, *Curse of the Crimson Throne* gives the PCs a chance to help shape the future leadership of not just the largest city in Varisia, but of Varisia itself. A more detailed preview of what this campaign entails and the plot it follows begins on page 92, but there’s certainly more to the city of Korvosa than *Pathfinder* #7’s contents.

As with *Rise of the Runelords*, *Curse of the Crimson Throne* will also have a player’s guide you can hand out to your players to help them create their characters.

New equipment, new feats, and a wealth of new background material await them. The *Player’s Guide to Curse of the Crimson Throne* will have a short description of the city of Korvosa, but it’s a big place. Players looking for more information about their characters’ new home should check out the *Guide to Korvosa*, a 64-page gazetteer of this sprawling city. While there’s a chapter in the book detailing GM-eyes-only secrets, the vast majority of this gazetteer is set up something like an immense handout. It’s “in character,” so your players can read through it to become as familiar with Korvosa as they need without you having to worry about them learning any spoilers for the campaign itself.

And finally, we’ve got something special planned—the Varisian Harrow deck. Something like tarot, Varisians have used this deck of cards to tell fortunes and divine the future for generations. Harrow readings will play a key part in *Curse of the Crimson Throne*, helping to guide PCs and aiding (or, in some cases, hindering) their attempt to save Korvosa from anarchy. We’ll even be creating an actual Harrow deck for you to use in your game as a prop!

So go check out that preview at the end of the book, and whet your appetite on the peril that’s coming to Korvosa. Unless you’re planning on being a player in that campaign, of course. If that’s the case... keep out!



James Jacobs
Editor-in-Chief
james.jacobs@paizo.com

RISE OF THE RUNELORDS



SPIRES OF XIN-SHALAST

RISE OF THE RUNELORDS: CHAPTER SIX

At the headwaters of the sacred River Avah rose a mighty city on the slopes of a legendary mountain—a testament to the greed of Runelord Karzoug and his sin-blessed power. This city is Xin-Shalast, and its sparkling Lower City, festooned with the plunder of a thousand campaigns, has remained hidden for millennia in its narrow valley in the shadow of Mhar Massif—a mountain of mythological proportions said to either support the sky or pierce it altogether. Atop the highest peak, bearing the unsettling carved visage for which it was named, stand the fabled Spires of Xin-Shalast, rising above the city like the pinnacles of a crown. Thus did Karzoug show his mastery over both the earth and the realms beyond.

SPIRES OF XIN-SHALAST

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

More than 10,000 years ago, the Empire of Thassilon was ruled by seven tyrannical despots known as runelords, powerful wizards whose magic was aligned on what have become known as the seven mortal sins. When the empire crumbled, these runelords were prepared. They escaped death (or worse) by various methods, entering states of hibernation from which their apprentices and loyal followers would revive them when the right time came. Yet the fall of Thassilon was far more complete and decisive than even the most pessimistic runelords anticipated, and none survived who could free them in the centuries of darkness to follow. In time, they were forgotten.

Runelord Karzoug ruled a land called Shalast, and as the lord of greed, his realm was the most decadent. His capital city, Xin-Shalast, lay nestled in a valley in the mountains, a place of golden streets and silver roofs sprawled in the shadow of volcanoes and watched over by one of the tallest peaks in the world—mysterious Mhar Massif. When the end drew near, Karzoug charged his agents in Runeforge with developing a method for him to escape the fall of the empire, and they responded by taking the location of his palace into account. For the Spires of Xin-Shalast, as his palace was known, were perched at the summit of Mhar Massif, where the boundaries between worlds are thin. Karzoug's agents transformed the source of his eldritch power, a device known as a *runewell*, into a portal of sorts into the void between these worlds. When the end came, Karzoug stepped through this portal and into a state of suspended animation in this extradimensional vault, caught between the mountain of Mhar Massif in this world and a terrible place known as Leng in another. And without surviving apprentices to revive him, Karzoug remained there for millennia.

The tale of Karzoug's awakening, of his slow return to Golarion, has been told over the past five adventures. Karzoug is now nearly ready to step back into this world, his powers restored and his city resurrected, to raise Thassilon from the ashes. Yet there is still time. Karzoug is awake, but though his mind has been hard at work, he cannot yet physically leave his *runewell*. While the stone giant Mokmurian was his primary agent in Varisia, in Xin-Shalast Mokmurian would have been but a captain in his army. The denizens of the ruined city have aligned themselves with Karzoug's banner, and though they bicker and fight among themselves, they are ready to serve him. Among these minions are devils, dragons, tribes of deadly lamias, creatures culled from the madness of Leng, and even platoons of rune giants—a race of giants crafted by the runelords of old, capable of controlling other giants.

With his rune giants, Karzoug's influence over the giants of Varisia will become complete.

Yet Karzoug's agents in Xin-Shalast do not end there, for he has selected new generals, new champions, and even a new apprentice to serve him. The stage is set for the runelord's return, and only one group of heroes stands between him and Varisia.

Adventure Summary

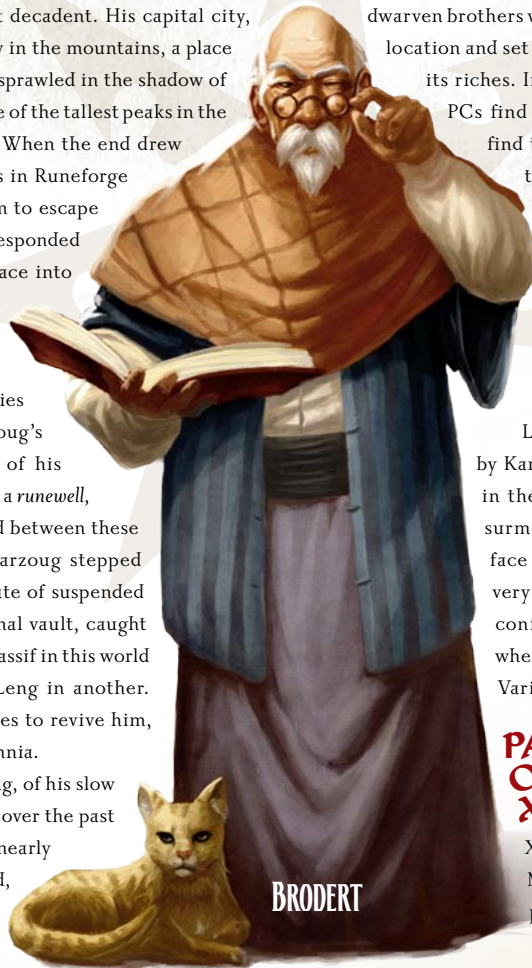
With the magic and lore retrieved from Runeforge, the PCs are finally ready to seek out Xin-Shalast and confront the rising runelord. After researching the ancient and legendary city and discovering that Mokmurian deliberately expunged his route from his notes, the best clue the PCs have to go on is a pair of dwarven brothers who claimed to have discovered the city's location and set off into the Kodar Mountains to plunder its riches. In their cabin in the Kodar foothills, the PCs find more than a map to Xin-Shalast—they find the brothers' ghosts, still tormented by the supernatural creature that slew them so many years ago. By defeating this menace and appeasing the ghosts, the PCs can finally discover the secret route to Xin-Shalast.

Braving the heights of the Kodar Mountains, the PCs face challenges both natural and wholly unnatural in the ruined Lower City, now being slowly reoccupied by Karzoug's army. Finding unexpected allies in the city, the party learns a secret way to surmount the incomparable heights of the face of Mhar Massif, atop which stand the very spires of Karzoug's citadel. Finally, they confront Karzoug himself in his *runewell*, where the fate of the ancient runelord—and Varisia's future—is decided.

PART ONE:
ON THE TRAIL OF
XIN-SHALAST

Xin-Shalast is located high in the Kodar Mountains, cloaked in ageless magic that prevents its approach by most who seek its legendary streets. The boundaries between worlds are transitory here,

a facet the city's founders sought precisely because of the fact that such conditions make it difficult to reach without knowing the way. An idle seeker of Xin-Shalast could walk up one side of Mhar Massif and down the other without ever finding the city—those who seek it actively can spend their entire lives looking without success. The stone giant Mokmurian discovered the city's location only with the aid of several rare books and maps he recovered from the hidden library under Jorgenfist, and he destroyed those sources after committing them to memory.



RISE OF THE RUNELORDS

Handout 1

Salutations, Mr. Quink!

Thank you again for the kind words and drink. It's always a pleasure to speak with readers of my work, especially those well-read and civilized enough to know of my writing beyond *Eidolon*. Alas, I was unable to procure a copy of the early draft from my personal files. It would seem that it has gone the way of so much of my early work, lost forever to the gulfs of time and narrow-minded publishers unable to grasp the import of a young Pathfinder's work.

Fortunately, my mind is as quick now as it was in those early days of my explorations of your fantastic homeland. I recall the evening I first heard the story of Xin-Shalast, while seated on a log in a Varisian camp, sharing ruby mead with an enchanting young woman. Ah, but that's a story for other times.

I was intrigued by the tale, though. All peoples have tales of "cities of gold," yet with Xin-Shalast, the Varisians had no tradition of explorers seeking it. They viewed the place as one of evil, a place to be feared and forsaken. As far as I could tell, none of your indigenous people ever sought out the ruins before the advent of Chelish rule. But there was mention, come to think of it, of two dwarven brothers. Vekker, I think their names were. Claimed to have found the route to Xin-Shalast and convinced several tradesmen in Janderhoff to support and supply their plan to establish a base of operations in the low Kodar Mountains along the Kazaron. Their vanishing into the Kodars bankrupted all but one of their investors, I hear, and even today, the Vekker name is generally accompanied by a litany of rousing dwarven profanity when it comes up in Hoffian taverns.

In the stead of enclosing a copy of the early, complete draft of my work, though, please find a signed copy of *Eidolon* with this missive. I trust it will look quite handsome on your shelf.

In good health,
Redwing

Yet traces remain. A character who researches Xin-Shalast in the library of Thassilon under Jorgenfist and rolls well on his Knowledge check (see the table on page 50 of *Pathfinder #4*) can learn much of the city's location, including the following:

- Xin-Shalast is located on the towering mountain of Mhar Massif, in a valley that lies at the headwaters of the River Avah.
- Mhar Massif itself is said to serve as a bridge to strange realms beyond Golarion.
- Anyone who can find the River Avah can follow it directly into Xin-Shalast.

The problem arises from the fact that this entire region, from the River Avah to the summit of Mhar Massif, lies in a realm where reality has frayed at the edges. In order to reach Xin-Shalast, the PCs need a guide of some sort—someone who has been there before and who can show them the way.

Consulting Brodert

The PCs have likely spoken to Brodert Quink, Sandpoint's local expert on all things Thassilonian, about their discoveries. This adventure assumes he's the one they go to for advice again when they seek answers to finding the hidden city of Xin-Shalast, though they could just as easily consult other experts, ranging from Pathfinders in Magnimar to extraplanar oracles to their own sages and scholars within the party.

Assuming the PCs have stayed in contact with Brodert since his help back during "The Skinsaw Murders," the old sage has begun to see the PCs as his own personal field research team. Certainly, if they share with him confirmation that the Old Light of Sandpoint was once a weapon and thus validate his own educated guesses as to the ruin's original purpose, he is very favorably disposed toward them.

Unfortunately, Xin-Shalast is as much a legend to him as to any other scholar of things Thassilonian. Yet if the PCs ask him about Xin-Shalast, he grows thoughtful for a moment, then snaps his fingers as he remembers an old account of a pair of dwarven brothers who claimed to have discovered the route to the fabled city. After rooting through his books and scrolls for a few minutes, he emerges triumphant with a letter he received from the author of the definitive cyclopedia on the region of Varisia and the Storval Plateau: Cevil "Redwing" Charms's well-known (and well-criticized) volume, *Eidolon*. He allows the PCs to read the letter but won't let them keep it—Redwing is one of his favorite authors, and the letter is a personal treasure. The letter is reproduced as Handout 1.

Brodert has done his own research and can confirm that Silas and Karivek Vekker did indeed abscond with a fair amount of invested capital into the mountains. The common theory in

SPIRES OF XIN-SHALAST



Janderhoff is that the dwarves used the “discovery of Xin-Shalast” as a cover for a con, but those who knew the Vekkers personally held them in quite high regard. Brodert suspects that they did indeed discover Xin-Shalast, and their secrecy was one born of necessity rather than malice. For if they had discovered the great city, until they could return with proof, it would only be wise to guard the discovery. Brodert theorizes that the Vekkers met some sort of foul end in the Kodars, and that if their base of operations could be found (along the banks of the Kazon River, according to Redwing’s letter), perhaps clues to the city’s location could be found therein.

Using Magic

Even if there aren’t PCs in the group who can cast divination spells, they can certainly seek out spellcasters or scrolls in Magnimar to use magic to aid in their search for Xin-Shalast. Unfortunately, most divination spells are somewhat reduced in effectiveness due to the reality-altering region in Mhar Massif’s shadow. Use the results of spells like *commune* and *contact other plane* to steer the PCs in the right direction, but don’t feel bound to answer questions precisely. Spells like *legend lore* reveal all of the bulleted information on page 8, as well as the fact that most recently two dwarven brothers named Vekker claimed to have discovered the route to the city, but after establishing a base of operations in the Kodar Mountains, they were never heard from again.

The World’s Roof

The Kodar Mountains are one of Golarion’s most intimidating and massive mountain ranges. Few places in the world are more inhospitable to life than these mountains, yet life endures here. The extremes make for equally powerful monsters and denizens, of course—only the strongest survive for long in this region, known to the Shoanti as the World’s Roof.

This adventure assumes the PCs come seeking Xin-Shalast by first traveling up the Kazon River in search of the vanished Vekker brothers and, possibly, the River Avah, said to show the route to Xin-Shalast. How the PCs reach the Kodar Mountains is left to them. *Pathfinder* #3’s gazetteer of Varisia should be a great help on this journey, should the PCs decide to make an overland trek. *Teleport* is unlikely to be useful until the PCs actually reach the Kodars and know where they’re going, but spells like *wind walk* and *shadow walk* can make the journey fly by.

A. The Kodar Mountains

Assuming the PCs are traveling up the Kazon River, it is at this point that they transition between rugged foothills and truly intimidating mountains. As long as the PCs continue to travel along the river bank, they find the overland journey somewhat easier—but eventually they need to head into the mountains themselves.

Make sure to be familiar with “Hazards on the World’s Roof,” which begins on page 66 of this volume. The physical dangers

RISE OF THE RUNELORDS

HAUNTS

Haunts function somewhat like traps, but are difficult to detect since they do not “exist” until they are triggered. When a haunt is triggered, its effects manifest at initiative rank 10 on a surprise round; the haunt effect vanishes as soon as the surprise round is over and things return to normal (haunts never persist into actual round-by-round “combat”). Those in the haunt’s vicinity can make a specific skill check to notice the haunt in time to react—if a character notices it, he may make an initiative check to determine when he acts in the round. Once a haunt is active, a successful turn undead attempt against the haunt’s effective Hit Dice ends it immediately, though the character making the turn attempt must notice the haunt and must act before it in the surprise round it is activated. If the turning attempt results in a destruction result, that particular haunt is exorcised and permanently disabled. Once a haunt triggers, it cannot trigger again for 24 hours.

A haunt is assigned a CR score, calculated as if it were a trap. For experiencing and surviving a haunt, award the entire party XP as if it had defeated a creature of that CR. All haunts are mind-affecting fear effects, even those that can produce physical effects.

presented by mountain climbing and high altitudes are, in many cases, as dangerous as the monsters the PCs are destined to face in this adventure, and enforcing these hazards can help to drive home the fact that the heroes are exploring a truly inhospitable range. More to the point, if the players feel the Kodar Mountains are dangerous, they can better understand why Xin-Shalast has remained hidden from the world for so long.

PART TWO: WHISPERS IN THE WIND

The dwarven brothers Silas and Karivek Vekker came to the Kodar Mountains 70 years ago, following up on rumors of an extensive vein of gold in the high mountains. When they found gold in some nearby alluvial glacier deposits, they staked their claim and opened a placer mine. As is often the way of dwarves, they were very secretive about their mine’s location, going as far as to build a cabin and mining headquarters several miles from their claim. They worked their placer mine for several decades but knew it would soon play out, so they scouted deeper into the surrounding mountains, searching the streams and cliff faces for a show of color where they could potentially find new deposits for mining. Their skill at mountaineering and their dwarven stubbornness paid off—they accidentally found the headwaters of the River Avah, and beyond that, Xin-Shalast.

The dwarves only explored the very edge of the city before they were forced to flee from a group of enraged giants. Yet the wealth they saw in the city had done its work—all thoughts of mining for gold had been banished from their minds. Why bother pulling gold out of deep holes in the dirt when you could just pick it up off the ground? Yet Xin-Shalast was far from a safe place, and in order to harvest it properly, the dwarves realized they needed support.

They returned to Janderhoff, where they approached several mining consortiums and quietly secured supplies and financing to begin deeper exploration of Xin-Shalast, proving their claim with the strange relics they’d brought back. The investors asked the Vekkers to keep their discovery quiet and put vast amounts of money at the Vekkers’ disposal. The brothers returned to the north with a small army of miners, explorers, and mercenaries, all eager to make a fortune exploring Xin-Shalast.

Yet the Vekkers’ army never made it to the City of Greed. Only a day after reaching the glacial site of their first mine, an avalanche struck their convoy and carried off all of their supplies. An attempt to retrieve the supplies resulted in the deaths of seven more dwarves. Their return route blocked, the survivors made their way on, hoping to find solace, shelter, and—above all—more food in the storerooms of the Vekkers’ cabin, but upon arriving they found the place had been raided by the abominable snowmen that dwell in the Kodars. No food remained.

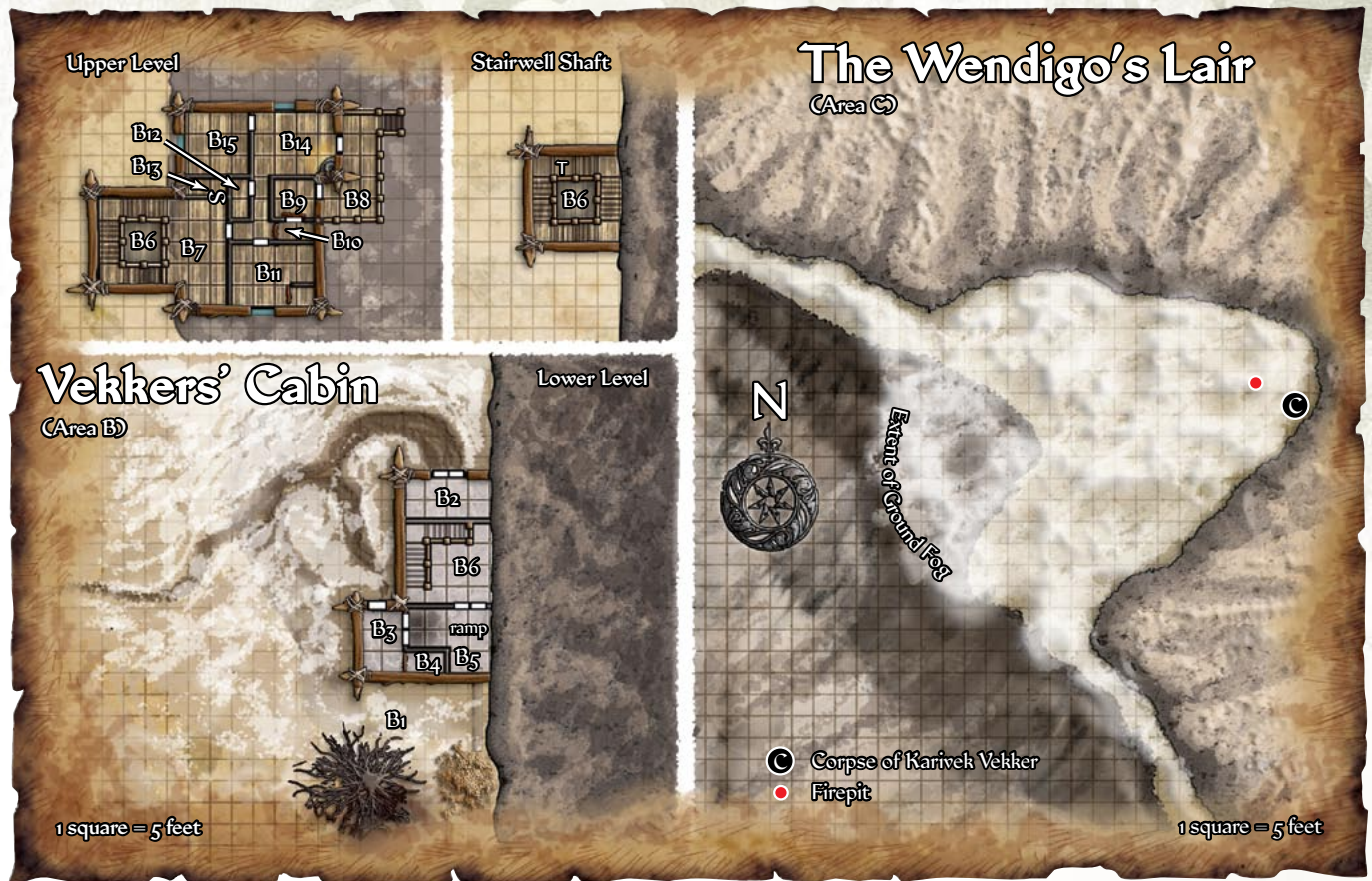
It didn’t take long for starvation to drive the dwarves to desperation and then to madness, and when Karivek suggested cannibalism as a route to regain their strength for the journey back out of the mountains, only his brother Silas and a few other dwarves objected. The dissenters were outnumbered, and with a fury born of madness, Karivek and the rest of the starving dwarves fell upon their companions and fed well for the first time in a month.

Then a curious thing happened. The dwarves found the feast strangely invigorating. Their minds cleared and their strength returned, and with it their greed. The dwarves decided not to turn back, but to continue on into the Kodar Mountains to find Xin-Shalast. As they traveled, those who fell behind or complained or merely had the disadvantage of being the largest among them became new meals, and with each meal, the dwarves felt their strength growing. They paid no attention to the strange whispers on the wind, or to feet blackened by frostbite and falling to pieces, or to the fact that they had been wandering the mountains for days without aim. Eventually, only one dwarf remained—Karivek Vekker. With nothing left to eat, he sat down upon a lonely mountain ledge overlooking the Kazaron River, and as starvation set in once more, he noticed for the first time the whispers in the wind. A shape congealed in the mist before his eyes, and as the source of the cannibal cravings took form in the air before him, as Karivek looked upon the wendigo that had brought the doom upon them all, he attempted to hurl himself off the ledge in despair. The wendigo caught him and dragged him through the sky with such speed that the dwarf’s frostbitten feet were blasted away, and at the end, the evil spirit dropped him from a staggering height. Karivek had nearly a minute to despair and regret before he hit the ground.

Vekkers’ Cabin

Though the placer mine itself was long ago lost in an avalanche, the brothers’ cabin still survives to this day. Anyone who travels

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this far up the Kazaron River can't miss the cabin built of split logs cemented with a rough mortar and a shake shingle roof. The logs and shingles are decades old, and a profusion of lichens growing on these walls gives it a strangely organic look. Each window is 2 feet high by 2 feet wide and has double shutters to aid in keeping out the cold.

No strangers to the dangers presented by the local fauna (especially the abominable snowmen, with whom the Vekkers had countless run-ins), the somewhat paranoid brothers constructed their cabin perched defensively at the edge of a 60-foot-high cliff. The dwarves then constructed a spiraling stair and pulley-and-bucket system leading directly up to the cabin from the base of the cliff. This they encased in a wooden shaft made of the same mortared logs, and built a small storage shed and an addition at the base of the stair where the mined ore could be separated from the worthless gangue before going through all the trouble of hauling it up to the cabin.

Today, the abominable snowmen and other regional beasts avoid the cabin for a singular reason: the place is haunted by the spirits of the dwarves eaten by their kin a decade ago. These haunts aren't evil, but neither do they welcome visitors to the cabin. Driven by the pain and horror of their hideous deaths, these haunts lash out at anyone trying to enter the cabin. Only one spirit among them, the shade of Silas Vekker, retains his mind and wits, but to reach him and learn how the haunted cabin can be put to rest, the PCs must brave the wrath of the rest.

STRONG WOODEN DOOR

hp 20; Hardness 5; Break DC 23; Open Lock DC 30

DOUBLE-SHUTTERED WINDOWS

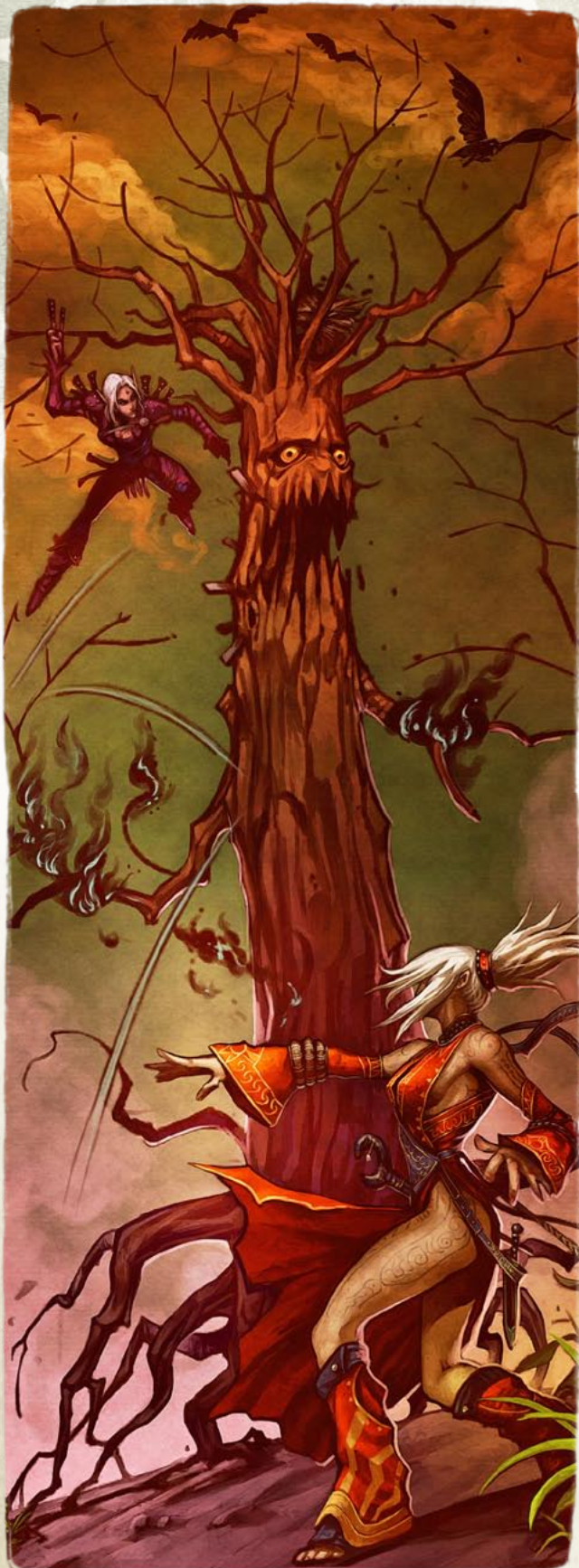
hp 10; Hardness 5; Break DC 18

B1. The Tailings (EL 14)

A split-log tower abuts the cliff face and rises from a workshop on ground level to a larger cabin perched on the cliff's edge sixty feet above. The rough wooden structure is so overgrown with lichen as to almost appear an extension of the rock face. The ground to the south of the lower structure is a steep embankment, over which a chute protrudes from the structure's southern wall. At the base of the embankment is a large pile of fine, black sand that spreads out in a deposit striated by years of erosion. The ground surrounding the pile is barren of any plant life, with the exception of a single sagging pine tree. Faint traces of a footpath lead to the workhouse doors, though it is obvious none have come this way in many years.

The mound of sand under the chute is the leavings from the act of processing gold ore in area B5. To separate the gold from the rock matrix, the dwarves used an arsenic solution. Over the years, this arsenic-rich debris has leached into the surrounding ground and destroyed all plant life in the region, with the exception of the lichens and fungus that grow so well

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on the cabin itself. Anyone coming in contact with the fine black dust risks arsenic poisoning (ingested Fort DC 13; initial 1 Con, secondary 1d8Con).

Creature: Two years ago, a guardian and protector of the upper treeline sensed the presence of poison and pollution here as it leached into the Kazon and flowed downriver. This guardian, an ancient treant, came upon this area and sought to clean up the flora-killing tailings, and while it managed to move many of the contaminants away from where they were leaching into the river, its own exposure to the pollution weakened and eventually killed it.

The death of the noble creature gave the spirits haunting the cabin a convenient corpse to focus upon. This, combined with the corruption and pollution now concentrated in the region, caused the treant to rise the next night as a horrific undead creature. Its once-kindly soul has been replaced with one of eternal hunger and wrath, and it is content now to slaughter any creatures that happen by. After killing them, it flings their shattered carcasses upon the tailings pile and awaits new victims. Now it stands beside the tailings, looking like nothing more than a dead pine tree on the verge of collapse, and does not attack unless PCs come down the embankment to examine the area of the tailings. Later, though, if a lone PC or pair of PCs exits the bottom floor of the cabin, it immediately tries to slay them before they have a chance to escape. It buries its victims shallowly in the tailings pile, where they can be discovered with a DC 16 Search check.

THE HORROR TREE

CR 14

Unique undead advanced treant (MM 245)

NE Gargantuan undead

Init –1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; **Listen** +27, **Spot** +27

DEFENSE

AC 30, touch 7, flat-footed 30

(–1 Dexterity, +23 natural, –2 size)

hp 220 (21d12+84)

Fort +9, **Ref** +5, **Will** +15

DR 10/slashing; **Immune** cold, undead traits

Weakness vulnerability to fire

OFFENSE

Spd 30 ft.

Melee 2 slams +22 (4d6+15 plus fungus)

Space 20 ft.; **Reach** 20 ft.

Special Attacks double damage against objects, trample 3d6+22 (DC 35)

TACTICS

During Combat The horror tree has an uncanny knack for sensing druids, rangers, gnomes, and other creatures with ties to the natural world. It targets these foes over others. The horror tree pursues foes as long as they remain in sight but does not pursue enemies into the cabin (though if foes remain in reach, it does strike at them through open doors and windows).

Morale The horror tree fights until destroyed.

STATISTICS

Str 41, **Dex** 8, **Con** —, **Int** 12, **Wis** 16, **Cha** 18

SPIRES OF XIN-SHALAST

Base Atk +10; **Grp** +33

Feats Awesome Blow, Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Critical (slam), Improved Natural Attack (slam), Power Attack, Weapon Focus (slam)

Skills Knowledge (nature) +25, Listen +27, Sense Motive +27, Spot +27, Survival +27 (+29 in above-ground natural environments)

Languages Sylvan

SQ unholy fortitude

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Fungus (Ex) The horror tree's branches are encrusted with a virulent fungus that grows rapidly when in contact with blood, sending filaments ripping through the bodies of any living creatures damaged by its slams and dealing 1d6 points of Dexterity damage in the process. A creature brought to 0 Dexterity by this effect is slain.

Unholy Fortitude (Ex) The horror tree gains bonus hit points equal to its Charisma modifier times its Hit Dice, and a bonus on its Fortitude saves equal to its Charisma modifier.

Treasure: A hollow in the undead treant's trunk hides some treasures it has gathered over the years. These can be found with a DC 20 Search check of its body and consist of a large black opal worth 2,000 gp, a cracked leather backpack containing a broken rock hammer and 43 gp, 12 +2 crossbow bolts of distance, and a sealed pocket flask holding an *elixir of the peaks*.

B2. Storage Shed

This rickety lean-to has a steeply sloping roof. A lock bars the doors, but it is so badly rusted that a DC 12 Strength check or 5 points of damage (hardness 6) shatters it. Within are the dusty remains of a once-thriving mining enterprise. The rotten remnants of wheelbarrows, shovels, picks, ore sacks, plates for panning, and sluices for separating placer deposits are stacked in a jumble. These are all covered in a thick layer of frost and have deteriorated to the point of uselessness.

B3. Lower Entry

This room has a bare plank floor. A wide double door stands to the east, and next to it a shabby curtain closes off another opening. The room's dry boards still appear to be stout, having successfully remained sealed from the elements over the years.

The outer door to this room is locked. The lock has corroded but is still strong—in fact, the corrosion has increased the Open Lock DC to 33.

This room served as the secure entry where the brothers could bring the ore they recovered from their mine for processing. The doors to the east are also locked, though they are not corroded and require only a DC 30 Open Lock check.

B4. Sack Room

Beyond the curtain is a small, barren chamber. A wood-frame cot rests against the far wall with a rough, straw-tick mattress and a threadbare

ELIXIR OF THE PEAKS

Aura moderate transmutation; **CL** 7th

Slot —; **Price** 2,450 gp

DESCRIPTION

You gain the Altitude Affinity feat (see page 68) and the ability to scale and survive in mountainous terrain with great skill, gaining a +10 competence bonus on Climb checks and Survival checks in mountainous terrain (these bonuses stack with the bonus on Survival checks provided by the Altitude Affinity feat). In addition, you gain the benefits of an *endure elements* spell. The effects of this elixir wear off after 8 hours.

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Craft Wondrous Item, *endure elements*, *spider climb*; **Cost** 1,225 gp, 98 XP

blanket. A pair of old work boots, crusted with the dried remains of old mud, still sits under the cot.

When a new load of ore was brought in from the mine, the Vekker brothers were loath to leave it unattended until it had been safely stored away in their strong room. To this end, they worked night and day in the separation chamber, but even their hardened dwarven constitutions required occasional breaks. When this occurred, one of the brothers slept in this chamber to ensure that thieves would be unable to break in and make off with the gold.

Treasure: A +1 *punching dagger* is hidden in the left boot. The deathblade poison that once coated the blade has long since dried and flaked away, leaving only a slight discoloration.

B5. Ore Separation (EL 8)

This air in this long-sealed chamber is putrid. The back wall is the solid rock of the cliff face. A ramp rises from the western door to a height of five feet, which is the elevation of the rest of the plank floor. Mounds of dust and rocky debris clutter the floor, while rusty mechanical equipment, large copper tanks, and several rock-crushing and chipping tools sit upon sagging wooden tables. The handle of a shovel sticks up from a debris pile immediately below this aperture. Two pairs of elbow-length, thick leather gloves, stained from long use, hang from hooks beside the north doors.

The Vekker brothers carted their placer deposits into this chamber to remove the gold ore from the gangue. They used an arsenic solution to chemically separate the minerals. Raw gold was carted into the next chamber to be stored safely in their cabin. The leftover debris was then shoveled through the barred window, where it was deposited in the tailings pile outside. The heavy window is latched from this side and can be easily opened (treat as a strong wooden door), but the iron bars cannot be removed from the frame, blocking access from outside.

This entire room is heavily tainted with arsenic deposits, especially the mounded dust and rubble on the floor. Anyone

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exposed to this material, either from falling prone in it or even by just having an open wound while in this chamber, is exposed to a high concentration of arsenic poisoning (ingested Fort DC 15; initial 1 Con, secondary 1d8Con).

Haunt: The Vekkers had enough gold to buy food to last them years, but nowhere from which to buy any, a powerful irony that Silas obsessed on in the final days before he was murdered by his brother. His spirit, still driven by hunger, manifests in this room as he appeared in life in healthier times, as a balding dwarf with a few facial scars and a full beard separated into two lengths by gold rings. When the PCs first enter this room, Silas appears to be squatting in the southeast corner of the room, his back to the doors as he scoops up handfuls of gold dust from the ground near the chute. When the PCs enter, Silas turns around, gold dust thick in his beard and dripping in slobbery strings from his lips, and says, "You! You have to try this! It's so... delicious!" As he says this, he stuffs another handful of gold dust into his mouth and swallows. Of course, the "dust" he's eating is in fact arsenic-tainted grit.

GOLD-EATING DWARF CR 8

Notice automatic; Effective HD 16

EFFECTS

Trigger proximity; **Reset** automatic (24 hours)

Effect Silas's words function as a mass

suggestion spell; anyone who hears him must make a DC 19 Will save to resist the compulsion to scoop up and eat a handful of the arsenic-tainted dirt on the floor of the room. The haunt enhances the already deadly effects of the arsenic in this case—anyone who eats the stuff must make a DC 20 Fortitude save to avoid taking 2d6 points of Constitution damage, and then 1 minute later must save a second time to avoid taking another 2d6 points of Constitution damage. Silas watches as anyone eats, and as the victim feels the poison flowing through his system, the haunted character sees Silas suddenly shrink in on himself, grow emaciated, and then fly apart in a red explosion of bite-sized morsels of flesh and bone. An instant later, he is gone.

B6. Ore Shaft (EL 8)

The description of this area depends on whether the PCs enter from the bottom or from the top. The following description assumes the party has entered from the bottom. Modify it accordingly if they come from area B7.

The three wooden walls of this musty shaft abut the natural stone of the cliff face to the east. A sturdy-looking wooden stair and rail starts at the bottom of this shaft and circles up into the heights, running clockwise. Above, its passage is lost in the gloom, like the musty interior of an ancient silo. No windows pierce the wooden walls. Propped against the east wall near the door is an upended wheelbarrow.

The Vekker brothers built this enclosed stair to create a secure way to access their cabin above. A great ore bucket hangs at area B7, which they lowered with a winch to load the gold gleaned from the separation chamber. The wheelbarrow was used to cart the gold to the ore bucket.

The stairs rise 60 feet to area B7 and are sturdy and in good repair despite their age. A trap is set 50 feet up the stairs. The Vekker brothers deactivated this trap in area B11 or just jumped over the steps whenever necessary.

Trap: A section of trapped stair (marked on the map) is 50 feet above the floor of area B6.

Placing any amount of weight on one of these three steps causes that section of the step and rail to collapse outward, dumping anyone on them into the central shaft of the stairwell. The collapsed steps and rail can

be reset by a lever hidden in room

B11. Anyone who fails his Reflex save

and falls from the stairs can attempt a DC 20 Jump check to try to leap out and grasp the ore bucket hanging down the middle of the shaft. If the Jump check is successful, then a DC 15 Strength check or Climb check allows the dangling character to clamber up into the bucket (it can hold one Medium creature). Anyone hanging from or in the

bucket can get it swinging enough in 4 rounds to leap back to the stairs. A simple DC 10 Dexterity check is sufficient to make the leap once the bucket is swinging far enough. Modify the check accordingly if a character tries to jump early or is helped by his compatriots in extricating himself from the ore bucket.

TIPPING STAIRS

CR 5

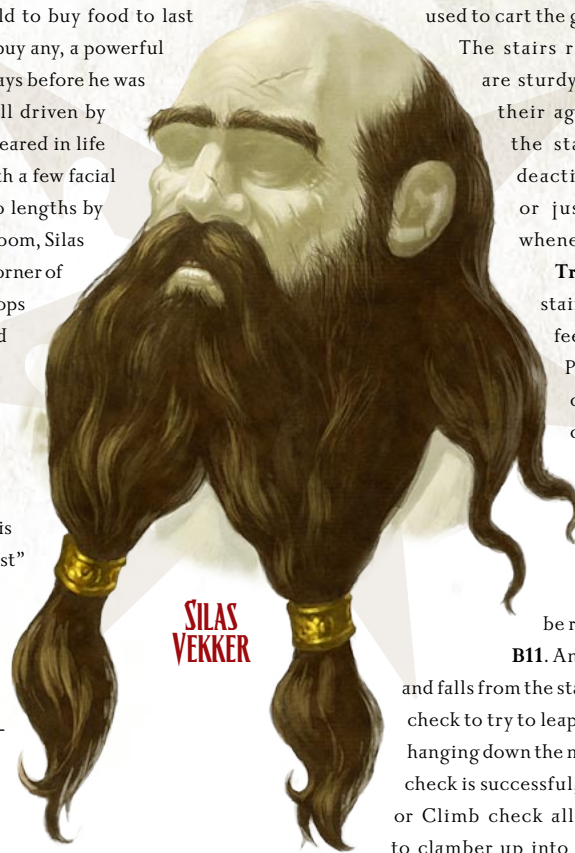
Type mechanical; **Search** DC 27; **Disable Device** DC 25

EFFECTS

Trigger location; **Bypass** (hidden lever in area B11); **Reset** manual

Effect DC 20 Reflex save avoids; 50-ft. fall (5d6, fall)

Haunt: As soon as the tipping stairs are triggered (or just before the PCs are about to exit the room), the spirits haunting the cabin manifest by animating the chain hanging from the ceiling here. The chain twists like an immense snake as it animates, coiling over and across itself and swinging the metal ore bucket with deadly effect. Unlike most haunts, the animated chain persists for 5 rounds. Treat it as a colossal animated object, save that it can only strike targets in the stairwell or in area B7 and has a speed of 0 feet. Though the chain only takes up a 5-foot square, its reach accounts for much of its size.



SILAS VEKKER

SPIRES OF XIN-SHALAST

HAUNTED CHAIN**CR 7**

Animated object (MM 14)

NE Colossal construct

Init 10 (fixed); **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Listen -5, Spot -5**DEFENSE****AC** 11, touch -1, flat-footed 11

(-8 size, -3 Dexterity, +12 natural)

hp 256 (32d10+80)**Fort** +10, **Ref** +7, **Will** +5**Defensive Abilities** Hardness 10; **Immune** construct traits**OFFENSE****Spd** 0 ft.**Melee** slam +25 (4d6+13)**Space** 5 ft.; **Reach** 60 ft.**Special Attacks** constrict 4d6+13**TACTICS****During Combat** The haunted chain lifts anyone it constricts to the top of the shaft and on the next round drops him after attempting (and possibly succeeding) on a second round of constriction damage.**Morale** The haunted chain continues its attacks for 5 rounds or until destroyed.**STATISTICS****Str** 28, **Dex** 4, **Con** —, **Int** —, **Wis** 1, **Cha** 1**Base Atk** +24; **Grp** +49**SQ** haunted**SPECIAL ABILITIES****Haunted (Ex)** The chain is haunted, and as such can be affected as a standard CR 7 haunt by turn undead checks. Its effective Hit Dice against turn undead checks is 14 HD.**B7. Tower Loft**

Windows, tightly shuttered against the cold, are set in the north, south, and west walls at the top of this dark, plummeting shaft. A heavy winch bolted to the balcony supports a rusty chain that runs up through a pulley mounted in the roof of the shaft and from which hangs a heavy iron bucket. Heavy wooden chocks have been nailed to the floor at the edge of the balcony, and the front wheel of a wheelbarrow rests against them.

Here, the Vekkers hauled up the gold from their mine for safe storage. The winch is still functional, though extremely rusty, and can be used to raise or lower the ore bucket between here and the floor of area **B6**. A full bucket can be raised at a rate of 10 feet per move action with a DC 15 Strength check for each 10 feet—the empty bucket requires no Strength check). Lying nearby is a 10-foot pole with an iron hook at the tip. This was used by the dwarves both to open and close the shuttered windows and to drag the ore bucket over to the balcony, where its contents could be dumped into a wheelbarrow. The windows, unlike most of those in the rest of the cabin, are shuttered from the inside.

A DC 30 Search check reveals the skillfully disguised secret door to room **B13**.

**HAUNTS AS STORYTELLERS**

Most of the haunts in this section of the adventure don't provide much of a challenge for 15th-level characters, but that's not really their goal. These haunts are included more to help build on the themes and mood of the adventure, of how greed can lead to terrible ends if not kept under control. Further, haunts are an excellent way for an adventure to give the players some backstory to events in the area. By the time the PCs finish their initial exploration of the cabin, they know most of the gruesome details of what happened here, and they learned of those details in an interactive way that, ideally, immerses them more in the adventure's story than would simply reading aloud some text.

—James Jacobs

B8. Front Porch (EL 5)

A rough porch with crudely crafted handrails extends from the front of this cabin. A short stair descends to the ground at its north end. The eaves of the overhanging roof are festooned with dozens of animal skulls, including bears, deer, aurochs, and various other animals. The posts supporting the overhang and the outside edge of the handrail itself are hung with racks of antlers. A stone chimney rises next to a door on the porch, and a couple of split logs have been set on the raised porch as furniture.

The Vekker brothers supplemented their carefully hoarded supplies with whatever game they could hunt. There is nothing of note among the many trophies here. A signboard mounted above the front door bears faded but still legible print in Dwarven naming this the "Vekker Mining Co., Headquarters." The front door is not locked but is stuck in its frame, requiring a DC 18 Strength check to open.

Haunt: Have each PC make a Spot check when the group reaches this area. No matter what the results are, tell the player who had the highest result that he feels strange here, as if he were being watched by something or someone. Since, by this point, the blizzard created by the wendigo is likely in full force, you can even tell this player he might have seen a humanoid shape staggering in the snow just at the edge of vision to the east. This is a manifestation of Silas Vekker as he attempted to escape his hunger-mad kin by racing into the snow. One round after this brief glimpse, the haunt manifests in force as Silas notices the characters.

PARTIALLY EATEN DWARF**CR 5****Notice** Spot DC 25 (to notice the shape turn to face the party);**Effective** HD 10**EFFECTS****Trigger** proximity; **Reset** automatic (24 hours)

Effect A dwarven man (recognizable as the same one from the haunt in area **B5**) staggers out of the snow. His eyes are wild with fear, his clothes in tatters, and blood drips from several cuts on his exposed flesh. When he sees the PCs, he cries out, "RUN! RUN FOR YOUR LIFE! THEY'RE GOING TO EAT YOU!" With that, the dwarf flees into the snow. All PCs in the area must make a DC 20 Will save to avoid being overcome

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with the conviction that the other members of the party are cannibals and are about to attack them—those who fail this save become panicked for 1d6 rounds, dropping all held items and attempting to flee from their allies at top speed. Characters who race blindly into the blizzard in this manner have a flat 50% chance each round of running off the edge of the cliff, in which case they fall 60 feet to the ground below.

B9. Entry

This simple chamber has a worn hide rug covered with muddy stains before the door, next to a rickety chair. A thick blanket covers the opening to the south.

The door can be locked and has brackets for a bar, though no bar is present.

B10. Coatroom

This tiny chamber is stuffy and lightless. Heavy blankets hang as curtains across two archways. A wooden bench rests against the south wall under which is arrayed an assortment of shabby foot gear. Above it is a row of hooks, a number of which hold dusty garments.

The dwarven miners removed their dirty clothing here to create some modicum of cleanliness in their cabin. Beneath the bench are six pairs of dried and cracked leather boots of various types, all sized for dwarves. They include everything from rough-soled climbing boots to hip-high waders for panning cold mountain streams. The various garments include oiled rain slickers, winter coats, and mud-stained dungarees and coveralls. These are likewise all proportioned for a dwarf and are largely ruined from moths and dry rot.

Treasure: Concealed beneath one of the rain slickers (DC 10 Search check), a +2 *earth breaker* (see *Pathfinder Player's Guide*, page 11) leans against the wall, purchased from the Shoanti long ago.

B11. Bunkroom

A large, worn elk hide is spread across the floor of this bunkroom. Another old, moth-eaten hide covers the entry into a small closet. Windows look out to the east and to the south. A crack runs through the thick panes of the southern window. A set of rough-made bunk beds stands against the north wall next to the door, an old coat with holes in its elbows hanging from one post. The bunks themselves have flat, straw mattresses and layers of heavy blankets piled at their feet. An old metal coal box rests on one for use as a foot warmer. A rack on the west wall holds a crossbow, two axes, and a light wooden shield. Beneath it is a large leather chest. A hooded lantern hangs unlit from a rafter.

The Vekker brothers shared this bunkroom. Nothing in it is of any value, and the weapons and shield are warped and useless. The leather trunk holds only mundane articles of rough clothing, a few grooming items, and various small trinkets of Shoanti manufacture. One of the unoccupied pegs on the weapons rack is

actually a lever that resets and deactivates the trap in area B6. It can be discovered with a DC 20 Search check. The cracked window has only 2 hit points remaining. The curtained closet is actually a privy with a wooden bench and an old rusty bucket. Hanging from a small hook are a number of torn papers. If examined these turn out to be broadsheets from Korvosa, dated 12 years ago. The Vekker brothers were not avid readers, but they saved every scrap of paper they could find to serve other purposes.

B12. Storage Closet

This chamber contains heavy shelving and still holds the detritus and debris accumulated over decades of habitation.

All manner of odds and ends for the maintenance and upkeep of the cabin and the mining venture can be found herein under a thick layer of dust and ancient rodent droppings. There is nothing of particular value, but feel free to throw in any mundane items you see fit, such as a pair of snowshoes or a tinder box.

B13. Strong Room

Seven large burlap sacks sit against the northern wall of this small room, while to the west sits a small desk and chair. A leather-bound ledger lies atop the desk.

The walls and door of this chamber are reinforced with double thickness. The secret door is locked and requires a DC 35 Open Lock to penetrate. Otherwise, treat it as a portion of the cabin wall with double hit points and +10 to the Break DC.

The ledger on the desk contains several detailed maps of the regions the brothers were mining, and locates all of their assay points and mines. Notes on the payout of each mine are listed—it appears that all of them have played out without imparting any particularly rich lodes. Several pages near the end of the ledger have been torn out—these once contained the brothers' notes on the location of Xin-Shalast. Silas tore them out when he realized how important the discovery was, committed them to memory, then burned the pages.

Treasure: Here, the Vekkers stored the gold from their mine after the ore was separated in the building below and hauled up through the shaft. The door creaks loudly when opened (by design to alert the Vekkers to thieves). Within are seven burlap sacks. Five are stuffed with gold dust and are worth 1,000 gp each. The last two actually hold gold nuggets and are worth 1,500 gp each. Each sack weighs 40 pounds. Hidden behind one of the sacks is a small coffer holding 14 uncut gems the brothers found, worth 50 gp each.

B14. Living Area (EL 8)

This room obviously doubled as the main living quarters and kitchen for the inhabitants of the cabin. A stone hearth and chimney occupy the southeast corner, with an iron hook holding a cauldron above the

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grate. The rest of the room is in a horrific state—firewood, cooking utensils, pots and pans, and even the furniture lie in scattered heaps. A painting of two dour-looking dwarves standing in front of an enormous elk hangs askew on the northern wall. Ancient bloodstains mar the walls and floor and bits of overturned furniture here and there, but there are no bodies.

This is where the Vekker brothers took their meals and spent most of what little leisure time they had. The painting clearly depicts two dwarves with a family resemblance; they are Silas and Karivek Vekker. The painting was made years ago in Janderhoff, where the brothers posed with a stuffed elk to commemorate their hunting prowess in the Kodar Mountains.

The disarray and blood are all that remains of the terrible fight that broke out in this room when Karivek and his dwarves decided cannibalism was the only solution. The fight spread out onto the porch and surrounding ledge relatively quickly, but here there have been no scavengers to remove the results of that fight.

Haunt: As the PCs investigate this room, they begin experiencing subtle twinges of hunger. Without much more warning, those twinges erupt into full-blown pangs of painful starvation and unholy urges to feast on their companions. While these hunger pangs pass quickly, the damage to the mind is more persistent.

CANNIBAL URGINGS**CR 8**

Notice Wisdom check DC 18 (to notice sudden twinges of unnatural hunger); **Effective** HD 16

EFFECTS

Trigger proximity; **Reset** automatic (24 hours)

Effect When the hunger pangs strike, all characters in the room must make DC 20 Fortitude saves to resist taking 10d6 points of nonlethal starvation damage from the sudden phantom hunger. Accompanying this ravenous sensation is the conviction that only the flesh of the other PCs can satiate the hunger. Any character who took starvation damage must then make a DC 20 Will save to resist taking 2d6 points of Wisdom drain as the cannibal urges overwhelm the PC and drive him to the brink of madness.

B15. Larder (EL 10)

The door to this room is heavy and seals with the surrounding frame, requiring a DC 15 Strength check to open.

This bare-floored room has a series of iron hooks suspended from the rafters. The window in the far wall looks out over the edge of the cliff and, unlike others in the cabin, has no glass or shutters—only a tight lattice of iron bars. Against the far wall sits a four-foot-tall mound of bones—dwarven bones, by the look of them.

The dwarves used this room for their cold storage. In all but high summer it remained cooler than the rest of the cabin and allowed their meats and foodstuffs to last a little while without spoilage. The close-set bars on the windows likewise kept out vermin, other than flies and mosquitoes in the warmest months, and the toughened dwarves were not overly picky about the condition of their meals.

The bones are the remains of the four dwarves, including Silas Vekker, who were killed and eaten a decade ago. An investigation of the remains followed by a DC 20 Heal check is enough to learn that the bones have been picked clean and are, in many places, scraped and gnawed by what would appear to be dwarven teeth.

Haunt: The first person to examine the bones is in for a rough surprise—on one of the bones, he recognizes his own jewelry: a ring on a skeletal finger, a necklace draped over a ribcage, or a belt dangling over ivory hips. With this discovery comes the conviction that the bones are, in fact, that character's own. An instant later, that character becomes surrounded by a whirling storm of shadowy forms as the ghosts of the cannibalized dead attempt to add that PC to their number.

THE HUNGRY DEAD**CR 10**

Notice Listen DC 25 (to hear the rising whispers and slobbering grunts of the hungry dead); **Effective** HD 20

EFFECTS

Trigger touch; **Reset** automatic (24 hours)

Effect To observers, the haunted character suddenly begins thrashing wildly, as if dozens of invisible hands were tugging and pushing him about the room. At the same time, bloody wounds from invisible teeth appear across the victim's body. The haunted character perceives that he has suddenly been surrounded by a dozen emaciated but fantastically strong dwarves, all of whom are attempting to eat him alive. The ghosts make 10 attack rolls against the PC at a +15 bonus; each hit deals 2d6+7 points of damage and threatens a critical hit on a 19–20. A character reduced to –10 hit points by these bites is torn apart so that nothing remains but a red skeleton draped in his gear.

Cannibal Fury (EL 12)

As the PCs finish exploring the cabin, they should be able to piece together some of what occurred here more than a decade ago, but unfortunately find the place to be devoid of any real clues as to Xin-Shalast's location. The true source of this information, the ghost of Silas Vekker, has yet to properly show itself—but before it does, the unquiet spirits haunting the cabin have one final cacophonous assault in mind.

This final haunting is more complex than those that take place in specific rooms—this is a multi-stage haunt that should play out, to a certain extent, like a highly scripted combat. It can begin at any point you wish—preferably after the PCs have already experienced most or all of the other haunts the cabin has to offer. If the PCs decide to spend the night in the cabin, this event plays out not long after they bed down. High-level PCs have access to teleportation and other effects, though, and chances are good you won't get the opportunity to have this final event occur in the dead of night. In that case, try to time the haunt so that it occurs at a natural climax to the exploration of the Vekkers' cabin, perhaps just after the PCs have experienced the last haunt, or just after they discover the secret strong room in area B13.

Haunt: This haunt starts innocently enough, with strange sounds from elsewhere in the cabin indicating that the PCs aren't the only ones here. These sounds rapidly grow in power, until it

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seems as if an entire army of invisible, shrieking lunatics is on the loose. Unlike a normal haunt, each of these haunts takes place over the course of a full round (not a surprise round). Allow the PCs to take actions as they wish each round; the haunt's actions always occur on initiative count 10.

CANNIBAL FURY

CR 12

Notice Listen DC 25 (to hear the sound of knocking downstairs);
Effective HD 24

EFFECTS

Trigger timed; **Reset** none

Effect This complex haunt adheres to the following round-by-round schedule.

Rounds 1–3: Allow the PCs to each make a DC 25 Listen check. Anyone who succeeds hears a faint knocking coming from the lower portion of the cabin, probably the outer door at area **B3**, as if some lost traveler were seeking shelter from the storm. PCs in the lower rooms of the cabin or the stair shaft need make only a DC 10 Listen check to hear this knocking. The knocking continues for 3 rounds, during which time PCs might head down to see whom it might be. Attempts to see the ground outside the cabin are fruitless due to the whirling snow flurries, unless the PCs are within 5 feet, and then they still see nothing present that could have caused the knocking.

Round 4: The strange knocking grows silent for 1 round.

Round 5: A loud crack followed by a mighty hammering sound suddenly fills the cabin as its walls begin to shake and groan, almost as if the structure were giving up its purchase on the cliff edge and sliding off. On each PC's turn, he must make a DC 15 Balance check; failure indicates he cannot move for that round, while failure by 5 or more indicates he falls prone. A character in area **B6** at this time falls off the stairs if he falls prone.

Round 6: The hammering continues, but now the faint images of starving dwarven ghosts can be glimpsed out of the corner of the eye. Each character suddenly experiences painful hunger pangs and must make a DC 15 Fortitude save to resist taking 4d6 points of nonlethal damage.

Round 7: Voices can now be heard, in most cases wordless cries of pain, but now and then snatches of sentences like "eating us..." or "don't let him..." or "so hungry..." The hammering continues, but now the starving ghosts seem to notice the PCs for the first time. Each PC must make a DC 18 Will save—failure indicates that the haunt possesses him as the ghosts themselves seem to flow into the PC's body.

Round 8–10: For the last 3 rounds of this complex haunt, the shaking and hammering continues. Characters possessed by the haunt do not need to make Balance checks to move and take whatever actions they can to render non-possessed characters unconscious or helpless, using whatever tools they have at their disposal. If a possessed character is adjacent to a helpless, non-possessed character and is not threatened by any other non-possessed character, he attempts a coup de grace action against the helpless character.

Round 11: With a sudden lurch, the haunting stops. Possessed characters immediately regain control of their faculties. The cabin

shows no signs of damage from the violence aside from anything the PCs themselves have done to it. A few rounds later, Silas Vekker finally manifests before the PCs as detailed in the next section.

A Ghost's Plea

The Cannibal Fury haunt ends abruptly not because the unquiet spirits have had their say, but because one among them retains fragments of sanity. This is the spirit of Silas Vekker, and just as it takes the angry ghosts of his kin several rounds to ramp up to the fury evidenced at the height of the climactic haunting, it takes him about a minute to finally gather the energy to quell these spirits. When he does, the ghosts vanish in an instant, save for one.

Silas Vekker is the same spirit the PCs might have encountered elsewhere in the cabin—a balding dwarf with a dark brown beard. His facial features are curiously indistinct—he has no eyes, for example, and when he speaks, his lips barely even move. Maintaining this manifestation is tremendously draining for the spirit, and he can do so only for a short amount of time. As he speaks, bite-sized bits and pieces of him tear loose and fade, leaving him a growing patchwork of red until finally, not enough of him remains and the entire thing fades away.

Silas Vekker's speech to the PCs is short and to the point.

"You... you are alive? You do not hunger? Ah... that is what I sense in your blood. Greed. You seek the City of Greed. You should abandon your quest, lest you end up like me. Cold. Dead. Eaten. But I suspect you cannot be swayed. Know then that I know the way to Xin-Shalast. I can show you the way, but only if you bring me my brother. He died on a ledge high above our final mine. I can feel his soul out there, still hungry, still insane. Bring his bones to me so that I might reconcile with him. Once he is at rest, I will show you the way so that I might rest as well..."

Silas's spirit doesn't have enough energy to maintain rational discourse for long—certainly not long enough to speak much more than his tale above. After delivering his message to the PCs, the ghostly dwarf shimmers and fades away. He and the other haunts in the cabin remain quiet for a full week thereafter. If after that time Karivek's bones have not been returned, the haunts resume their normal patterns of haunting.

Hungry Ghost (EL 15)

Karivek's body lies on a high mountain ledge overlooking the final mine the brothers worked before they discovered Xin-Shalast. The location of this ledge and mine are indicated on the regional map as area **C**. Discovering this location via divination spells is certainly one option, but PCs lacking these resources need to recover the ledger from area **B13**. The location of the final Vekker mine is indicated in that book—at the base of a 2,000-foot-tall cliff in the mountains, 15 miles north of the cabin. The remnants of what was once a well-worn trail between this mine and the cabin still exist, but it takes a DC 25 Survival check to follow it. Otherwise, the journey to Karivek's body is one through trackless, rugged mountains.

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The cliff itself is relatively sheer, and for the purposes of searching for the proper ledge, thankfully free of many areas that would qualify. Unfortunately, this means that the sheer cliff face also presents a difficult obstacle for characters unable to fly, teleport, or otherwise bypass the climb. The wind around the cliff is strong and the cliff face icy, so it takes numerous DC 30 Climb checks to scale it.

The ledge in question is near the mountain's peak above. Trailing to a 5-foot-wide shelf to the northwest and southeast, the ledge deepens into a large flat area in the middle. The ground here is rough and uneven, covered with rubble and rocks and counting as difficult terrain. Further, the presence of Karivek's unquiet spirit causes a layer of thick fog to obscure the ground to a depth of 1 foot. This fog extends out over the cliff and down 30 feet from the edge, so that a character unable to see through the fog who moves through a square adjacent to the edge must make a DC 15 Reflex save to avoid stumbling and falling into a 2,000-foot fall into the mine digs below.

Near the eastern end of the ledge, a small number of gravestones protrude from the mist. As Karivek neared the end, guilt and remorse for his heinous acts of murder and cannibalism faded in the stark face of starvation, and the gravestones, each marked with dwarven names (including that of his brother, Silas), were a last-minute attempt to atone for his deeds. Despite the dozen or so grave markers, there's only one body here, and it's not even buried.

Creature: Karivek's body lies near a long-dead fire pit in the eastern portion of the ledge, frozen solid and preserved by the cold mountain air. The corpse still wears its padded armor, but is itself in frightful shape. Not only is it broken and mangled, as if it had fallen from a great height, but the body's legs end in charred, blackened stumps where the feet had been burnt off.

In life, Karivek was a gifted and adventurous miner—he and his brother were something of a legend in Janderhoff for their eagerness to seek out incredibly dangerous places to mine. Karivek could have had a quite comfortable life, plying his skills closer to home, but his adventurous spirit would have never let him settle down. Now that same spirit remains here, transformed by his hunger and guilt and fear into a powerful ghost. He remains hidden until his corpse is touched, at which point he flies up out of the mist to attack. In death, Karivek's mouth is filled with fangs.

KARIVEK VEKKER

Male dwarf ghost expert 14 (incorporeal) (MM 116)

NE Medium undead

Init +6; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +10, Spot +10

Aura horrific appearance (60 ft., DC 22)

DEFENSE

AC 17, touch 17, flat-footed 15

(+5 deflection, +2 Dexterity)

hp 91 (14d12)

Fort +6, **Ref** +6, **Will** +12

Defensive Abilities +4 turn resistance; **Immune** incorporeal traits, undead traits

CR 15**KARIVEK VEKKER****OFFENSE**

Spd fly 30 ft. (perfect)

Melee vicious bite +15 touch (3d6+7/18–20 plus eater of flesh)

Special Attacks frightful moan (DC 22), telekinesis (CL 14th, DC 22)

TACTICS

During Combat Karivek uses his frightful moan on the first round of combat, then uses telekinesis to hurl non-flying foes off of his ledge. He focuses his melee attacks on larger foes—victims with the most meat on their bones.

Morale Once Karivek engages in battle, he fights until destroyed, knowing he will just rejuvenate in a few days.

STATISTICS

Str —, **Dex** 14, **Con** —, **Int** 13, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 20

Base Atk +10; **Grp** —

Feats Endurance, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Great Fortitude, Skill Focus (Profession [miner])

Skills Climb +17, Craft (armorsmith) +18, Craft (blacksmith) +18, Hide +10, Knowledge (geography) +18, Knowledge (nature) +18, Listen +10, Profession (miner) +21, Search +26, Spot +10

Languages Common, Dwarven, Giant

SQ rejuvenation

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SPECIAL ABILITIES

Eater of Flesh (Su) As a victim of the wendigo's insidious disease prior to his death, Karivek retains a portion of that sickness within his very being. On a successful critical hit with his bite attack, the ghost tears away a chunk of flesh and consumes it (the flesh becoming ethereal and vanishing as he does so)—this deals 1d6 points of Constitution and Charisma damage to the victim.

Rejuvenation (Su) Until his bones are returned to the Vekkers' Cabin, Karivek's ghost rejuvenates 2d4 days after it is destroyed.

Vicious Bite (Su) Karivek threatens a critical hit with his bite on a natural roll of 18–20. His fangs become solid and razor sharp as they cut through flesh but ignore armor, allowing him to attack with his bite as a touch attack. Karivek adds 1-1/2 times his Charisma modifier as damage to his vicious bite attack. Wounds caused by his vicious bite are deep and gory, continuing to bleed for 1d8 points of damage per round for 4 rounds after they are dealt. This bleeding cannot be staunched by nonmagical means, but any amount of magical healing stops it at once.

Treasure: Karivek's corpse still wears his +4 improved cold resistance padded armor, but his other gear has long since gone missing.

The Wendigo Siege (EL 17)

Once the PCs defeat Karivek's ghost and secure his body, they need only return it to the Vekkers' Cabin. Unfortunately, doing so is made more complicated by the wendigo's mounting wrath. The horrific outsider is displeased with the PCs' meddling in its cannibal tableaux and steps in to punish them and ideally induct them into its monstrous ways. The PCs have already heard its howl once as they approached the cabin the first time, and one of them might even be haunted by the monster's dreams. As they return to the cabin, the wendigo howls once again, also creating a new blizzard to hinder movement and ideally catch the PCs in an open area on their way back from the Vekkers' final mine.

When the PCs return to the cabin with Karivek's bones, a strange sense of calm seems to fill the structure. Even the howling sounds of the blizzard outside seem muted and quiet. As soon as the PCs bring the bones to area B14 (or wherever Silas manifested to them to ask this favor), Silas Vekker appears again, an expression of sadness and forgiveness on his face. Yet Karivek is not yet quite ready to accept his brother. The cannibal ghost manifests as well, his corpse crumbling to dust and reforming his ghostly incarnation—though he doesn't attack the PCs, his horrific appearance might cause them problems still. The two ghosts silently face off against each other, seemingly caught in a struggle of wills as wispy strings of ectoplasm and wafts of ghostly presence lash out and coil about one another.

All Silas needs to calm his brother's spirit is time—10 minutes is enough. Unfortunately, the wendigo can sense the reconciliation and the impending loss of its masterpiece, and it quickly takes action against the cabin and the PCs inside.

Creature: The wendigo does not initially attack the PCs directly, preferring to wage a psychological war of fear and terror against them. If they're caught outside in the blizzard, it follows them in

THE PLATEAU OF LENG

Leng is a remote location on another plane, one mostly unknown to Golarion's scholars but referred to obliquely in certain ancient and blasphemous tomes. The runelords of Thassilon knew of it and often drew creatures from its frozen, inhospitable reaches to do their bidding.

Though Leng itself has traditions beyond *Pathfinder* (see the "Lovecraftian Locations" sidebar), in the *Pathfinder Chronicles Campaign Setting*, Leng is an obscure and difficult-to-reach plane—one that has strange ties to the dimension of dream. This is a desolate realm inhabited by semihuman cannibals, immense intelligent spiders, flying draconic creatures, and other horrific monsters. Immense mountains, some of which seem impossibly tall, hedge in Leng from every side.

Leng has normal gravity and time, is finite in size, and is divinely morphic, though what kind of gods exist therein who can transform the realm is unknown. Leng is strongly chaotic aligned and mildly evil aligned.

snow form, turning solid now and then to make flyby attacks against stragglers or anyone who becomes separated from the group.

Once the PCs return to the cabin, though, the wendigo's tactics become more physical. The monster lays siege to the cabin, smashing its walls and roofs with its powerful claws in an attempt to tear the place apart and to get to the souls inside. Left to its own, the wendigo can use its dream haunting ability against the reconciling brothers, infusing them both again with cannibal urges and madness. This overwhelms Silas over the course of 10 minutes, transforming him into a cannibal ghost as well (use the same stats as Karivek)—if this occurs, the PCs must slay the wendigo and then defeat both rejuvenated ghosts before Silas can attempt to heal the rift between himself and his brother.

Of course, if the PCs remain in the area, the wendigo does not ignore them. It stalks around the cabin, howling and roaring and smashing walls and windows until it finds living victims, at which point it attacks with a murderous fury.

WENDIGO

CR 17

hp 279; see page 88

TACTICS

During Combat The wendigo prefers to attack lone targets if it can, but it doesn't shrink from multiple foes if confronted with such. It focuses its attacks on the weakest-looking or most lightly armored foes at first, and if it manages to establish a hold on a creature, flies at least 200 feet into the air before dropping its foe onto the rocky ground below, after which it returns to the cabin to finish off anyone still within.

Morale If reduced below 40 hit points, the wendigo assumes snow form and flees into the mountains—it does not return to reassert its dominance over the region any time soon.

Development: If the wendigo is defeated or driven off, Silas wins the silent confrontation with his brother in 10 minutes, at

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which point Karivek's ghost suddenly relaxes and sighs. His teeth return to normal and his feet grow back before he fades away into nothingness. Silas turns to face the PCs, his expression now at peace but not without an element of sadness. His final words to the PCs before he fades are a warning.

"You have saved my brother. You have saved me. I should reward you by simply taking the path to Xin-Shalast with me into the beyond, yet I sense that you still harbor a desire to see those golden ruins. Very well. Look to the pages of my ledger for the way, and may Torag watch over you in the darkness to come..."

As he finishes speaking, Silas fades away as well. As he does, several parchment pages appear and float lazily to the ground. These are the missing five pages from Silas's ledger from area B13, and they provide exacting details on the route to Xin-Shalast.

Ad Hoc XP Award: If the party puts the Vekkers to rest and secures the route to Xin-Shalast, grant them a CR 15 experience award.

PART THREE: ON THE WORLD'S ROOF

Once the PCs have secured the missing pages of the Vekker ledger, they have in their hands an incredible treasure. The route to Xin-Shalast would be a physical trial even without the influence of intruding realities and the disorienting effects of Leng's proximity to the world—with those in play, only by sheerest luck could anyone hope to find the lost city of greed. Such was the Vekkers' luck a decade ago when they first found the ruins while searching for mining locations.

The first step for the PCs, according to the Vekkers' directions, is to continue traveling up the Kazon River until they reach the second tributary. The ledger identifies this river as the legendary River Avah, yet it also says the winding route between the Kodar Mountains is not one for the faint of heart. There are no banks to walk along and the river itself often rises in cataracts of up to 300 feet in height as it climbs ever higher into the mountains. The waters of the River Avah are freezing cold, yet they themselves never freeze. As the PCs follow the river upstream, the air grows thin and the sky a deep blue. From leaving the Kazon to the point just south of the Icemists (where the PCs move onto the smaller scale "Environs of Xin-Shalast" map), they climb thousands of feet to a height of 15,000 feet above sea level—consult "Hazards on the World's Roof" on page 66 for rules and guidelines on how to handle adventuring in this hostile environment.

Eventually, the PCs reach the River Avah's source, yet even then they find no indication of the ruined spires of Xin-Shalast. Here, the ledger tells the PCs they must fast and wait for a night with a full moon, whereupon the remainder of the route is made clear to them, for here is the edge of Leng's otherworldly influence upon Golarion. Natural creatures are skittish in this region, and with the exception of magically compelled animals, animal companions, and familiars, no animal willingly travels into the region depicted on the Environs of Xin-Shalast



LOVECRAFTIAN LOCATIONS

Leng and Kadath are the creations of H. P. Lovecraft, immortalized primarily in his short novels "The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath" and "At the Mountains of Madness." Leng seems to serve several roles in Lovecraft's writings, and it's unclear if it's a real place in the Antarctic or the Himalayas or a fantastic place in the mystical realm of Earth's Dreamlands. For *Pathfinder*, we're treating Leng as another plane, one that overlays the Material Plane slightly in the Kodar Mountains but is itself another place entirely that exists in a forgotten and remote corner of the Outer Planes and is inhabited by creatures inimical to sane life.

Kadath can be reached by passing through Leng, but does not itself reside in Leng. In Lovecraft's writings, this is where the Gods of Man dwell, but in the *Pathfinder* Chronicles campaign setting, Kadath is a place of horror and nameless dread, where entities uninterested in the affairs of mortals hold court and lay their monstrous plans. What exactly Kadath equates to in your game is left to you—all it needs to do for "Rise of the Runelords" is add a flavor of menace and mystery.

Neither Leng nor Kadath serve much more of a purpose in "Rise of the Runelords" than as names for the alien realms that overlay this region of the Kodar Mountains and help to make Xin-Shalast difficult to discover. If you aren't fond of the concept of using these locations in your game or of having Leng be an Outer Plane, you can change the names without impacting the adventure itself at all. Likewise, if you're looking for more information about Leng and Kadath in the context of RPG games, you should check out Chaosium's excellent *Call of Cthulhu* RPG, particularly their sourcebook, *The Complete Dreamlands*.

—James Jacobs

map. Particularly sensitive intelligent creatures can sense the inherent "wrongness" of the region as well—any character who can make a DC 20 Wisdom check feels distinctly unwelcome in the region and suffers nameless feelings of dread and worry. These sensations have no game effects but should serve to keep the PCs on their toes nonetheless.

Anyone attempting to enter this region must make a DC 25 Will save or unknowingly and unintentionally wander out of the region after following a curving path that takes him back into a region of the Kodar Mountains not influenced by Leng. This warping of reality affects even attempts that use ropes or other methods of marking progress, shifting things subtly so that an explorer who fails the Will save simply emerges on the opposite side of the region without actually ever traversing the realm within. A character who makes the Will save after entering this region finds he can come and go as he pleases, yet the feeling of wrongness from Leng's proximity persists.

A character under the effects of *protection from chaos* gains a +2 bonus on this Will save. *True seeing* allows the character to come and go as he wills as well, bypassing the save. Once inside the zone, he need not maintain *true seeing* until he wishes to leave the area, in which case he must make the DC 25 Will save to

RISE OF THE RUNELORDS

avoid finding that the distortion works in reverse and that, no matter what route he takes, he constantly finds himself returning to Leng's heart. A character who attempts to teleport into this region from outside (or out from within) must make a DC 30 Caster Level check or the spell fails.

A nonmagical method to cleanse the body and mind and ease the journey into Xin-Shalast exists as well—this is the method the Vekkers accidentally stumbled upon when they camped at the region's boundary at the current source of the River Avah while searching for a new mine. They had extended their assaying trip an additional week and were forced to ration their food supplies. Anyone suffering nonlethal damage from starvation who stands at the source of the River Avah during a full moon can make a DC 15 Spot check to notice what appears to be a ghostly afterimage of the River Avah continuing up into the mountains to its original source from before geologic activity in the region altered it. Once this ghostly river is spotted, a character can follow it with ease as long as he continues to suffer from starvation; following the ghostly river (shown as a dotted line on the Environs of Xin-Shalast map) eventually leads the PCs to the lower city of Xin-Shalast—but not before passing through one of the region's more dangerous areas.

Queen of the Icemists (EL 16)

Soon after the phantom river leads into the Xin-Shalast environs, it comes upon a frozen swampland shrouded in glittering clouds of ice crystals. This rime-encrusted marsh is known as the Fen of the Icemists. Once the crystal-clear headwaters of the sacred River Avah of ancient Golarion myth, this lake was clogged with silt by several volcanic eruptions at the time of Thassilon's fall, creating this treacherous and unique high-altitude fen. The waters of the Icemists are in a constant state of freezing and thawing, with the mix of high altitude and latent volcanism creating a mist-shrouded frozen region of water and swaths of icy mud. No plants exist in the Icemists apart from the ever-present stalks of strange pale fungi and clots of floating lichens that cover and hide deep tarns of freezing water.

The Fen of the Icemists is riddled with hummocks of solid ground and protruding rocks. A careful traveler can move through the fen without falling into the water, but doing so requires a DC 25 Survival check, made once per hour. On a failed check, a random member of the party falls through a patch of thin ice into the freezing waters of a 1d10×10-foot-deep tarn. A creature so submerged takes 3d6 points of cold damage per round—the hole through which he fell through refreezes in only 1d4 rounds. A character who attempts to extract someone through the hole must make a DC 15 Balance check to avoid breaking through the ice himself. A lone victim can attempt to climb out of the hole by making a DC 20 Climb check followed by the DC 15 Balance check to avoid falling back in before reaching more solid ground.

The Fen is about 2 miles wide, but due to the treacherous nature of the path, travelers on foot move at 10% their normal speed.

Creature: Aside from the occasional flying creature, few beings dwell in the freezing waters of the Icemists. One notable exception is a capricious nature spirit—an icy nymph named Svevenka. She makes her presence known to the PCs at some point as they pass through her fen, appearing as a beautiful elven woman with long dark hair and exaggerated ears and limbs. She watches them carefully in hiding as an otter hidden in the water and attacks them only if they disrespect the swamp. If one of the PCs is particularly loud or obnoxious, she attempts to tease that character a little by casting *baleful polymorph* on him. She only attacks the PCs if they're blatantly disrespecting her swamp or if they take her *baleful polymorph* joke poorly.

If, on the other hand, there are any PCs in the party who helped put Myriana's troubled spirit to rest in "The Hook Mountain Massacre," Svevenka recognizes them. Myriana was Svevenka's cousin, and she felt her kin's death as a stab in her own heart. Svevenka learned of the PCs role in putting Myriana's spirit to rest through her various fey contacts, and when she recognizes them here in her home, she is moved to reveal herself, her relationship to Myriana to them. In thanks for what they did, Svevenka warns the PCs that all is not right in the region, and that they would do best to avoid traveling further north.

If the PCs reveal to the nymph their plans to assault Xin-Shalast, she grows thoughtful and perhaps a bit excited. While she does not wish to leave her beloved Icemists unprotected, she volunteers her aid, telling the PCs that this place can be a safe harbor for them if they wish. She'll even put her spells at their disposal. Svevenka knows quite a bit about the region, and if the PCs ask for advice, she can warn them about the giants, lamia, and abominable snowmen that dwell in Xin-Shalast. She can also warn them about the region's proximity to Leng, although she doesn't know the name or nature of this alien realm. She does know about the occluding field around Mhar Massif's peak, and suspects both that the denizens of Xin-Shalast created the field to protect it and that they must have some magical method of protecting themselves from the field, but these are merely guesses on her part.

SVEVENKA

CR 16

Female icy nymph druid 8 (MM 197, *Advanced Bestiary* 150)

CN Medium elemental (augmented fey, cold, extraplanar, water)

Init +6; **Senses** low-light vision; Listen +23, Spot +23

Aura blinding beauty (30 ft., DC 20), cold (10 ft., DC 22)

DEFENSE

AC 28, touch 21, flat-footed 22

(+5 deflection, +6 Dexterity, +5 natural, +2 shield)

hp 161 (14d8+98)

Fort +20, **Ref** +18, **Will** +22

DR 10/cold iron; **Immune** cold; **Resist** fire 30

Weakness vulnerable to fire

OFFENSE

Spd 30 ft., swim 20 ft.

Melee +3 dagger +18/+13 (1d4+2/19–20 plus icy touch) or icy touch +15 touch (1d6 cold)

Special Attacks exude ice, icy touch, stunning glance (DC 18), wild

SPIRES OF XIN-SHALAST

shape 3/day (Large)

Spell-Like Ability (CL 7th)

1/day—dimension door

Spells Prepared (CL 15th)

8th—finger of death (DC 24)

7th—heal, wind walk

6th—antilife shell, greater dispel magic (2), transport via plants

5th—baleful polymorph (DC 21), call lightning storm (DC 21),
commune with nature, cure critical wounds (2)

4th—air walk, control water, cure serious wounds (2), ice storm

3rd—cure moderate wounds (3), dominate animal (DC 19), quench,
sleet storm

2nd—barkskin, bear's endurance, cat's grace, chill metal (DC 18), gust
of wind, lesser restoration, resist energy

1st—charm animal (DC 17), cure light wounds (3), obscuring mist (2),
speak with animals

0—cure minor wounds (3), guidance (3)

TACTICS

Before Combat Svevenka casts barkskin, bear's endurance, and cat's grace on herself before revealing herself to the PCs.

During Combat Svevenka's first action in combat is to cast antilife shell.

She then relies on this spell to keep enemies from engaging her in melee while she summons creatures and uses ranged spells against foes. If her foes manage to engage her in melee, she wild shapes into a dire bear to continue the battle.

Morale Svevenka fights until brought below 25 hit points, at which she flees using transport via plants to escape to the opposite side of the Ice mists; she does not seek another confrontation with the PCs.

STATISTICS

Str 8, **Dex** 22, **Con** 24, **Int** 16, **Wis** 22, **Cha** 20

Base Atk +9; **Grp** +8

Feats Ability Focus (blinding beauty), Dodge, Mobility, Natural Spell, Weapon Finesse

Skills Balance +11, Climb +4, Concentration +24, Diplomacy +13, Escape Artist +15, Handle Animal +14, Hide +15, Knowledge (nature) +21, Listen +23, Move Silently +15, Sense Motive +15, Spot +23, Swim +24

Languages Aquan, Common, Sylvan

SQ animal companion (none currently), ice mastery, nature sense, resist nature's lure, trackless step, unearthly grace, wild empathy +19, woodland stride

Gear +3 dagger, ring of force shield, ring of greater fire resistance

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Cold Aura (Su) Svevenka emits an aura of cold to 10 feet. Any creature in this range takes 2d6 points of cold damage per round, with a DC 22 Fortitude save halving the damage for that round. Svevenka can suppress or resume her cold aura as a free action. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Exude Ice (Su) At will as a full-round action, Svevenka can exude a circle of slippery ice in a 20-foot-diameter spread centered on her. This ice remains in the affected area, melting away as normal for the ambient temperature. Moving into a square of ice costs 2 squares of movement, and the DC for Balance, Climb, and Tumble checks in the area increases by +5.



SVEVENKA

Ice Mastery (Ex) Svevenka gains a +1 morale bonus on attack and damage rolls if her foe is touching ice. She never slips or slides on ice unless she wishes, and can climb icy surfaces as though affected by a spider climb spell.

Ice Touch (Su) Svevenka's touch deals 1d6 points of cold damage. Attacks she makes with metallic weapons deal +1d6 points of cold damage as well. Anyone who suffers this additional cold damage must make a DC 22 Fortitude save or be paralyzed for 1d4 rounds. The save DC is Constitution-based.

D. Giant Sentinels (EL 15)

At this point along the ghostly river's route, the phantom waters are joined by what appears to be an ancient road. The road is paved with flat stones that have a faint sheen of gold to them. This road continues north to Xin-Shalast—from this point on, the PCs have a physical route to follow and need no longer depend upon the phantom waters of the Avah. The road itself is 100 feet wide, its surface patchy here with swaths of ice but providing a welcome flat surface upon which to travel.

Creatures: A small tribe of cloud giants has been ordered by their rune giant masters to guard this approach to Xin-Shalast. The giants dwell in a cave overlooking the road—the 60-foot climb up to the cave requires a DC 20 Climb check. Two of the four giants stand guard at the cave entrance at all times, taking shelter behind several immense boulders so as to hide their presence from intruders.

RISE OF THE RUNELORDS

GIANTS OF XIN-SHALAST

Many giants dwell in Xin-Shalast, mostly cloud giants and frost giants, but with a few taiga giants (*Pathfinder* #4) and storm giants thrown into the mix. Without exception, these giants have all fallen under the control of the revived rune giants of Xin-Shalast. Before Karzoug's waking 5 years ago, the cloud and frost giants of Xin-Shalast lived in a dozen different bickering tribes, but under the new regime they have reverted to the enslaved minions of Thassilon's glory days.

All of the giants encountered in Xin-Shalast possess telepathic links with a rune giant within the city itself. They can use this telepathic link to inform their lords of the PCs, and in so doing alert the city of their approach. This mental link and command functions similar to *dominate monster* (CL 20th), and can be dispelled. A giant freed from his rune giant master becomes panicked and attempts to flee the environs at once—only if magically compelled does a freed giant even contemplate a return to Xin-Shalast.

The control exerted over the giants by their masters is much more subtle than that of most *dominate monster* effects—it's a DC 30 Sense Motive check to sense this enchantment effect.

CLOUD GIANTS (4)

hp 178 each (MM 120)

TACTICS

During Combat When the giants spot intruders, they start throwing rocks on the surprise round. The sound of the rocks smashing into the ancient road below is enough to draw the other two giants from the cave's depths in only 2 rounds. The four giants gain cover against attacks from below from their positions behind boulders, and continue attacking with hurled boulders until foes confront them in melee. If foes flee to the north toward Xin-Shalast, the cloud giants *levitate* down to the road and give chase.

Morale The giants fight to the death unless freed of their slavery to the rune giants.

Treasure: The giants have gathered a total of 1,265 gp in coins, a chest of copper bars worth a total of 500 gp, and a fine cave bear cloak worth 2,000 gp.

PART FOUR: XIN-SHALAST

Xin-Shalast. Fabled city at the edge of reality. A stepping stone between this world and that which is Beyond. Doorway to the Plateau of Leng. The spired city of Xin-Shalast has stirred the imaginations of poets and madmen for thousands of years—quite a feat for a city that has been lost to exploration in all that time. Cradled against the slopes of one of the tallest mountains on Golarion, tales of Xin-Shalast have called it the cradle of life, claim it to have been built by the First Race, and hold its streets to be of gold and towers to be of ruby and diamond. Time and legend have a way of making such distortions seem like fact, yet Xin-Shalast is indeed a place of wonder, mystery, and danger. Once the crown jewel of the nation of Shalast, and arguably the greatest

of all Thassilon's capitals, Xin-Shalast has remained hidden from prying eyes for ages, preserved against the steady march of decay by its proximity to other worlds, where the very rules of existence are twisted and wrong. Today, high in its mystical mountain valley, when the wind cuts just right between the jagged peaks, listeners can still sometimes hear the otherworldly voice of the Ancients piping, "Tekeli-li... Tekeli-li...."

Despite its legendary status among explorers and scholars (most of whom argue that, if indeed the place ever existed, it is certainly gone now), Xin-Shalast is a very real place. The former capital of Shalast, Domain of Greed, and one of the seven rune-cities of Thassilon, the city is actually comprised of two distinct entities. Xin-Shalast Major, known more commonly by its inhabitants as the Lower City, occupies a long valley at the foot of the great mountain of Mhar Massif. Xin-Shalast Proper, also known as the fabled Spires of Xin-Shalast, sits high upon the southern slope of Mhar Massif, just below its demon-haunted summit. This was the personal palace and fortified citadel of the Runelords of Greed, a line of eight archmagi that ended in the reign of Karzoug the Claimer. From this perch, the current runelord could survey his city in the valley below.

The ancient citadel of the Spires of Xin-Shalast is further explored in Part Five—this section is concerned with the Lower City itself. In its heyday, the Lower City was a booming metropolis unnaturally sustained in one of the most forbidding environments of Golarion, high in the Kodar Range, by the will and magical might of the Runelord of Greed. The citizens believed that the runelord's magic was all that kept the three ever-simmering volcanoes of the nearby peaks quiescent, though even in the years after Thassilon's fall, only one major eruption occurred (see area I).

At its height, Xin-Shalast's population consisted of a varied mix of races. The bulk of its citizens were humans, yet they could not be called the movers and shakers of the city. At the top of the city's hierarchy were the bestial lamiakin, Karzoug's favored servants, valued for their ability to erode the will of dissenters and magically compel their victims. As with the other six runelords, giants of all types answered the Runelord of Greed's call as well, serving as shock troops and enforcing his will across the length and breadth of Shalast. The giantkind were controlled by a relatively small tribe of rune giants, unnatural creations whose sole purpose was to dominate the lesser giant races in the runelord's service. Below these groups came the various humanoid races who comprised the majority of the city's population and filled the provider caste, performing the roles of artisans, entertainers, and merchants to keep the economy and infrastructure of the empire alive. Beneath all of these was the slave caste, almost always humanoids from neighboring nations (particularly from Bakrakhan to the west), segregated into a fortified district of the city when not going about their daily labors. Upon their backs lay the task of maintaining the empire, and their lot in life was a hard one indeed, rarely allowing survival past middle age.

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Apart from all of these groups within the city were the many dragons who owed allegiance to Karzoug. These great beasts laired mainly in the Teeth of Karzoug's mountain citadel or in caves along the slopes of the mountain and Garavar's Gorge. Some few chose to dwell in the Lower City itself. The dragons answered to none save Karzoug and the most highly placed Harridans of the Mountain, as well as the occasional rune giant assigned to oversee a flight of (usually young) dragons.

Today, very few humans remain in the city of Xin-Shalast. The bulk of the city is uninhabited, yet over the past 10,000 years, the giants and lamias have retained their presence here. Now that Karzoug is awakening, they are eager to see the ancient tales handed down by their ancestors once again come to life.

City Overview

What was once a vibrant, cosmopolitan city built miraculously above the 15,000-foot mark is now a desolate ruin of cyclopean proportions. Still mind-boggling in its scope and grandeur at first glance, on closer inspection it is a mere shadow of its original glory—a sterile, forsaken shell. Only with recent events have the ruins of Xin-Shalast begun to come to life once again. With the stirring of its former master in the spires upon the mountain above, this haven of evil has begun to attract the descendants of those who once owed him fealty. Though the city is still vastly underpopulated and largely deserted, new dangers roam its echoing streets and forgotten passages in addition to the natural hazards to be found in this bleak locale at the edge of the world.

Even today, the most striking aspect of the Lower City is its epic size. Designed to house hundreds of thousands of souls in close quarters, a sizable portion of them giants, everything about Xin-Shalast is massive. Buildings tower to great heights, byways are wide and lined by massive columns, doorways are cavernous openings, and building interiors are composed of great hollow chambers like the naves of primeval cathedrals. When first viewed from the entrance pass into the valley, the proportions of the city make it seem much smaller than it really is. Only when the viewer realizes the distances and scale involved does he grasp the true scope of this monstrous place. Read or paraphrase the following description when the Lower City is first viewed from its southern entrance.

This tableau defies belief. A narrow mountain pass opens into a glacial valley extending north and then turning to the west at the base of the vast mountain at the far end. Filling this valley is an ice-capped city of enormous proportions. The near end is mostly blocked by a huge fortress of smooth black stone, with multiple towers rising from its high walls. Exiting the bailey of this fortress is a massive causeway of gold that dominates the city as it travels down the center of the vale. Enormous towers and spires of many-colored stone pack both sides of the central thoroughfare, rising to prodigious heights and giving the illusion that the road itself is a valley. The eastern slope of the valley has been partially subsumed by an ancient glacial flow—nearly a quarter of the city appears to have been so buried. That section is now little more than a great mass of ice, with the jagged angles and

XIN-SHALAST'S HEYDAY

This sidebar provides a glimpse into what Xin-Shalast looked like at the height of Karzoug's rule. In a place as rife with mystery and unknown power as Mhar Massif, it is not impossible that a group of intrepid adventurers might find themselves transported in time to that ancient era, facing the challenges and dangers of a very-much-alive Runecity of Greed.

XIN-SHALAST

Metropolis magical (runelord); **AL** NE

GP Limit 100,000 gp; **Assets** 1,445,000,000 gp

DEMOGRAPHICS

Population 289,000

Type integrated (human 75%, giant 12%, lamiakin 9%, other 4%)

AUTHORITY FIGURES

Karzoug, Runelord of Greed, Tyrant of Xin-Shalast, Suzerain of Greater Shalast, Protector of Thassilon, Champion of the Rune Law, etc. (NE male human transmuter 16/archmage 4); **Khalib**, Apprentice of Karzoug (NE male cloud giant wizard 14); **Mother Pampa-Ogeyek**, Chief Inquisitor (NE female lamia harridan bard 7/assassin 1); **Turengate**, Grand Polemarch of the Shalastine Hordes (LE male rune giant fighter 5); **Ethelcar**, Provost Marshal of Xin-Shalast Major (CE female advanced lamia matriarch rogue 3/assassin 4); **Brinius Vale**, Commandant of the Shahlaria (NE male cloud giant fighter 2/blackguard 7); **Aguinbreke**, Commissar of Xin-Shalast (CE male ancient blue dragon)

peaks of ruined structures poking through its topmost layer here and there. Where the valley curves slightly to the west, the structures, if anything, grow even larger, becoming truly gigantic as they climb up and over the rocky spur. At the far end of the valley, the city abuts the lower slope of a truly massive peak. Yet the city builders appear to have taken no heed of this change in slope, for the great causeway merely elevates at a steep angle and continues to climb the increasing slope in a nearly straight line, transforming into an immense stairway. Additional buildings cling precariously to the mountain face alongside the causeway, growing even larger and more impressive as they ascend. The gigantic buildings finally give way a few thousand feet above, but the mighty road continues to wend its treacherous way to just below the mountain's peak. There, a spired citadel looms, its size and proportions truly magnificent. It, too, fails to summit the mountain—instead, its topmost spires end just below the dominant face of a stern man, carved into the peak of the mountain and surveying the city below. The otherworldly quality of this strange panorama is further reinforced by the sound of the cold winds slicing across the high peaks, making strange cries and shrieks in the ether.

As mentioned, the structures are universally of massive proportion with multiple levels, usually in the form of towers of various shapes, and are mostly covered in a thin rime of hoarfrost. Strong winds and the lurking presence of Leng work to prevent much in the way of actual snowfall in Xin-Shalast, but here and

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SPIRES OF XIN-SHALAST

there small drifts lie against buildings or mounds of stone. Built as they were by giants, the buildings are incredibly durable, with thick walls and roofs, and have largely remained intact through the ages. Many have holed roofs or crumbled sections but remain structurally sound; very few beyond specific areas of the city mentioned below have crumbled into true ruin. The structures of the Lower City are reminiscent of the ancient architecture of vast proportions that can still be found in other parts of Varisia, such as the Storval Stair or the Irespan of Magnimar. Other than these similarities and a propensity for multi-balconied spires, the actual buildings of Xin-Shalast are extremely dissimilar, built in a great variety of exotic styles reflecting the various giant races, multiple cultures of the subjugated peoples, and magnificent architectural skill and magic once available to the Empire of Thassilon.

The Lower City of Xin-Shalast is divided into seven districts, each of which had its own consul appointed by the Harridans of the Mountain during the city's height. These consuls led their districts and made sure they were run in a manner consistent with the principles of greed and dictates of the runelord. Six of the districts are the Artisan District, the Slave District, the Entertainment District, Temple Row, Jotunburg, and the Rising District. The seventh district actually existed in the twisted maze of tunnels and catacombs below the city and was called the Hypogeum.

The building materials are several varieties of stone quarried from the rock faces of the Kodar Range, including a hard green marble similar in appearance to emerald. Walls, especially outer walls, tend to be extremely thick, sometimes 20 feet or more, and the principle of the arch and vaulted ceilings are used repeatedly to support the massive weight of the structures above. To lessen the weight of the building materials, many rooms in the buildings have vast open spaces with multiple columns and high ceilings. Most of the wooden doors and accoutrements within the city still exist today, having been essentially freeze-dried to a silvery finish and stony hardness.

The valley walls are extremely steep—cliffs of sheer, gray rock rise from 100 to 300 feet above the tops of the buildings before angling away into mountainous peaks. Unless otherwise mentioned, they are devoid of flora other than simple lichens and the occasional high-altitude nightshade or waterleaf eking out a harsh existence in a crack or fissure.

Exploring Xin-Shalast

Although the PCs are now in Karzoug's direct shadow, the exploration of Xin-Shalast is not on a timetable. There is no rush for the PCs to complete this portion of the adventure, so you can allow them to spend some time exploring the ruins at their leisure. A certain amount of exploration is necessary, in fact, before the PCs can even approach the Spires of Xin-Shalast above, as Karzoug's *runewell* creates an immense occluding field that prevents any but his most trusted minions from entering with ease. In order to survive within this hostile zone, the PCs need not only powerful magic, but also magic items called *Sihedron rings* that prevent the occluding field from utilizing its potent transmutation

WANDERING MONSTERS IN XIN-SHALAST

There's a 10% chance of an encounter—check once per day and night.

d% Roll	Encounter	Average EL	Source
01–15	1d8 lamia kuchrimas	12	Page 80
16–22	2d4 hill giants	12	MM 123
23–28	1d6 frost giants	12	MM 122
29–32	1d6 vampire skulls	12	Page 37
33–37	1 frost worm	12	MM III
38–44	1d8 crag spiders	12	Page 77
45–48	1d8 denizens of Leng	12	Page 78
49–53	1d4 cloud giants	13	MM 120
54–57	1 storm giant	13	MM 125
58–66	2d4 stone giants	13	MM 124
67–75	1d6 abominable snowmen	13	Page 33
76–80	1d4 lamia harridans	14	Page 82
81–87	1 mountain roper	15	Page 41
88–91	1 lamia hungerer	15	Page 84
92–95	1d3 rune giants	16	Page 86
96–97	Gamigin	16	Page 40
98–100	Ghlorofaex	17	Page 43

WEARING SIHEDRONS

Throughout the “Rise of the Runelords” adventure path, the PCs have likely been collecting *Sihedron medallions* from their vanquished foes. Once they enter Xin-Shalast, these medallions add a new level of tactical complexity, for as indicated in the medallion description on page 55 of *Pathfinder #1*, a runelord can sense the world through the *Sihedron medallion* wearer's senses and can speak through the wearer's voice. As long as at least one PC wears a *Sihedron medallion* in Xin-Shalast, Karzoug knows where that PC is. The chance of an encounter occurring increases to 40% per check, and you should make encounter checks twice as often (twice per day and twice per night). Karzoug might, at times, taunt the PCs using the wearer's voice. He might even attempt to disrupt spells with verbal components or call out warnings to monsters the PCs are about to ambush. A PC can attempt to resist this effect by making a DC 25 Will save.

A *Sihedron medallion* can substitute for a *Sihedron ring* in protecting its wearer in the occluding field, so if the PCs can't find enough rings, the medallions can be less desirable and more dangerous replacements.

magic on the wearer. Several creatures encountered in Xin-Shalast wear *Sihedron rings*—they can be found in three locations (areas I, K, and Q), and many more are to be had in the Pinnacle of Avarice. There are intentionally fewer rings than there are expected PCs, since this forces them to be creative in their initial entrance into the occluding field, but if you'd rather hand out more rings so the PCs aren't forced to use *Sihedron medallions* or other forms of magic to protect against the field's effects, feel free to do so. It's possible the PCs could attempt to explore the Spires and the Pinnacle

RISE OF THE RUNELORDS

of Avarice before securing the proper gear—if they try this, let them. Assuming they survive, there's no real penalty for having to head back down into Xin-Shalast to gather more rings, apart from wasting their resources. Ultimately, PCs who take their time exploring Xin-Shalast not only find themselves better prepared for what awaits them in the Pinnacle of Avarice, but they can also learn more about Karzoug, the city's history, and the methods by which he can be defeated. Not everything in Xin-Shalast is an enemy.

Emergence of the Spared

This encounter can occur at any time after the PCs enter the ruins of Xin-Shalast, ideally not long after they first run afoul of some of the city's hostile inhabitants and have secured a safe place to rest and recover. As the PCs do so, the rattle of falling rock should attract their attention to an opening in a nearby building.

Creatures: The source of the sound is a strange humanoid creature known as a skulk. After Thassilon's collapse and the volcanic eruption that destroyed nearly a quarter of the city, many of Xin-Shalast's slaves found themselves suddenly freed, yet without the gear or experience to make escaping the city possible. Instead, they retreated to the deep caves below Xin-Shalast, where they found themselves safe within cysts that formed among the ruined buildings. Led by a woman named Mesmina, a powerful cleric of the goddess of runes who had abandoned her loyalty to Karzoug with the empire's fall, they remained beneath the notice of the remaining inhabitants of the ruined city above, and over the course of hundreds of generations, they evolved into something beyond humanity—a race of chameleon-like humanoids called skulks.

Calling themselves the Spared, these survivors believed in a divine mandate handed down from Mesmina that they were meant to survive, no matter the cost, and find freedom in the city that once oppressed them. Over the years, the Spared excavated a series of tunnels through the earth and grew to know the tangle of caverns connecting various cysts and partially intact buildings buried in the flow. They scavenge vermin and what plants and fungi are able to grow in their humid tunnels and only rarely make use of their hidden surface entrance at area I.

After centuries of undisturbed isolation, trouble has come to the tunnels of the Spared. Recent diggings to expand their warrens broke through into the passages of the Hypogeum. Though the breach was quickly repaired and camouflaged to avoid the notice of the savage tribes occupying those subterranean quarters, it was not done quickly enough, and something passed undetected into the tunnels of the Spared. With this creature, a hideous abnormality known as the Hidden Beast, the Spared find themselves once again enslaved. It is ensconced within the inner chambers of these tunnels, surrounded by dominated skulks who do its bidding.

The prophecies of Mesmina say that when the Spared become enslaved once more, outsiders like their ancestors pictured in their tunnel murals will come to free them. These outsiders are the PCs, and though their appearance in Xin-Shalast is little more than a coincidence (if they were truly prophesized saviors, certainly the PCs would have arrived to deliver the Spared to freedom 30 years ago when the Hidden Beast first established its

rule over the tribe), one skulk in particular becomes convinced the PCs are the skulks' saviors as soon as he notices them in a battle with one of Xin-Shalast's other monsters.

This skulk, a quietly observant creature named Morgiv, hopes the PCs might be able to save his tribe from the Hidden Beast's control. Though the skulks of the Spared appear doughy and blubbery (an evolutionary result of life in this cold, harsh environment), they are in fact quite quick on their feet and agile. Skulks can change the color of their skin with ease to match the environment around them—perhaps the singlemost reason their tribe has survived this long in a city inhabited by bickering groups of lamiakin and giants.

Morgiv has come to talk, not fight. He speaks only Thassilonian, so the PCs need to devise some means of communication or else resort to pantomime. If communication can be established, Morgiv explains the history of his tribe quickly, ending with the recent developments of his people falling under the control of an invisible monster known as the Hidden Beast. Many skulks have disappeared, and others clearly serve this unknown being—those who aren't enslaved call the entity the Hidden Beast because none of them have seen it. All who have sought it out disappear or end up its mindless slaves.

Morgiv notes that his tribe was once enslaved by the rulers of this city, and that their leader, beloved Mesmina, delivered them out of that bondage. She prophesized that, should the tribe ever again fall victim to slavery, outsiders will come to the people's aid. At this point, Morgiv excitedly tells the PCs that they are those outsiders, that their appearance and raiments are similar to those pictured on the walls of his home in the depictions of Mesmina herself.

If the PCs agree to help Morgiv by slaying the Hidden Beast, he excitedly leads them to area I and thence down through a network of tunnels that leads directly to the Hidden Beast's deep underground lair, bypassing all of the monster's guardians above with ease. See the description of area I for more details.

MORGIV

CR I

Male skulk (*Tome of Horrors* 231)

CN Medium humanoid (skulk)

Init +2; **Senses** low-light vision; Listen +1, Spot +2

DEFENSE

AC 13, touch 12, flat-footed 11

(+2 Dex, +1 natural)

hp 11 (2d8+2)

Fort +1, **Ref** +5, **Will** +1

OFFENSE

Spd 30 ft.

Melee spear +1 (1d8)

Ranged spear +2 (1d8)

Special Attacks sneak attack +1d6

TACTICS

During Combat Morgiv, like most skulks, lives by avoiding combat; he fights only if cornered, but does so while sobbing and begging for mercy.

Morale Morgiv flees if confronted with combat.

STATISTICS

SPIRES OF XIN-SHALAST

Str 10, **Dex** 14, **Con** 12, **Int** 10, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 6

Base Atk +1; **Grp** +1

Feats Altitude Affinity

Skills Hide +22, Move Silently +14, Spot +2

Languages Thassilonian

SQ untrackable

Gear spear

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Untrackable (Ex) Skulks can pass through forest and subterranean settings without a trace—double the DC for any tracking attempt against a skulk.

Skills Skulks have a +8 racial bonus on Move Silently checks and a +15 racial bonus on Hide checks.

The Hypogeum

Each time Xin-Shalast came under the rule of a new runelord, many of the city's older structures became obsolete, as noble families and tastes in pleasure and architectural style changed. Rather than demolish the structures that existed in the city, new structures were merely built atop the older ones, and in this way Xin-Shalast's buildings grew mighty and tall indeed. This was done through laws of eminent domain passed by the runelord and was often accomplished without bothering to purchase the original buildings or gain the permission of their owners. Connections to these lower levels were unnecessary, and entrances to lower chambers were traditionally sealed with stone walls. As additional structures were added, this region of hidden structures likewise expanded, creating a multi-level warren composed of the old dwellings, businesses, and ground-level streets. The entire region of lower structures became known as the Hypogeum.

The twisting catacombs of the Hypogeum have weathered the years well, and many still exist in the quarter-mile-wide section of the city adjoining the Golden Road, forming a maze of catacombs, smugglers' tunnels, and trap-laden hideouts. The skulk tribes of the Spared avoid these tunnels and seal all openings into them, as all manner of dangerous monsters dwell within.

Artisan District

The southernmost district of Xin-Shalast is the Artisan District. Many of its shops and bazaars lined the Golden Road, with its many foundries, workshops, and mills being situated further to the east and west. Cisterns fed by subterranean aqueducts from the Entertainment District now stand empty. The majority of this district's populace was humanoid and represented the provider caste in Xin-Shalast—their descendants became the heritors of Varisia. Of all the city's districts, this one was the least repressive and enjoyed a modest amount of freedom from scrutiny by the ruling class. Karzoug was not fool enough to believe that his extravagant penchant for greed could be satisfied by the fruits

of oppressed artisans, and thus let them be, for the most part, as long as they remained loyal and filled his coffers with their taxes. The district even had a separate gate into the city to avoid

Krak Naratha. The northern portion of the Artisan

District has a wide colonnade leading to a pyramidal structure set atop a large dome.

This served as the headquarters of the Guild of Master Masons and Architects, the grandmaster of which typically served as the district's consul.

Slave District

The slaves of the city, except for those privately owned as personal servants in the various households, were considered property of the state and served the communal needs of the city. They were usually humanoids captured in raids upon neighboring lands or criminals punished with a sentence of lifelong servitude, but occasionally included giants who had fallen out of favor or deserted from the army, yet didn't warrant transformation

into a runeslave (see *Pathfinder* #4). All of these slaves were quartered here in extremely cramped conditions, in poorly made buildings of clay brick rather than stone and were under constant scrutiny by special units of Xin-Shalast's army trained as slave takers and overseers. Shoddy workmanship and overcrowding killed thousands of slaves each year due to building collapses, yet there were always more slaves to be had to replace those lost.

At the fall of Thassilon, a volcano east of the city finally erupted after centuries of quiescence. Whether this was caused purposely by Karzoug or simply resulted from the many wards preventing such an event suddenly expiring remains open to speculation. Whatever the cause, the effect on the Slave District was devastating. Prevailing winds and the angle of eruption spared the city from much of its fallout, but the earth tremors and pyroclastic flow that crashed into the Slave District swallowed it whole. Only a few of the hardier stone buildings survived, and in the ages since, they have slowly been consumed by the advance of a great glacier, its leading edge icy and razored, its body a dark mass of gritty ice. The district exists now as a haunted landscape of blasted glacial terrain and occasional ruins projecting up at crazy angles where they have managed to oppose the glacier's advance.

The high-incalculable loss of life that occurred here in a matter of moments has spawned a multitude of undead over the years. Fortunately, most of these creatures are corporeal monsters like wights or ghouls, and remain encased in their tombs of ice, waiting for an unwary digger to set them free. Yet there are also quite a few wraiths, spectres, and ghosts that haunt the glacier, and they have no such constraints stemming from their remains still being buried. The skulk tribes of the Spared have done much to check the



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spread of the undead. Approximately half of the tunnels below the Slave District are under skulk control and relatively free of undead today. Unfortunately, these skulks themselves have recently fallen victim to the monstrous undead Hidden Beast.

Entertainment District

Like all great tyrants and dictators, the runelords realized they could never maintain control of their empire unless they were able to keep the masses distracted. To this end, one of the most opulent districts of the Lower City was the Entertainment District. Here could be found just about any hedonistic diversion imaginable (with those unavailable found in the Hypogeum). Massive works of architecture were erected to awe visitors and cater to the citizens of Xin-Shalast. Great spectacles were staged in the various venues available in this district. While not the most heavily populated district of the city, it was certainly the most heavily visited by those seeking everything from fine foods and innocent entertainment to the vilest depths of depravity. A constant stream of purchases from the Slave District came through this district to replenish losses due to attrition. The spectacular architecture of the northern part of this district remains largely intact, while the southern portions have been buried under a tide of unnaturally fecund lichen growth.

Temple Row

The exotic, cyclopean architecture of Xin-Shalast is nowhere more apparent than this stretch of temples built along the Golden Road, where it meets the mountain. Here were built the religious centers of Xin-Shalast in a plethora of styles, shapes, and materials, with only two things in common: multiple towers and prodigious dimensions. That the majority of these temples were dedicated to Karzoug speaks volumes to the mindset of his people, yet here and there stood cathedrals dedicated to the gods of Thassilon—Lissala, Minderhal, the Peacock Spirit, and even Desna. Intermixed with these temples are darker, brooding structures—once shrines and fanes dedicated to various demon lords and archdevils, including such horrors as Mamon, Orcus, Pazuzu, Rubicante, and Lamashtu.

The Golden Road passes by these edifices before climbing upward through the Rune Gates toward the Spires of Xin-Shalast above. A self-indulgent and godless faith called Divine Consumption (a thinly-veiled tiered organization geared primarily toward lining the pockets of the few with the riches gathered and earned by the many) served as the only officially sanctioned religion of Xin-Shalast, but Karzoug pragmatically allowed other faiths to build their houses of worship here as well, as long as they paid their temple taxes and their doctrines did not contradict his rule. Behind the temples, on the west side of the road, stretches an area of residences for the clergy and lay workers, huge storage complexes to hold the temple tithes and supplies, and various private shrines and amusements claimed by the hierarchy of one temple or the other. These buildings remain largely intact and are under the control of the lamiakin of Xin-Shalast, the leaders of whom have converted the one-time temples into personal mansions.

Jotunburg

This section of the city is squeezed between Temple Row and the Artisan District. Here the buildings are oversized for a reason, as they housed the majority of Xin-Shalast's giant population. These massive edifices extend all the way up the shoulder of the valley overlooking the Lower City and are accessed by gigantic unsupported spans hundreds of feet in the air that extend from the Golden Road to this mountain spur. Today, Jotunburg is the home of several tribes of giants, including cloud, frost, and even a few taiga and storm giants.

Rising District

The Rising District begins immediately beyond the Rune Gates and served as the residential quarters for the nobility of the city—Harriandans of the Mountain, high-ranking lamias, and so on—as well as those non-monstrous inhabitants with enough power, influence, or gold to earn a spot upon the sacred Face of Mhar Massif. The highest dwelling typically served as the residence of the priestess holding the rank of Most High at the House of Divine Consumption. The dwellings are usually towers protruding from the rock face, due to the lack of ground to build upon, and they grow larger and more elaborate as they climb the mountain.

The Golden Road runs through the center of the Rising District, up to the citadel in a close approximation of a straight line. This makes the road extremely steep and, in some places, nearly vertical, with great steps carved into its surface almost like a ladder. Unfortunately for PCs, these steps are sized for giants and are most comfortable for those of size Huge or larger. Smaller creatures must make numerous Climb checks as they ascend the steps, each of which has only a narrow ledge abutting the risers. In addition, ice tends to form on the steps and the incredible cold, high winds, and other hazards of the high mountains are faced by anyone who chooses to clamber up this treacherous trail. The Golden Road climbs 8,500 feet to the Spires of Xin-Shalast, though the Rising District ends around the 24,000-foot elevation, about 2,000 feet below the citadel. Actually climbing this expanse of steps can require mountain climbing gear and take days to complete even in good weather. Unlike the rest of Xin-Shalast, those mighty towers outside the occlusion field have not fared well over the years. Many have collapsed and tumbled down the mountain, taking those below with them, and many more are unstable, so climbers who plan on sheltering in these structures might be in for a rude surprise as one shifts and begins to slide down around them, out into open space, for a very long freefall. Though these buildings are in large part uninhabited, they are not entirely deserted. A squad of five rune giants regularly patrols the lower reaches of the district. Higher up, giant riders atop their sure-footed crag spider steeds make sure that only those bearing invitations from the runelord attempt the climb.

E. Krak Naratha (EL 15)

The ruined road branches here, a narrower route leading around to the west while the main thoroughfare passes through a looming stone wall flanked by glossy black towers. It seems to be some sort of ancient

SPIRES OF XIN-SHALAST

gateway to the city proper. A dark mass of gritty, rocky ice presses up against the fortress's northern face, the ancient glacier apparently stopped (but only just) by the stone walls.

This is Krak Naratha, a huge fortress that guards the entrance to the valley of Xin-Shalast. Its walls are 50 feet thick and rise to a height of 75 feet. The square towers extend as high as 200 feet. Krak Naratha is composed of volcanic glass harvested from the caldera east of the valley, its roof and edges once gilt in gold but now only retaining splashes of color. Its joint seams are very fine and almost invisible in the dark stone. Climbing the walls requires a DC 40 Climb check.

The gates of Krak Naratha fell long ago, leaving an empty gatehouse to provide entry to its bailey. The former garrison blockhouse has partially collapsed, as has much of the northeastern wall. The ancient eruption of the volcano did significant damage to these structures, but not enough to completely destroy them. A smaller gate to the east of the ruined blockhouse once opened into the Slave District, but this is now blocked by a mass of ice. Anyone climbing the tower stairs up to the fortress's rear wall can easily descend onto the surface of the glacier (which lies only 8 feet below the ramparts).

Creatures: Krak Naratha currently serves as the home of a particularly enterprising group of harpy-like lamias known as kuchrimas. These kuchrimas have transformed Krak Naratha's bailey into an enormous paddock for the keeping of a vast herd of high-altitude mountain aurochs—yak-like bovines raised by the lamiakin as food sources. While many of Xin-Shalast's inhabitants hunt the city itself for food, quite a few have taken to the convenience of Krak Naratha's farm and paid the Kuchrimas handsomely for access to their herd. With Karzoug's wakening, the burgeoning lamia matriarchs and harridans have decreed that the kuchrimas are no longer to charge for access to the aurochs—that any of Xin-Shalast's growing army can visit here for food as they wish. Worse, the lamia rulers have seized Krak Naratha's treasury. The kuchrimas are foul-tempered about this recent turn of events, but when three previous rebellions resulted in quick and painful punishment from the lamias and their rune giant allies, the kuchrimas swallowed their pride and accepted the new order bitterly.

Unless the PCs are particularly stealthy, one of the four Krak Naratha soldiers always on duty on the walls notices their approach and uses a thunderstone to sound the alarm. A few moments later, two soldiers and a commander fly down to confront the PCs. If the characters can produce Sihedrons and can bluff the kuchrimas, they might be able to convince the lamiakin that they are new recruits of Karzoug's growing army and be allowed to pass into the city. Otherwise, the lamiakin shriek in anger, detonate another thunderstone to raise the alarm again, and attack.

If the PCs attempt to enter Krak Naratha, several soldiers use thunderstones to whip the aurochs into a stampede. The stampede consists of 24 aurochs running at full speed (160 feet) from the entrance of the fortress. They do not stop to attack individual PCs—any character caught in the path of the stampede

must make a DC 15 Reflex save to avoid taking 12d12 points of damage. The individual aurochs are otherwise not combative, but if stats for one become necessary, they are the equivalent to 7 HD bison with the Altitude Affinity feat.

In all, there are only a dozen kuchrimas left in Krak Naratha—a shadow of their former strength, a testament to the decisive punishment inflicted upon them after their previous rebellions against Xin-Shalast's new leaders.

KRACK NARATHA SOLDIERS (12)

CR 8

Lamia kuchrima (see page 80)

TACTICS

Before Combat The kuchrimas cast *shield* on themselves before entering battle.

During Combat The kuchrimas avoid melee combat, hovering within 30 feet in order to gain the Point Blank Shot attack and damage bonuses. They use their flaming arrows first. They use *true strike* on their initial attacks to make a catastrophic shot. Creatures successfully climbing the sides of the ravine or who separate themselves out are subject to grab attempts to carry them up high and drop them.

Morale The kuchrimas fight to the death at their leaders' commands.

F. Golden Road

This elevated stone causeway is seventy-five feet wide and runs nearly a hundred feet off the ground in places. This elevation is not immediately obvious, though, as huge buildings and towering structures constructed along the road's entire length give the illusion that the causeway remains at ground level. This illusion is broken somewhat where small "feeder alleys" branch off from the main course of the causeway to descend into the various districts of the city below. Though the bricks of the road are of basalt, they do in many places retain gold plating that might once have covered the entire run.

The Golden Road remains sound, though here and there stretches of up to 200 feet in length have collapsed into rubble. In areas abutting the Slave District, the Golden Road is often bordered to the east by the glacier and in many places has been destroyed or overflowed by it. Other sections actually open into the deeps of the Hypogeum and the lairs of creatures dwelling there.

The Golden Road is so named for its course that leads through the center of the city and up the side of the mountain, supposedly directly to the feet of the golden throne of the Runelord of Greed. It was indeed even plated in thin sheets of gold for its length at Xin-Shalast's height, but time has not been so kind to these sheets. The thoroughfare remains the most heavily traveled route in Xin-Shalast today—check for wandering monster encounters twice per day and twice per night here, with the chance of an encounter 20% of the time.

G. Giant Encampment

This section of the ruined city has been cleared of rubble, leaving a roughly circular courtyard about a quarter-mile in diameter. Many

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LOOTING XIN-SHALAST

The amount of wealth in Xin-Shalast is staggering—precious metals and gems and other rare materials having been used in the construction of the city's buildings, to say nothing of the countless hidden vaults of treasure and gold in areas not covered by this adventure. A character could become comfortably rich just scavenging gold leaf or gems from the walls of Xin-Shalast's structures, but for 15th-level PCs, this level of "rich" might seem relatively poor. A day's work scavenging precious metals and gems from Xin-Shalast's architecture yields 10d6 gp worth of commodities. The true treasures of the city are hidden in its vaults, which are, in most cases, still guarded by ancient and deadly traps and creatures. Since on average it'd take a group of four PCs two solid weeks of scraping and scavenging to pull together enough gold to buy a single +1 dagger, ideally your group soon realizes its time is better spent elsewhere.

Once the PCs reach the Pinnacle of Avarice in Part Five, the amount of riches increases dramatically. Spending time here peeling gold plate off of doors, prying gems from walls, and stealing the bejeweled everburning torches yields 10d6 pp worth of commodities per day's work.

oversized tents and crude shelters have been erected in the clearing, turning it into what looks like a giant-sized refugee camp.

Although Karzoug was pleased to find that giants still dwelt in Xin-Shalast when he awoke 5 years ago, the total number was but a fraction of what he needs to rebuild the city. When he revived his rune giants, they were able to subjugate the cloud, frost, and storm giants that dwelt here in the ruins, after which rune giant scouts slowly expanded their explorations into the surrounding mountains. When they find a tribe, they dominate its leaders and move on, trusting their minions to handle the heavy work of relocating the tribe to Xin-Shalast.

New arrivals to Xin-Shalast generally congregate here, in a large swath cleared of rubble. Hundreds of giants dwell in the yurts, tents, and surrounding ruins, awaiting assignments by the giants of Shahlaria (area R). The giants living here spend long hours toiling at rebuilding the northern section of Xin-Shalast, returning here only to grab a few hours of sleep and food.

There are more than 500 hill giants, frost giants, and stone giants currently encamped in this area. Most come from lower elevations and require time to acclimate to Xin-Shalast's thin air, but once they're ready, they're put to work to the north. There's little of interest for PCs here but a fight—fortunately, these giants aren't too aggressive (either because they're acclimating to the elevation or because they're recovering from a hard day's work) and only attack those who are overly aggressive or openly attempt to walk among the larger folk. The giants hold the rune giants in awe, especially given the larger giants' size and swift action when punishment is required, and have little interest in talking with (or being seen talking with) obvious intruders.

Creature: Not all of the giants here are cowed by their new masters. One stone giant mercenary, a heavily tattooed creature

named Gyukak, has begun secret talks with several giants here in an attempt to organize a rebellion and escape what he sees as an accursed city. His giants keep their true allegiances secret, but are completely loyal to Gyukak.

Gyukak's motivations aren't entirely selfless. In truth, he is an ogre mage who maintains a stone giant disguise. Gyukak hopes to build himself a private army large enough to lead out of Xin-Shalast so he can claim several now-abandoned giant homelands on the Storval Plateau as his own holdings. Despite the fact that his intentions for the giants have marked similarities to those of Karzoug, his plans for fomenting a rebellion run counter to the will of the runelord. When enough giants are properly indoctrinated into the runelord's service, they might provoke a pogrom of annihilation upon the resistant hill giants loyal to Gyukak. A party could find itself on either side of this conflict or stuck in the middle as scapegoats.

Gyukak pays attention, and if the PCs' presence becomes known to the giants of this encampment, he might attempt to contact them, introducing himself as a rebel and the leader of giants who want to escape Xin-Shalast. Gyukak hopes to convince the PCs to create a big distraction to the north, such as attacking the blue dragon Ghlrofaex or even attempting to scale Mhar Massif, so he can lead his giants south and out of Xin-Shalast without attracting the attention of the rune giants. You can use Gyukak to answer PC questions about Xin-Shalast (the ogre mage has spent some time exploring the place and knows most of its dangers). He can certainly warn the PCs about the occlusion field near the peak of Mhar Massif, and he suspects that certain leaders among the giants and the lamia have items that allow them to enter the field unharmed. Gyukak encourages the PCs to attempt to assassinate these leaders, for such an attempt would certainly create the distraction he craves.

GYUKAK

CR 8

Male ogre mage

hp 37 (MM 200)

TACTICS

Morale Gyukak is a swift judge of character and knows he's no match for the PCs. If he gets the feeling they might be about to attack him, he decides to cut his losses and turns invisible as he attempts to escape.

Ad Hoc Experience Award: If the PCs manage to get important information about Xin-Shalast from Gyukak, grant them experience as if they had defeated him in combat.

H. Abominable Dome (EL 15)

An immense dome of stone rises at the end of an elevated road here. The structure towers five hundred feet in height and is capped by a smaller dome that brings its total height to nearly seven hundred feet in all. Numerous arches and openings decorate the building's sides, all allowing access to its cavernous interior.

The interior of this building is mostly open, creating a truly impressive enclosed area once used as a place for the most gifted stone giants of ancient Xin-Shalast to practice the art of monument construction. All that remains of their final project

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is a heap of rubble 100 feet high in the center of the area. The stone giant architects themselves dwell in chambers built into the walls of the dome, accessed by spiraling ramps and each with its own private exit into the city.

Creatures: Although no giants have dwelt here for thousands of years, its current tenants are no less huge. A tribe of particularly violent and loathsome abominable snowmen took up residence here 6 decades ago and were more than capable of holding their own against the giants and lamias of the city. Until recently, the tribe was led by an immense chieftain named Voorgoor, a monster who maintained his rule through brutality and force. When Karzoug awoke and his rune giants returned to Xin-Shalast, they knew the abominable snowmen were a tremendous resource for their armies. Yet not being giants, they were immune to more traditional methods of rune giant control. Instead, the giants made an open and public invitation to Voorgoor, acknowledging his strength and power before the other yetis under his command and inviting the behemoth to join them as a co-ruler of Xin-Shalast. The abominable snowmen remaining here assume that Voorgoor remains there, for their leader pays visits to the tribe on a weekly basis to check up on them and punish those who have strayed too far from his leadership, yet there is no more day-to-day leadership in the tribe.

In fact, Voorgoor was slain and fed to the dragon Ghlorofaex, and his weekly “visits” back here are made by Khalib, disguised as Voorgoor via magic. In this way, the rune giants keep the abominable snowmen under control with a minimum of effort and fuss, ready for a time when their savagery might be needed.

The tribe itself dwells in hollows and chambers within the central pile of rubble. Voorgoor once dwelt in a spacious cave near the top of the pile, but that cave now stands empty. At the peak of the rubble pile, the snowmen maintain a 30-foot-tall altar to Voorgoor in the form of hundreds of bones tied together with lengths of sinew to form a rough approximation of a humanoid shape. The tribe numbers 26 in all, but at any one time, only 6 are present here, with the remaining 20 scouring Xin-Shalast or the surrounding mountains for smaller things to torment and eventually eat. The snowmen belong to a particularly powerful breed of yeti—towering humanoids with thick white fur, wide slavering toothy jaws, hairless hands tipped with talons, and immense orange eyes that glow like fire.

ABOMINABLE SNOWMEN (6)

CR 10

Yeti barbarian 2/fighter 4 (*Tome of Horrors* 283)

CE Large monstrous humanoid (cold)

Init +2; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +6, Spot +6

Aura frightful gaze (30 ft.)

DEFENSE

AC 23, touch 9, flat-footed 21

(+2 Dexterity, +14 natural, -2 rage, -1 size)

hp 113 (10 HD; 4d8+2d12+4d10+60)

Fort +16, **Ref** +7, **Will** +9

Defensive Abilities uncanny dodge; **DR** 10/piercing; **Immune** cold

Weaknesses vulnerable to fire

OFFENSE

Spd 50 ft.

Melee 2 claws +19 (1d8+11/19–20 plus 2d6 cold)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

Special Attacks cold, improved grab, squeeze

TACTICS

During Combat The abominable snowmen lack subtlety in combat—their roars and bellowing charges are as close as they get to organized tactics. Each snowman picks one target to attack, doubling up only if there aren't enough victims to go around.

Morale The snowmen fight to the death to protect their lair but do not pursue foes further than 500 feet from its edge.

Base Statistics When not raging, an abominable snowman's stats change as follows: **AC** 25, touch 11, flat-footed 23; **hp** 93; **Fort** +14, **Will** +7; **Melee** 2 claws +17 (1d8+9/19–20 plus 2d6 cold); **Str** 24, **Con** 18; **Climb** +14

STATISTICS

Str 28, **Dex** 15, **Con** 22, **Int** 6, **Wis** 14, **Cha** 10

Base Atk +10; **Grp** +21

Feats Great Fortitude, Improved Critical (claw), Improved Natural Attack (claw), Power Attack, Skill Focus (climb), Weapon Focus (claw), Weapon Specialization (claw)

Skills Climb +16, Hide +9 (+21 in snow), Listen +6, Move Silently +10, Spot +6

Languages Giant

SQ thick hide

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Cold (Ex) An abominable snowman's body generates intense cold, even more so than that generated by a typical yeti, dealing 2d6 points of damage to those who contact it for at least 1 round or those who are struck by its claws.

Frightful Gaze (Su) Creatures within 30 feet that meet the eyes of an abominable snowman must succeed on a DC 12 Will save or stand paralyzed in fear. This is a mind-affecting fear effect. A creature that successfully saves cannot be affected again by the frightful gaze of that abominable snowman for one day. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Improved Grab (Ex) To use this ability, an abominable snowman must hit with a claw attack. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, the abominable snowman establishes a hold and can squeeze.

Squeeze (Ex) An abominable snowman that makes a successful grapple check against a Medium or smaller opponent pulls the opponent against its body and squeezes it with both arms, dealing 2d6+10 points of crushing damage and 2d6 points of cold damage each round.

Thick Hide (Ex) Abominable snowmen of the Kodar Mountains have thicker fur and hides than most yeti—their base natural armor bonus is +14 and they possess damage reduction 10/piercing as a result.

Skills An abominable snowman has a +4 racial bonus on Listen and Spot checks. They gain a +12 racial bonus on Hide checks made in snowy terrain.

Treasure: Scattered among their lairs, the abominable snowmen have collected several pieces of treasure—all of which

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Lair of the Hidden Beast



have been left behind by those unfortunate enough to be caught by the snowmen and eaten. Each of the following items can be discovered with a DC 20 Search check and 10 minutes of work picking through the refuse- and rubble-filled dens: a mithral breastplate, a cobra-shaped platinum arm band with rubies for eyes worth 2,000 gp, a *ring of the ram* with only 5 charges left, a +2 *vicious kukri* that bears the unholy symbol of Lamashtu etched on its blade, and a *bronze griffon figurine of wondrous power*.

1. Lair of the Hidden Beast (EL 16)

Buried under the glacier, the majority of the Slave District buildings are hidden completely from view. Most of them were destroyed when a nearby volcano exploded, sending a pyroclastic flow into the city, but those that were built strong survived, and their interiors remain open and navigable where natural tunnels in the ice connect them. The glacier is, as a result, a tangled network of caves and chambers. Explorers could spend weeks, if not months, wandering these tunnels and never see them all. For thousands of years, these tunnels were the primary home of the Spared.

The Spared slowly expanded their tunnels as their population grew, but on a fateful day five decades ago, skulk tunnelers broke into an ancient crypt deep below the surface at this location, inadvertently releasing an immortal monstrosity that had been trapped therein since the fall of Thassilon. This creature was the Hidden Beast, and it took less than a month for it to seize control

of the Spared. Ever since, the skulks have lived only to serve the Hidden Beast's whims, with only a handful brave enough to escape into outlying reaches of Xin-Shalast.

Although the PCs could find their way into the lair of the Hidden Beast accidentally, it's more likely they are directed here by Morgiv, a brave but simple skulk who wants to see his people freed from the tyranny of the Hidden Beast, which treats the Spared as a farm for its gluttonous hunger. Morgiv knows the tunnels under the Slave District well and can lead the PCs to the very doorstep of the Hidden Beast's lair, bypassing its lax security with ease. The defenses of the lair itself, unfortunately, are not so easily surmounted.

Read or paraphrase the following to the PCs as they reach the Hidden Beast's lair.

The tunnel opens into a large room, a cyst in the earth under the weight of the buried city formed by some ancient basement gallery. A raised balcony to the northwest is accessed by two stairs and has a low stone balustrade. Pillars along the room's perimeter rise to a vaulted ceiling, while in the center of the room sits a dais holding an ornate throne. Seated upon the throne is a skeletal figure shrouded in musty robes bearing arcane symbols.

An *alarm* spell (silent mental) wards each of the three tunnel entrances to this chamber, placed there by the Hidden Beast itself. The central throne and dais sit above a large hollow area created by

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the Hidden Beast to serve as a “coffin”—this area can be reached with ease by creatures in gaseous form, but other creatures must move aside or destroy the 9-1/2-ton slab of basalt to get to this chamber.

Creatures: The ancients of Xin-Shalast often explored other realms and realities, ever seeking new discoveries of magic and wealth to use to leverage more favor from Karzoug. One such sect of astral travelers came upon a strange leathery sphere floating inert in the void and brought it back here to investigate. Unfortunately for them, that sphere was a slumbering monstrosity—an undead tentacled sorcerer from a distant realm cast into the Astral Plane by its enemies. When the travelers returned to the Material Plane with it, the monster awoke and slew all but one of them. This last Thassilonian escaped only by sealing the chamber with *walls of force*, then later by collapsing the tunnels that accessed the chamber. The creature itself, ever patient and potent, returned to its slumber after realizing it couldn't escape. It slept through the fall of Thassilon and the following millennia, only to be awakened again by the Spared.

The Spared have taken to calling this creature the Hidden Beast. The monster is a vampiric decapus—an octopoid creature with ten tentacles protruding from its body surrounding a maw with large yellow fangs. Its cruel red eyes and slimy skin augment its monstrous visage. The Hidden Beast has no real goals or desires beyond feasting on the blood of the living—its mind works in ways alien to most life on the Material Plane. It keeps the Spared under its control by dominating them or by transforming their leaders into enslaved vampires who then, in turn, dominate the living for their master. The Hidden Beast has no real desire to leave this area (feeding has been great over the past few decades), nor does it care that some of its flock escape its dominion now and then. Karzoug's agents discovered the Hidden Beast not long after Mokmurian's visit and managed to establish peaceful contact with it, but haven't quite managed to convince it to accept Karzoug as lord. The runelord himself plans to visit the Hidden Beast to make an offer it can't refuse after he escapes the *runewell*, but until then, the Hidden Beast is allowed to maintain its tiny empire under the Slave District.

The Hidden Beast spends its time invisible. The skeleton atop the throne in the middle of the room is actually the monster's public “face”—an illusion it maintains. When the Hidden Beast needs to speak to visitors, it uses a silent *ventriloquism* to do so through the illusion. As soon as it notices the PCs, it does exactly this, causing the desiccated and dead skeleton to sit up and take notice before addressing them in Abyssal: “Which of you would offer your blood to me? Step forward and feel the embrace of your new lord!”

The Hidden Beast isn't interested in visitors more than as a source of blood—if no PC steps forward to offer himself to the illusion, it attacks as detailed below. If a PC does offer himself, the beast slithers up to that character and attempts to grapple him so it may use its blood drain ability.

The Hidden Beast is not alone in this chamber—four vampire skulks hide in the shadows around the room's perimeter. Absolutely loyal to their master, they wait until combat begins before joining the fight, attacking first only if they're noticed beforehand.

THE HIDDEN BEAST

CR 15

Male advanced dread vampire decapus sorcerer 10 (*Tome of Horrors*)

64, *Advanced Bestiary* 97)

CE Large undead (augmented aberration)

Init +8; **Senses** blindsight 30 ft., darkvision 120 ft., scent; Listen +22, Spot +22

DEFENSE

AC 33, touch 16, flat-footed 29

(+5 armor, +3 deflection, +4 Dexterity, +12 natural, –1 size)

hp 177 (25d12+15); fast healing 5

Fort +13, **Ref** +17, **Will** +22

Defensive Abilities turn resistance +6; **DR** 10/good and silver;

Immune cold; **Resist** acid 10, electricity 10, sonic 10

Weaknesses sunlight vulnerability, water vulnerability

OFFENSE

Spd 30 ft., climb 30 ft., fly 15 ft. (perfect)

Melee 10 tentacles +27 (1d8+12/19–20)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 15 ft.

Special Attacks blood drain, children of the night, constrict 1d8+12, create spawn, dominate (DC 26), energy drain, illusion, improved grab, sound imitation

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 10th)

3/day—darkness, fog cloud

1/day—deeper darkness

Spells Known (CL 10th, +19 ranged touch)

5th (5/day)—telekinesis (DC 24)

4th (7/day)—greater invisibility, phantasmal killer (DC 25)

3rd (7/day)—dispel magic, displacement, lightning bolt (DC 22)

2nd (8/day)—blindness/deafness, false life, mirror image, scorching ray

1st (9/day)—alarm, magic missile, ray of enfeeblement, shield, ventriloquism (DC 22)

0 (6/day)—acid splash, dancing lights, detect magic, ghost sound (DC 21), mage hand, message, open/close, prestidigitation, read magic

TACTICS

Before Combat The Hidden Beast casts extended *false life* on itself every day and places a silent mental alarm at each of the room entrances. It uses its *ring of invisibility* to remain invisible at all times.

During Combat The Hidden Beast concentrates on maintaining the illusion of the undead speaker, hoping the PCs waste at least a round fighting it while its vampire minions move into position around them. The creature uses *ventriloquism* to disguise its actual location, taking the first few rounds of combat to cast *displacement*, *mirror image*, and *shield* on itself. Its final act is to cast *greater invisibility*, so on ensuing rounds as it attacks the PCs, it remains unseen. The Hidden Beast is fond of using *telekinesis* to disarm foes, but it generally starts its offense by casting *phantasmal killer* or *lightning bolt*. It avoids melee combat unless it can engage a foe one-on-one.

Morale If reduced to 0 hit points, the Hidden Beast automatically assumes gaseous form and attempts to escape through the fissures in and around the dais in the center of this room. These narrow fissures lead down 30 feet to a circular cavern, 20 feet in diameter, that serves as the Hidden Beast's “coffin.” Once at rest here, it

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rematerializes and is helpless. It regains 1 hit point after 1 hour, then it is no longer helpless and resumes healing at the rate of 5 hit points per round from its fast healing.

STATISTICS

Str 34, **Dex** 19, **Con** —, **Int** 14, **Wis** 16, **Cha** 28

Base Atk +16; **Grp** +36

Feats Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Eschew Materials, Extend Spell, Great Fortitude, Greater Spell Focus (illusion), Improved Critical (tentacle), Improved Grapple, Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Attack (tentacle), Lightning Reflexes, Power Attack, Silent Spell, Spell Focus (illusion), Track

Skills Bluff +19, Climb +20, Concentration +20, Hide +10, Listen +22, Move Silently +29, Search +12, Sense Motive +13, Spot +22

Languages Abyssal

SQ alternate form, flight, gaseous form, summon familiar (currently none), uncanny climber

Gear bracers of armor +5, ring of invisibility, Sihedron ring

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Alternate Form (Ex) As a standard action, the Hidden Beast can assume the shape of a crag spider or a spider swarm, although it rarely chooses to do so.

Blood Drain (Ex) The Hidden Beast can drain blood from a living victim by making a successful grapple check. If it pins the foe, it drains blood, dealing 1d6 points of Constitution drain each round it maintains the pin.

Children of the Night (Su) The Hidden Beast can command the lesser creatures and undead of the world and can summon them three times a day as a standard action. It can summon 1d8 crag

spiders, 2d4 spider swarms, or 1d6 shadows with each use of this ability. Summoned creatures arrive in 2d6 rounds and serve the Hidden Beast for up to 1 hour.

Constrict (Ex) The Hidden Beast deals 1d8+12 points of damage with a successful grapple check.

Create Spawn (Su) Any humanoid or monstrous humanoid slain by the Hidden Beast's energy drain attack rises as a vampire 24 hours later. Any creature with an Intelligence score of 3 or higher whose Constitution score reaches 0 from the Hidden Beast's blood drain attack rises in the same manner after death, but as a dread vampire. Undead created in this manner are under the Hidden Beast's control—at any given time, the Hidden Beast may have enslaved vampires totaling no more than 30 Hit Dice—and undead it creates beyond this limit are free-willed. The majority of the Hidden Beast's vampire minions are skulk rogues.

Dominate (Su) The Hidden Beast can crush an opponent's will by looking into its eyes. This requires a standard action. Anyone targeted by the Hidden Beast's gaze must make a DC 26 Will save or fall instantly under its control as though by a *dominate monster* spell (CL 15th). This ability has a range of 30 feet. The Save DC is Charisma-based.

Energy Drain (Su) Once per round, a living creature hit by one of the Hidden Beast's tentacles in that round gains 2 negative levels. It's a DC 26 Fortitude save to remove these negative levels. The Save DC is Charisma-based.

Flight (Su) The Hidden Beast's flight is supernatural in nature and cannot be dispelled.

Gaseous Form (Su) The Hidden Beast can assume gaseous form at will, as the spell of the same name (CL 5th), except that the Hidden Beast may remain in gaseous form indefinitely and has a fly speed of 40 feet (perfect) in this form.

Illusion (Su) The Hidden Beast can create illusions, as per *minor image* (CL 15th), at will. A DC 26 Will save allows a creature to see through the illusion. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Improved Grab (Ex) To use this ability, the Hidden Beast must hit a creature of any size with a tentacle. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and can constrict.

Sound Imitation (Ex) The Hidden Beast can mimic any creature it has previously encountered with total accuracy. A DC 26 Will save detects the ruse. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Sunlight Vulnerability (Ex) The Hidden Beast takes 5 points of damage per round of direct exposure to sunlight and does not gain any benefit from fast healing when exposed to sunlight.

Uncanny Climber (Su) The Hidden Beast can climb with ease, as if spider climbing. It can use the accelerated climb action to cover any distance up to 4 times its climb speed, with each check allowing it

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to climb a distance equal to its Climb speed. Climbing a distance equal to or less than its climb speed is a move-equivalent action.

Water Vulnerability (Ex) Running water (including the sea) deals 5 points of damage per round that the Hidden Beast is in contact with it, and its fast healing ability does not function during this time.

VAMPIRE SKULK**CR 9**

Vampire skulk rogue 6 (MM 251, *Tome of Horrors* 231)

CE Medium undead (augmented humanoid)

Init +2; **Senses** low-light vision; Listen +20, Spot +20

DEFENSE

AC 29, touch 18, flat-footed 22

(+2 armor, +1 deflection, +7 Dexterity, +7 natural, +2 shield)

hp 52 (8d12); fast healing 5

Defensive Abilities evasion, trap sense +2, turn resistance +4, uncanny dodge; **DR** 10/magic and silver; **Resist** cold 10, electricity 10

Fort +2, **Ref** +17, **Will** +6

OFFENSE

Spd 30 ft.

Melee slam +12 (1d6+7 plus energy drain)

Special Attacks blood drain, children of the night, create spawn, dominate (DC 15), sneak attack +4d6

TACTICS

During Combat Once combat begins, the hidden skulks move along the walls of the room and attempt to take up positions where they can move as pairs to flank foes. They continue to fight two-on-one as long as possible to maximize their sneak attacks. They prefer to fight foes who do not possess silver weapons, breaking off combat with those who use such weapons to seek easier prey if possible.

Morale The vampire skulks fight until reduced to 0 hit points, at which point they turn gaseous and drift toward the balcony to the northwest. Once there, they seep through cracks in the wall into a room under the balcony in which their coffins (actually nothing more than narrow niches in the floor) wait for them to rest and recover.

STATISTICS

Str 20, **Dex** 24, **Con** —, **Int** 12, **Wis** 18, **Cha** 12

Base Atk +5; **Grp** +10

Feats Alertness, Altitude Affinity, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Shield Proficiency, Weapon Finesse

Skills Bluff +9, Climb +13, Hide +41, Jump +15, Listen +20, Move Silently +34, Search +9, Sense Motive +12, Spot +20, Tumble +17

Languages Thassilonian

SQ alternate form, gaseous form, spider climb, trapfinding, untrackable

Gear +1 padded armor, +1 buckler, ring of protection +1

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Untrackable (Ex) A vampire skulk can pass through forest and subterranean settings without a trace—double the DC for any tracking attempt against a skulk.

Skills Skulks have a +8 racial bonus on Move Silently checks and a +15 racial bonus on Hide checks.

SIHEDRON RING

Aura moderate abjuration and illusion; **CL** 9th

Slot —; **Price** 35,000 gp

DESCRIPTION

This otherwise plain gold ring is adorned with seven black sapphires arranged in the shape of a tiny Sihedron rune. These rings were given to agents and allies of the runelords as badges of office and tokens of appreciation for their work—sometimes, they were given as bribes to those a runelord was attempting to win to his cause. Unlike the more common *Sihedron medallion*, a runelord has no special link to a *Sihedron ring*—such a link would undermine the item's diplomatic value, since many of those who wore them were strong-willed and powerful creatures in their own right.

A *Sihedron ring* grants a +3 deflection bonus to AC, a +3 resistance bonus on all saving throws, and protects you with *endure elements*. At will, as a standard action, you can use the *Sihedron ring* to change the appearance of your clothing or armor into any other kind of clothing or armor. The actual clothing and armor worn retain all their properties (including weight) when glamered—only *true seeing* or similar magic reveals the true nature of your adornments.

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Forge Ring, *endure elements*, *resistance*, *shield*;

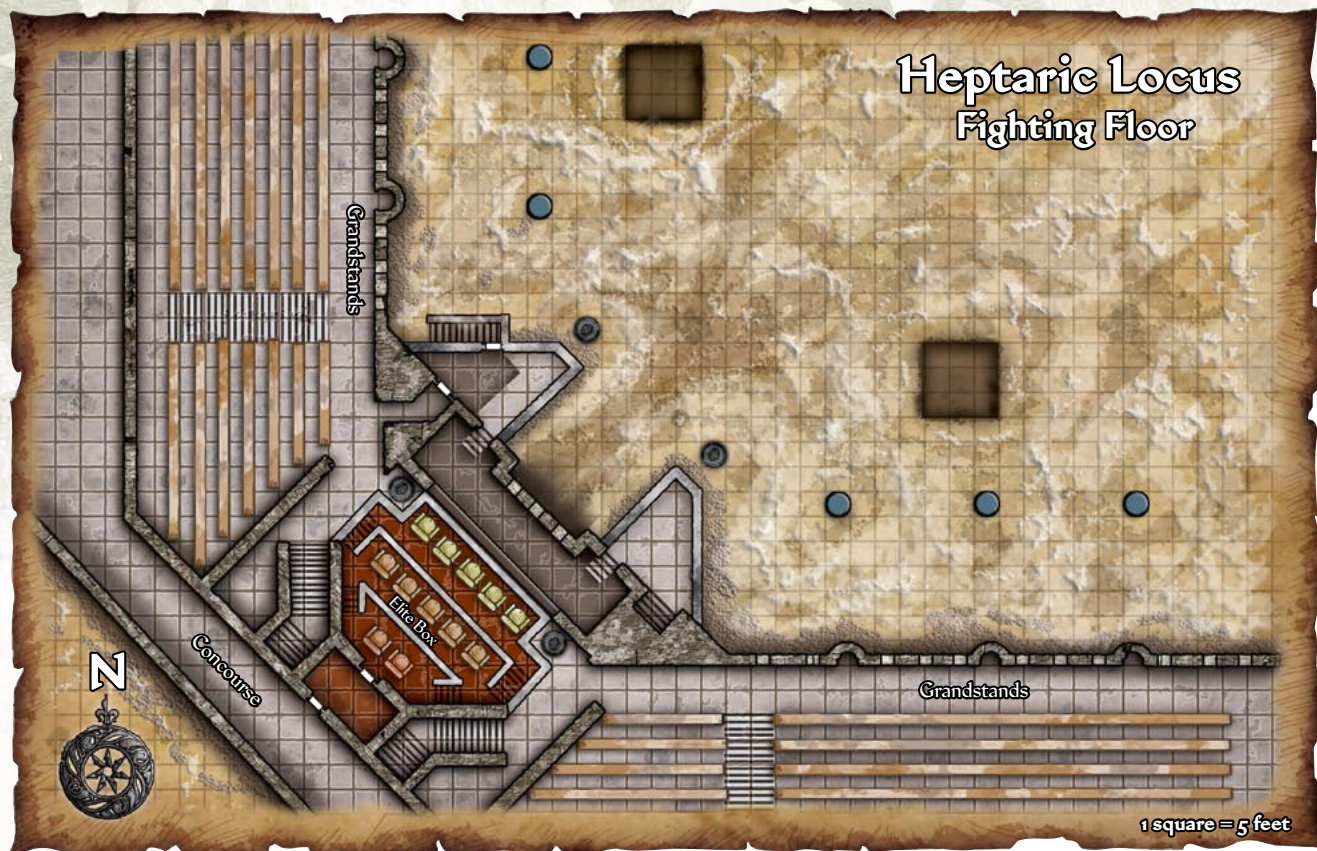
Cost 17,500 gp, 1,400 XP

J. The Tangle

This southern portion of the Entertainment District was once the hub of brothels, gambling dens, small arenas and fighting pits, and less savory venues such as torture chambers and drug parlors. Often informally referred to as the Eurythian Quarter, after Runelord Sorshen's realm to the south (although never called such when Karzoug or his agents were in earshot), this portion of the city was ruined by the fall of Thassilon and the attendant volcanic eruption. While the pyroclastic flow that buried the Slave District didn't hit this section of the city, lava bombs and a devastating mudslide did, reducing much of this region to tangled rubble. The nutrient-rich mud cascaded into the edge of this quarter and buried dozens of public baths built around thermal springs. The combination of nutrients, mineral-laden waters, and a favorable environment caused by the warming and humidifying influence of the hot springs resulted in a burst of strange plant and fungal growth. This ecosystem flourished, expanding across much of the area and covering it in an enveloping tangle of pallid vines and sheets of lichen. This overgrowth ground the buildings beneath into rubble and then into soil, creating more opportunities for growth and leaving a strange high-altitude fungus jungle filled with hidden ruins and unexpected flora and fauna. The flora was never able to expand farther south onto the mud field because of the lack of necessary moisture and warmth provided by proximity to the thermal springs.

While the combination of fertile soil, plentiful water, and artificially warm climate did cause the beginning of the Tangle's spread, it has since far outgrown and outlasted those natural

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resources. Not only is this plant life unnaturally healthy, it is also unnaturally large and has begun to mutate, in some cases creating wholly unnatural species. Strange fauna sometimes emerges from the tangled depths of this quarter, and at night, weird and mournful cries can be heard from deep within. Whether these are creatures somehow transplanted here or monstrous plant forms resulting from continuing mutation is unclear to the giants and lamias, who take pains to avoid this portion of the city, as giants who wandered too close have gone missing. A lamia-led search party of giants sent in recently to determine the source of the strange growth has yet to return.

The Tangle's depths are beyond the scope of this adventure, but should the PCs decide to explore this dangerous section of Xin-Shalast, they soon find there is a malign intelligence to the Tangle. Anyone exploring here is attacked by strange and terrifying forms of sentient plant life and creatures that exist in a symbiotic relationship with them, with shambling mounds, immense tendriculoses, yellow musk zombie giants, and vegpeygmys (the last two of which are detailed in the *Tome of Horrors*) being the primary denizens of the deep Tangle. Those captured alive are taken to the original hot springs beneath a cathedral of greenery, where the malevolent Root of the Tangle dwells. There they are suspended alive above this water, where their bodies are then slowly drained of nutrients to feed the plant host. The Root of the Tangle is, in fact, an enormous and unusually intelligent yellow musk creeper—this plant has an Intelligence of 20, 26 Hit Dice, and is Colossal in size. The

creeper's eventual goal is nothing less lofty than to grow over the entirety of Golarion—but in the thousands of years it has already been growing, it's only managed to take over this portion of Xin-Shalast. Still, the creeper is patient and immortal—a good combination for those with world domination on the mind.

K. Heptaric Locus (EL 16)

The greatest architectural feat of the Lower City was (and remains) the magnificent Heptaric Locus, a massive covered arena and amphitheater of unsurpassed grandeur composed on a foundation shaped as a vast Sihedron Rune to represent the might and resplendence of Thassilon. To the average citizen of the city, this coliseum represented the heart of the entire nation of Shalast. This magnificent edifice rises more than 500 feet to an elaborate seven-paneled dome of crystal, from which a slender spire extends another 200 feet into the air. Seven towers surround the dome, one dedicated to each of the Thassilonian schools of magic (with the tower of Greed aimed directly at the Spires of Xin-Shalast above). Though the building shows signs of the years, with parts of the facade having fallen away and some of the lesser domes fallen in, the great central dome and spire remain intact and alive with the multiple permanent *daylight* spells that circumscribe their interiors, creating a shining beacon in the sky above. Inside, the Heptaric Locus is a ring-shaped maze of access tunnels and gates surrounding a vast arena floor. The arena seats surrounding this heptagonal battleground can accommodate up to 150,000 spectators. Below lie even more chambers—gladiator cells,

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training rooms, and endless storage chambers necessary to put on the spectacles for which the arena was justly famous.

Despite the excellent condition of the facilities, Karzoug's harridans have not yet attempted to reclaim this structure for use. They have not cited reasons when the giants and lesser lamia, eager to see the grand building restored to its proper glory, ask about the subject, instead pushing the topic aside in favor of more pressing matters. The truth is the lamiakin secretly fear the arena. The thousands of blood-soaked spectacles held in its confines to sate the lust of the bloodthirsty observers left their mark on the battlefield. In fact, following the fall of the empire so long ago, the emotional resonance that remained created a locus not of the glories of Thassilon as intended, but rather a locus of death that suited well the tastes of a particularly cruel gelugon named Gamigin.

Creature: Long held as a bound guardian and oracle by one of Karzoug's many apprentices, Gamigin escaped his prison when Thassilon fell. The powerful ice devil landed atop the central dome of the Heptaric Locus and watched as Xin-Shalast fell into ruin, torn apart from outside by volcanic eruptions and inside by rioting giants and wizards gone mad with terror. Eventually, even the skies above grew dark, and for a thousand years after Thassilon's fall so the darkness remained. In that time, Gamigin traveled Golarion, adding to the suffering and despair wherever he went. When the Great Darkness finally passed, Gamigin returned to Xin-Shalast and claimed the Heptaric Locus as his lair.

Since then, the ice devil has periodically left Xin-Shalast to search for "entertainment" in Golarion, often spending hundreds

of years at a time in roles as diverse as mass murderer, mercenary, warlord, the power behind several thrones, and even a god worshiped by several humanoid tribes. Each time, outraged and righteous adventurers eventually rose against the devil, but he always escaped via teleportation and returned here to rest, relax, and plot his next move. He maintains his presence in the arena with the clever use of illusions and summoned devils—even though he only spends about a decade each century in Xin-Shalast, his efforts have been strong enough to secure a lasting pall over the place.

The PCs might decide to explore the Heptaric Locus on their own. An exploration of the locus should involve encounters with summoned bone devils, ancient traps, and periodic encounters with the wraiths that haunt the place—these wraiths do not molest Gamigin, but they do rise up against other intruders.

As in the case of the Hidden Beast, Karzoug noted Gamigin's presence and sent his agents to contact the ice devil, asking him to ally with the runelord when he rose to his full power. Gamigin, intrigued by what would happen if Thassilon returned, agreed, and was given a *Sihedron ring* as a token of Karzoug's thanks. If the PCs come to the attention of Karzoug's minions (perhaps after spending several days in Xin-Shalast and killing many lamias and giants, or maybe after they first attempt to climb Mhar Massif), Khalib contacts Gamigin and asks the devil to assassinate the PCs. Gamigin's attack on the PCs can happen at any time after this order is given; the devil prefers to locate the PCs as they rest or wait until they're fighting other monsters in the ruins before launching his attack.

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One section of the Heptaric Locus is shown on the nearby map; the elite box shown serves as Gamigin's main lair, so if he attacks the PCs and retreats, it's to here he does so. This chamber is guarded at all times by a pair of dread wraiths allied with Gamigin. You can use the section of the Heptaric Locus as a guide for generating additional maps for this large building as necessary.

GAMIGIN

CR 16

Male elite advanced ice devil (MM 56)

LE Large outsider (evil, extraplanar, lawful)

Init +4; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., see in darkness; Listen +28, Spot +28

Aura fear aura (10-ft. radius, DC 25), *unholy aura* (spell-like ability always active)

DEFENSE

AC 35, touch 17, flat-footed 31

(+4 deflection, +4 Dexterity, +18 natural, –1 size)

hp 225 (18d8+144); regeneration 5 (good-aligned weapons and spells with the good descriptor)

Fort +23, **Ref** +19, **Will** +22

DR 10/good; **Immune** fire and poison; **Resist** acid and cold 10; **SR** 25

OFFENSE

Spd 40 ft.; fly 60 ft. (good)

Melee +4 *icy burst returning spear* +30/+25/+20/+15

(2d6+16/19–20/X3 plus 1d6 cold plus slow) and

bite +23 (2d6+4) and

tail +23 (3d6+4 plus slow)

Ranged +4 *icy burst returning spear* +26 (2d6+12/19–20/X3 plus 1d6 cold plus slow)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

Special Attacks slow (DC 27), *summon devil*

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 13th)

At will—*cone of cold* (DC 22), *fly*, *greater teleport* (self plus 50 pounds of objects only), *ice storm*, *persistent image* (DC 22), *unholy aura* (DC 25), *wall of ice* (DC 21)

TACTICS

Before Combat Gamigin maintains *fly* and *unholy aura* at all times. Just before he starts a fight, he attempts to summon 2d4 bone devils to aid him.

During Combat Gamigin lets summoned devils engage foes in melee while he wreaks havoc with mobility, using *wall of ice* to break up enemy tactics. *Cone of cold* and *ice storm* are favorites to use at range, but once he's engaged in melee he abandons his spell-like abilities and focuses his anger on obvious healers before moving on to other enemies.

Morale Gamigin has lived for thousands of years by knowing when he's outclassed, but he's never been confronted here in Xin-Shalast. He cuts it close to the edge as a result, fleeing to a distant hideout via *greater teleport* only if reduced to fewer than 20 hit points. He does not return to Xin-Shalast anytime soon if he escapes in this manner.

STATISTICS

Str 27, **Dex** 18, **Con** 26, **Int** 22, **Wis** 24, **Cha** 24

Base Atk +18; **Grp** +30

Feats Dodge, Improved Critical (spear), Mobility, Multiattack,

Persuasive, Spring Attack, Weapon Focus (spear)

Skills Bluff +30, Concentration +29, Intimidate +32, Jump +33, Knowledge (arcana) +27, Knowledge (history) +27, Knowledge (local) +27, Knowledge (nobility and royalty) +27, Knowledge (religion) +27, Knowledge (the planes) +27, Listen +28, Sense Motive +28, Spellcraft +29, Spot +28

Languages Celestial, Draconic, Infernal; telepathy 100 ft.

Gear +4 *icy burst returning spear*

DREAD WRAITHS (2)

CR 11

hp 104 (MM 258)

Treasure: Apart from the gear he carries, Gamigin keeps his treasure split among dozens of caches scattered across the face of Golarion, nest eggs for starting up new projects as the urge seizes him. One such cache is kept in the elite box that serves as his lair. This consists of three darkwood chests (themselves worth 300 gp apiece) containing 4,500 gp, 220 pp, and 8,000 gp in assorted gems and jewelry. His *Sihedron ring* sits in one of these chests as well, ignored and unused since its benefits are overshadowed by Gamigin's *unholy aura*.

L. Vomarck's Circus

For events too large to be held in the Heptaric Locus, Vomarck's Circus had to suffice in ancient times. Named for the stone giant champion who won the first Mastodon Chariot Races, only to die moments after victory on the goring tusks of his own blood-crazed mastodon team, this venue held everything from the aforementioned races to wizard duels, siege weapon demonstrations, and even standard horse and horse-drawn chariot races. Regardless of the event, most of the competitions were to the death. Events were talked about throughout Shalast, and the seating could hold a quarter-million spectators. Much of the southern portion of the circus has been enveloped and ruined by the Tangle, which extends a bit farther every year. Barely visible among this layer of vegetation is a stone colossus depicting the ancient hero Vomarck, complete with mastodons in the process of goring him to death. The effect is that at first glance the whole appears to be some hideous multi-headed beast emerging from the overgrowth.

M. Spolarium

This long, low series of buildings is situated strategically near the Heptaric Locus and Vomarck's Circus. Its primary purpose was disposal of the dead contestants from those two venues, but it quickly came to serve as the city morgue and crematorium. Deceased combatants were brought here and stripped of goods and equipment, which were then reused or sent to the Artisan District for repair and refitting. The morbid attendants were not above absconding with jewelry, personal effects, gold teeth, and even ornate tattoos on flayed swatches of flesh. The great ovens that then consumed the remnants are located at the back of the building and remain functional—if someone took the time to refuel and relight them—though there is a considerable layer of

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soot and charred humanoid remains to dig or chip through to gain access to them.

Intrepid adventurers might search these chambers to find one of the many caches of valuables gathered by the morticians and secretly hoarded to prevent nosy relatives or slave owners from gaining proof that the bodies had been looted. Several such hoards still exist under loose flagstones, in hollow pillars, and in at least one oven. Unfortunately, spontaneously generated undead are a problem in this place, and searchers must contend with spectres, dread wraiths, ghosts, and worse during their scavenging. In addition to these standard varieties of undead, strange undead beings composed of burning corpses roam the halls as well, and more than one centuries-unused furnace has sprung to sudden, searing flames while an intrepid looter explored its interior for hidden gold.

N. Hidden Path

Although this relatively small tower might seem uninteresting at first glance, particularly due to the looming presence of the Heptaric Locus and Vomark's Circus, the basement contains a long, winding tunnel that leads up a gently rising slope inside Mhar Massif. This path bypasses a fair portion of the lower route and allows characters to avoid the chance of being spotted by guardians in the lower city entirely. The passageway exits onto a high mountain ledge in the upper portion of the Rising District at an elevation of 22,000 feet.

Creatures: Unfortunately, the reason the tunnel is so free of monsters despite its wide-open upper entrance is due to the presence of a 28-foot-tall predator that dwells on the ledge overlooking the mountainside. This is an immense mountain roper, a creature adapted to the high mountain environs that normally subsists on a diet of crag spiders and other vermin. It immediately attacks any characters it notices, eager for a change in cuisine.

MOUNTAIN ROPER

CR 15

Advanced roper (MM 215)

CE Huge magical beast

Init +5; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Listen +7, Spot +7

DEFENSE

AC 27, touch 10, flat-footed 26

(+1 Dexterity, +17 natural, –1 size)

hp 216 (16d10+128)**Fort** +17, **Ref** +10, **Will** +11**Immune** electricity; **Resist** cold 10; **SR** 30**Weakness** vulnerability to fire

OFFENSE

Spd 10 ft.**Melee** bite +24 (3d6+15)**Ranged** 6 strands +15 ranged touch (drag)**Space** 15 ft.; **Reach** 15 ft. (75 feet with strand)**Special Attacks** weakness (DC 28)

TACTICS

During Combat The mountain roper lashes out at the closest foes, but isn't unintelligent. It knows to focus its first attacks on heavily armored foes.

Morale The mountain roper fights to the death.

STATISTICS

Str 30, **Dex** 12, **Con** 26, **Int** 10, **Wis** 20, **Cha** 12**Base Atk** +16; **Grp** +34

Feats Ability Focus (weakness), Alertness, Altitude Affinity, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Weapon Focus (strand)

Skills Climb +29, Hide +12 (+20 in stony or icy areas), Listen +7, Spot +7

Languages Terran, Thassilonian

O. House of Divine Consumption

This mighty structure is walled off from the road by a row of corrugated towers ending in fluted prominences and onion-shaped domes. Multiple balconies open off of these towers and overlook the ruined compound below. Beyond gates of beaten bronze, a huge temple constructed upon a raised platform dominates the compound itself. Thassilonian runes and the seven-pointed Sihedron are prominent motifs engraved in the stone of the temple walls. Double pagodas, both of which are hollow and open onto the temple nave below, top the temple itself. One holds a massive statue of Karzoug rising from the floor of the temple, his head brushing the top of the pagoda. The other is empty, and the floor beneath is set with a gold engraving of the ever-present clawed hand grasping a gem—the rune of greed.

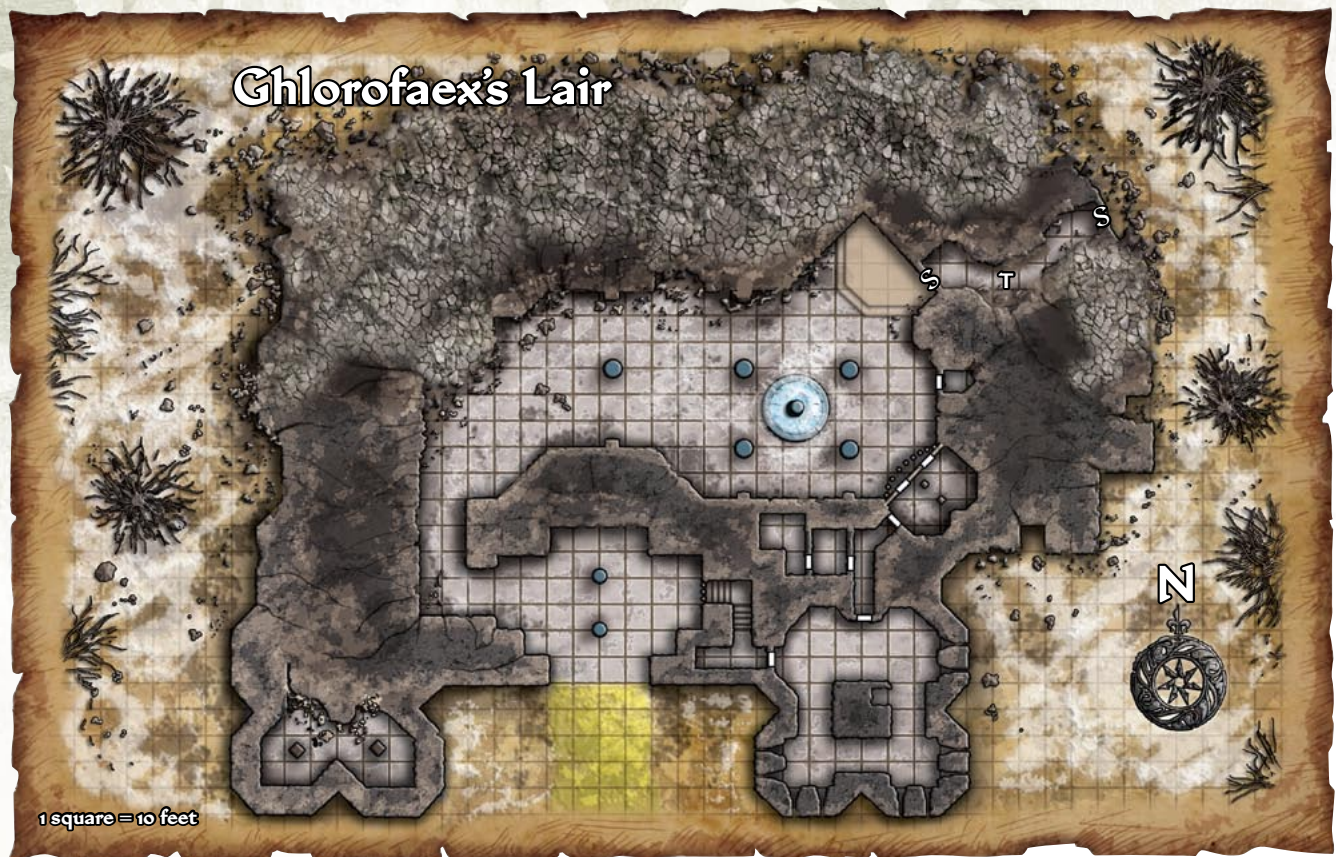
The House of Divine Consumption served as the focal point for the official church of Shalast, invented by Kaladurnae, the first Runelord of Greed, and revering the philosophical and esoteric tenants of greed. The lamiakin high priestess of the temple, referred to by the title of Most High, served as the highest authority in the Lower City, answering only to the Harridans of the Mountain and other officials who actually received the right to dwell in the Spires of Xin-Shalast. Edicts coming from the mouth of the Most High were considered law unless countermanded by Karzoug or one of his representatives from the citadel above.

The current high priestess is Most High Ceoptra, a lamia harridan who serves Karzoug faithfully as she works to re-establish his following and rebuild the ruins of the Lower City into the capital of his new empire. She has not lived within the walls of this immense temple for years, now dwelling in the Pinnacle of Avarice above so she can be at hand to speak with Karzoug as necessary. Many of Xin-Shalast's lamias—harridans, matriarchs, and normal lamias alike, dwell in this building or in the surrounding ruins—as a result, 50% of the encounters within 1,000 feet of this area are with lamia patrols.

P. Temple of the Beast

This gargantuan edifice has not fared as well with the passage of the years. Built as one bulky ziggurat-like mass with multiple towers, it has collapsed somewhat under its own weight and sections have caved in. Exploring the interior is a dangerous prospect due to the threat of additional collapses, though anyone doing so can quickly determine that this was a temple dedicated to Lamashtu, popular with many of the more brutish and

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animalistic races in Karzoug's service. Images and idols of lions, dragons, and fantastical predators cover the cracked plaster of the walls and ceilings, and the empty corridors still have the faint musky odor of wild animals. No one has attempted to reoccupy this structure, but the few to have explored it and emerged alive speak of bestial shadows moving around corners just out of view, echoed rumbling growls, and the very real sensation that something was stalking them. Explorers who did not return were later found as bloody smears of mangled flesh, recognizable only by their tattered gear.

Q. Ghlorofaex's Lair (EL 17)

This fortified but partially collapsed structure was once a massive blockhouse of stone and steel with a single well-protected gate providing the only obvious entrance. In a city of greed, the most important consideration was that the rulers received their share. Thus, this fortress housed the offices of a veritable army of tax collectors—agents in the upper levels and brutish enforcers billeted in the bowels of the building. In addition, the city's mint and treasury were located here as well, as were the offices of the city's commissar, who oversaw all of these operations.

When Thassilon collapsed, these tax collectors and the commissar were among the first to flee. Those few who simply fled survived, for the most part, but those who attempted to rob the treasury before they left Xin-Shalast only slowed their

escape long enough to doom them when a pyroclastic flow from the volcanic eruption swept through this portion of the city. The stolen treasure was scattered and over the years decayed or was claimed by other survivors, leaving the fortress itself empty. But not forever.

The building today is mostly collapsed, but a few rooms remain clear. The central audience chamber is partially fallen in, but enough of it remains to serve as a spacious lair for the current denizen. A lone tower remains standing just south of this room, but its halls are empty. A single secret tunnel leads into the central chamber from the east—these doors can be discovered with a DC 25 Search check, but they (as well as the main entrance to the building to the south) are guarded by *alarm* spells cast by the ruin's occupant.

Creature: A powerful blue dragon named Ghlorofaex, one of the strongest dragons in the Kodar region, discovered Xin-Shalast 150 years ago and was impressed, even then, with the city's glory and extravagance. Himself a creature of greed and far-reaching knowledge about Thassilonian ruins, he chose this building as his lair as soon as he recognized its original purpose. Ghlorofaex spent the last century studying Xin-Shalast and building his treasure hoard—mostly from objects stolen from lowlanders, as he views most of Xin-Shalast's treasures as better placed now than in his personal treasury.

After Karzoug awoke, one of the first commands he issued his newly awakened rune giant minions was to contact all local

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dragons and recruit them to the runelord's cause. In ancient times, Karzoug counted dozens of dragons as his allies, and he is eager to rebuild these ties. Most of the dragons recruited so far still dwell in the surrounding mountains (and can be encountered as wandering monsters), and only Ghlorofaex lived inside the city itself. Of the dragons, this blue was dangerous enough that, as in the case of the Hidden Beast and Gamigin, the rune giants opted for a diplomatic approach. Fortunately for all concerned, Ghlorofaex was honored to have been chosen by Karzoug. A student of Thassilon's architecture, the blue dragon is eager to ally himself with the rising runelord, knowing full well from his studies of the city's carved walls that favored dragon allies were well rewarded by the rulers of Xin-Shalast in the past.

For now, Ghlorofaex has been spending his time waiting patiently here in his lair, emerging now and then to make token fly-overs of the city to appraise its condition. He does not react well to intruders unless they can convince him they are Karzoug's minions as well, in which case Ghlorofaex demands to know when Karzoug will be fully returned to the world so he might benefit from the runelord's alliance. The dragon has little patience for visitors, though, be they giants or lamiakin or PCs, and if visitors remain too long (5 minutes should be the maximum), the dragon's impatience gets the better of him and he attacks.

GHLOORFAEX

CR 17

Male elite mature adult blue dragon (earth) (MM 72)

LE Huge dragon

Init +6; **Senses** blindsense 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft., keen senses; Listen +30, Spot +30

Aura frightful presence (210 ft., DC 26)

DEFENSE

AC 40, touch 13, flat-footed 38

(+4 armor, +3 deflection, +2 Dexterity, +23 natural, -2 size)

hp 324 (24d12+168)

Fort +24, **Ref** +19, **Will** +20

DR 10/magic; **Immune** electricity, paralysis, sleep; **Resist** cold 30;

SR 22

OFFENSE

Spd 40 ft., burrow 20 ft., fly 150 ft. (poor)

Melee bite +30 (4d6+8/19-20) and

2 claws +28 (2d6+4) and

2 wings +28 (1d8+4) and

tail slap +28 (2d6+12)

Space 15 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft. (15 ft. with bite)

Special Attacks breath weapon (100 ft. line, 14d8 electricity, DC 29), crush (4d6+12, DC 29), sound imitation (DC 26)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 7th)

3/day—create/destroy water, ventriloquism (DC 15)

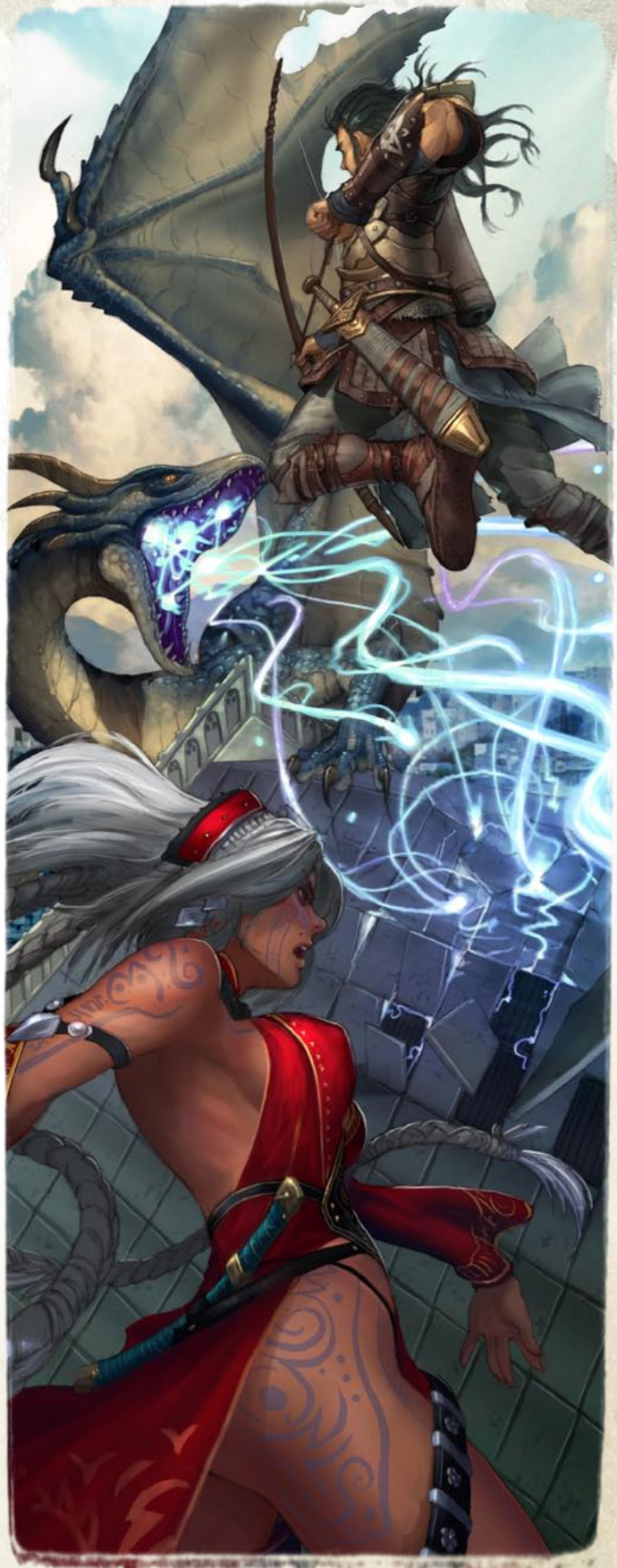
Spells Known (CL 7th)

3rd (5/day)—cure serious wounds, haste

2nd (7/day)—invisibility, lesser restoration, resist energy

1st (7/day)—alarm, cure light wounds, mage armor, magic missile, shield

0 (6/day)—detect magic, detect poison, mage hand, mending, message, prestidigitation, read magic



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TACTICS

During Combat Ghlorofaex first attempts a breath weapon pass if two or more opponents are in a line. He focuses his *shatter* spell against an obvious handhold where a PC clings or a piton is embedded.

Before engaging in melee, he casts *shield of faith* and *invisibility*, unleashing a second breath weapon before doing so if able.

Morale If reduced to below 100 hit points, Ghlorofaex flees back to the Teeth to warn his brethren. If this transpires, chances of encounters occur every 2 hours and involve pairs of dragons.

STATISTICS

Str 26, **Dex** 15, **Con** 24, **Int** 18, **Wis** 16, **Cha** 19

Base Atk +24; **Grp** +40

Feats Altitude Affinity, Dodge, Hover, Improved Critical (bite), Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Attack (bite), Mobility, Multiattack, Spring Attack

Skills Bluff +31, Concentration +34, Hide +21, Intimidate +33, Knowledge (architecture and engineering) +31, Listen +30, Sense Motive +30, Spellcraft +33, Spot +30, Use Magic Device +31

Languages Common, Draconic, Giant, Infernal, Thassilonian

Gear *Sihedron ring*, ring of greater cold resistance

Treasure: Ghlorofaex keeps his treasure in a highly organized state behind a large stone door in the eastern area; beyond is a 10-foot-square chamber, the far wall of which is collapsed. There's more than enough room left for the dragon's treasure, though, which consists of 64,000 sp, 21,000 gp, 520 pp, a gold coffer worth 1,400 gp that contains 35 assorted gemstones worth a total of 12,000 gp, a silver bracelet worth 25 gp, a jade comb worth 300 gp, a pair of red silk gloves embroidered with gold thread worth 800 gp for the pair (in a glass display box itself worth 100 gp), a suit of masterwork mithral half plate, a masterwork breastplate, a suit of +2 banded mail, a wand of lightning bolt (CL 6th, 23 charges), a leather bag containing 4 frozen *potions of cure light wounds*, a frozen *potion of owl's wisdom*, a flask of *oil of magic vestment* +4, a bejeweled ivory scroll tube worth 300 gp that contains a *scroll of unseen servant* and a *scroll of keen edge*, a *ring of evasion*, and a *rod of extend metamagic*.

R. Shahlaria

Situated on a low rise overlooking the northern edge of Jotunburg is a ponderous fortress that served as the pride and joy of the Shalastine military. This was the Shahlaria, the military training and indoctrination academy that turned out the hordes of loyal giant soldiers that served as the front line of Karzoug's fighting forces. Under the direct tutelage of the Grand Polemarch, the supreme military leader of Shalast who answered only to the runelord himself, the commandant of the academy gave the giant conscripts and volunteers the premiere martial and tactical training available in that age, and probably any age since. It was here that the rune giants of Xin-Shalast dwelt, in massive chambers carved into the rock below the fortress above.

Turengate, the last grand polemarch of Xin-Shalast, was considered to be perhaps its finest. His forces saw few setbacks and no defeats in the constant vying with armies of other runelords,

and he was the only general to face Alaznist's personal army on the field of battle and walk away a clear victor. A mystical book called the *Ebidwar* is said to contain Turengate's military strategies. Rumors state the *Ebidwar* can bestow Turengate's insights and instincts upon a reader, making said reader a nearly undefeatable war leader. Legends of the *Ebidwar* continued through the many intervening centuries and the book has now become mythical and synonymous with any general's overall strategic philosophy. In truth, the *Ebidwar* does exist and remains hidden deep in the ruins of the Shahlaria. Anyone who finds and translates its Thassilonian script would surely become a mighty general among the modern nations of Golarion, commanding great respect and enabling him to raise loyal armies almost overnight.

The majority of the cloud giants and storm giants who live in Xin-Shalast dwell in Shahlaria—an attempt to explore this immense structure could well entail an adventure in itself. Unfortunately, apart from incidental treasure (and perhaps the discovery of the *Ebidwar*), there's little in here for the PCs to aid them in their current conflict against Karzoug.

PART FOUR: SCALING MHAR MASSIF

The geological monstrosity known as Mhar Massif provides the very backbone of the World's Roof and supports one of Golarion's tallest peaks. Reaching a staggering elevation of 31,565 feet, the peak shares its name with the entire massif, whose eponym is derived from the gigantic carving of Karzoug's visage that graces the south face of the mountain. This feature is itself 1,500 feet high and reaches the crown of the mountain. Just below this carving soar the mighty towers of the Spires of Xin-Shalast, though even the highest of these dare not intrude upon the elevation that is the face's alone.

The name Mhar is itself from a legend, as can be recalled with a DC 30 Knowledge (history) or Knowledge (the planes) check. This legend tells of a being's attempted entry into Golarion from some alien realm, only to be caught and petrified midway through its emergence from the mountain. What Mhar might have been and what power might have been great enough to stop him is unknown, but none dared contemplate the consequences had Mhar been successful in his transition. The entity's face was all that remained, frozen at the mountain's peak in stone. Runelord Kaladurnae (the original Runelord of Greed) chose this site to build his city partially due to these legends, and now, thousands of years after Thassilon's fall, tales of Mhar can still be read in moldering tomes. With each new runelord, arcane sculptors changed and altered the features of the face to match the new lord, yet still, even the runelords themselves couldn't completely shake the feeling that something else, something far older than Thassilon itself, looked out from those cold stony eyes in the World's Roof.

Certainly, the proximity of Leng grows ever more powerful the higher one climbs along the slopes of Mhar Massif, almost as if the mountain's sheer height were piercing the firmament and allowing other worlds to leak in around its crown. Scaling the Face of Mhar is extremely dangerous, with even the most obvious

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and safest route (the ascending Golden Road) posing numerous difficulties along the way.

Ascending the mountain via the Golden Road is the easiest climb, requiring only a dozen DC 15 Climb checks in total along its face, where the road becomes particularly steep or has crumbled away for short stretches. Attempts to climb the mountain along any other route require DC 25 Climb checks, made round-by-round, along with a dozen areas that require DC 30 Climb checks to bypass particularly harrowing obstacles. Magical flight is a much safer option, as is teleportation. Even then, the winds, thin air, and cold present deadly hazards.

As the PCs climb up from the Lower City, there's a 15% chance per hour that someone notices and attacks—possibly dragons, flying patrols of lamias, or frost giants mounted on crag spiders. Once the PCs climb above 20,000 feet, though, they have no further chance of encounters, as even these hardy monstrosities find the conditions at this elevation uncomfortable. Once they pass above 26,000 feet, the PCs enter what is known as the “death zone,” the point at which the air itself grows too thin to breathe. Yet these perils are merely the prelude for what awaits them at the mountain's crown.

The Occluding Field

To keep the Spires of Xin-Shalast a secret through the millennia, the entire complex lies within a vast effect called the occluding field, centered upon the Eye of Avarice (area **X11**). The occluding field renders the entire area shown on the Spires of Xin-Shalast map on page 47 impenetrable to divination or scrying of any sort (though use of the Eye of Avarice to scry upon the outside world is not similarly barred).

Furthermore, the occluding field sheds a powerful effect that spurns and rejects those not attuned to the region. This field feels like an invisible force, almost like gravity, that seems to push against intruders. Teleportation effects do not function in this area, and it creates a completely impassable barrier to creatures that are astrally *projecting* or who attempt to enter the region while *ethereal* or *shadow walking*. The sensation also causes intense vertigo, as if gravity's direction had suddenly changed to be behind the character attempting to approach the Spires of Xin-Shalast. Worse, once a minute, the field pulses with invisible force that creates wracking, blinding pain. When that happens, a creature in the occluding field must make a DC 20 Fortitude save to avoid taking 8d6 points of damage (this damage bypasses all forms of damage reduction and energy resistance) and a DC 20 Will save to avoid taking 1d4 points of Wisdom drain as flashes of an alien world rip through his mind, leaving madness and fear in their wake (this is a mind-affecting effect). A character who fails both saving throws in the same round is permanently blinded by the pain.

A character who wears a *Sihedron medallion* or *Sihedron ring* can ignore the effects of the occluding field. Mindless creatures like constructs and vermin are immune to these effects. Characters who wield *domineering rune-forged weapons* (see *Pathfinder* #5) gain a +4 bonus on saving throws to resist the effects and do not go blind if they miss both saves.



XIN-SHALAST'S INSPIRATION

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan

A stately pleasure-dome decree:

Where Alph, the sacred river, ran

Through caverns measureless to man

Down to a sunless sea.

With these words, Samuel Taylor Coleridge launched into his poem fragment “Kubla Khan,” or “A Vision in a Dream.”

Likewise, with these words did the fabled palace of Xin-Shalast take shape, a fairy-tale castle atop an incomparable mountain peak. Through Coleridge's poem, my vision for Xin-Shalast took root and became a place both epic and sublime, with a quest worthy of Kubla Khan to find its mystical spires. Despite this inspiration, don't be fooled; Xin-Shalast is no idyll. It is a place of rampant danger and harsh surroundings just waiting to take the life of the unwary adventurer. Perhaps when seen from a distance, serenely gracing a snow-capped peak, a viewer might let his mind take flights of fancy as to what wonders such a palace could hold.

—Greg A. Vaughan

If the PCs have not yet learned about the aid the *Sihedron rings* can grant them, once they are exposed to the occluding field's power they can certainly learn about these items' value via spells like *commune* or *divination*.

The Spires

The Spires of Xin-Shalast, the fabled citadel on the World's Roof, house the end of the party's quest. Situated on the steep face of the mountain in the death zone between 26,000 and 30,000 feet, these fantastic spires served as the administrative heart of the Satrapy of Greed and the seat of power of Karzoug and his runelord predecessors. Composed of multiple towers clinging to the side of the mountain, surrounding the central Pinnacle of Avarice, this vast citadel once comprised a city in and of itself, with each tower soaring hundreds of feet in height and containing countless passages, chambers, and battlements. Despite the size of this fortress, it is all but abandoned—only the highest level of the Pinnacle of Avarice, the chambers where Karzoug spent the last minutes of Thassilon's height and the chambers where he will once again emerge into this world, is inhabited. Its residents are Karzoug's elite—his champions, his apprentices, and his generals—and to defeat the runelord and prevent his return, the PCs must first best these powerful minions.

The outlying areas of the Spires are detailed in brief here, however, for you to expand upon in your campaign as you see fit.

S. The Teeth

These structures of cut alabaster rise on squat bases to pyramidal peaks 400 feet high. Their interiors are largely hollow, composed of a few cavernous chambers. In days of old, these towers served as the guarded gateway into the domicile of the Runelords of Greed. Blue dragons outfitted with *necklaces of adaptation* once

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dwelt in these towers, serving as guardians for the approach to the Spires. In time, Karzoug hopes to repopulate his draconic guards, starting with Ghlorofaex. For now, though, these ivory teeth stand silent and empty.

T. Harridans' Compound

These three spires have intricate facades with hundreds of arches and balconies. Each stands 1,300 feet high, and the three surround a walled compound. Those harridans who served in the runelord's highest echelon and saw to most of the administration of his empire—freeing him to pursue his magical research and plot the downfall of his rivals—became known as the Harridans of the Mountain, for their place of prominence at the feet of the runelord's own abode. The three towers of this compound were the Ambassadors' Spire, where envoys to the court of the Runelord of Greed were welcomed and housed; the Rune Spire, where Xin-Shalast's giant servitors were subjected to the will-sapping and mind-controlling talents of the lamias to indoctrinate them as absolutely loyal slaves; and the Harridans' Spire, where the Harridans of the Mountain themselves resided and held court with their own secret councils. The descendants of these lamiakin have spread throughout Xin-Shalast and await a time when their leaders return to these towers.

U. Malign Ascension

This winding path climbs from the harridans' compound to the runelord's citadel. It rises 1,000 feet over its meandering course, providing the only direct land access from the city below that doesn't involve flight or mountain climbing.

V. Fugue Towers

This triangular fortress is comprised of 3 slender towers rising 800 feet, each connected by thick walls to create a deep pit of a courtyard in the center. A single stair spirals within the south tower, connecting all of the levels, which consist of hall upon hall of cell blocks built within the thick fortress walls. On this desolate precipice, enemies too valuable to kill whiled away the years in squalor and isolation. Today, the cells stand empty but for the souls of the restless dead left to rot within them, but the halls themselves are still patrolled by powerful golems.

W. Runelord's Citadel

For generations, the Runelords of Greed made their home here atop the mountain. The central tower, an immense structure called the Pinnacle of Avarice, is surrounded by vast barracks, storehouses, and mustering areas for the acting runelord's personal army. Today, the approach to the citadel is unguarded—Karzoug's final guardians wait atop the Pinnacle itself.

PART FIVE: THE PINNACLE OF AVARICE

The true heart of the domain of greed, this massive ice-shrouded tower of white granite served as the seat of every Runelord of Greed up to and including Karzoug. The 2,200-foot-tall tower tops

out respectfully just below the carved face at the mountain's peak, yet is itself mostly hollow. The inside of the immense structure soars like a cavernous silo, supported by an intricate architectural wonder of flying buttresses and arches. Hundreds of 50-foot-tall arches around the structure's base allow access to its ground floor, which is a huge circular room that once held the *runewell* at its center. The *runewell* has shifted into a small dimension between the Material Plane and Leng (see Part Six), leaving only a 200-foot-diameter polished stone circle on the floor surrounded by 16 immense pillars that rise up like the legs of a spider to support a central column that itself extends all the way up to Karzoug's personal chambers more than 2,000 feet above. A spiraling ramp wraps around the outer circumference of the lower 16 pillars up to the central column, continuing up its length and giving the central column a look akin to an immense screw. This ramp leads up to area **XI** of the Pinnacle of Avarice above.

The entire edifice looks impossible—a DC 15 Knowledge (architecture and engineering) check is enough to realize that the immense size of the structure should have seen to its immediate collapse, yet still it stands. The stone of the Pinnacle of Avarice is infused with powerful magic, and it is this that has protected the tower from the elements and collapse over the last 100 centuries.

No encounters occur in this cavernous space—Karzoug and his final minions await the PCs on the Pinnacle's only inhabited floor, 2,000 feet above.

Pinnacle of Avarice Encounter Areas

The Pinnacle of Avarice is composed of massive stone blocks hewn from the mountain's surface. Its outer face is smooth, with only small mortared seams between the masonry blocks. The whole construction is considered magically treated reinforced masonry ranging from a few feet to hundreds of feet thick, depending on the location. Rooms and passages are at least 50 feet high and often rise as high as 100 feet to accommodate its former gigantic inhabitants. The walls of the rooms are carved in all manner of detailed murals depicting life in ancient Xin-Shalast and are still painted in vibrant color. The floor is of highly polished gold and onyx in a checkerboard pattern. Doors are made of solid stone and plated in gold and silver and studded with gemstones. They are unlocked, unless otherwise noted, and despite their immense size swing open silently at the lightest touch—opening a door in the Pinnacle of Avarice is a free action. Ancient everburning torches still light the halls and rooms at irregular intervals, providing shadowy illumination throughout. These torches are made of ivory and inlaid with rubies and glow with a vibrant light. Even the sconces in which the torches sit are made of silver with jade inlay.

Once, these chambers were equally opulently decorated, and the temperature and air were maintained at a comfortable level for creatures more used to life in the Lower City. While the magical enhancements that keep the air in here breathable and at a chilly but not deadly temperature of 40° F still function, over the centuries the decorations and furnishings in these rooms have decayed and crumbled, leaving behind only the stone walls. The new denizens of these chambers

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have brought along their own rough furnishings to make life here comfortable.

Note that all of the Pinnacle's inhabitants know who the PCs are and are familiar with their basic strengths and weaknesses. Karzoug has learned from speaking to the souls the PCs sent to his *runewell* as much as from reports from his numerous agents in the world. As such, unless the PCs are well disguised and have a really good story, the chances for diplomacy and non-violent resolutions to encounters in the Pinnacle of Avarice are unlikely at best.

Although there's no wandering monster chart for the pinnacle, the sound of combat here quickly attracts the attention of the denizens. How long it takes creatures in neighboring rooms to respond to combat and join in is mostly just a factor of their speed—as a result, fights here should have a tendency to spiral out of control fast, as more and more reinforcements arrive. It's likely the PCs need to mount multiple forays into the Pinnacle before they can secure an entrance into the Eye of Avarice where Karzoug waits. Overall, exploration of this complex shouldn't feel like a dungeon crawl as much as it should feel like a long, drawn-out battle that spans multiple rooms and opponents.

Pinnacle Resources

While the PCs are free to tackle the encounter areas in the Pinnacle of Avarice in any order they wish, once a fight begins, word spreads fast. If the PCs don't handle their fights quickly

and decisively, they swiftly find themselves being overwhelmed by lamias, giants, and worse. For sake of ease, the total numbers of opponents in the Pinnacle are summarized here, so you can more easily keep track of the area's reinforcements.

Cloud Giants: There are 16 cloud giants in all: 4 in area X1, 4 in area X2, and 8 in area X9. They react to the alarm immediately, moving to the source of battle as quickly as possible.

Denizens of Leng: The 12 denizens of Leng remain in area X6 and do not emerge under any circumstances.

Lamia Harridans: There are 8 lamia harridans in all: 6 in area X5 and 2 in area X11. The two in area X11 do not respond to alarms, but the others respond immediately.

Rune Giants: There are 8 rune giants in all: 2 in area X3 and 6 in area X7. Those in area X7 respond to alarms immediately, but the ones in area X3 don't mobilize unless an alarm continues for at least 5 rounds. Each time a rune giant is defeated, one storm giant and two cloud giants are released from domination and attempt to escape Xin-Shalast.

Storm Giants: There are 8 storm giants in all: 1 in area X1, 2 in area X2, and 5 in area X10. All respond to alarms immediately.

Ceoptra: The lamia high priestess guards the entrance to the Eye of Avarice in area X11—she does not leave this post if the alarm is raised. As long as she lives, the complex can replenish fallen harridans at the rate of 1d6 per day from the effectively limitless number in Xin-Shalast below.

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Khalib: Karzoug's only surviving apprentice, Khalib, is in area X8. He responds to alarms after casting his preparatory spells as detailed in that encounter area.

Vorian: Karzoug's current champion and wielder of the sword of greed, Vorian serves as Karzoug's word of law until the runelord emerges fully from the *runewell*. She spends most of her time in area X3, patiently awaiting the will of her master. She and her two rune giant guardians remain here unless an alarm persists for 5 rounds, at which point they move to provide aid. As long as she lives, the complex can replenish fallen storm giants at the rate of 1d4 per day and fallen cloud giants at the rate of 1d8 per day.

X1. Entrance Ramp (EL 16)

The seemingly infinite stone ramp finally comes to an end here. A massive pair of golden double doors stands to the north, while a smaller golden door to the west allows an alternative route onward. Intricate carvings on the walls evoke images of Xin-Shalast in its heyday, accented with vibrant paint and inlaid gems here and there. The highly polished floor consists of a checkerboard pattern of gold and black tiles, while the entire place is brilliantly lit by what appear to be dozens of bejeweled everburning torches in equally decadent sconces.

Creatures: A group of four cloud giants led by a storm giant is posted to this hall as guards. Dominated by rune giants, these five lesser giants remain watchful and alert, patient, and silent. All of these giants prominently bear the mark of the Sihedron as a brand on their brows.

WARDEN OF WIND (4)

CR II

Male cloud giant (MM 120)

LE Huge giant (air)

DEFENSE

AC 34, touch 12, flat-footed 33

(+10 armor, +3 deflection, +1 Dexterity, +12 natural, -2 size)

hp 178 each

Fort +19, **Ref** +9, **Will** +13

TACTICS

During Combat The cloud giants' primary goal is to prevent the PCs from exiting this area into the rest of the Pinnacle; they take up defensive positions near the doors to do so. Each has a stash of six boulders to hurl at foes who choose to fight at range.

Morale These giants fight to the death.

STATISTICS

Gear +2 full plate, Sihedron ring

WARDEN OF THUNDER

CR 13

Male storm giant (MM 125)

LE Huge giant

DEFENSE

AC 34, touch 12, flat-footed 33

(+10 armor, +3 deflection, +1 Dexterity, +12 natural, -2 size)

hp 199

Fort +20, **Ref** +11, **Will** +16

TACTICS

During Combat The storm giant stands between the two doors and opens combat with *call lightning*. He moves up to engage foes in melee, leaving the guardianship of the doors to the cloud giants.

Morale The storm giant fights to the death.

STATISTICS

Gear +2 full plate, Sihedron ring

X2. Central Hall (EL 17)

The ceiling of this curving hallway rises to an arch some fifty feet above. Curving to the west, the hall ends at a particularly immense pair of double doors that appear to be made of gold, while curving to the east, numerous smaller stone doors are set into the outward wall.

Creatures: Another group of giants remains vigilant here. The four cloud giants patrol back and forth, from the doors to area X3 around to the door to area X7 and back again. One storm giant stands guard at the doors to X3, and another stands at the doors to X9.

WARDENS OF WIND (4)

CR II

hp 178 each (MM 120)

TACTICS

During Combat The four cloud giants move to engage intruders in melee, resorting to thrown boulders (each carries six rocks) only against foes they can't keep up with.

Morale These giants fight to the death.

WARDENS OF THUNDER (2)

CR 13

hp 199 each (MM 125)

TACTICS

During Combat The storm giants remain at their posts if a fight breaks out, using their spell-like abilities and a collection of a dozen throwing rocks apiece to fight the PCs, resorting to melee only to prevent characters from getting by them. If the enemy retreats to the east, one of the giants breaks free from his post to follow, while the other stays behind to watch the doors.

Morale The storm giants fight to the death.

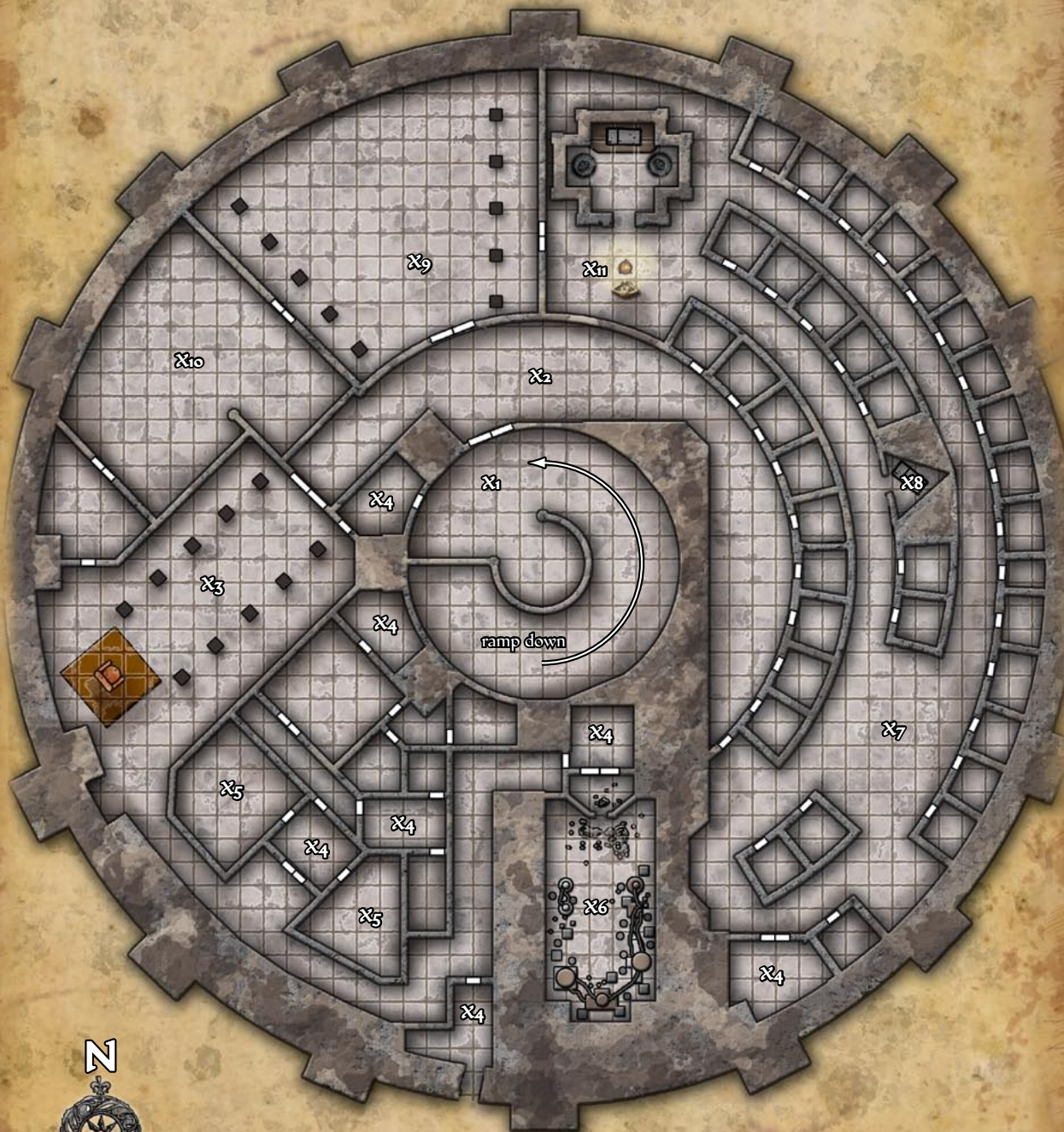
X3. Throne Room (EL 19)

The interior of this dazzling chamber is awash in golden light—it shines from every gem, every strip of gold, and every silver-inlaid wall carving, creating a kaleidoscope of color and riches. The checkerboard pattern on the floor is interrupted in a twenty-foot-wide path from the northeastern doors to a throne on a dais of onyx to the southwest by a path of what appear to be countless rubies, forming a "red carpet" of sorts to the throne itself. This throne, if possible, makes the rest of the chamber's extravagance seem pale and poor, for it is made of shining gold, diamonds, rubies, and sapphires, and draped with shimmering, glowing furs from unrecognizable creatures. The throne itself is sized for a giant, and stands nearly twenty feet tall from foot to peak.

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Pinnacle of Avarice

Aerie of the Runelord



1 square = 10 feet

RISE OF THE RUNELORDS

This was Karzoug's throne room—the place where he would hear the needs of his nobles and pass down judgement on crimes against his nation. He very rarely held court here, though, preferring to spend his time in other endeavors (usually in one of his many transmutation labs, located elsewhere in the secret corners of Shalast). When he wasn't in court, this throne was typically occupied by his current champion—a soldier hand-picked to wield one of the *Alara'hai*, the legendary sword of greed.

Creatures: When Thassilon fell and the runelords went into hiding, the seven *Alara'hai* likewise went dormant, leaving their champions to their fates. For thousands of years, these weapons circulated among treasure hoards, collections, and owners, and while their magic remained minimal, their legends did not. They became known as the Seven Swords of Sin, and until recently, were little more than obscure reminders of the power the runelords once wielded. The sword of greed is a golden scimitar named *Chellan* (see page 52), and most recently was the property of a particularly greedy mercenary guildmaster from Riddleport named Vorian Dekanti. When Mokmurian wakened Karzoug 5 years ago, *Chellan* awoke as well, flaring to golden life. Woken from sleep by the keening sound, Vorian investigated her collection to find the sword shining in its display. As she removed the sword from its case to examine it, the powerful weapon seized control of her. She murdered everyone in her manor, help and mercenary alike, and then set off for Xin-Shalast. The sword kept her alive on the journey, and when she arrived she was met with open arms by its inhabitants. She has been baptized in the *runewell* and spent the past 5 years training and honing her skill under *Chellan's* command, so that now Vorian is little more than a vessel for the sword's power.

Vorian is a beautiful woman, yet her years under *Chellan's* command have erased any remnants of her soul and personality. She is now little more than a mindless shell controlled by the sword of greed, with little to interest her apart from basking in the glory of this throne room. She has become yet another of Karzoug's treasures, and one of his most deadly, for she does not hesitate to attack any who dare enter this sacred vault. She is attended by two rune giants who serve her, in theory, as bodyguards, although both fear what she has become to the extent that they avoid approaching within 10 feet of her unless absolutely necessary.

VIRIAN DEKANTI, CHAMPION OF SHALAST CR 18

Female human fighter 18

NE Large humanoid

Init +7; **Senses** Listen +3, Spot +3

DEFENSE

AC 33, touch 13, flat-footed 32

(+13 armor, +3 deflection, +1 Dexterity, +7 shield, –1 size)

hp 247 (18d10+144)

Fort +24, **Ref** +14, **Will** +14

Defensive Abilities 20% miss chance; **Immune** death effects, energy drain, mind affecting effects; **SR** 20 (32 against transmutation)

OFFENSE

Spd 20 ft.

Melee *Chellan* +22 (2d6+27/15–20) or

Chellan +28/+25/+20/+15 (2d6+17/15–20) and shield bash +21 (1d6+4)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

TACTICS

During Combat Vorian's tactics are simple—she selects the strongest looking foe and focuses her wrath upon him, moving to other foes only when her current target is defeated. She uses a 10-point Power Attack when she isn't making a full attack, but abandons this tactic when making a full attack with *Chellan* and her shield bash.

Morale Vorian fights to the death.

STATISTICS

Str 26, **Dex** 16, **Con** 26, **Int** 10, **Wis** 16, **Cha** 8

Base Atk +18; **Grp** +30

Feats Altitude Affinity, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Great Fortitude, Greater Weapon Focus (scimitar), Greater Weapon Specialization (scimitar), Improved Bull Rush, Improved Initiative, Improved Shield Bash, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Mobility, Quick Draw, Power Attack, Spring Attack, Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Focus (scimitar), Weapon Specialization (scimitar)

Skills Intimidate +20, Jump +18, Ride +24

Languages Thassilonian

SQ runelord champion, inherent bonuses, permanent spells

Combat Gear *potions of cure serious wounds* (5), *potions of fly* (2), *potion of haste*; **Other Gear** +5 full plate, +5 heavy steel shield, *Chellan*, amulet of health +4, belt of giant strength +4, cloak of minor displacement, ring of freedom of movement, Sihedron ring, scarab of protection (10 charges)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Inherent Bonuses In order to ensure his champion is as powerful as possible, Karzoug has used *wish* spells to grant Vorian a +5 inherent bonus to Strength and Dexterity and +4 inherent bonuses to Constitution and Wisdom.

Permanent Spells Vorian has the following permanent spell effects at CL 22nd (placed by Karzoug): *enlarge person* and *telepathic bond*.

Runelord Champion (Ex) Vorian bears the rune of greed upon her left cheek, a physical manifestation of her role as Karzoug's champion. She has pledged herself to his service, body and soul, and as long as Karzoug lives (even while that life is confined inside of the *runewell*), she gains complete immunity to mind-affecting effects. In addition, she possesses SR 32 against spells from the school of transmutation. Unfortunately, being the champion of greed also brings with it an associated weakness against *domineering rune-forged weapons*—she qualifies as a transmuter for that weapon's bane effects, and critical hits made against her with such weapons automatically confirm.

WARDENS OF RUNES (2)

CR 14

Male rune giant (see page 86)

LE Gargantuan giant

DEFENSE

AC 36, touch 10, flat-footed 35

(+12 armor, +3 deflection, +1 Dexterity, +14 natural, –4 size)

hp 230 each

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TACTICS

During Combat While these rune giants are technically Viorian's bodyguards, they do not begin combat protecting her. Instead, they swiftly move to engage armored foes in melee, switching targets as necessary to attack those who seem to be the most effective against Viorian.

Morale The rune giants fight to the death.

STATISTICS

Gear +4 full plate, Sihedron ring

X4. Karzoug's Manifestations (EL 15)

In several places throughout the Pinnacle of Avarice, the boundary between Golarion and Leng are particularly thin—these locations allow Karzoug to directly observe and, to a certain extent, interact with objects in the vicinity. Treat this as if Karzoug were using a *projected image* into the center of each of the areas marked X4—he cannot move his projected image from this spot (although he can rotate in place), but can sense the area around him as if he were there in person. Likewise, he can use this *projected image* to cast spells against targets in range of the image. The image has a cumulative 20% chance of vanishing each time he casts a spell through it, the magic having disrupted the tenuous connection. An image can also be dispelled (CL 22nd) as normal. Once an image vanishes, it takes 24 hours before Karzoug can manifest a new image at that particular location.

The first time Karzoug manifests in this way, his attitude is one of condescension and mockery aimed at the PCs. A typical introduction might be as follows.

"And so the fools have found me. I must applaud your tenacity. You are much more persistent than the worms I thought you to be. You are more like hungry maggots in your endless squirming and writhing to get to the death that awaits you at the core of your fate. I am that fate, maggots. I am your death!"

Karzoug saves his really powerful spells for the inevitable final confrontation, preferring to hit the PCs with 6th-level and lower spells through these images. He cannot use wands through the link.

In future encounters against the PCs, Karzoug grows increasingly aware of how powerful his foes are and spends less and less time on mockery. By the time the PCs encounter and survive five of his manifestations, Karzoug actually begins to grow nervous, although he tries not to show it.

The opening in the southern wall of the southernmost of these areas was created five years ago by Mokmurian via a few disintegrate spells—this was his initial entrance into the Pinnacle, since the route from below was closed at that time.

Ad Hoc Experience Award: For surviving the first of these manifestations, award the PCs a CR 15 XP award.

X5. Harridan Dwellings (EL 17)

Creatures: These chambers are the dwellings of the lamia harridans who have been selected to serve in the Pinnacle by Karzoug. At any one time, six harridans lounge here—they respond immediately to raised alarms.

PINNACLE HARRIDANS (6)

CR 12

Female lamia harridans (see page 82)

LE Huge monstrous humanoid

DEFENSE

AC 35, touch 13, flat-footed 32

(+8 armor, +3 deflection, +2 Dexterity, +14 natural, -2 size)

hp 161 each (see page 86)

Fort +17, Ref +15, Will +13



RISE OF THE RUNELORDS

Chellan, Sword of Greed

Minor Artifact

Aura strong transmutation; **CL** 16th

Slot —; **Weight** 25 lb.

DESCRIPTION

Of the Seven Blades of Conviction wielded by the runelords' champions, weapons known as the *Alara'hai* to the Thassilonians, the sword of greed was the most extravagant, for it was made of magically hardened gold, tempered to the strength of adamantine yet retaining its luster. Although made of gold, *Chellan* functions as an adamantine weapon for purposes of overcoming damage reduction and bypassing hardness. *Chellan* is a +5 *keen scimitar*, and its dense weight allows it to damage foes as if it were one size category larger than its actual size. It can be properly wielded only by characters with a Strength of 18 or higher—all other characters must either wield it as a two-handed weapon or take a –2 penalty on attack rolls with the weapon.

Whenever *Chellan* strikes a foe, the target must make a DC 20 Fortitude save or be *slowed* as the spell (CL 16th). If the sword instead scores a critical hit, the target must make a DC 25 Fortitude save or be turned into a crystalline statue, as if by *flesh to stone*. Characters turned to crystal by *Chellan* appear to be made of ruby, diamond, or some other valuable gem, but are in fact merely colored quartz of little value to the looter.

TACTICS

Morale The harriidans fight to the death as long as Ceoptra lives—if they know she's perished, they attempt to flee down to Xin-Shalast if brought below 40 hit points.

STATISTICS

Gear +3 *breastplate*, *Sihedron ring*

X6. The Leng Device (EL 15)

The plain stone walls of this long room have been lined by a variety of tables, boxes, crates, and cylinders. Some are made of stone, but others appear to be composed of metal. Strange winding cables protrude from some to connect to others. All of this clutter seems to focus upon a large metal framework constructed at the southern end of the room, where strange currents of energy dance and shimmer. Now and then, these currents coalesce into shapes—images startling for their familiarity and yet totally alien. The image revealed is of a massive city of towers and gigantic monuments set in a mountain valley at the foot of a huge peak—Xin-Shalast, as it would appear from this high mountain vista. The city beyond the energy curtain is very different, however, in that its towers and buildings are ablaze with light both magical and mundane and the great central road and surrounding streets teem with tens of thousands of giants and humanoids of all descriptions. The sounds and even the smells of this strange metropolis waft through the image—an image that is, perhaps, trying to be an open window.

This chamber was once sealed from the rest of the Pinnacle, accessible only via magic. A group of creatures from Leng

invaded the Pinnacle several decades ago and bashed their way into the room to get to the device hidden in the chamber beyond. Karzoug has yet to take action against these intruders—they aren't hampering the device yet, and serve well as guardians, and so he has ordered his minions to leave this chamber alone, for now.

This chamber holds an ancient experiment begun by Karzoug with his Kadathan allies, one he abandoned and sealed away just before he entered hibernation. The strange apparatus splayed about the room and culminating in the energy field at the far end is an otherworldly experiment known as the *Leng Device*. Using the warped technologies of the outer realms, Karzoug and his nameless associate from Leng attempted to create a fixed portal in time—one that would allow travel to a specific day from any point in the future. That day is one when Xin-Shalast was at its height—Karzoug knew he would need an army when he awoke, and with this device he hoped to bring forth the ancient armies already gathered to reign terror anew upon the world, transporting them wholly from the past to the present. While this device was nowhere near completion when Thassilon fell, if Karzoug awakens fully he can have it ready to transport the armies of Xin-Shalast from the ancient past to the modern day—perhaps his greatest magical feat ever.

Yet there are others who have an interest in the device. That same nameless patron from Leng who once helped Karzoug build the device has finally managed to send minions into Golarion recently. Working under this master's command, these denizens of Leng seek to alter the *Leng Device* to open a portal to time immemorial, when the being known as Mhar first attempted to birth itself into Golarion. Dozens of denizens now dwell in Xin-Shalast and the surrounding mountains, sent here to scout the place, observe, and gather topographical data that they then report to the denizens toiling in here so they can make proper adjustments. The work is long and grueling, made more so by the necessity of hiding their work's results so that Karzoug doesn't realize what the alien technicians are actually up to. Indeed, to someone viewing the results of the denizens' tinkering from afar (such as the *runewell*) it seems their work is merely tuning the device and preparing it for the portal to ancient Xin-Shalast. Yet once Karzoug's *runewell* triggers and returns him to this realm, the denizens of Leng are ready to siphon that power into the *Leng Device* and to awaken Mhar Massif from its eons of slumber.

The *Leng Device*'s portal cannot yet allow physical travel or even communication—the portal does not exist in ancient times at this point. Yet it does allow an observer in this chamber to see Xin-Shalast at its height 10,000 years ago, only a few years before the empire's fall. Contact with the energy field has no effect other than a slight tingling, and spells cannot be cast through it.

Anyone examining the panels or consoles of the device must make a DC 45 Knowledge (arcana) check to understand the *Leng Device*'s general purpose—it takes a DC 55 check to realize it's slowly being repurposed to a point in time eons before Thassilon's

SPIRES OF XIN-SHALAST



ADVENTURE CROSSOVER

The Seven Blades of Conviction, known today as the Seven Swords of Sin, have lost much of their magical power over the thousands of years and have languished in museums, vaults, and private collections. This was *Chellan's* fate as well, until it was stolen by a woman named Tirana, who then took it to the dungeons below Kaer Maga, where she hoped to awaken it to grant herself incredible power. So, how can you explain *Chellan* being under Kaer Maga and being in Xin-Shalast at the same time?

The “official” answer is that GameMastery Module D2: *Seven Swords of Sin* already occurred, as hinted at in *X3*. The timing of *Seven Swords of Sin* is somewhat fluid, though. You could just as easily say that when the PCs defeat Vorian, *Chellan* goes dormant again. The PCs might then sell it off to a collector, at which point the plot of *Seven Swords of Sin* can unravel unaltered in the future, after Rise of the Runelords has ended. As suggested on our messageboards, you could even have the events in *Seven Swords of Sin* take place during Rise of the Runelords, with *Chellan* awakening at some point after that adventure ends, or perhaps even during the adventure—maybe Tirana herself ends up becoming the new Champion of Greed.

—James Jacobs

height. Anyone who attempts to damage or manipulate the device has a 30% chance of creating a small explosion affecting all within 5 feet and dealing 6d6 points of force damage (no save). This causes no noticeable damage to the device and has no effect on the portal—the device itself is a major artifact and cannot be destroyed without traveling to Leng, where its unknowable foundations lie shrouded in secret monasteries.

Creatures: The 12 denizens of Leng working here are in the process of fine-tuning the device. They do not interact with any of the other inhabitants of the Pinnacle, but are prepared to defend their work if necessary.

Unknown to the PCs, the denizens of Leng themselves are inexorably tied to the device. Each time a denizen is slain, the *Leng Device* flashes with light and emits a strange high-pitched whine. With each death, the image in the window shifts, growing distorted and warped. With the last denizen slain, the image vanishes altogether, transforming into a gut-churning vortex of spinning lights and sheets of energy. Unfortunately for the PCs, this disruption in the fabric of time quickly draws the attention of an ancient and powerful monstrosity from the dawn of time itself—an advanced hound of Tindalos. The hound manifests in this chamber only 2d6 rounds after the last denizen of Leng is slain, pouring from the southern corners of the room with a blast of noxious mist and a blood-curdling howl. Only by defeating at least one of the denizens of Leng without slaying him can the PCs prevent the arrival of this hound (banishing denizens to another plane has the same effect as killing them).

If the hound appears after the PCs have left the room, its howl can still be heard throughout the Pinnacle. It emerges from the room and begins stalking the complex, killing anything (PC, giant, or lamia alike) it comes across. Particularly cagey PCs can

actually use the hound as a dangerous ally, since the beast focuses its wrath on larger foes before smaller ones.

In any event, the hound's manifestation has one positive effect: it overloads the *Leng Device*. While not destroying it, the portal energy built up in its conduits is dispersed and the device becomes inert. Future denizens of Leng might return here some day to begin the decades-long process of activation again, but for now, this dangerous device's threat is stymied.

DENIZENS OF LENG (12)

CR 8

hp 105 each (see page 78)

TACTICS

Before Combat The denizens ignore the PCs unless they become hostile or try to damage the machine.

During Combat The denizens of Leng attempt to flank the PCs and use sneak attacks with their poisoned blades and disrupting touch.

One moves in to do so before tumbling away, while the others flank and disrupt the PCs with their spell-like abilities.

Morale These denizens fight to the death to protect the secret of their project.

THE THING FROM BEYOND TIME

CR 16

Advanced hound of Tindalos (*Pathfinder* #4 82)

NE Large outsider (evil)

Init +13; Senses darkvision 120 ft.; Listen +36, Spot +36

Aura ripping gaze (30 ft.)

DEFENSE

AC 26, touch 19, flat-footed 17

(+9 Dexterity, +7 natural)

hp 294 (28d8+168)

Fort +21, Ref +26, Will +20

DR 10/magic; Immune poison, mind-affecting effects

OFFENSE

Spd 40 ft.

Melee bite +26 (4d6+16) and

2 claws +21 (3d6+13)

Space 10 ft.; Reach 10 ft.

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 10th)

At will—air walk, fog cloud, invisibility, locate creature

3/day—dimensional anchor, greater scrying (DC 18), haste, slow (DC 17)

TACTICS

During Combat The Thing from beyond Time is not immune to the effects of the occluding field—in fact, its presence causes the monster extreme discomfort and pain. Beyond its first manifestation in the room (made possible only by the *Leng Device's* fluctuation of energy), the hound of Tindalos cannot use its angled entry ability at all. The feeling of being trapped and cut off from the angles of time enrages the monster, driving it into a blind frenzy. It attacks any creature it sees, not using its spell-like abilities at all and focusing on the largest target available if choices must be made. It makes all attacks as 10-point Power Attacks.

Morale If the occluding field is brought down, the hound immediately plane shifts away, never to return. Otherwise, it fights to the death.

RISE OF THE RUNELORDS

STATISTICS

Str 23, **Dex** 28, **Con** 22, **Int** 20, **Wis** 21, **Cha** 18

Base Atk +28; **Grp** +38

Feats Ability Focus (ripping gaze), Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Attack (bite, claw), Lightning Reflexes, Power Attack, Track, Weapon Finesse

Skills Balance +44, Concentration +37, Hide +36, Jump +45, Knowledge (arcana) +36, Knowledge (geography) +36, Knowledge (the planes) +36, Listen +36, Move Silently +40, Search +36, Spot +36, Survival +36, Tumble +44

SQ angled entry, otherworldly mind

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Angled Entry (Su) Normally, a hound of Tindalos can use *greater teleport* at will once per round as a free action and *plane shift* three times a day, but as long as the occluding field is active, the Thing from beyond Time cannot use these abilities.

Otherworldly Mind (Ex) A non-outsider who attempts to read a hound's thoughts must make a DC 29 Will save. Those who succeed take 5d6 points of damage and the attempt to read the hound's thoughts ends. Those who fail are driven insane, as the spell *insanity*. The save DC is Wisdom-based.

Ripping Gaze (Su) 14d6 damage, 30 ft., Fortitude DC 29 negates. Those damaged by this gaze attack suffer deep, bloodless, but hideously painful rents in their flesh. The save DC is Charisma-based.

X7. Rune Giant Cells (EL 19)

Each of these empty chambers radiates lingering transmutation magic. A character who studies these auras and makes a DC 38 Spellcraft check can tell that these rooms once served as stasis chambers, utilizing an effect similar to that created by *temporal stasis*. In fact, each chamber held a single rune giant in stasis, placed there by Karzoug in the twilight days of Thassilon so he'd have a small army of them at his disposal when he woke. Karzoug was able to release these giants from stasis and now uses them as a key component to the rebuilding of Shalast's power.

Creatures: Six rune giants remain here, patrolling the halls of this area and standing guard, ready to come to the aid of any alarms raised elsewhere in the complex.

WARDENS OF RUNES (6)

CR 14

Male rune giant (see page 86)

LE Gargantuan giant

DEFENSE

AC 36, touch 10, flat-footed 35

(+12 armor, +3 deflection, +1 Dexterity, +14 natural, -4 size)

hp 230 each

TACTICS

During Combat The rune giants patrol the halls here, moving from area XII to the southernmost wing (near one of the X4 locations) and remaining equidistant from each other until battle begins.

Morale The rune giants fight to the death.

STATISTICS

Gear +4 full plate, Sihedron ring

X8. Khalib's Quarters (EL 16)

This triangular room is empty, save for a golden bed strewn with exotic furs and silk sheets. A long shelf above the bed holds nearly two dozen leather-bound books.

As with the rune giant cells, this room once served as a stasis chamber for a man named Khalib—one of Karzoug's most powerful apprentices and, in theory, the man who was originally destined to waken a few years after Thassilon's fall to rouse Karzoug. Unfortunately, Karzoug's other apprentices didn't necessarily want their runelord to return—they harbored secret jealousies and envied Karzoug's power. They thought that by preventing Khalib's return they could thus prevent Karzoug's, and therefore one among them could take up the mantle of greed. Their plan half-worked—after Karzoug and Khalib entered stasis, they did manage to alter the “timer” on Khalib's stasis chamber so he would never emerge (barring external tampering). That done, the remaining apprentices turned on each other, the focus of their envy having shifted to themselves. It took them less than a month to kill each other off. It would be 10,000 years before Mokmurian would finally come to the Pinnacle of Avarice to finish the job Khalib was never able to complete.

Creature: When Karzoug wakened his rune giants, he considered not wakening Khalib, so disappointed was he in his apprentice's failure. The runelord has only recently reversed this petty decision, and wakened Khalib a few weeks ago, after Karzoug realized he was going to require all the help he could muster against the PCs. Since then, Khalib has spent much of his time here, recovering from his long stasis and searching his soul for a way to repay Karzoug for his failure to waken him. Destroying the PCs strikes him as the perfect solution—once he realizes the PCs are in the Pinnacle, he searches them out immediately and confronts them. Only if the PCs are particularly stealthy in their invasion do they find Khalib here, deep in study and meditation.

First of his school in power and magical skill, Khalib was a natural choice as an apprentice aspirant for Karzoug and quickly rose through the competition on his own raw power and ambition. Seeing the other apprentices as beings of lesser power, Khalib took to calling himself First Apprentice in Karzoug's court and in the presence of the others. Khalib saw his rise as the next Runelord of Greed to be a natural progression, waiting patiently for Karzoug's power to wane so he could convince the rune giants to support his bid for power. At least, that was his mindset before his long period in stasis—now, he fears that Karzoug will cast him aside before he has a chance to wrest control. Khalib hasn't even fully comprehended the fact that 10,000 years have come and gone, and that Thassilon is no more.

KHALIB

CR 16

Male human transmuter 16

LE Medium humanoid

Init +4; **Senses** arcane sight, darkvision 60 ft., see invisibility; Listen +1, Spot +1

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DEFENSE

AC 28, touch 17, flat-footed 24

(+5 armor, +3 deflection, +4 Dexterity, +2 natural, +4 shield)

hp 120 (16d4+79)

Fort +9, **Ref** +9, **Will** +11

DR 10/adamantine; **Immune** mind affecting effects; **SR** 18

OFFENSE

Spd 30 ft., fly 40 ft. (average)

Melee staff of size alteration +11/+6 (1d6+3)

Spells Known (CL 16th; ranged touch +12)

8th—quickened maximized *magic missile*, *mind blank* (already cast), *temporal stasis* (DC 26)

7th—*delayed blast fireball* (DC 23), *ethereal jaunt*, *statue*, *summon monster VII*

6th—*disintegrate* (DC 24), *flesh to stone* (DC 24), *greater dispel magic*, quickened *resist energy*, *summon monster VI*

5th—*dismissal*, quickened *magic missile*, *overland flight* (already cast), *summon monster V*, *telekinesis* (DC 23), *wall of force*

4th—*arcane eye*, *dimension door*, *enervation*, maximized *magic missile*, *mnemonic enhancer*, *wall of ice*

3rd—*dispel magic*, *lightning bolt* (DC 19), *greater magic weapon* (already cast), *haste*, *nondetection* (already cast), *slow* (DC 21)

2nd—*bear's endurance*, *blindness/deafness* (3, DC 19), *cat's grace*, *false life* (already cast), *glitterdust* (DC 19)

1st—*alarm*, *expeditious retreat*, *feather fall*, *magic missile*, *obscuring mist*, *ray of enfeeblement*, *shield*

0—*acid splash*, *light*, *mage hand*, *message*, *prestidigitation*

Prohibited Schools enchantment, illusion

TACTICS

Before Combat Khalib casts *greater magic weapon* on his staff and *false life*, *overland flight*, *mind blank*, and *nondetection* on himself every morning. Once an alarm is raised, he also casts *stoneskin*, *shield*, *bear's endurance*, and *cat's grace* on himself before entering battle.

During Combat Khalib begins his battles by casting *summon monster* spells, augmenting them with quickened spells as appropriate. He saves *temporal stasis* for particularly troublesome enemy spellcasters. He prefers to fight alongside giants and lamia, and if he finds the PCs before they're already in a fight, he attempts to rally the nearest group of monstrous allies to

attack before he confronts them.

Morale Khalib fights to the death.

Base Statistics **Init** +2; **AC** 21, touch 14, flat-footed 19; **hp** 73; **Fort** +7, **Ref** +7, **Will** +11; **Dex** 14, **Con** 14

STATISTICS

Str 8, **Dex** 18, **Con** 18, **Int** 22, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 10

Base Atk +8; **Grp** +7

Feats *Altitude Affinity*, *Augment Summoning*, *Craft Staff*, *Craft Wondrous Item*, *Greater Spell Focus* (transmutation), *Maximize Spell*, *Quickened Spell*, *Scribe Scroll*, *Spell Focus* (conjunction, necromancy, transmutation)

Skills *Concentration* +19, *Decipher Script* +18, *Knowledge* (arcana) +19, *Knowledge* (architecture and engineering) +19, *Knowledge* (the planes) +19, *Spellcraft* +19

Languages Draconic, Giant, Thassilonian; *tongues*

SQ contingency, permanent spells, summon familiar (none currently)

Combat Gear staff of size alteration (18 charges); **Other Gear**

amulet of natural armor +2, *Sihedron ring*, *evil robe of the archmagi* (variant: +4 resistance bonus on saves replaced by +4 enhancement bonus to Intelligence; this does not alter the robe's gp value), gold and ivory contingency statuette worth 2,000 gp, spellbook (contains all spells from PH save for enchantment and illusion spells), gemstone dust worth 5,000 gp (for *temporal stasis*)



RISE THE RUNELORDS



KHALIB

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Contingency When Khalib snaps his fingers (a free action), *stoneskin* activates on him.

Permanent Spells Khalib has made the following spells permanent on himself: *arcane sight*, *darkvision*, *see invisibility*, *tongues*.

X9. Wardens of Wind (EL 17)

Pillars of gold support the arching ceiling of this room. The northern wall bears a particularly detailed mural that shows Xin-Shalast at its height, with the face atop Mhar Massif appearing to address its citizens as magical runes and spirals of energy emerge from its open mouth. Numerous immense furs lie strewn on the floor.

Creatures: Once an immense lecture hall where Karzoug could speak to his assembled apprentices and champions, this chamber has been converted into a barracks for the cloud giants

chosen to defend the Pinnacle. At any one time, eight of them can be found here, at rest on the furs they've set about the room.

WARDENS OF WIND (8)

CR 11

hp 178 each (see page 120)

TACTICS

During Combat The cloud giants move to engage intruders in melee, resorting to thrown boulders (each carries six rocks) only against foes they can't keep up with.

Morale These giants fight to the death.

X10. Wardens of Thunder (EL 18)

Immense furs, harvested from mammoths and other massive creatures, lie in organized mounds on the floor of this otherwise empty chamber. To the southeast, a golden arch marked with thousands of runes opens into a forty-foot-wide empty alcove.

This was once a laboratory where Karzoug could teach his apprentices. The equipment has long since rotted away or moved. The archway was once a magical portal that allowed Karzoug and certain guests passage into Karzoug's personal laboratory, quarters, harem, and treasury, a complex hidden in a distant undisclosed location. The portal has ceased to function—if it could be reactivated, the complex it leads to would doubtless provide both a great source of peril and a great source of power and wealth to adventurers brave enough to explore it.

Creatures: The stormgiants selected as the Pinnacle's guardians barrack here. At any one time, five of them are present.

WARDENS OF THUNDER (5)

CR 13

hp 199 each (see page 125)

TACTICS

During Combat The storm giants remain at their posts if a fight breaks out, using their spell-like abilities and collection of a dozen throwing rocks apiece to fight the PCs, resorting to melee only to prevent characters from getting by them.

Morale The storm giants fight to the death.

X11. Reliquary (EL 17)

A 20-foot-tall golden statue of Karzoug, Runelord of Greed, stands in the southern portion of this chamber, his hands before him and gripping a circular lens of green crystal in an iron frame. A brazier stands before the statue, plumes of smokeless fire churning inside of it. North of the statue stands a stone pagoda-like structure, a single opening in its southern face revealing two smaller statues of Karzoug within, on either side of a twenty-foot-long sarcophagus bearing the likeness of the runelord on its golden lid.

It was inside the pagoda-like structure that Karzoug prepared for his final entrance into the half-world between Golarion and Leng, the hideout intended to keep him safe from his enemies and the fall of his empire just long enough for his followers to release

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him, yet it became his tomb for 10,000 years. The contents of the pagoda are mostly symbolic; opening the sarcophagus reveals it to be empty. An examination of the statues themselves reveals that they once seemed to hold a large object between them, perhaps something that even arched over the sarcophagus. This was where the *soul lens* was kept, before it was moved into the *runewell* (see area X12).

The true key to the Reliquary lies in the lens gripped by the statue to the south. This lens is not the true *soul lens* (that lens has been located inside of the *runewell* for the past 10,000 years), but it is linked to that lens. As long as the *soul lens* remains inside the *runewell*, this smaller lens, known as an *anima focus*, cannot be damaged or moved from its location. It functions as an anchor and window for the *soul lens*, and it is through it that souls of greed have been siphoned into the *runewell* as this Adventure Path has progressed. Whenever such a soul perishes, the *anima focus* glows green and siphons a portion of that soul's greed into the *soul lens* in the *runewell*, which in turn amplifies the siphoned soul fragment so it can be used by the *runewell* to fuel Karzoug's return to Golarion.

Although the *anima focus* cannot yet be moved or damaged, it does serve as the only route into the *runewell*. A DC 20 Search of the *anima focus* reveals traces of dried blood along the etching of the symbol of greed on its face. A character who smears his blood on the *anima focus* becomes sickened by a sudden sense of vertigo and double vision, as the Eye of Avarice appears to be overlaid over his current field of view. The character cannot visually make out any figures inside the Eye of Avarice, but he can certainly sense the presence of both Karzoug and the *soul lens* inside. This disorientation lasts for 1 minute, during which time everything appears blurry and indistinct to the character (incidentally providing concealment and a 50% miss chance to all creatures the character attacks). Only fire remains crisp and in focus to the character while so affected (creatures with the fire subtype are not effectively concealed due to the disorientation)—the only real clue as to how to transition completely into the Eye of Avarice.

If, while under the disorienting effects of the Eye, a character touches flame to himself, the fire immediately and instantly consumes him, even if he's normally resistant to or immune to fire. To observers, it appears that the character has been burnt to nothingness in the span of an instant, when in fact the user has merely transported into the Eye of Avarice. This journey is not without pain—the traveler must make a DC 20 Fortitude save to avoid being stunned by this transportation. While immunity or resistance to fire doesn't prevent this planar transportation, it does prevent the chance from being stunned by it.

A character who strikes the *anima focus* with a *domineering runeforged weapon* can also effect entrance into the Eye of Avarice, for in so doing, the disruptive clash of opposing magic tears a hole in reality before the statue. This opening functions as a *gate* into the Eye of Avarice, but one infused with domineering magic such that Karzoug cannot use the *gate* to escape (although he can certainly cast spells through it into this area). The *gate* remains open for 10 minutes before closing.

Apart from general experimentation, spells like *legend lore* and *vision* can reveal the method and function of the *anima focus*—this was how Mokmurian learned how to enter the Eye of Avarice and, subsequently, what doomed him.

Creatures: Before the PCs can take the time to tinker with the *anima focus*, they need to deal with three final guardians: two lamia harriidans who attend to their leader, Most High Ceoptra. This lamia, like the long line of her ancestors back to Xin-Shalast's heyday, is a devoted servant of the concept of greed and Shalastian tradition—she doesn't worship a specific deity. The closest approximation to a deity for her is Karzoug, although she gains her spells from her blind faith in greed and her ancestors and not from the runelord. Her slavish devotion made her the obvious choice for the runelord when he decided he needed a guardian to watch over the only entrance to his prison. Ceoptra takes the charge quite seriously and never abandons her post, sending one of her two harriidan attendants as a proxy whenever she needs to conduct business elsewhere.

MOST HIGH CEOPTRA

CR 16

Female lamia harriidan cleric 4 (see page 82)

CE Large monstrous beast

Init +3; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Listen +29, Spot +29

DEFENSE

AC 34, touch 14, flat-footed 31

(+4 armor, +3 deflection, +3 Dexterity, +14 natural, +2 shield, -2 size)

hp 237 (17d10+4d8+126)**Fort** +24, **Ref** +17, **Will** +21**DR** 10/magic; **SR** 23

OFFENSE

Spd 60 ft.**Melee** +4 *unholy dagger* +29/+24/+19/+14 (1d8+8/19–20) and touch +20 (1d8 Wisdom drain)**Space** 15 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.**Special Attacks** pounce, rake (1d6+7)**Spells Prepared** (CL 16th, +23 touch, +19 ranged touch)8th—*quickened cure critical wounds*, *fire storm* (DC 28), *greater spell immunity*, *quickened unholy blight*^P (DC 24)7th—*quickened cure serious wounds*, *destruction* (DC 27), *disintegrate*^P (DC 17), *quickened searing light*, *word of chaos*6th—*blade barrier* (DC 26), *quickened cure moderate wounds*, *greater dispel magic*, *harm*^P (DC 26), *heal*5th—*quickened cure light wounds*, *dispel good*^P, *quickened divine favor*, *greater command* (DC 25), *flame strike* (DC 25), *slay living* (DC 25), *wall of stone*4th—*air walk*, *cure critical wounds*, *death knell*, *greater magic weapon* (already cast), *sending*, *spell immunity*, *unholy blight*^P (DC 24)3rd—*blindness/deafness* (DC 23), *contagion*^P (DC 23), *cure serious wounds* (2), *dispel magic*, *magic vestment* (already cast), *prayer*, *searing light*2nd—*cure moderate wounds* (3), *hold person* (DC 22), *resist energy*, *shatter*^P (DC 22), *silence* (DC 22), *spiritual weapon*1st—*cure light wounds* (5), *endure elements* (already cast), *obscuring mist*, *protection from good*^P, *sanctuary* (DC 20)

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0—*cure minor wounds* (3), *guidance*, *mending* (2)

D domain spell; **Domains** Destruction, Evil

TACTICS

Before Combat Ceoptra casts *magic vestment* on her clothing and *greater magic weapon* on her dagger every morning. She also casts *endure elements* on herself every morning as well. Once she realizes the PCs are in the Pinnacle, she casts *air walk* and *death knell* on herself. If possible, just before combat begins, she casts *sending* to warn Karzoug his enemies are near.

During Combat Ceoptra lets her harridan minions engage the PCs at first while she hangs back and uses her attack spells at range. As soon as one harridan dies, she abandons this tactic and enters melee as well. She saves her quickened attack spells to augment her melee attacks.

Morale Ceoptra fights to the death.

STATISTICS

Str 24, **Dex** 16, **Con** 22, **Int** 12, **Wis** 28, **Cha** 19

Base Atk +20; **Gp** +35

Feats Altitude Affinity, Craft Magic Arms and Armor, Craft Wondrous Item, Dodge, Forge Ring, Iron Will, Multiattack, Quicken Spell



CEOPTRA

ANIMA FOCUS

Minor Artifact

Aura strong transmutation; **CL** 20th

Slot —; **Weight** 5 lb.

DESCRIPTION

This powerful artifact was originally created in the twilight years of Thassilon by Karzoug to serve as an anchor for the *soul lens*, allowing it to draw power from the plane on which the *anima lens* resided in addition to the plane on which the *soul lens* itself resides. When carried, the *anima focus* also allows its owner to temporarily shed his mortal flesh and become ghostlike, as if using the spell *ethereal jaunt*. The lens can be used to cast this spell up to three times per day.

Skills Bluff +12, Climb +11, Concentration +30, Hide +3,

Knowledge (religion) +9, Listen +29, Spot +29

Languages Common, Giant, Thassilonian

Gear +1 *unholy dagger*, *periapt of Wisdom* +6, *ring of force shield*, *Sihedron ring*, four pearl anklets worth 2,000 gp each, golden crown worth 6,000 gp

LAMIA HARRIDANS (2)

CR 12

hp 161 each (see page 86)

TACTICS

Morale The harridans fight to the death as long as Ceoptra lives—if they know she's been slain, they attempt to flee down to Xin-Shalast if brought below 40 hit points.

Treasure: The burning brazier serves only as a convenient source of fire to create a portal into the *runewell*—it bears a minor magic that causes the fire within to burn forever without fuel. This device is worth 400 gp.

Once Karzoug is defeated and the *soul lens* returns to the pagoda here, the *anima focus* can be removed easily from the statue's grip.

X12. Eye of Avarice (EL 21)

This place—for it does not seem to be a “room” in any normal sense of the word—is at once vast and finite. A cylindrical space two hundred feet in diameter yet trailing into the infinite above, the smoky white walls of this shaft churn and spiral about as if this were the eye of a vast storm. Faces and twisted figures are apparent in that smoke, constantly stretched and mangled by the violence as they are spun in endless circles. The floor of the place is of stone, but spiraling and curving channels have been carved into it. Sixteen ghostly flames burn around the place's perimeter, while at its center stands a glowing pool of shimmering blue waters. Low stone walls divide the pool into sections, while at the center, floating five feet above a central platform in the middle of the well of water, is a bluish-purple almond-shaped crystal, a ring of gold carved with runes encircling it and a second ring constricting its middle like a belt. Blue smoke writhes around the crystal, and a red glowing rune winks from the central band.

SPIRES OF XIN-SHALAST

Eye of Avarice



1 square = 10 feet

This cylindrical realm is its own reality, a demiplane lodged in the gulf between the Material Plane and Leng. This demiplane has normal gravity and time, and while its width is finite, one can fly “up” forever without ever reaching the end of this plane. The plane itself keeps the air breathable, the temperature comfortable, and sustains life so that those in this area need not eat or drink. The walls surrounding the place seem to be made of smoke, but they are in fact a hard planar boundary—as nothing exists beyond the walls of this place, they are impossible to penetrate. The swirling smoky walls feel solid and smooth to the touch, and cannot be climbed without magical aid.

This realm is known as the Eye of Avarice. Karzoug, working on theoretical notes provided to him by his minions in Runeforge, created this demiplane by turning the *runewell of greed* at the base of the Pinnacle of Avarice “inside out.” In effect, the entire realm is the *runewell*, its walls made of the spirits of those infused inside it, its floor the now forever-closed entrance, the ceiling its undone and infinite depths. The crystal floating in the center just above the symbolic waters of the *runewell* (these waters are themselves merely a powerful illusion) is the *soul lens*.

Creature: For most of the previous 10,000 years, Karzoug had been physically encased by the *soul lens* in a form of *temporal stasis*, yet able to observe and influence the area around the artifact. When Mokmurian came to this place, Karzoug was able to reach out and, through sheer force of will augmented by thousands

of years of pent-up magic, made the stone giant wizard into his puppet. Since then, the souls of those properly anointed with the Sihedron and steeped in greed have been suffusing the walls of this realm, each one allowing Karzoug’s physical body to manifest more and more. At first, only his vague ghostly outline could appear, and for only a few moments at a time, but now the *runewell* is full, and Karzoug has truly returned to flesh and blood—at least, as long as he remains within the Eye of Avarice.

That Karzoug can manifest images of himself in places in the Pinnacle of Avarice shows how close he is to emerging back into the Material Plane. He has enough souls stored (particularly after the PCs went on a rampage against the stone giants of Jorgenfist), yet still they take time to process and be fully “digested” by the *runewell*. Until the last soul is consumed, Karzoug cannot physically leave this realm. How long that takes is left to the GM—if you want to put this adventure on a timer, you can set the event of Karzoug’s release for a specific time (although to do so most effectively, you’ll need to somehow let your PCs know when the timer is up). A better choice might be to tie the event of his release to the point at which the PCs first enter this realm. If the PCs are forced to flee (via *plane shift* or *gate*, most likely), it won’t be much longer before the *runelord* emerges from the Eye of Avarice—2 days is a suggestion, although you can certainly adjust this length as you wish.

Karzoug is a powerful foe, and the PCs should be at the top of their game when they confront him. They have the advantage of

RISE OF THE RUNELORDS

numbers and, perhaps, domineering weapons forged in Runeforge, but Karzoug has the advantage of sheer power. His resources may have been somewhat drained by encounters in area X4, but he's held his most powerful magic in reserve. Make sure to study Karzoug's abilities and tactics, detailed on page 62 of this volume, before combat occurs here!

Slaying Karzoug is, of course, the best way to defeat the runelord. A spell like *imprisonment* only delays the inevitable, but would certainly count as a victory as far as this campaign is concerned. Yet there is another way to defeat Karzoug—destroying the *soul lens*. Doing so traps the runelord inside this realm forever without the ability to return to the Material Plane. Destroying the *soul lens*, alas, is not much easier than simply killing Karzoug. A successful *disjunction* can do it, of course, but otherwise only a domineering rune-forged weapon has any hope of damaging the artifact. Damage from any other source is ignored by the *soul lens*, and even against these weapons it retains its Hardness 10. Of course, Karzoug immediately moves to destroy anyone who attempts to harm the *soul lens*. If the *soul lens* is destroyed, Karzoug roars in frustration and rage. In that case, he is trapped forever inside the Eye of Avarice, but as long as the PCs remain in here with him, he does his best to destroy them. A gate or plane shift spell allows PCs to escape, yet prevent the incensed runelord—still bound within the Eye of Avarice—from reentering Golarion.

SOUL LENS

hp 200; Hardness 10

KARZOUG THE CLAIMER

hp 266 (see page 62)

TACTICS

During Combat Karzoug starts combat at a height of 40 feet above the *soul lens*—he strives to remain out of melee as long as possible. On round one of combat, he casts *meteor swarm* on the party, then uses his rod to cast *time stop* as a quickened spell. During the 1d4+1 rounds he gains, he casts spells like *prismatic wall*, *wall of force*, and *cloudkill* among the PCs to disrupt their tactics, and casts defensive spells on himself like *spell turning*, *true seeing*, and *globe of invulnerability*. He'll also use his wand of *stoneskin* on himself at this time. When *time stop* ends, Karzoug hits the PCs with area affecting spells like *wail of the banshee* and *horrid wilting*, saving spells like *temporal stasis* and *maze* to use against anyone who seems to be particularly dangerous. Karzoug's glaive takes actions on its own as well, unleashing *fireballs* on non-spellcasters and curing Karzoug of wounds whenever he drops below 220 hit points. If it comes down to melee, Karzoug releases his glaive to dance as soon as possible, fighting

with his talons and using quickened spells like *lightning bolt* and *magic missile* to support his attacks.

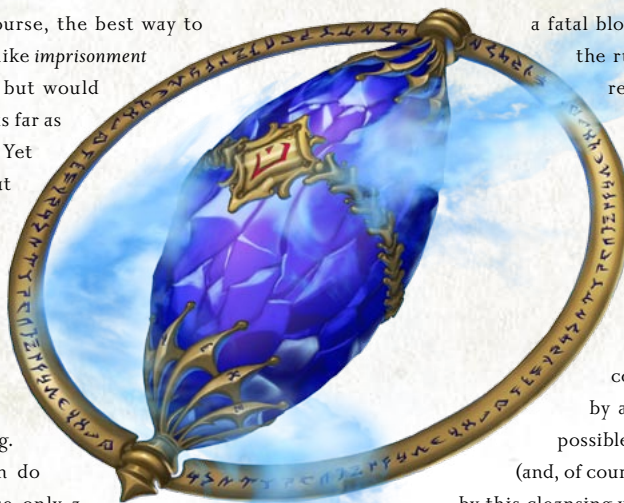
Morale Karzoug has nowhere to flee—he fights to the death.

CONCLUDING THE CAMPAIGN

Once the *soul lens* is destroyed or Karzoug is dealt a fatal blow, the energy of the greedy souls the runelord's mortal form has used to return are unleashed in a blinding flash of light. All creatures in the Eye of Avarice must make a DC 25 Fortitude save to avoid being permanently blinded. Yet this blast of soul energy is not completely destructive—the energy immediately heals all damage and cures all debilitating conditions (including death) suffered by any creature in the *runewell*. Only possible blindness caused by the explosion (and, of course, Karzoug's death) are untouched by this cleansing wave of positive energy. When the light clears, the air seems to grow thin and cold and the smoky walls of the place vanish. The *runewell* has returned to its place at the base of the Pinnacle of Avarice, and its waters quickly freeze—whatever magic the *runewell* might have once contained having been consumed in this final catastrophic turn of events. If the *soul lens* is destroyed, all things not inexorably tied to the Eye of Avarice (i.e., the PCs) are shunted back to the Material Plane, near the *anima focus* in area X11. This event also brings down the occluding field that surrounded the Spires.

Although the PCs have averted a terrible threat to Varisia, it seems likely that most of the region's inhabitants won't even notice—to them, stopping the very real threat of a possible invasion by giants made the PCs as much heroes as they'll ever be. Nonetheless, there are some who know the true extent of what the PCs have accomplished, from lowly Brodert Quink (whose claims that the PCs saved Varisia from the End of the World merely become the latest in a long line of unbelievable tales) all the way up to organizations like the Pathfinders. Some weeks after the PCs return from Xin-Shalast, they are contacted by the Pathfinder Society and asked for their story. This necessitates escorting several Pathfinders to Xin-Shalast, but for discovering the city and revealing its route, the Pathfinder Society is prepared to pay each PC a staggering sum of 30,000 gp each.

Of course, once word of Xin-Shalast's location gets out (either because the PCs reveal it to the Pathfinders, or simply because they start selling off gold shingles and diamond door handles they scavenged from the ruins), interest in the distant city explodes. Hundreds of adventuring groups attempt to make the difficult journey to the city to find their fortunes. Yet Xin-Shalast's remote location all but ensures that the majority of the vast wealth remains trapped there—unless the PCs take it upon themselves to harvest the place using spells like *teleport*. Xin-Shalast is a fantastic, nearly limitless source of wealth, and those who know of its location can use



SPIRES OF XIN-SHALAST

that wealth to build empires. Varisia's future could well be shaped by the choices such PCs make in where and how to spend their wealth.

Yet even without Karzoug's looming threat, Xin-Shalast remains a dangerous place. Giants, vampiric skulls, abominable snowmen, lamias, dragons, and worse still haunt its golden streets. And there's always the fact that Leng is just "around the corner" from Xin-Shalast. This proximity could cause unforeseen problems in the future, for one can never be sure what malignant eyes might be watching from this ancient, evil realm.

Most importantly, for all the party's success against Karzoug, he was but one of seven. The other six runelords went into seclusion at the same time as Karzoug, and the Runelord of Greed's attempt to rise sent ripples through the various *runewells* scattered throughout the world. These other six runelords are quickening in their tombs, preparing for their own emergence into Golarion. It might be years, even decades, but one thing is certain:

The Return of the Runelords draws near.

WHAT IF KARZOUG WINS?

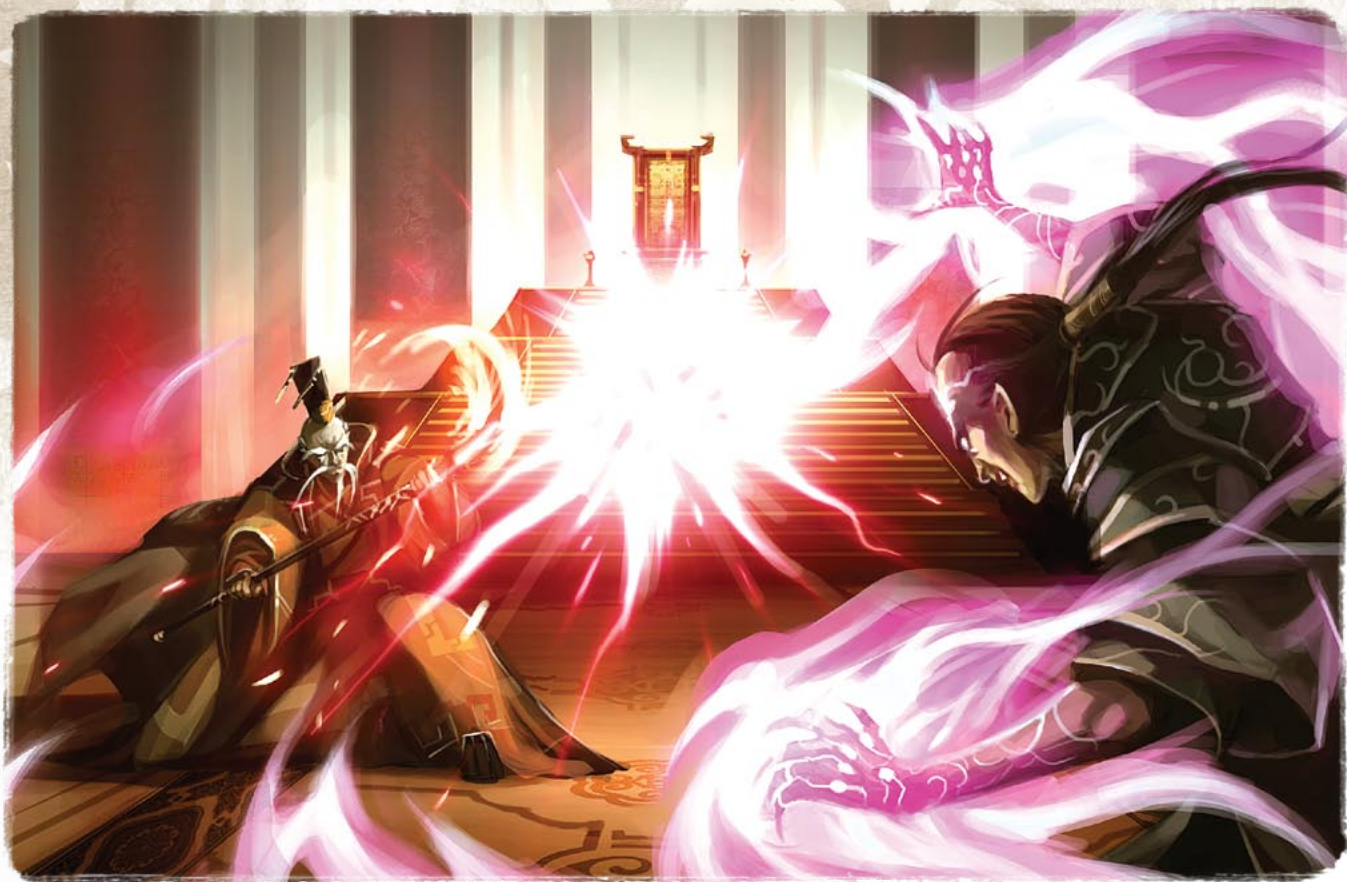
If Karzoug defeats the PCs, or if they are forced to flee and don't return in time to defeat him, the runelord's emergence into Xin-Shalast has one of two effects, depending upon the status of the *Leng Device*. Both possibilities are dire for Varisia. For the sake of Golarion, let us hope the PCs do not fail!

Leng Device is Shut Down: When Karzoug emerges from his prison, it only takes him a few weeks to rally all of the denizens of Xin-Shalast to his banner. Rune giants, lamia harriads, and other agents stream down from the Kodar Mountains and begin to subjugate the giant tribes of the Storval Plateau—in only a few months' time, Mokmuriar's army seems like a ratty band of mercenaries. Before long, Karzoug manages to transplant his ancient army into Xin-Shalast as well by using the *Leng Device*, at which point he immediately becomes one of Golarion's most powerful figures. Conquering Varisia is child's play, and within a year of his rise, Thassilon is reborn. Defeating Karzoug at this point should be a fantastically difficult challenge.

Leng Device is Operational: When Karzoug emerges from the Eye of Avarice, the *Leng Device*, which has been secretly altered by the denizens of Kadath, siphons away all of the soul energy within the *runewell* and awakens Mhar. The entity, trapped in the stone of the mountain for countless eons, awakens with an incredible earthquake felt as far away as Magnimar. Mhar's rise from the mountain reduces it, Xin-Shalast, and several nearby mountains to rubble, creating an unimaginably vast badland of fissures and crags that quickly becomes infested with lesser creatures that follow Mhar into this world. Mhar's roar, a keening howl, is heard across Varisia, and in the northeastern sky, the night glows with ominous red fire. What Mhar is, and what his emergence into Golarion portends, is beyond the scope of this adventure, yet the results should be fundamentally catastrophic in a Lovecraftian sort of way. Karzoug survives this event, but his armies and city do not; the archmage is forced to flee the Kodars and seeks shelter elsewhere, likely in Runeforge. If this event occurs, the PCs need all the help they can gather to face the alien monstrosity that is Mhar—and Karzoug might, ironically, be their best bet.



RISE OF THE RUNELORDS



KARZOUNG THE CLAIMER

RETURN OF THE RUNELORD OF GREED

“Your sniveling is neither amusing nor an excuse. As a servant of Shalast, you rightly understand that you are held to certain expectations. Failure in your duties extends beyond yourself, affecting your family, your countrymen, and this realm at large. Yet, no one feels your inadequacies more keenly than myself.

“As your ineptitudes have stolen something precious from me, I will repay you in turn. I seem to recall that you have seven sons, Arrdual of Vadan. Therefore, for each gold coin you have misaccounted, one of your children will be brought to the Pinnacle of Avarice. There, his flesh will be transmuted into the same gold you seem to place so little value upon.

“But fear not, Vaultkeeper, your children will be returned to you—and of greater value than ever before. Their gilded flesh will be a new monument set within Vadan’s square—an enduring reminder of precision’s necessity, and that all things within this domain belong to me.”

—Karzoug, the Runelord of Greed, to the High Vaultkeeper of Vadan

KARZOUG THE CLAIMER

During the reign of Haphrama, Karzoug was born in a slave den in the city of Malistoke. What horrors he endured through the early years of his life in the city's flesh pits are unknown, for they were later stricken from history at his command. One thing is for certain, though: when Karzoug walked from the dark gates of that city 27 years later, his path was soaked in blood and his soul was charred as black as the Pit of Night.

With the gold teeth plucked from the head of his last master, he was able to buy an apprenticeship with a traveling demon binder named Thurbel. For seven years he followed Thurbel, serving as both a lure for summoned demons and a slave to the wizard. He died more than once during these years at the overzealous claws and fangs of demons, but each time his master—who had grown wealthy through the sale of his demonic services—saw fit to have Karzoug raised. Karzoug's suffering was perhaps as great during this time as it had been in Malistoke, but during these years he rose in magical power, learning the finer points of rulership and exercise of power at the hands of amoral demon tutors.

Thus, when Karzoug heard of Runelord Haphrama's call for new apprentices, he scuffed a summoning circle during one of Thurbel's conjurations and idly looted his master's belongings as the freed demon devoured the conjurer's soul. With several potent magic items in tow and enough gold to impress the runelord, Karzoug was easily selected to serve as one of Haphrama's new devotees.

At the feet of the runelord, Karzoug learned much of the art of transmutation and the magic of Greed. He found himself enthralled by the thinning of reality that occurred near the slopes of Mhar Massif. With secret alliances between himself and denizens from Leng, Karzoug began to master strange, eldritch powers in secret. His pacts promised a twisting of reality, providing his inscrutable tutors greater access to the lands of men. When, in the 206th year of his reign, Haphrama finally caught wind of Karzoug's plotting, he was too late to stop him. An unknown spell provided to Karzoug from Leng consumed both Haphrama and his other apprentice, Vhage, stripping their souls from their bodies and hurling them into the void between the planes.

Karzoug took up the burning glaive—the Runelord of Greed's symbol of rule—at the age of 77 and began his reign as Runelord of Greed. His reign saw the rise of Shalast to new heights, as his cunning and manipulative nature wended countless paths to power. Despite his people's dread, Karzoug's capital at Xin-Shalast rose in prominence, becoming one of the age's most breathtaking cities—though its grandeur existed only to delight the runelord and the nobles and slaves he gathered around him. In his 466-year reign, he surpassed all of the previous Runelords of Greed in power and, it could be argued, many of his fellow runelords as well. Like his peers, though, at the height of his influence he was forced to retreat from the world to avoid the cataclysm that befell his nation. Dormant, his mind exploring realms beyond, Karzoug waited for millennia, anticipating the time when the runelords would once again rise over Golarion.

A time that, it seems, has finally come.

KARZOUG'S IOUN STONES

Karzoug benefits from an ancient Thassilonian tradition, the implantation of *ioun stones* directly into one's flesh. The Runelord of Greed bears 20 *ioun stones*, all of shapes and colors either exceedingly rare in modern times or lost altogether. Karzoug's implanted *ioun stones* cannot be sundered or taken from him. If Karzoug is killed, the stones shatter, rendering them useless.

Crimson Sphere: +2 enhancement bonus to Intelligence (the bonuses from possessing multiple spheres stack, up to a maximum of +6).

Emerald Ellipsoid: 5 bonus hit points (the bonuses from multiple emerald ellipsoids stack; there is no maximum benefit).

Onyx Rhomboid: +2 enhancement bonus to Constitution (the bonuses from possessing multiple onyx rhomboids stack, up to a maximum of +6).

Amber Spindle: +1 resistance bonus on all saving throws (the bonuses from possessing multiple amber spindles stack, up to a maximum of +5).

KARZOUG THE CLAIMER

CR 21

Male human transmuter 16/archmage 4

NE Medium humanoid

Init +7; **Senses** arcane sight, darkvision 60 ft., *see invisibility*; Listen +1, Spot +1

DEFENSE

AC 36, touch 21, flat-footed 29

(+6 armor, +4 deflection, +7 Dexterity, +5 natural, +4 shield)

hp 266 (20d4+215); fast healing 10

Fort +15, **Ref** +15, **Will** +17

Defensive Abilities *freedom of movement*; **Immune** mind-affecting effects; **SR** 24

OFFENSE

Spd 30 ft., fly 60 ft. (perfect)

Melee Karzoug's burning glaive +20/+15 (1d10+12/19–20/×3 plus 1d6 fire) or

2 talons of Leng +18 (1d4+8/×3)

Ranged arcane fire +17 (4d6+1d6 per level of spell sacrificed)

Special Attacks high arcana (arcane fire, mastery of elements, spell power, spell-like ability)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 22nd)

2/day—quickened teleport

Spells Prepared (CL 22nd, +17 ranged touch)

9th—*meteor swarm*, *time stop*, *wail of the banshee* (DC 31), *wish* (2)

8th—*horrid wilting* (DC 30), *maze*, *mind blank* (already cast), *prismatic wall* (DC 30), *temporal stasis* (2, DC 31)

7th—*finger of death* (DC 29), *forcecage*, quickened haste, quickened lightning bolt (DC 24), *limited wish*, *reverse gravity*, *spell turning*

6th—*disintegrate* (DC 29), *flesh to stone* (DC 29), *globe of invulnerability*, *greater dispel magic*, *repulsion* (DC 27), quickened resist energy, *sign of wrath** (DC 27), *true seeing*

5th—*baleful polymorph* (DC 28), *cloudkill*, *cone of cold* (DC 26), quickened magic missile, quickened shield, *telekinesis* (DC 28), *wall of force*

4th—*bestow curse* (DC 26), *black tentacles*, *enervation* (2), *ice storm* (2), *mass reduce person* (DC 27), *scrying*

RISE OF THE RUNELORDS

3rd—*blink*, *fireball* (DC 24), *keen edge* (already cast), *greater magic weapon* (already cast), *protection from energy*, *slow* (DC 26), *stinking cloud* (DC 25), *vampiric touch*

2nd—*blindness/deafness* (DC 24), *false life* (already cast), *glitterdust* (DC 24), *protection from arrows*, *pyrotechnics* (DC 25), *resist energy*, *scorching ray* (2), *shatter* (DC 23)

1st—*alarm*, *enlarge person*, *expeditious retreat*, *grease* (DC 23), *ray of enfeeblement* (4), *reduce person* (DC 24)

0—*acid splash*, *flare* (DC 21), *mage hand*, *prestidigitation*, *touch of fatigue* (DC 22)

Prohibited Schools enchantment, illusion

XP Karzoug has 17,500 XP available for casting powerful spells like *wish*

STATISTICS

Str 20, **Dex** 24, **Con** 24, **Int** 32, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 18

Base Atk +10; **Grp** +15



Feats Craft Magic Arms and Armor, Craft Wand, Craft Wondrous Item, Eschew Materials, Greater Spell Focus (transmutation), Inscribe Rune*, Martial Weapon Proficiency (glaive), Quicken Spell, Scribe Scroll, Skill Focus (Spellcraft), Spell Focus (conjuration, necromancy, transmutation)

Skills Concentration +30, Craft (alchemy) +34, Knowledge (arcana) +34, Knowledge (architecture and engineering) +34, Knowledge (geography) +16, Knowledge (nobility) +34, Knowledge (religion) +16, Knowledge (the planes) +22, Spellcraft +36

Languages Abyssal, Giant, Thassilonian; tongues

SQ contingency, exceptional stats, immortal, inherent bonuses, permanent spells, summon familiar (none currently)

Combat Gear *rod of greater quicken metamagic*, *wand of blood money** (33 charges), *wand of dispel magic* (CL 10th, 40 charges), *wand of magic missile* (CL 9th, 24 charges), *wand of stoneskin* (CL 10th, 17 charges); **Other Gear** Karzoug's burning glaive, talons of Leng, belt of giant strength +6, boots of Dexterity +6, implanted ioun stones (3 crimson spheres, 12 emerald ellipsoids, 3 onyx rhomboids, 2 amber spindles), Sihedron Tome, robes of Xin-Shalast, ring of protection +5, ring of freedom of movement, rune of contingency, runewell amulet, ruby inscribed with the rune of wrath worth 1,000 gp (focus for sign of wrath), ruby dust worth 1,500 gp (for forcecage), vial of powdered gemstones worth 10,000 gp (for temporal stasis)

*Sign of wrath, Inscribe Rune, and blood money are detailed in Pathfinder #5.

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Exceptional Stats (Ex) Karzoug was destined from birth to become one of the greatest wizards of his age. As a result, his ability scores were generated using 32 points, rather than the standard 25-point elite array. Additionally, he has much more gear than standard for an NPC of his level. These modifications increase his total CR by 1.

Immortal Secrets from ancient Thassilon and realms beyond have allowed Karzoug to sustain his life indefinitely. Unless slain by violent means, he is effectively immortal.

Inherent Bonuses Karzoug has used *wish* spells to increase his stats. He has a +5 inherent bonus to his Intelligence and a +4 inherent bonus to his other five ability scores.

Contingency If Karzoug ever becomes affected by a hostile spell effect that prevents him from acting on his own, a *greater dispel* magic targets him.

Permanent Spells Karzoug has made the following spells permanent on himself: *arcane sight*, *darkvision*, *see invisibility*, and *tongues*.

Rune of Contingency This magic rune, created by Karzoug's Inscribe Rune feat, allows Karzoug to gain the effects of *feather fall* and *water breathing* once each per day. In addition, if he's reduced to 0 or fewer hit points but is not killed, he turns into a cloud of vapor as per the spell *gaseous form* for 5 rounds. He remains conscious during this time, but after 5 rounds he returns to his normal form and is unconscious and dying.

THE RUNELORD'S ARCANA

Karzoug carries with him a variety of unique magic items.

KARZUG'S BURNING GLAIVE

Aura strong transmutation; **CL** 17th

Slot held; **Price** 180,308 gp; **Weight** 8 lb.

KARZOUG THE CLAIMER

STATISTICS

Alignment NE; **Ego** 22

Senses 120 ft. darkvision, hearing

Int 17, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 17

Communication read languages, speech (Ignan, Thassilonian), telepathy

Lesser Powers cure moderate wounds on wielder 3/day, faerie fire 3/day, major image (DC 16) 1/day

Special Purpose defeat non-spellcasters; **Dedicated Power** fireball (CL 17th; DC 16)

DESCRIPTION

Soon after the founding of Thassilion, the ancient emperor Xin crafted the *Alara'quin*, seven icons symbolizing the runelords' mastery of rune magic and dominance over their respective domains. Karzoug's +2 flaming dancing glaive is one of these ancient icons.

Karzoug's burning glaive possesses a keen intellect, granted to it by its imperial creator. Meant to embody all that is right and virtuous about the luxury of wealth, the weapon is only concerned with the acquisition of riches and safeguarding the treasures of the rightful runelord of Shalast. It eagerly seeks to immolate non-spellcasters, which it sees as paupers likely to steal what its master possesses. While the glaive endlessly fawns over Karzoug (as it would any rightful ruler of Shalast), it tirelessly berates other wielders, constantly comparing their flaws to the perfection of its past runelord owners.



DESCRIPTION

A useful lesser artifact said to have been crafted by a dragon in the service of Emperor Xin, the *Sihedron tome* holds infinite pages for wizards to inscribe spells upon. In addition to potentially holding libraries worth of arcane knowledge, any wizard who prepares spells from the Sihedron Tome may prepare bonus spells as if his Intelligence were 6 points higher. This is not an actual bonus to Intelligence and grants the user no additional benefit. Currently, the book is filled with arcane formulas for every spell Karzoug has memorized, plus 2d12 others (mostly from the school of transmutation and none from the schools of enchantment or illusion).

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Craft Magic Arms and Armor, cure moderate wounds, faerie fire, fireball, major image, wish; **Cost** 90,308 gp, 7,200 XP

ROBES OF XIN-SHALAST

Aura strong abjuration and conjuration; **CL** 16th

Slot robe; **Price** 198,000 gp; **Weight** 1 lb.

DESCRIPTION

The robes of Xin-Shalast grant a +6 armor bonus and spell resistance 24. Fashioned for an archmage, the robes are also meant to aid and accentuate their wearer's spellcasting ability. Thus, the robes cause the wearer to cast all spells at +1 caster level, while two of the robe's pockets function as handy haversacks. The wearer of these robes is immune to the effects of the occluding field that surrounds the Spires of Xin-Shalast, and can exist comfortably in all high altitudes, including within the death zone.

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Craft Wondrous Item, endure elements, mage armor, protection from spells, secret chest; **Cost** 99,000 gp, 7,920 XP

RUNEWELL AMULET

Minor Artifact

Aura strong transmutation; **CL** 20th

Slot amulet; **Price** —

DESCRIPTION

This amulet of gold and red crystal grants the wearer a +5 enhancement

bonus to his natural armor bonus. In addition, the wearer becomes attuned to both the *runewell of greed* and the *soul lens* that controls it.

While within the confines of the *runewell*, the wearer does not age and has no need for food or water. In addition, he can move about the interior of the *runewell* at a fly speed of 60 feet with perfect maneuverability. The wearer of the necklace is sustained by the souls absorbed by the *runewell* and, as a result, gains fast healing 10.

SIHEDRON TOME

Minor Artifact

Aura strong transmutation; **CL** 16th

Slot —; **Price** —; **Weight** 1 lb.

TALONS OF LENG

Aura strong transmutation; **CL** 15th

Slot gloves; **Price** 67,000 gp; **Weight** 1 lb.

DESCRIPTION

Finely laid gold filigree lines these ornately worked gloves. Once worn, the talons of Leng grant the wearer two natural claw attacks, both with a +3 enhancement bonus on attack rolls and damage. A hit from one of the talons inflicts 1d4 points of damage. On a critical hit, the talons inflict x3 damage, and force the victim to make a DC 20 Will save. Failing this save renders the target permanently insane (as per the spell *insanity*), while success leaves the target confused for 1 round. This is a mind-affecting effect.

The wearer of the talons of Leng is immune to the spells *confusion* and *insanity*, and any ability that produces similar effects. For as long as he wears the talons, however, his Wisdom is reduced by 2, as alien voices constantly whisper through his head.

The talons of Leng do not interfere with spellcasting, the use of handheld items, or wielding other weapons (though a wielder cannot make an attack with a claw that's holding another weapon or item). If the wielder attacks only with the talons, they are treated as a primary attack, but if he attacks with a weapon or other natural attack, the claws are treated as secondary attacks and suffer a -5 penalty to their attack roll.

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Craft Magic Arms and Armor, greater magic fang, insanity; **Cost** 33,500 gp, 2,680 XP

RISE OF THE RUNELORDS



HAZARDS ON THE WORLD'S ROOF

ADVENTURING AT HIGH ALTITUDES

“The cold’s not your enemy. No, when you get it in your fool head to go gallivanting up to the top of the world, there’s plenty else to be worried of. Up there, there’s mountains that roar and try to eat you alive. There’s air that quits caring and does you about as much good as trying to breathe a lake. There’s rock that’s solid as a fortress wall ’til it’s the only thing holding you over a gap a mile deep. And then there’s the things. The snowy, hungry things that don’t let anything made of meat just pass on by.

“The cold, though, it’ll kill you slow and quiet. It’ll be there when you’re fallen and broken, half-eaten at the bottom of some ravine. It’ll make the hurting stop, wrap you up in that dull, soft numbness, and make your forget any thought of climbing back down.

“No, the cold’s not your enemy. Up there, it’s the best friend you’ve got.”

—Ronagard “Two Toes” Roteshield, Mountaineer Extraordinaire

HAZARDS ON THE WORLD'S ROOF

The city of Xin-Shalast lies in a hidden vale at the base of one of Golarion's tallest mountains, Mhar Massif. Adventuring on and among the peaks of the Kodar Mountains presents many deadly environmental obstacles to player characters in addition to the various hungry creatures they face. In fact, as illustrated in real-world high altitude climbing, even without any fantastic dangers, the venture can take a high toll in human life. Page 90 of the DMG provides rules on the dangers encountered in high-altitude mountain travel, but standardizes the effects of all altitudes above 15,000 feet. The rules presented therein are sufficient for traveling within the Lower City of Xin-Shalast, which stands at a paltry 15,500 feet above Golarion's sea level. Once the bold adventurers choose to tackle the unique challenge that is Mhar Massif in order to breach the Spires of Xin-Shalast above, however, more detailed rules for traversing altitudes that extreme become necessary.

MOUNTAINOUS MENACES

Aside from mountain-dwelling monsters, a host of dangers faces any adventurers who would follow their daring to lofty heights. A number of the perils discussed here refer to Xin-Shalast's legendary peak, Mhar Massif, but these rules can apply to any mountainous area anywhere in the world.

Altitude: As altitude increases, atmospheric pressure decreases, such that at 26,000 feet, atmospheric pressure is about one-third of that at sea level. This has a decidedly negative effect on organisms not acclimated to those conditions. At these altitudes, the air thins. While the oxygen concentration actually remains the same in the air, the lower pressure causes less oxygen to be drawn into a climber's lungs with each breath. The effects of this thinning air are described in rules for the low peaks/high passes and high peaks, including the game mechanics for altitude fatigue and altitude sickness (see the "Mountain Travel" sidebar). In addition to these effects, there are two additional altitude categories above high peaks: extreme altitude for elevations between 20,000 and 26,000 feet, and the death zone for altitudes above 26,000 feet (see page 68). The rules for these altitudes are further expanded on the following pages.

Avalanches: One of the best-known and most feared dangers facing mountaineers, avalanches are unpredictable and almost unavoidable. Few climbers hold out hope of surviving should the mountain they traverse turn against them in a rush of earth, ice, and snow. Complete rules for avalanches appear on page 90 of the DMG.

Avalanches are very rare on the south face of the Mhar Massif, due to the extensive terraforming and magical manipulation that were applied to it in millennia past. On the east, west, and north flanks, however, avalanches remain a real danger. Each day or portion thereof that PCs remain upon one of these parts of the mountain, there is a 5% chance that an avalanche occurs.

Cold: The higher you climb, the colder it becomes, with ice, snow, and glacial environs being typical atop mountains. Cold dangers are described on page 302 of the DMG and are

MOUNTAIN TRAVEL

High altitudes present even the best-prepared climbers with a variety of dangers. These hazards are explained in their entirety on page 90 of the DMG, but the majority are summarized and expanded upon here.

ACCLIMATED CHARACTERS

Characters who live at a high altitude for a month become acclimated to the lack of oxygen and avoid the dangers of altitude sickness up to 20,000, and receive a +4 competence bonus on saving throws to resist altitude effects. Those who spend more than two months away from the mountains lose their acclimation. Creatures that do not breathe are immune to altitude effects, as are creatures with the air or incorporeal subtypes, outsiders, elementals, dragons, oozes, plants, and aberrations. In addition, immunity to the effects of lack of air at high altitudes can be gained through the Altitude Affinity feat (see page 68).

LOW PEAK/HIGH PASSES (ALTITUDE FATIGUE)

Mountains from 5,000 to 15,000 feet fall into this category. All non-acclimated creatures labor to breathe in the thin air at this altitude and must succeed on a Fortitude save each hour (DC 15, +1 per previous check) or be fatigued. This high-altitude fatigue ends when the character descends to an altitude with more air. Acclimated characters do not have to attempt the Fortitude save.

HIGH PEAK (ALTITUDE SICKNESS)

Mountains from 15,001 to 20,000 feet fall into this category. In addition to the effects of lower altitudes, after each 6-hour period a character spends at this height he must succeed on a Fortitude save (DC 15, +1 per previous check) or take 1 point of damage to all ability scores.

categorized as cold, severe cold, and extreme cold. In low peak or high pass elevations, temperatures drop one category below that of the surrounding land. In high peak or extreme altitude areas, the temperature drops by two categories. For all practical purposes, temperatures in the death zone are always considered to be extreme cold. Nightfall drops temperatures by an additional category, as does wind chill if present.

Falling: The nightmare of any climber, falling from a mountain face typically results in a quick but terrifying death. Any fall from the slope of the Face of Mhar Massif is a potentially lethal event. Unless there is an obvious obstacle below to arrest the plunge, roll 1d20×10 feet to determine the length of the fall. If the result is between 150 and 200 feet there is a 50% chance that the multiplier is ×50 feet instead of ×10 feet, indicating that the unfortunate climber has tumbled over a sheer escarpment into open space with nothing between him and the ground far below. Otherwise, the fall includes tumbling down steep, rocky slopes and through crevasses as the PC scrambles for purchase. Damage is determined normally by the length of the fall (see page 303 of the DMG).

RISE OF THE RUNELORDS

ALTITUDE AFFINITY

Through means both mundane and magical, you have hardened your body to the rigors of surviving at altitudes where the thin air is not conducive to normal life.

Prerequisite: Con 19, Endurance.

Benefit: You are unaffected by altitude fatigue, altitude sickness, lack of oxygen, or any of their accompanying complications while at high altitudes, including the death zone above 26,000 feet. In addition, you gain a +4 bonus on all Survival checks made at high altitudes (above 5,000 feet).

Normal: Only creatures with the air or incorporeal subtypes, aberrations, constructs, dragons, elementals, oozes, outsiders, plants, or undead, as well as creatures that do not breathe, are immune to the harmful effects of high altitudes.

Ice: The result of elevation's perpetual chill, thick ice and other glacial conditions often add to the numerous perils climbers face. On the slopes of Mhar Massif, as well as the surrounding peaks, there exists a perpetual rime of ice. A character requires an additional 2 squares of movement to enter a square covered by ice. The DC for Balance, Climb, and Tumble checks increases by +5.

Wind: At extreme elevation and above, there is always wind chill in the Kodar Range due to strong prevailing winds of at least 21 mph. There is a 30% chance of severe winds each day lasting 1d12+2 hours, which have an additional 15% chance of turning into a 1d4-hour-long windstorm (see page 95 of the DMG). In the death zone, whatever wind effects existed at extreme altitude are increased by one category (though never higher than hurricane category winds). A climber who is knocked down must make a Climb check with a -5 penalty to avoid a fall, while a climber who is blown away automatically falls unless roped to someone else or otherwise secured to the mountain face.

OVERCOMING ALTITUDE EFFECTS

Even considering the varied mundane methods mountaineers use to avoid the dangerous effects of high altitudes, the highest peaks remain inaccessible without the use of extraordinary or magical aid. The simplest ways to offset the effects of high altitudes involve the use of specific magic items such as a *ring of elemental command (air)* (its affinity to air somewhat mimics the air subtype when worn), a *bottle of air*, a *cloak of etherealness* (when activated), a *helm of underwater action* (due to the globe of air it creates), an *iridescent spindle ioun stone*, a *necklace of adaptation*, and new magic items introduced in this adventure such as the *elixir of the peaks* (see page 13). Spells that access extraplanar spaces, such as *rope trick* and *magnificent mansion*, can also be used to provide respite from high altitude effects. The extradimensional spaces created by a *bag of holding* or a *portable hole* do not provide this protection, as they merely draw their air reserve from the atmosphere outside when they are opened. Transmutation spells that allow a climber to take the form of creatures immune to the dangers of high altitudes also prove quite helpful and often make climbing easier.

EXTREME ALTITUDE ZONES

Piercing the skies with countless jagged peaks, the Kodars are among the highest mountains in all Golarion. In the cases of near-mythical peaks such as Mhar Massif, Tvhar Massif, Minderhal's Throne, Smokemaw, and others, the elevations rise to deadly new heights. Presented here are two new altitude extremes and the effects associated with each.

Extreme Altitude (20,001 to 26,000 feet)

At extreme altitude, creatures are subject to the altitude fatigue and altitude sickness of lower altitudes. Mundane acclimation to high altitudes no longer benefits climbers at this height.

When an individual takes any ability damage from altitude sickness while at extreme altitude, he develops a hacking cough within 2d4 hours. This results in a persistent cough as the cold, arid air dries out the individual's throat and lungs. The coughing spasms are frequent and cause a -4 penalty on all Balance, Climb, Concentration, Hide, Listen, and Move Silently checks. In addition, any spell with verbal components requires a Concentration check (DC 14 + spell level) to successfully cast. If this Concentration check is failed, the spell is not lost, but the caster must start over again in the next round if he wishes to cast it.

These coughing spasms can be so violent that they can even break ribs. Each day an individual suffers the cough, he takes 1d6 points of damage. Moving back to a lower altitude zone relieves the cough, as does 2 hours per day spent in an extremely humid environment (such as a *fog cloud*). Spells such as *heal* and *restoration* can remove this effect but do not prevent it from returning normally. The cough is not a disease, and cannot be cured by *remove disease*.

Death Zone (More than 26,000 feet)

Normal life is not possible above an altitude of 26,000 feet; there simply is not sufficient atmospheric pressure to allow enough oxygen to be inhaled by breathing creatures. When a creature that does not possess the Altitude Affinity feat, or does not fall into one of the types or subtypes immune to high altitude effects, climbs to 26,000 feet of elevation, it immediately begins to suffocate as described on page 304 of the DMG. Acclimation to high altitudes does not prevent this effect.

REACHING HIGH ALTITUDES

Altitude effects are rarely a concern for traveling adventurers, primarily as there are few worthwhile reasons to explore such heights and even fewer ways to make such ascents. Characters determined to make their way up to the roof of the world might utilize a variety of methods.

Climbing: The most basic way to traverse a mountain is to scale it. Those who take to mountaineering the "old-fashioned way" must spend weeks acclimating themselves to the high altitudes, and even then can rarely hope to reach extreme altitude zones without the use of some magic. Traveling through trackless mountains reduces the movement speed of

HAZARDS ON THE WORLD'S ROOF

KODAR MOUNTAINS RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

d%	Encounter	Avg. EL	Source
01–04	Denizens of Leng	7	See page 78
05–16	Avalanche	7	DMG 90
17–23	1d4 remorhazes	9	MM 214
24–29	2d6 kuchrima	10	See page 80
30–38	1d6 crag spiders	11	See page 77
39–43	1d4 rocs	11	MM 215
44–46	Mature adult white dragon	12	MM 77
47–58	1d4+1 frost giants	12	MM 122
59–63	Frost worm	12	MM III
64–70	Abominable snowmen	13	See page 33
71–78	1d4 cloud giants	13	MM 120
79–87	12-headed cryohydra	13	MM 157
88–90	Ice devil	13	MM 56
91–95	Rune giant	14	See page 86
96–98	Adult blue dragon	14	MM 72
99–100	Wendigo	17	See page 88

a group by 1/2, but in areas of such extreme difficulty—like the Kodars—speed is slowed to 1/4. Climbers must make hourly DC 15 Climb checks to see whether they are able to progress though the treacherous landscape or if conditions prove too rugged. There might even exist impossible heights, barriers which can only be surmounted by creatures with a climb speed, the ability to fly, or similar extraordinary or magical ability.

Flight: Either by spell or by beast, mountain travelers can quickly traverse even the most treacherous peaks by air. Although this avoids many of the dangers of mountain travel, flying creatures must still deal with the effects of high altitudes, often more hazardous than those upon the peaks they would explore.

Magic: The easiest way to reach a mountaintop is to cast a spell and simply step from one's home to the summit. Several spells exist that transport characters directly to their lofty destination. Utilizing a combination of scrying and teleportation spells, teleporting from summit to summit within sight, moving through transitive planes, and opening a gate from one destination to the next are all effective methods of scaling mountains without ever setting a foot on a slope.

ENCOUNTERS IN THE KODAR MOUNTAINS

For all the hazards associated with climbing and high altitudes, these threats are, for the most part, passive dangers. Yet high in

the mountains, where men were not meant to tread, live some of the most resilient beasts in existence—terrors existing undaunted among the harshest climes the natural world can muster. The following creatures inhabit the high interior of the Kodar Mountains. Check for an encounter once per day and once per night—there's a 15% chance of an encounter occurring for each.

Abominable Snowmen: A group of 1d6 ravenous abominable snowmen happen upon the PCs and hungrily attack. See page 33 for these advanced yetis' complete stats.

Avalanche: A wave of earth and ice crashes down a nearby slope, endangering the PCs. See page 90 of the DMG for details on avalanches.

Denizens of Leng: The PCs encounter a group of strange, veiled explorers traveling through the mountains with ease. These eerie figures are 1d6 denizens of Leng, attracted to the Kodars by its proximity to the alien realm.

Rune Giants: A rune giant scout has wandered far from Xin-Shalast, exploring. In 1d6 days, he returns to the city to report on the terrain. He doggedly pursues any smaller humanoids he encounters, under strict orders to let none discover the location of the City of Greed.

Wendigo: There is only one wendigo in the Kodar region at this time. If this terror has already been defeated, reroll for another encounter.





OF ENDINGS AND BEGINNINGS

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"I still think I could open it."

I snorted. "I'm sure you could. And if what came out was a swarm of flesh-eating locusts or a thousand souls of the hungry dead, what then? Or do you think those screaming skulls embossed all over it are just for decoration?"

"Humph. If it's really that dangerous, I'm not sure how I feel about leaving the others in my shop. Besides, it's probably just somebody's jewelry box." Sascha crossed her arms over her leather jerkin and picked up the pace, her long strides eating up the cobblestone street, but I could tell that she wasn't truly peeved. "Well, it's a moot point now. We're here." She pointed.

Rising up before us, the hall was a work of gothic genius, all tapered spires and leering gargoyles. Even for those satellite buildings set apart from the main campus, the Acadamae was easily recognizable. My hand went instinctively to my sword.

"And you trust this man?" I asked, for the third time that morning.

"As much as I trust any wizard, which is just barely. But Devoren has identified plenty of items for me in the past, and he's always played fair and paid full market for whatever he decides to pick up for himself." Brushing past me, she danced nimbly up the marble steps and rapped hard on the doors. Somewhere inside, a bell chimed.

Without warning, a disembodied voice rang clear in my ear, as if the speaker were standing by my side. "Who seeks entrance?" it croaked. "State your name and purpose."

"Sascha Antif-Arah," Sascha responded easily to the empty air. "Here to see the Sage Devoren, by appointment. This is my comrade, Eando Kline."

There was a momentary silence, and then the doors in front of us cracked and swung open of their own accord. Beyond, a wizened, white-haired man in purple livery stood next to a small writing desk.

"You're expected," the doorman said in the voice from the doorstep. "Please follow me." He turned and strode off down the long, wood-paneled hall, not bothering to look behind him to see

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if we followed. Sascha nudged me into motion, and we fell into step a few paces behind him.

The hall was plain and level, the thick burgundy carpet and dark wood paneling seeming to soak up the sound of our passage. Softly glowing ghost lamps floated near the ceiling at regular intervals, lighting our way. We traveled for long minutes, passing closed door after closed door, and soon I became convinced that there was no way the building, large as it was, could possibly contain it all. I began to remark as much to Sascha, but she cut me off with a gesture, and we walked in silence until the stooped doorman finally slowed and knocked at one of the doors, pulling himself up into a semblance of parade rest.

"Enter," said a male voice, and the doorman bowed his head as we passed into the room.

The chamber beyond was sober and elegant. High ceilings were complemented by equally towering bookshelves, and deep green carpet played counterpoint to maroon curtains girding the floor-to-ceiling window which took up most of one wall. More drapes hid what appeared to be the entrance to a well-appointed apartment. In the room's center stood a massive wooden desk, and behind it lounged a man. Shorter than me by a good deal, his eyes were sharp, and his small black beard was trimmed to a meticulous point. His dark robes were modest, yet obviously of high quality. He stood as we entered.

"Sascha! Always a pleasure. What wonders have your thieves and scholars brought us today?"

"Devoren," she replied. "Good to see you as well."

The man moved around the desk to greet us, and as he did I noticed for the first time the view out the window, which confirmed what my gut had told me—without any discernable slope to the hallway, we appeared to have climbed several stories. Wizards.

Devoren clasped hands with both of us, then seated himself on the lip of his desk and gestured for the doorman to leave, which the little man did with a bow, closing the door behind him.

Without hesitation, Sascha pulled out the strange steel puzzle box and handed it to him. Devoren twirled it slowly in his hands several times, peering at it intensely, before setting it carefully down on the desk.

"Where did you get this?" he asked.

In answer, Sascha launched into our carefully pruned version of the truth, telling how I'd taken it off the corpse of a courier at the edge of the Mushfens, but neglecting to mention its subsequent theft.

"You didn't open it yet, did you?"

Sascha shook her head.

"Good," Devoren replied. "While I can't tell offhand exactly what charms are warding this piece, there's obviously more here than just an elaborate lock. The design as a whole I don't recognize, but judging by the auras, somebody obviously put a lot of time or coin into this. Probably both. And you see this here?" He pointed at one of the carvings, and Sascha and I leaned in closer. "That's a Taldoran death's head. Not something you see a whole lot anymore, but a clear warning of danger to anyone who recognizes it." He stopped again and peered closer at the tiny, screaming skull. "And to those who don't, I suppose," he conceded. There was a long pause in which he seemed to forget we were there. Finally Sascha cleared her throat loudly, and he started back into the present.

"Well enough," said Sascha. "But I'm more concerned with whatever's inside it. Can you get through the wards?"

"What?" He was staring at the box. "Oh, yes, yes. Give me two days. I should have everything sorted out by then. Usual rates."

"Agreed," said Sascha. She paused a moment, and when no more words were forthcoming, took me by the shoulder and said, "We'll just let ourselves out." We moved back into the hall and closed the door on the wizard, leaving him sitting on his desk and musing over the box, deep in thought.



*Hellhounds are
everything their
name implies.*

RISE OF THE RUNELORDS

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Two days later, we returned at the appointed time and repeated the process, following the little doorman up to Devoren's quarters. This time the room was dark, the curtains drawn across the great window, and the warm study lit by candles. The wizard greeted us with a smile and motioned to two chairs in front of the desk, which we took. The box was not in evidence.

"So what did you find out, Devoren?" Sascha asked. "Where's our box?"

The sage smiled again, this time sheepishly.

"I'm sorry to report that there were... complications," he replied. "I had my strongest countercharms in place, but there was a hidden evocation failsafe I was unable to detect. When I moved to open it, the entire thing burst into flames—if I hadn't placed wards around it, my whole workshop could have gone up! Of course, I'll be happy to pay whatever you think it might reasonably have been worth, but..."

He pressed on, making further excuses, but I slumped back in the chair, defeated. After all my effort, riding halfway across Varisia, nearly getting my throat slit multiple times—nothing. Not even the chance to see what the box contained. I put my hand over my eyes and did my best to control my breathing, lest I throttle the useless wizard. I could tell that beside me, Sascha was having the same reaction.

Suddenly something the wizard said caught my attention.

"I'm sorry, what was that?" I asked.

"I just said that there's an upside to all this," Devoren repeated, eager to regain our favor. "Now that I've figured out the box's wards, there should be no problem opening the others. In fact, I think that—"

I cut him off.

"Devoren," I said quietly, "who said anything about others?"

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Sascha stiffen. My hand on my sword, I stood up slowly.

A single bead of sweat ran down the wizard's cheek.

"Well, I—I mean, I assumed—"

"I did," said a familiar voice, and the curtains to Devoren's apartment parted to admit a tall, well-dressed Chelish man with gray-streaked hair. As he spoke, the curtains behind him and over the window rustled, disgorging four Korvosan Guards with truncheons drawn.

"I'm—I'm sorry, Sascha," pleaded Devoren, who was standing now, his hands clasped in entreaty. "I didn't want to turn you in, but your friend's gone too far this time. Lord Briarus is a very well-respected man, and to steal from his private collection is a serious crime... I have his promise that you'll receive a fair trial, and I'm sure the jury will understand that you knew nothing about—"

"Guards," the nobleman broke in, "these two invaded my residence and stole a number of priceless artifacts. By the laws of this city, I demand that they be taken and brought before the arbiters."

Finally the voice clicked.

"Sascha!" I yelled. "It's him! It's the Mantis who—"

And then they were upon us.

I started to draw my sword, but Sascha's shout stopped me. "These are city guards!" she cried, heaving over the massive desk to block the guards advancing from the apartment. "They're the good guys. Do you *want* us to be executed?" She caught up one of the heavy chairs we had been sitting in and swung it hard and fast in a wide arc, bringing it down on one of the guards' shoulders and driving him to the floor. Following her lead, I stepped in close to his partner and delivered my best uppercut, catching him flush on the chin and snapping his head back in a spray of blood and spit. Then something hard and weighted caught me on the back of my head and buckled my knees. I went down, and from the floor I could see Briarus standing calmly in the corner, apparently confident that the guards could handle us.

A boot came down hard between my shoulder blades, pinning me to the ground, and I was forced to admit that he might be right.

"This is suicide, Kline!" Sascha yelled. She stood with her back to a corner, holding two more guards at bay with a pair of chairs, as if she were a lion tamer. "Get us out of here!" Catching a glancing blow from Sascha's chair, one of the guards dropped his truncheon and drew his sword.

That was it. Drawing my dagger, I reached back and slammed it into the calf of the guard behind me, sending him screaming to the ground. Before he could recover I took two steps and leapt over the table, straight into Devoren. Locking one arm around his chest, I swung him between the guards and me, my dagger pressing hard enough to draw blood from his frantically bobbing larynx.

"Nobody move!" I screamed. "Take one step, and I swear to the gods I will end this bastard here and now!"

To my surprise, they didn't. To a man, the guards took one look at the blood seeping slowly from the mage's throat and put up their swords. Behind them, I could see Briarus looking back and forth from me to the guards, obviously weighing the merits of keeping his identity hidden versus taking me apart.

"Alright, here's what's going to happen," I said, doing my best to keep my voice level. "Devoren, you're going to use your magic to transport Sascha and me out of here safely. In exchange, we let you live. Sound fair?"

He started to nod, then thought better of it and agreed hoarsely.

"Good," I said. "I'm not going to give you a destination and risk these bastards hearing it, so you just pick a place and take us there, but know that if you try anything cute, like popping us into a jail cell or off a cliff, it'll be the last thing you ever do. Now do it."

With the sage mincing on his tiptoes in an effort to avoid my knife-point, the two of us marched awkwardly across the room until we stood next to Sascha. Then, grabbing both our arms, Devoren began to chant, liquid syllables that rolled off his tongue and brushed past our ears without being retained. Around us, the room twisted and blurred, and my grip on my dagger tightened. There was a momentary feeling of weightlessness, and then the world untwisted itself again and we found ourselves on the doorstep of a modest townhouse, just a few blocks from the still-visible front door of the Acadamae building.

"There," Devoren said, sweating with exertion. "I've done as you asked. May I please go?"

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"Certainly," I said, removing my dagger from his chin. Then I swung hard and brought the pommel down on the back of his head, sending him crumpling to the pavement.

"Eando!" Sascha yelled, appalled.

"What?" I asked. "He'll live. Come on, let's get out of here."

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We were fools to think it would be so easy.

For three days we laid low in one of the cheaper inns in Old Dock, leaving only under cover of darkness, and then only to do covert walk-bys of Sascha's shop. I was sitting on the mite-infested bed, counting out my meager supply of coins, when Sascha returned from the last one.

"Well?" I asked.

"The same," she said, removing the heavy cloak that shrouded her form, then hanging it on a hook. "Still no sign of surveillance. No guards, no suspicious characters, no magical auras—nothing. It looks like they've either forgotten about us or decided to leave us be."

"Which is exactly why I don't like it," I said, scooping up the coins and dumping them back into my purse.

"Me either," she agreed. "Neither the Mantis nor the Korvosan Guard are known for their leniency."

"And there's no chance that they might have legitimately overlooked your shop?" I asked, already knowing the answer.

"Not hardly," she said. "Unless you think Devoren suddenly grew a spine and decided to cover up our names."

I snorted. "So it's a trap."

"Yup."

"And we're going in anyway."

"Yup."

"I'll get my coat."

Outside, the two of us moved quickly and silently through the city's restless darkness, keeping our faces hidden within our cloaks as best we could. When at last we arrived at Sascha's street, it was as she said—quiet, dark, and seemingly unobserved. My skin itched with unseen eyes.

"You're sure this is necessary?" I asked.

"Listen, tomb-robber, you got me into this mess, and I'll be damned if I'm going to hear any whining from you now. I don't know how long it'll be before things cool down, or if any of my property will still be here when it does. I need to pick up some coins and choice items to get me through, and you still want those damn boxes, so buck up or shut up. We're going in. Ready?"

I nodded.

Together, we slipped through the shadows beneath the eaves, passing the door and going straight for the window. With me standing guard, Sascha quickly glued a piece of cloth to the glass, then shattered it silently with a rap of her dagger. With the window unlocked, we slid

into the showroom. Everything was in its place: animal heads and bizarre weapons, knick-knacks and trinkets from the far corners of Golarion. Motioning me toward the counter, she slipped through the beaded curtain into the living chambers.

And screamed.

I was there in two long steps, tearing down beads as I lunged through the curtain, sword half-drawn, and slammed into Sascha's back, stopping short. There, in front of her, was the largest dog I had ever seen. Red eyes glowed above a muzzle of glistening teeth, and bladed spurs of bone punctured skin that looked burnt, and indeed still smoldered in places. From between the dripping fangs, wisps of smoke rose toward the ceiling. Behind the hound, seated incongruously on the rumpled bed, sat a massive figure in armor, his helm and breastplate worked into elaborate demonic devices.

"All prey is the same," boomed a voice from within the helmet.

"The hunter's greatest asset is patience, the ability to remain still. Eventually, the quarry always comes."

The Order of the Nail gladly uses any means necessary to enforce the law.



RISE OF THE RUNELORDS

He stood, and his spiked helm nearly brushed the ceiling. In front of me, Sascha let out a little moan.

"Hellknight," she whispered, eyes still wide.

"Correct," the deep voice intoned, inclining its head in a mocking bow. "Of the Order of the Nail. Both of you will surrender yourselves to me for judgment."

"And who are you to judge us?" I blustered, moving around Sascha. "You're no guardsman, so you have no authority. We haven't broken any of your laws."

"All laws are my laws."

And then several things happened very quickly. With a gesture from the hellknight, the hound sprang, the smoke sucked back into its maw as it inhaled mightily. As I raised my sword in a futile thrust, Sascha grabbed me and threw something past my shoulder, drawing me backward with one hand over my eyes. Suddenly there was a massive flash and a noise like thunder, and then a wave of heat as flames erupted from the spot I had stood a moment before. As we sprinted through the shopfront, we could hear muffled curses

behind us, and a long excited howl. We had barely reached the door when the hound emerged from the back room, fur ablaze. Silently, it leapt for us, but as we passed the final display case, Sascha grabbed a nondescript pouch and flung it. There was a wet popping noise, and then a snort of surprise as the hound found itself glued to the floorboards by a mess of sticky strands. Without looking back, we exploded out into the street.

"What the hell is going on here?" I screamed as we rounded the first corner.

"Shut up and run!" was Sascha's only response.

Behind us, the hound bayed again.

28 Erastus, 4707 AR

Damn it, Sascha. You were supposed to be retired.

With the trap at Sascha's shop sprung unsuccessfully, the powers that be in Korvosa forsook any pretense of subtlety. At guard posts around the city, handbills with our names and likenesses were tacked to walls. At the gates, carts were searched, and anyone near our size and shape detained and questioned. It appeared that Briasus had the ear of someone high up in the Guard, and the reward offered for our capture was more than generous.

I'd have been flattered, if we weren't totally screwed.

When we had finally collapsed after our initial escape from the shop, I lay gasping against the side of a crumbling warehouse and refused to move until Sascha explained things.

"That," she panted, "was a hellknight—one of the Order of the Nail. I trust you've heard of them?"

I had run across mentions of them in the past, but had never paid them any mind, as they were primarily a Chelaxian affair. I nodded, unable to speak.

"They're independents, beholden to no one here, but they occasionally take up bounties and other tasks for the city. They're militant freaks, worship nothing except absolute law, but they're good—very good. Sooner or later, he'll find us."

"And the hound?"

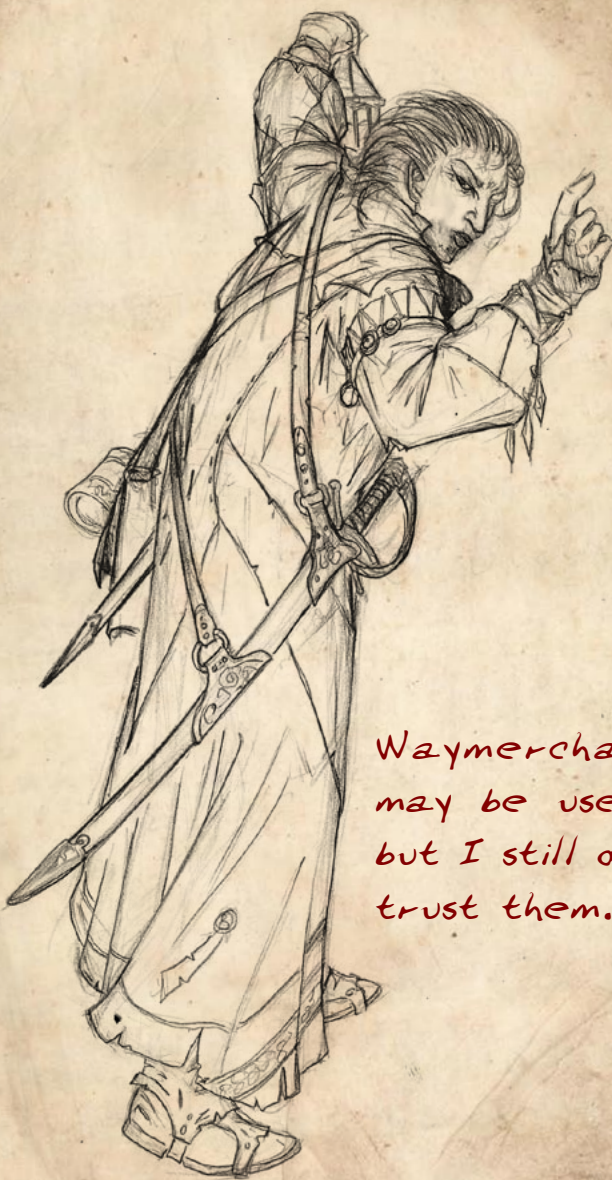
"A fiend in a dog's skin, called up from the Pit itself to track us. Why do you think they call them hellknights?"

For close to a week, we dared not even take a room in a flophouse for fear of recognition, and we slept in stables and beneath carts, once even in the Vaults. Everywhere we went, it seemed the eyes of the crowd followed our movements, and several nights we heard from far off the sound of the terrible hound's baying. Finally, after a particularly despicable evening, Sascha had enough.

"That's it," she said, throwing down the half-cooked rat we had been contemplating for supper. "There's nothing for it. We have to get out of the city."

"Oh?" I asked, scooping up the steaming carcass and wiping it on my pants. "And how do you propose we do that?"

"It's time to call in some favors," she said, standing. Without another word, she strode off into the darkness, and I followed, munching the rat philosophically. Again we



Waymerchants
may be useful,
but I still don't
trust them.

PATHFINDER'S JOURNAL

slunk through the streets, furtively in shadows and boldly where anything else would draw attention. Dawn was kissing the rooftops as we stopped at a hovel in the depths of Bridgefront. Sascha pounded three times on the scavenged steel grating that made up the door. From inside came a faint scrabbling, as of tiny feet, which suddenly changed timbre to that of someone stumbling around.

"Whassat?" a man's voice called.

"Open up, Irvine," Sascha whispered. "It's Sascha."

The door cracked open to reveal a beady eye, then was thrown open as a greasy little man with a pinched, rat-like face opened rag-clad arms in welcome, ushering us inside.

"Such a pleasure!" the man crowed, and then slightly softer, "Sought by ev'ry guard in the city, and she visits m'self! Truly, an honor fit for a king."

"Can it, Irvine," Sascha said, shutting the door firmly behind us. "I take it you know why we're here."

"Of course, of course." The weaselly man stank even worse than we did. His hands moved nervously as he talked, picking bits of leaves from his hair, but his voice betrayed no anxiety.

"I'm not sure I do," I said. "Sascha, who is this guy?"

"Irvine's a Rat's Teat Boy," she said. "A second-story man. His gang knows every tunnel in the Vaults, and can get you into any house or shop in the city. Or out of it."

"It's a talent of my people," said Irvine proudly, his nose twitching.

"Wait a second," I pressed. "If he's such a fabulous burglar, why's he living in this hellhole?"

"Poor fiscal responsibility," he grinned.

"Irvine has something of a gambling problem," Sascha drawled. "Not to mention drinking and whoring problems."

"I'm a social animal, I am," Irvine added.

"Fine, whatever," I replied. "What'll it take to get us out of the city undetected?"

"Wells, now, seeing how we're friends and all, I reckon it'll be jus' a shade over the reward they're postin', to be paid no later than a month from now." He brazenly patted Sascha's bottom, and I was astonished to see that he kept his hand. "No worries. I knows yer good for it."

Through gritted teeth, Sascha growled, "Deal. And we leave now."

"As ye wish, m'lady," the little man bowed.

Pausing only to recover a grimy pack and a hooded lantern—"Fer ye 'n the missus," he explained—Irvine led us out of Bridgefront and back onto the mainland, finally stopping near a large drainage pipe at the water's edge, hidden by the wreckage of a burned-out cannery. Heaving aside several concealing boards, he said, "Here's yer out. Once upon a time, taxes was different, and this tunnel was used to sneak fish outta the city without paying. Then laws changed, and it was forgotten. It'll get ye past the wall and then some. Now if ye'll just follow me..."

He turned to enter the tunnel, and perhaps it was a blessing, for he never saw the hound that came flying over a crumbling wall to catch him in the back of the neck, jaws closing sickeningly over bone and sinew. It landed and turned, shaking the little man like a rag doll, and let loose a breath of flame that engulfed them both. As Sascha and I yelled and pawed at our weapons, an armored shape stepped out of the factory's wreckage, a massive sword held easily in one hand.

"So it goes," the hellknight intoned. "The prey that runs blindly might surprise you both, but once it calms enough to plan, its motions become predictable."

I drew my sword and started forward, but Sascha stopped me.

"No, Eando," she said, drawing her own blade. "I've got this one. You get going."

"What?!" I cried. "That's insane. Come on; together we can take him!"

"No," she said again. "You go first. I'm faster than you, and you know it—I'll buy us some time and catch you before you're halfway out. See if I don't."

I dodged to the side, but she moved with me, refusing to let me pass. I punched her back in frustration, but she stood firm. Tears sprang unbidden to my eyes.

"Sascha..." I pleaded.

"Godsdamn it, Eando, go!" She gave me a shove that sent me sprawling into the mud of the tunnel mouth. Outside, the hound moved to stand next to its master, who lifted one hand to Sascha.

"So be it," he said, and raised his sword.

At a flick of her wrist, Sascha's own blade ignited with blue flames, and she looked back at me one last time.

"Run!" she screamed, then turned and charged the hellknight.

I ran. I will not ask forgiveness, for I am owed none. When I meet my end and arrive before the gods for judgment, I will say only this: that when it all came down, I would not let my friend sacrifice herself in vain. For hours, I stumbled through the stinking tunnels, blind, sobbing, scarcely caring which turn I took, but when the end came and a circle of light burned my eyes, I found myself deposited in a grassy field. I lay there for some time, numb, then finally dragged myself up a small hill to look out over the city of Korvosa, its distant walls shot with gold in the morning light.

I don't know how long I stood there, but finally my responsibility to honor Sascha's gift returned, and I found myself faced with a new question: Where to next? I was hungry and alone, left with only my sword, my pack, my journal, and my wayfinder.

The wayfinder. Of course.

Tearing the pouch from around my neck, I shook it out into my hand. With the compass came the tiny green ioun stone from Kaer Maga, the one I should have identified weeks ago, should have analyzed to determine its function and if it was safe to use in a wayfinder. I stared at them both, then looked back once more toward the city.

Screw it.

Taking the compass in one hand and the ioun stone in another, I inhaled deeply and closed my eyes, tensing my muscles for whatever was to come. Carefully, I fitted the stone into the wayfinder's empty slot.

Nothing happened.

After a long moment I opened my eyes. Nothing. No lightning shooting from my fingers, no dragons called down from the sky, no sudden inrush of knowledge or transformation into a dire bear. Nothing at all. I stared down at the compass.

And as I watched, totally still, the needle which had always pointed due north swung slowly to the east.

SIZE COMPARISON

The world's deadliest beasts rarely live in close proximity to the safe, pastoral lands of men.

In the trenches of ocean abysses, in the hearts of glacial deserts, and in the depths of the deadliest jungles, only the strongest and fiercest creatures can hope to survive. At those extremes, terrible beasts grow to monstrous sizes and develop deadly abilities, relying on terrible prowess and ruthlessness to survive.

As one of the tallest mountain chains in Golarion, the Kodar Mountains are scarcely matched in their deadliness and impenetrability. In turn, the beasts that live and thrive among these daunting summits are as violent and dangerous as the merciless heights they inhabit.

This month's bestiary reveals just a few of the dreaded inhabitants and sanity-shattering visitors that have been drawn to

the Kodars for the climax of the Rise of the Runelords Adventure Path. With Karzoug's imminent resurrection, armies of his former slaves prepare for his coming, beings from other realities grow near, and even forces of nature's wrath take notice. An entire culture of monstrous manipulators, the lamyros or lamia-kin, have assembled again, and while Varisia has suffered the subtle plots of their lesser breeds, the cruelty of the race's cursed queens and flesh-warped abominations can scarcely be imagined. The last of the runelords' great armies have also marshaled their forces, the titanic rune giants rising again to reclaim all they survey in the name of Thassilon. But even these monstrosities are not the greatest terrors to take notice of the runelord's return.

BESTIARY

ON TOP OF THE WORLD

To create the crag spider, the runelords made use of a real-world jumping spider, the *Euophrys omnisuperstes*. This little fellow has been found on Mount Everest at heights of up to 6,700 meters. As its name—which means “standing above everything”—implies, *E. omnisuperstes* is considered to be perhaps the highest-living resident on Earth. How it gets there or what it eats remains a mystery to scientists, as there is little organic material atop Everest to feed upon. Perhaps the runelords provide for their care and feeding as part of their ongoing experimentation.

STATISTICS

Str 20, **Dex** 18, **Con** 14, **Int** —, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 2

Base Atk +12; **Grp** +25

Feats Altitude Affinity*^a

Skills Climb +21, Hide +0, Jump +15, Spot +8

SQ tether

*new feat, see page 68.

ECOLOGY

Environment cold mountains

Organization solitary or colony (2–5)

Treasure 1/10 coins; 50% goods; 50% items

Advancement 17–32 HD (Huge), 33–48 HD (Gargantuan)

Level Adjustment —

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Poison (Ex) Injury, Fortitude DC 20, 1d8 Str/1d8 Str. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Tether (Ex) As a move action, a crag spider can anchor itself to a surface within its reach by a tether of webbing. This web is identical in characteristics to its normal webbing. A tethered crag spider gains a +10 competence bonus on Climb and Jump checks and can arrest any fall as a free action, taking no damage. The maximum distance a crag spider can jump or climb while tethered is 200 feet. It can release its tether as a free action and start another normally if it needs to move its anchor point.

A crag spider cannot use any of its other web abilities while anchored to a tether. Creating a tether counts as one of the eight times a crag spider can throw its web per day.

Web (Ex) Crag spiders can use the web ability as other monstrous spiders (see page 288 of the MM). An entangled creature can escape with a successful DC 20 Escape Artist check or burst the web with a DC 24 Strength check. Each 5-foot section has 16 hit points.

Skills A crag spider has a +4 racial bonus on Jump checks, and a +8 racial bonus on Climb checks. It can always choose to take 10 on a Climb check, even when rushed or threatened.

The original crag spiders were magically engineered from a species of common spider that resides atop the mountain and were created to serve as steeds for the personal guards of the Runelords of Greed. They are still primarily used for that purpose, but escapees from captivity over the years have begun to breed in the wild and migrate to other mountaintops.

CRAG SPIDER

This gigantic spider-thing is covered in jagged red-and-black chitin. Many-legged and alien, the creature's waving tendrils and serrated pedipalps twitch hungrily beneath a cluster of unblinking black eyes. Hooked claws at the ends of its many-jointed legs pierce the earth with every step.

CRAG SPIDER

Always N Huge vermin

Init +4; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 60 ft.; Listen +0, Spot +8

DEFENSE

AC 19, touch 12, flat-footed 15

(+4 Dex, +7 natural, –2 size)

hp 104 (16d8+32)

Fort +12, **Ref** +9, **Will** +5

Immune mind-affecting effects

OFFENSE

Spd 40 ft., climb 30 ft.

Melee bite +15 (2d6+7 plus poison)

Ranged web +14 touch (entangle)

Space 15 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

Special Attacks web

CR 8

RISE OF THE RUNELORDS



DENIZEN OF LENG

At first glance, this resembles a man dressed in a tattered leather robe, his head obscured by a dirty silk turban and his lower face swathed in a scarf. Yet closer inspection reveals odd bumps beneath the turban, something strange about how the scarf wiggles and writhes, and an awkward stance and way of moving that hints at limbs not wholly human under those weirdly twitching robes.

DENIZEN OF LENG

Always CE Medium outsider (chaotic, evil, extraplanar)

Init +6; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +16, Spot +16

DEFENSE

AC 24, touch 16, flat-footed 18

(+2 armor, +6 Dex, +6 natural)

hp 105 (10d8+60); planar fast healing 5 (10 on Material Plane, 0 on Leng)

CR 8

Fort +6, **Ref** +5, **Will** +3

Defensive Abilities internal derangement; **DR** 5/cold iron;

Immune cold, electricity, poison; **SR** 18

OFFENSE

Spd 30 ft.

Melee +1 dagger +17/+12 (1d4+2/17–20 plus poison [Fort DC 17, 1 Str drain/2d6 Str]) and

claw +16 (1d4+2) and

bite +14 (1d6+1 plus disrupt flesh)

Special Attacks sneak attack +5d6

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 10th)

3/day—*detect thoughts* (DC 17), *hypnotic pattern* (DC 17),

levitate, *minor image* (DC 17)

1/day—*locate object*, *plane shift* (DC 22)

TACTICS

Before Combat Prior to combat, a denizen of Leng coats his blade with poison and conceals it in his sleeve.

During Combat Denizens of Leng avoid combat unless they are cornered or outnumber their foes. A denizen of Leng usually tries to capture foes alive to take as slaves.

Morale Denizens of Leng encountered anywhere but Leng know they will be reborn in Leng upon their deaths, and therefore they rarely flee from battle, only doing so when the inconvenience of having to return to their location from their homeland to pick up their projects anew would be too troublesome.

STATISTICS

Str 14, **Dex** 22, **Con** 23, **Int** 22, **Wis** 16, **Cha** 20

Base Atk +10; **Grp** +12

Feats Improved Critical (dagger), Multiattack, Quick Draw, Weapon Finesse

Skills Bluff +18, Concentration +19, Craft (alchemy) +20,

Disable Device +20, Disguise +18 (+22 as human),

Forgery +20, Intimidate +20, Knowledge (any one)

+20, Listen +16, Profession (sailor) +16, Search +20,

Sleight of Hand +23, Spellcraft +20, Spot +16, Use

Magic Device +18

Languages gift of tongues

SQ no breath

Combat Gear shadow essence (10 doses); **Other Gear** +1 dagger

ECOLOGY

Environment any

Organization solitary, press gang (2–4), or crew (5–12)

Treasure standard coins, double goods (rubies only), standard items (including +1 dagger and poison)

Advancement by character class; **Favored Class** rogue

Level Adjustment —

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Disrupt Flesh (Su) On a successful bite attack, a denizen of Leng's otherworldly teeth and tongue infuse the struck creature with the essence of Leng. This deals 1d6 points of Dexterity drain as the creature's body twists, deforms, and no longer completely follows the victim's commands. Constructs, elementals, outsiders, and undead are unaffected by this attack.

Planar Fast Healing (Ex) A denizen of Leng's physiology is such that its whole being does not exist on the Material Plane all at

BESTIARY

once; rather, it maintains a link to Leng. While on any plane other than Leng, a denizen of Leng is rejuvenated by this connection and receives fast healing 5. This link is strongest on the Material Plane, where a denizen of Leng enjoys fast healing 10. While on the Plateau of Leng, a denizen of Leng does not retain this ability. If a denizen of Leng is reduced to below 0 hit points while on any plane other than the Plateau of Leng, its body dissolves into nothingness in 1d3 rounds and reforms on Leng with full hit points, but is barred from returning to the plane of its demise for 1 year. Equipment carried by a denizen of Leng when it is slain remains on the plane of its death and does not reform in Leng with its body. A denizen of Leng can only be permanently slain while on Leng.

Gift of Tongues (Su) A denizen of Leng can speak any language it hears spoken for at least 1 minute. It retains knowledge of this learned language forever—most denizens of Leng effectively know all languages as a result.

Internal Derangement (Ex) The physiology and anatomy of a denizen of Leng is so abnormal and alien and varies so much between individuals that vital areas do not conform to those of humanoids or other Material Plane creatures. When a critical hit or sneak attack is scored on a denizen of Leng, there is a 50% chance that the critical hit or sneak attack is negated and damage is instead rolled normally. They are also immune to effects dealt from bleeding, such as the ability loss caused by a weapon with the wounding special quality.

No Breath (Ex) A denizen of Leng does not breathe, and as such is immune to inhaled toxins and diseases.

Sneak Attack (Ex) This ability functions as the rogue ability of the same name.

Of all the strange and otherworldly creatures that dwell upon the Plateau of Leng, the most common are undoubtedly these denizens—architects of Leng’s mysterious, now abandoned city of Sarkomand. Whether the denizens were once Material Plane humanoids who were transformed by Leng, or if they are the native children of that mysterious realm is unknown, but their influence within the lands beyond the barrier of reality is undeniable. They are fantastically intelligent, possessing insights into secrets of reality much sought after by the daring, and have been on hand to counsel many a mighty archmage or insidious madman, carefully weaving such plots to fit their own hidden agendas.

A denizen of Leng superficially resembles a human in size and shape, yet in order to walk among men it must disguise its true form. They most often do so via long tattered robes of leather, as well as gloves, scarves, and turbans. Their true forms are anything but human, with horned brows, hideous mouths that unfold into nests of tentacles and pedipalps, thick clawed fingers, and crooked legs ending in hooves.

Denizens of Leng average 5-1/2 feet in height and weigh up to 200 pounds. They are immortal, and can live forever unless killed by violence.

Ecology

A denizen of Leng’s body is not quite composed of flesh and bone, but of a strange material that closely mimics the properties of

LOVECRAFT AGAIN

“They leaped as though they had hooves instead of feet, and seemed to wear a sort of wig or headpiece with small horns. Of other clothing they had none, but most of them were quite furry. Behind they had dwarfish tails, and when they glanced upward he saw the excessive width of their mouths. Then he knew what they were, and that they did not wear any wigs or headpieces after all.”

—H. P. Lovecraft, *The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath*

The denizens of Leng are heavily based upon the strange turbaned slavers who torment Randolph Carter in *The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath*, one of H. P. Lovecraft’s most ambitious works. This story is perhaps the closest he ever came to an action-packed fantasy. If you’re looking for more information on these mysterious people, check out Chaosium’s (chaosium.com) excellent *Dreamlands* hardcover, or go right to the source with Lovecraft’s rousing epic of ghouls and ghosts and moon beasts and outer gods and armies clashing on fantastic shores.

such. The strangest manifestation of this feature is the fact that they do not bleed. Their “blood” continues to flow through the veins of even a severed limb, but does not leave the body, simply flowing over the raw red stump and back inside as needed, while the actual severed portion quickly melts away into corruption. This makes it extremely difficult to study their alien physiology, and as such, much about them remains a mystery to Material Plane scholars.

Habitat & Society

The denizens of Leng are rare beyond that realm’s borders, yet unfortunately more common on Golarion than one would suspect, for they are experts at disguising their true forms and walking among mortal men unnoticed. They often explore the Material Plane aboard dark galleons with black sails, utilizing strange and hidden monstrosities to power their banks of oars. Often, they pose as gem merchants (their rubies are particularly lustrous and plentiful), but this is merely a cover while they go about their actual business—abducting fresh slaves. Often, a ship consists of only a few actual denizens of Leng, with the crew made up of fiendish humans whose traits (horned brows and cloven feet) mirror their Leng masters but are much easier to hide in public.

Yet when properly approached, denizens of Leng have been known to lend aid and advice in unexpected places, from the vaulted halls of a runelord to the squalid hut of a beggar. In one instance, they might assist a megalomaniacal warlord or a degenerate group of deranged cultists and in the next preserve an elderly widow from the influence of a corrupt politician. They keep their own council on such matters, and no sane being enters into terms with them without being on his guard. Denizens of Leng are patient in their unfathomable agendas, and their plans might take decades or even centuries to come to fruition.

RISE OF THE RUNELORDS



KUCHRIMA

This foul creature is a disgusting cross between a humanoid and a condor. Almost harpy-like in appearance, it has powerful avian legs ending in wicked talons, and a torso and upper body resembling that of a human, though covered in patches of filthy, blood-crusted hair and feathers. Great feathered wings extend from its shoulders, and a beaked, vulture-like head bobs at the end of a crooked neck.

KUCHRIMA

Always CE Medium magical beast

Init +6; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft. low-light vision, scent; Listen +1, Spot +19

DEFENSE

AC 24, touch 16, flat-footed 18

(+6 Dex, +8 natural)

hp 84 (11d10+22)

Fort +9, **Ref** +13, **Will** +2

Immune disease, magic missile

CR 8

OFFENSE

Spd 20 ft., fly 60 ft. (good)

Melee bite +13 (1d6+2 plus disease) and

2 talons +8 (1d4+1)

Ranged Large mwk composite longbow +17 (2d6+2/×3)

Special Attacks catastrophic shot, improved grab

TACTICS

Before Combat Upon noticing potential prey, a single keen-eyed kuchrima seeks out more of its kind, then returns to attack in force.

During Combat A kuchrima prefers to avoid melee combat and always attempts to ambush opponents from above, hovering within 30 feet in order to gain the attack and damage bonuses from Point Blank Shot. If battling upon a mountainside it may try to use its improved grab to pull opponents off the mountain and drop them.

Morale A kuchrima is cowardly at heart, but if under orders from a more powerful lamyros might show extreme courage—fearing its master more than its opponents.

STATISTICS

Str 14, **Dex** 22, **Con** 15, **Int** 7, **Wis** 9, **Cha** 10

Base Atk +11; **Grp** +17

Feats Alertness, Altitude Affinity*, Endurance, Point Blank Shot

Skills Spot +19

Languages Giant, Thassilonian

SQ oversized weapon

Combat Gear Large masterwork composite longbow (+2 Str bonus)
w/20 arrows

*new feat, see page 68

ECOLOGY

Environment any mountains

Organization solitary, pair, flight (7–12), gluttony (20–50)

Treasure standard (gems and art only)

Advancement by character class; **Favored Class** ranger

Level Adjustment +6

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Catastrophic Shot (Ex) By taking a full-round action to carefully steady its bow, a kuchrima can increase the critical threat range of its bow to 18–20 for one shot. This attack provokes an attack of opportunity. If the kuchrima takes damage during this action, it must make a Concentration check just as if it was casting a spell. If the Concentration check fails, the kuchrima still gets the shot off but with only the normal critical threat range. This ability only functions when the kuchrima is wielding a bow.

Disease (Ex) A kuchrima is a filthy creature that feasts upon carrion. Anyone hit by its bite attack is exposed to disease. Filth fever—Fortitude DC 17, incubation period 1d3 days, damage 1d3 Dex and 1d3 Con. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Improved Grab (Ex) To use this ability, a kuchrima must hit with both of its talons. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and can carry, at half its fly speed, any creature of size Medium or smaller that weighs 175 pounds or less. Its grapple check includes a +4 racial bonus.

BESTIARY

Oversized Weapon (Ex) Many kuchrima wield a great composite longbow (big enough for Large creatures) without penalty by gripping it with its talons. They can only fire these weapons when flying.

Also known as the Eaters of the Dead, the kuchrima are the lowest order of the lamyros. They not only serve the function of common soldiers and scouts, but are left to take care of disposal of bodies, garbage, and other waste—most of which they feed upon. This results in their foul appearance and disease-ridden bite. Kuchrima often wield giant bows in their powerfully taloned feet, holding the weapon in one talon and pulling the bowstring with the other in order to fire arrows to devastating effect.

Kuchrimas are roughly the size of a human with bird-like talons and legs and great feathery wings allowing them to soar effortlessly on thermals. They have vulture-like heads and necks and a scattered covering of dark-colored hair and feathers that is usually smeared with grime and dried gore. On average, they stand 6 feet tall and weigh 150 pounds.

ECOLOGY

Having much in common with the condors they resemble, kuchrima are opportunistic hunters and scavengers. Bands of kuchrima hunters might fly dozens of miles from their communal aerie, using their keen sight to locate large prey. In the extreme mountainous areas they inhabit, such meals often take the form of giant rams, mountain aurochs, and even the occasional mountaineer, though these disgusting lamyros prefer their meals dead and rotting. Kuchrima sometimes follow rocs—notoriously messy predators who typically ignore the smaller avian creatures—eating the scraps the gigantic birds leave behind. Particularly large or desperate groups might even attack giants or other massive mountain-dwellers, but only when such prey looks vulnerable. As their territories are usually relatively lifeless places, kuchrima glut themselves whenever possible, the scarcity of food causing them to regularly go for upwards of two weeks without eating.

HABITAT & SOCIETY

Kuchrimas dwell principally in the thin air among the upper peaks of desolate mountain ranges where they have gathered in enclaves or “gluttonies.” They have lived in a state of static barbarism since the diaspora following the fall of the Thassilonian Empire. In the thousands of years since that civilization’s collapse, these lamyros have migrated to many mountainous regions throughout Golarion. Roosting in aeries amid the highest mountain peaks, these disease-ridden hunters strive to remain well out of sight of land-bound races, which they mistrust and fear in numbers. Should a new runelord or powerful harridan come into power and manage to locate these disparate gluttonies, though, the kuchrima could be gathered into a formidable airborne force once again.

A gluttony of kuchrima typically consists of 13 to 34 individuals, plus about half that number of young. Although the avian lamyros breed rapidly, they are terrible parents, with eggs and young often being cannibalized in times of scarce food or for even the slightest

LAMYROS CLAMIA-KIN

From ancient Thassilonian, meaning gluttons or “The Eaters,” lamyros are wholly unnatural creatures born of magic and hunger. They are often referred to as lamia-kin since lamias and lamia matriarchs are the most commonly known members of their foul race. Three types of lamyros are described here: the harridan, hungerer, and kuchrima. Other types include the more common lamia and the lamia matriarch (see *Pathfinder* #2).

Like lamias, the rest of the lamyros are evil and take pleasure in the suffering of others. Although they are not exclusively found in the lands that comprised the former Thassilonian domain of greed, as a race they were the most embraced and integrated into those lands, serving as powerful nobles and enforcers of the master of Xin-Shalast. Born of a curse laid by Pharasma upon a selfish priestess, the many existing lamyros were modified from more common lamias into their present forms by the runelords themselves. Scholars speculate that harpies might be another distant kin of the lamyros, but this connection has yet to be proven.

Many lamyros that live in the region of the old domain of greed still speak Thassilonian in addition to whatever language is most commonly spoken in the region, and those with an Intelligence of 12 or higher typically learn to speak Giant as well.

Aside from a shared name and history, little binds this group of creatures together. Under the leadership of a single ruler, though, the regimented societal order they followed during Thassilonian times returns with an almost instinctual ease (see page 85).

perceived flaws. The leader of the gluttony is always the strongest member, regardless of gender. Kuchrima groups never have elders. As soon as a kuchrima can no longer hunt or defend itself, the rest of the tribe turns on the weakening member, picking its bones just as they would any other wounded prey.

TREASURE

Aside from having a distinctly avian appearance, kuchrimas also have a propensity to collect shiny objects like many scavenging birds. Their keen eyesight and role of disposing of the dead in lamyros society means that they are particularly well suited to noticing and collecting stray gemstones, forgotten bits of jewelry, and the taboo treasures of the dead.

In lamyros society, it was traditional that a corpse be dressed in fine clothes and jewelry, both as an honor to the dead and an offering to the kuchrima disposing of the body. Although lamyros of higher castes bristled at this tradition, most at least went through the motions of doing the dead and their least cousins honor. As a result, living lamyros typically steal the most precious treasures from the bodies of their dead brethren, but replace them with trinkets of brass and colorful glass to appease their perverse sense of responsibility. The undiscerning kuchrima never seem to mind. To this day, kuchrima favor gemstones and jewelry—especially those treasures plucked from the bodies of their meals—and lamyros still dress their dead in shimmering adornments of little real value.

RISE OF THE RUNELORDS



HARRIDAN

This massive beast is a beautiful giantess from the waist up and a vicious hunting cat from the waist down. Somehow, the look of abject cruelty in her eyes is more unsettling than the feral claws of her lower half.

HARRIDAN

CR 12

Usually CE Huge magical beast

Init +2; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Listen +13, Spot +13

DEFENSE

AC 25, touch 8, flat-footed 25

(+5 armor, +2 Dex, +14 natural, -2 size)

hp 161 (17d10+68)

Fort +14, **Ref** +12, **Will** +10

DR 10/magic; **SR** 23

OFFENSE

Spd 60 ft.

Melee touch +23 (1d8 Wisdom drain) or

mwk greatsword +24 (4d6+8/19–20) and

2 claws +22 (1d6+4)

Space 15 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

Special Attacks pounce, rake, spells, Wisdom drain

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 12th):

6th—blade barrier (DC 19), greater dispel magic, harm^D (DC 19)

5th—dispel good^D (DC 18), flame strike (DC 18), greater command (DC 18), true seeing

4th—air walk, dimensional anchor (DC 17), freedom of movement, inflict critical wounds^D

3rd—blindness/deafness (DC 16), contagion^D (DC 16), dispel magic, invisibility purge, meld into stone, prayer

2nd—aid, cure moderate wounds (3), death knell (DC 15), desecrate^D

1st—command (DC 14), comprehend languages, cure light wounds, doom (DC 14), obscuring mist, protection from good^D, shield of faith
0—detect magic, detect poison, inflict minor wounds, light, read magic, resistance

D domain spell; **Domains** Destruction, Evil

STATISTICS

Str 26, **Dex** 15, **Con** 19, **Int** 13, **Wis** 16, **Cha** 16

Base Atk +17; **Grp** +33

Feats Altitude Affinity*, Dodge, Iron Will, Mobility, Multiattack, Spring Attack

Skills Bluff +16, Climb +12, Concentration +14, Diplomacy +10, Hide +12, Knowledge (arcana) +6, Listen +13, Move Silently +7, Spot +13

Languages Common, Giant, Thassilonian

Gear masterwork breastplate, masterwork greatsword

*new feat, see page 68.

ECOLOGY

Environment any mountain or desert

Organization solitary, pair, or gang (3–4)

Treasure double standard

Advancement by character class; **Favored Class** cleric

Level Adjustment —

BESTIARY

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Pounce (Ex) If a harridan charges, she can attack with both of her claws and make two rake attacks.

Rake (Ex) Attack bonus +23, damage 1d6+4.

Spells A harridan casts spells as a 12th-level cleric. Her save DCs are Wisdom-based.

Wisdom Drain (Su) A harridan drains 1d8 points of Wisdom each time she hits with her melee touch attack. (Unlike with other kinds of ability drain attacks, a harridan does not heal any damage when she uses her Wisdom drain.)

Skills Harridans have a +4 racial bonus on Climb checks and a +8 racial bonus on Bluff and Hide checks.

Harridans are manipulators and slave takers, the spiritual leaders of the lamyros race's dark faith. Megalomaniacal and corrupt, these giant lamias obsess over control, seeking to bend all they encounter to their will through lies and subtlety, brute force, or magic. Fewer in number than even the rare lamia matriarchs (see *Pathfinder* #2), harridans are the cunning masterminds of their race and all other lamias rightly fear and obey these powerful and cruel despots.

A harridan is a massive creature with the torso of a gigantic female humanoid sprouting from the body of a 20-foot-long dire lion. Her fur is darker than that of a normal dire lion, making it easier for her to blend in with the rocks of the mountains and deserts where harridans reside, and her upper body is hairless save for a luxurious mane of thick hair growing from her scalp. Harridans often weigh upwards of 6,000 pounds and can live to be more than 500 years old.

ECOLOGY

Harridans are members of a royal caste of lamyros. They are always female and only occur in about 1 out of every 500 lamia births. When such a child is identified by her unusually rapid mental and physical maturation, she is taken by other harridans in the clan and raised among her own kind. When born to a lamia who is not a member of a group led by harridans, if the child survives to maturity she invariably assumes leadership over all other lamyros in the region, establishing a new royal caste, often after eliminating her own parents.

HABITAT & SOCIETY

Like all lamyros, harridans are cursed creatures, but among their kind, they are the most honored of the cursed. Traditionally, harridans assume the roles of leaders and oracles, guiding their people in the names of a variety of dark gods. Many pay only the barest lip service to their deities, using their clerical magic to overpower and enslave. While some deities might abandon servants of such hollow devotion, the foul powers lamias typically worship usually find their goals matched by harridans' selfish depredations. While these lamyros might show a weakness of faith, they demand that their followers adhere to the tenants of their religion, enslaving new minions to their deity's will.

LAMYROS RELIGION

Renowned for their selfishness and savagery, lamyros are not disposed toward the worship of higher powers. As the first of their kind was a cursed priestess of Pharasma (see *Pathfinder* #3, page 93), the most pervasive beliefs tend not toward worship, but toward a concerted, racial drive for revenge. Many lone lamyros are vehement atheists, renouncing the powers of the gods and cursing their works. They would mastermind the destruction of the world and everything in it to avenge themselves against the deities for their accursed fate. Their greatest cruelty they reserve for the goddess who afflicted them with their accursed forms.

Lamyros under the leadership of a harridan typically prove more devout, suffering the indignity of religion out of fear of their powerful matron. Although the harridans themselves care little for the traditional tenants of the faiths they adopt, they harshly enforce their chosen deity's divine laws upon their followers. As the service of a single selfish harridan can, by extension, bring an entire cult of lamyros servants into a deity's fold, most evil gods care little that the lamyros leaders offer them empty praises and half-hearted sacrifices.

Although most lamyros shun the will of deities, they often seek power from other sources. The worship of disembodied forces of evil—particularly revenge, discord, and the end of the world—provides many lamyros priests with access to divine power without the distastefulness of involving actual gods and goddesses. The reverence of demon lords also provides an acceptable path to divine might, as such powerful fiends share the lamyros's hatred of gods. Among the kuchrima, Pazuzu is often venerated, while Noctricula's and Socothbenoth's profane faiths inspire many harridans and matriarchs.

PRIESTESSES OF FALSE FAITHS

Despite their roles as religious leaders for their people, harridans are among the least sincere of all lamyros when it comes to matters of devotion. Three examples of likely harridan faiths follow.

Greed: The lamyros of Xin-Shalast—one of the largest harridan populations currently active in Golarion—revere the sin the lost city was founded upon: greed. Enthroned in the ruins of a city of decadence, the harridans obsess over collecting ever-greater power and treasures, their passion having taken on all the elements of religious fervor with the near resurrection of an embodiment of their faith.

Lamashtu: Unlike many half-beast races, the lamyros are not related to the Mother of Monsters, but Lamashtu eagerly adopts any of the brutal and manipulative predators that will turn to her fecund foulness. As a race dominated by females, lamyros leaders sometimes covet the powerful monstrous offspring that worshipping the Demon Queen can spawn.

Calistria: The goddess of trickery, lust, and revenge particularly appeals to seductive members of the lamyros race. As many of their kind hold an ages-old grudge against Pharasma for her cursed creation of their kind, they find support among Calistria's bitter faith and acceptance—even encouragement—of their own fickle power-mongering.

RISE OF THE RUNELORDS



HUNGERER

This creature's appearance is accompanied by the sound of retching and wet, flapping flesh. A thing of corpulent terror, it drags its swollen bulk spasmodically—a body composed of a sack-like mass of stitched flesh swollen almost to bursting. The iron staples that hold it together strain as if ready to burst asunder. The giant creature's maw is vast, with a huge, lolling tongue writhing between rows of broken teeth. Its head and torso are a travesty of a humanoid atop a twisted leonine body that is little more than a pulpy mass of shattered limbs and sinew under its monstrously obese upper body. It drags itself along the ground with two clawing forepaws—straining limbs that seemingly struggle to free themselves from beneath the thing's horrid girth.

HUNGERER

Always CE Huge magical beast

Init +1; **Senses** darkvision 90 ft., low-light vision; **Listen** +10, **Spot** +16

DEFENSE

AC 31, touch 9, flat-footed 31

(+1 Dex, +23 natural, –2 size)

hp 262 (21d10+147)

Fort +21, **Ref** +13, **Will** +9

DR 10/cold iron; **Immune** poison; **Resist** electricity 10, fire 10; **SR** 26

OFFENSE

Spd 30 ft.

Melee bite +29 (2d8+15 plus wisdom drain)

CR 15

Space 15 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

Special Attacks appalling stench, vile spew, vorpal bite, wisdom drain

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 21st)

At will—grease, stinking cloud (DC 14), ventriloquism

3/day—charm monster (DC 15), fly, gust of wind (DC 13), major image (DC 14), mirror image, suggestion (DC 14)

1/day—deep slumber (DC 14), mass charm monster (DC 19)

TACTICS

Before Combat A hungerer uses its illusion spells to lure opponents into traps or ambushes while remaining in concealment. It casts *mirror image* on itself before combat begins.

During Combat A hungerer usually begins combat by using its *mass charm monster* ability to make as many opponents docile as possible. It uses its *Spring Attack* and *fly* spell to maneuver through combat, following its Wisdom-draining attacks with *suggestion* or *deep slumber*.

Morale A hungerer's highest mandate is satiation of its never-ending torment of hunger pangs. It must be reduced to 20 or fewer hit points before it even considers abandoning its meal for its own safety.

STATISTICS

Str 30, **Dex** 13, **Con** 25, **Int** 13, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 13

Base Atk +21; **Grp** +39

Feats Altitude Affinity*, Diehard, Dodge, Endurance, Great Fortitude, Iron Will, Mobility, Spring Attack

Skills Climb +28, Hide +3, Intimidate +12, Listen +10, Spot +16, Use Magic Device +11

Languages Giant, Thassilonian

*new feat, see page 68

BESTIARY

ECOLOGY

Environment cold mountains

Organization solitary or mob (2–5)

Treasure standard

Advancement by character class; **Favored Class** sorcerer

Level Adjustment —

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Appalling Stench (Ex) A hungerer is rank with the scent of its own grotesque corpulence and the rotting remains of its past meals. Any creature that comes within 10 feet of a hungerer must make a DC 27 Fortitude save or be nauseated for 1d4+1 rounds. Creatures that make their save against a hungerer's appalling stench cannot be affected by the same hungerer's stench for 24 hours. A *delay poison* or *neutralize poison* removes the effects from the nauseated creature. Creatures with immunity to poison are unaffected by this ability, and creatures resistant to poison receive their normal bonus on their saving throws. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Vile Spew (Su) A critical hit upon a hungerer causes a spew of vile blood and stomach acids to gush out upon the attacker. If the attacker is within 5 feet, he and any other character who is both adjacent to him and also within 5 feet of the hungerer must make a DC 27 Reflex save or take 6d6 points of acid damage (save for half). Characters more than 5 feet away from the hungerer are unaffected. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Vorpal Bite (Ex) On a successful critical hit, the bite of a hungerer severs the head of a Large or smaller opponent unless the victim makes a DC 27 Fortitude save. This functions in all ways like the vorpal weapon quality (see page 226 of the DMG). The save DC is Constitution-based.

Wisdom Drain (Su) A hungerer drains 1d6 points of Wisdom each time it hits with its bite attack. Unlike with other kinds of ability drain attacks, a hungerer does not heal any damage when it uses its Wisdom drain.

These hideously deformed creatures are the result of a harridan that has experienced Karzoug's special "blessing" in hidden fleshwarping labs. The runelord was not above sending mobs of these abominations to terrorize the settlements of his fellow runelords or even to conduct genocidal raids upon his own people when displeased. Although they have strong forelimbs with powerful claws, hungerers mainly use them for locomotion and they are useless in battle.

The head and torso of these creatures are nearly 10 feet in diameter by themselves, and the pulpy lower body adds only a little bit of height. Despite their seemingly helpless appearance, the magic that binds them together is actually quite strong and makes them extremely resilient. A typical hungerer weighs about 20,000 pounds.

ECOLOGY

Hungerers are unnatural creatures, re-released into the world with Karzoug's awakening. These terrors live in constant pain and serve as living embodiments of hunger, never becoming sated in their constant quests for sustenance. Although they prefer to tear

LAMYROS SOCIETY

A fractured race, the various breeds of lamyros widely adhere to a collective society when encountered in large groups. Each breed is considered its own caste, with its own traditions, responsibilities, and typical role in society.

The harridans are the motivators of lamyros kind, serving as the warlords, priestesses, and manipulators of their race. In groups of multiple lamyros breeds, they lord their might over their inferiors with hellish glee, directing their servants in subtle schemes likely to grant themselves greater power and riches.

Subservient to the harridans, yet constantly vying for greater power, are the lamia matriarchs. Able to easily obtain humanoid forms, lamia matriarchs are prone to pursuing their own independent plots once out from under the thumbs of the mistresses. Despite this, they often serve as spies, assassins, and heralds of their kind in the outside world.

The most numerous of the lamyros, lamias have duties that differ between genders. Females serve as mothers, protectors, priests, and enforcers of the superior castes' will. Males—culturally being seen as of lesser intelligence and worth—serve as hunters, warriors, and attendants to their betters. While cowed by the will of more powerful lamyros, all lamias revel in the power they wield over their own inferiors and become master manipulators in engineering their own advancement.

The lowest order in the lamyros hierarchy is the kuchrima. These foul carrion eaters serve as brute enforcers and the eyes and ears of their masters. It is a rare kuchrima indeed who will refuse the commands of a common lamia, much less a matriarch or harridan, so inbred is their conditioning for obedience.

Completely outside of this order are the rarely whispered-of hungerers. Foul abominations born of flesh-warping magic, these terrors are rumored to be merely one of the corrupted offshoots of lamyros blood.

and rend living flesh, hungerers can consume almost any organic material and might even gnaw on stone or metal without ill effect when nothing else is available.

In Thassilonian times, it was rumored that, rather than being birthed individually, all hungerers were budded from one great, massive Glutton Mother. Even if these tales were true, it seems unlikely that such a grotesquely fecund abomination could have survived to modern times.

HABITAT & SOCIETY

Hungerers are only known to have dwelt in the remote mountains around the city of Xin-Shalast. These creatures were forgotten before their reappearance in the capital of the Runelord of Greed, with a handful only recently freed from temporal stasis in tombs within the Spire of Avarice. Certainly no instances of encounters with a hungerer have been documented in the ages since the fall of Thassilon. It is possible that some of them survived elsewhere, though, whether locked away in other Thassilonian vaults or reproducing and creating some profane society within the depths of the earth, waiting millennia for their fabled master's reawakening.

RISE OF THE RUNE GIANT



RUNE GIANT

This towering muscular giant's skin is nearly black in color, as if made from pitted iron and then etched with countless complex runes. As the creature moves, the runes flash and ripple, glowing from the strange internal fires that burn within it. The giant wears ornate armor with a grimacing full helm, and wields an immense sword that looks big enough to bisect a house.

RUNE GIANT

CR 14

Always LE Gargantuan giant

Init +1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Listen +24, Spot +24

DEFENSE

AC 29, touch 7, flat-footed 28

(+8 armor, +1 Dex, +14 natural, -4 size)

hp 230 (20d8+140)

Fort +19, **Ref** +7, **Will** +7

Immune cold, electricity, mind-affecting effects; **Resist** fire 30

OFFENSE

Spd 35 ft. in full plate; base speed 50 ft.

Melee greatsword +27/+22/+17 (6d6+24/17-20) or

2 slams +27 (2d6+16)

Ranged rock +16 (3d8+16)

Space 15 ft.; **Reach** 15 ft.

Special Attacks command giant, improved rock throwing, spark shower, runes

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 20th)

At will—*air walk*, *endure elements*, *suggestion* (DC 24; affects giants only)

3/day—*mass charm monster* (DC 28; affects giants only), *dominate*

monster (DC 29; affects giants only)

STATISTICS

Abilities Str 42, Dex 13, Con 24, Int 14, Wis 12, Cha 24

Base Atk +11; **Grp** +47

Feats Altitude Affinity, Awesome Blow, Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Critical (great sword), Power Attack, Quick Draw

Skills Climb +34, Jump +38, Listen +24, Spot +24

Languages Giant, Thassilonian

SQ rock catching

ECOLOGY

Environment cold mountains

Organization solitary, pair, patrol (3-6), squad (7-12), or company (13-30)

Treasure standard plus full plate and greatsword

Advancement by character class; **Favored Class** fighter

Level Adjustment —

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Command Giant (Su) Rune giants were created with a mystical link to all giant kind. When a rune giant uses a skill against creatures of the giant type, it gains a +10 bonus on the check. When a rune giant uses any sort of charm or compulsion effect against a giant, it gains a +4 bonus to its save DC—this bonus is included in its spell-like abilities above.

Improved Rock Throwing (Ex) With their enhanced size and Strength, rune giants are more adept at rock throwing than even their kin.

BESTIARY

Rune giants receive a +4 racial bonus on attack rolls when throwing rocks. A rune giant can hurl rocks weighing 100 to 150 pounds each (Huge objects) up to five range increments. The range increment is 240 feet for a rune giant's thrown rocks. It uses both hands when throwing a rock.

Rock Catching (Ex) A rune giant gains a +4 bonus on its Reflex save when attempting to catch a thrown rock.

Runes (Su) The runes scribed across a rune giant's body are the source of its magic power. When it uses its spark shower or spell-like abilities, the runes flash and glow brightly. Any creature within 10 feet of a rune giant at this time must make a DC 27 Fortitude save or be blinded for one round—success indicates the creature is merely dazzled for 1 round. A rune giant can make a Fortitude save to resist the effects of an *erase* spell cast against his runes, but if he fails that save, he loses access to his spell-like abilities and his spark shower ability for 24 hours until his runes “grow back.”

Spark Shower (Su) The runes covering a rune giant's flesh are infused with magical power. Once every 1d4+1 rounds as a free action, a rune giant can cause a 30-foot cone of sparks to discharge from its runes. Those within the area of this cone take 12d6 points of damage (half fire and half electricity), with a DC 27 Reflex save halving the damage done. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Created long ago by the runelords of Thassilon, rune giants were originally of fire giant stock, harvested from among the most loyal of the Thassilonian troops. Given special affinity for the rune magic of the runelords and put through grueling alchemical processes and fleshwarping rituals, rune giants became the perfect generals and leaders of other giant troops, exercising a unique mental domination among their own kin. Their immunity to mental control combined with their unwavering loyalty to their runelord creators made them an invaluable component of the armies of giants these ancient wizards commanded. Other giants of the time viewed the rune giants as traitors and despots, and although their existence has dwindled to the status of legend today, most tribes think of them in the same way humans regard demon lords and archdevils—as horrors best not spoken of.

Rune giants stand 40 feet tall and weigh 25,000 pounds. They can live to be 1,200 years old. Their skin is warm to the touch from the fires that burn within them, and they emit a faint grinding and rumbling when they move. They wear elaborate armor and helms designed to provide protection but still leave their rune-inscribed bodies visible as much as possible. They use weapons of wicked design intended to inspire fear in their opponents, with many rings and spikes providing added flourish. They keep throwing rocks handy in sacks made of mail that hang from their belts.

Ecology

Imbued with unyielding obedience and discipline, rune giants are something more than normal giants, with an arcane flame within them creating heat and electrical discharges. Though originally taken from fire giant bloodlines long ago, they are now their own race and, despite their strange physiology, they breed true. Examination of the runes inscribed on the flesh of these giants

reveals them to be natural markings rather than tattoos or artificial brands. A rune giant that mates with a fire giant has a 10% chance of producing a rune giant child instead of a fire giant child. Newborn rune giants have runes faintly visible on their flesh that grow more distinct and take on the typical fiery glow as they reach maturity. Rune giants of a single family bear similar runes on their flesh, though marriages of different clans cause variation in this. It is whispered that if anyone can gather together enough rune giants to include all of the various runes, then that individual would have the power of all Thassilon at his command.

Habitat & Society

Rune giants are fantastically rare, found only in remote locations once held under Thassilonian rule. Those few who survive into the modern day often serve as kings and lords to other giant tribes, and with the exception of the high concentration in and around Xin-Shalast, are never encountered in groups of more than two or three. They have largely disappeared from the face of Golarion and are only found in small pockets, usually high in isolated mountain ranges close to the crumbling cities and edifices their ancient ancestors once called home.

The Rune Giant Legacy

The runelords sought more than perfectly disciplined generals and veritable war machines on the battlefield when they created the rune giants. They wanted something much more, something rooted in the giant stock from which the rune giants were developed. The runelords, through their domination and extensive studies of giants, discovered a certain primordial timelessness to these creatures formed from the bones of Golarion. Though individual giants lived out their allotted spans and then died like other living creatures, the runelords discovered a core running between them from generation to generation reaching all the way back to the bedrock of time. Individually mortal, it appeared that giants possessed a shared immortal essence, preserving a timeless piece of primeval history in their bones. The runelords discovered this and coveted it.

It was based on this eternal thread of existence that they developed their *runewells*, allowing them to harvest similar energies from other sentient creatures. And it was this discovery that likewise brought about the creation of the rune giant race, not just as all-powerful servants, but as living heralds of their immortal ambition. The runes of power, sacred to the runelords, are indelibly inscribed into the very flesh of these giants and continually renew themselves with each new generation. The bodies of the rune giants serve as repositories of the secrets of the runelords, merely waiting for one with the power and knowledge to unleash them. Immortality through their *runewells* was only part of the runelords' plans to resurface in another age, and calling forth their rune giants who unknowingly carry within them the heritage of the Thassilonian sin magic was the key to regaining their power of old. Even if Karzoug is destroyed, this unguessed truth may be all that stands in the way of the eventual rise of the other six runelords and their rune giant minions.

RISE OF THE RUNELORDS



WENDIGO

This tall, emaciated creature has pale skin stretched taut over bones that seem to push outward and threaten to split the flesh. Its head resembles that of a monstrous elk, but with deeply inset eyes gleaming with a feral, hungry light, and tattered, bloody lips that part to reveal jagged broken teeth. Humanoid in basic shape, the creature's legs end not in feet but in blackened, charred stumps.

WENDIGO

Always CE Large outsider (cold, native)

Init +8; **Senses** blindsight 90 ft., darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision;

Listen +26, Spot +26

DEFENSE

AC 29, touch 13, flat-footed 25

(+4 Dexterity, +16 natural, -1 size)

hp 279 (18d8+198); regeneration 15 (fire)

Fort +22, **Ref** +17, **Will** +16

DR 15/cold iron and magic; **Immune** cold, fear; **SR** 26

Weaknesses vulnerability to fire

CR 17

OFFENSE

Spd fly 120 ft. (perfect)

Melee bite +26 (2d8+9 plus 2d6 cold) and

2 claws +24 (2d6+4 plus 2d6 cold)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

Special Attacks dream haunting, howl, improved grab, savaging, windwalk

Spell-Like Ability (20th)

At will—*wind walk*

1/day—*control weather* (as druid)

TACTICS

During Combat A wendigo makes heavy use of Flyby

Attack at the start of combats, closing to melee with foes only when there are fewer than two enemies standing. A wendigo never initiates an attack on a creature suffering from wendigo psychosis.

Morale A wendigo generally retreats if reduced to 30 hit points or less by foes who wield fire—otherwise it fights to the death.

STATISTICS

Str 29, **Dex** 19, **Con** 33, **Int** 16, **Wis** 20, **Cha** 24

Base Atk +18; **Grp** +31

Feats Ability Focus (dream haunting, howl), Flyby Attack, Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Multiattack, Track

Skills Hide +23, Knowledge (geography) +24, Knowledge (nature) +24, Knowledge (religion) +24, Knowledge (the planes) +24, Listen +26, Move Silently +27, Search +24, Spot +26, Survival +26, Tumble +25

Languages Auran, Common, Giant, Sylvan

SQ no breath

ECOLOGY

Environment any arctic or subarctic

Organization solitary

Treasure none

Advancement 19–22 HD (Large), 23–30 HD (Huge), 31–40 HD (Gargantuan), 41–54 HD (Colossal)

Level Adjustment —

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Dream Haunting (Su) A wendigo can visit the dreams of a single victim within 1 mile while that individual sleeps. The afflicted individual experiences vivid nightmares of starvation and cannibalism. The victim can resist the effects of this dream with a DC 28 Will save. Failure indicates that the victim awakens fatigued but can't quite remember the nature of his dreams. After failing two of these saving throws against the same wendigo, the victim contracts wendigo psychosis. A victim who successfully saves against the same wendigo's dream haunting three times is forever immune to that wendigo's dream haunting ability. This is a mind-affecting effect. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Howl (Ex) Up to three times per day as a standard action, a wendigo can let loose a forlorn howl that echoes throughout the countryside and can be heard up to a mile away—even during the fiercest storm—unless magically silenced. This primal howl raises the hackles of all who hear it and sends chills down the spine. Anyone who hears the howl must make a DC 28 Will save to avoid

BESTIARY

becoming shaken for an hour. Creatures within 120 feet of the wendigo when it howls also become panicked for 1d4+4 rounds, and those within 30 feet also become paralyzed with fear for 1d4 rounds. Anyone who makes the saving throw is immune to that particular wendigo's howl for 24 hours. This is a mind-affecting fear effect. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Improved Grab (Ex) To use this ability, a wendigo must hit a creature one size category smaller than itself with both claw attacks. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and can savage the foe.

No Breath (Ex) A wendigo does not breathe, and is immune to inhaled toxins and diseases.

Savaging (Su) A wendigo that makes a successful grapple check against a foe can savage that creature with its claws, fangs, and antlers. This attack deals 4d6+13 points of damage and 1d4 points of Charisma damage.

Windwalk (Su) If a wendigo pins a foe no larger than one size category smaller than itself, the wendigo can snatch up that foe as a free action. If the victim makes a DC 26 Will save, he is dropped to the ground. If he fails this save, his body is transformed into cloud-like vapor and remains in the clutches of the wendigo, which can then hurtle through the sky with its captive at a speed of 600 feet. Each round, a victim can make a new DC 26 Will save to turn solid again, but at this point he falls if he cannot fly himself. A creature that windwalks with a wendigo automatically contracts wendigo psychosis. The save DC is Charisma-based.

From unknown lands beyond the cold northern skies comes the wendigo. While certainly an outsider, these foul creatures do not dwell in the Outer Rifts of the Lower Planes—they are native to the Material Plane, yet not wholly of it. There are many myths that explain the source of this terrible monster. Popular stories among the northern Ulfen people tell of a nomad driven to cannibalism by derangement or privation, and of his subsequent transformation into a monster. Some scholars instead whisper of worlds beyond Golarion, where strange life holds sway and the wendigo hails, the spawn of an entity known to some as the Ithaqua the Windwalker. Whatever their origin, wendigos seek to spread cannibalism throughout the frozen reaches of the world, for it is from such desperation and taboo that new wendigos are born.

Wendigos vary widely in appearance. Typically they take the form of gaunt, starved-looking humanoids bearing the features of wild animals native to the areas they inhabit. Often their bodies look to be frail, twisted, or horribly wounded, but such traits are only manifestations of the creatures' insatiable hunger.

Habitat & Society

Wendigos reside in the frozen regions of the world, and though they or those they have infected sometimes travel down into the rugged wilderness of the subarctic regions, it is to the tundra and high mountain and frozen forest they eventually return. Beings of great power and alien malevolence, they are often worshiped

WENDIGO MYTHS

The wendigo is a figure from Algonquian myth, a malevolent, cannibalistic spirit that supposedly haunts the wilderness of the northern United States and Canada. They were often said to be giants, or harbingers of famine, and were frequently associated with the advent of winter. Wendigo psychosis is a real-world affliction, although it doesn't have quite the fantastic results detailed here.

The wendigo has appeared often in fiction, most notably in the short story "The Wendigo" by Algernon Blackwood. In August Derleth's story "Ithaqua," the wendigo is formally woven into the Lovecraft Mythos, taking the role of one of the Great Old Ones, and in Stephen King's *Pet Semetary*, the wendigo has a cameo as one of the malevolent spirits found near a certain stony burial ground. He's even appeared as a character in the Marvel Comics universe. Various incarnations of the wendigo can be seen on film in movies like *Wendigo*, *Ravenous*, and most recently, *The Last Winter*. The creature has certainly had other incarnations in various RPG rules, but the one presented here is what adventurers in Golarion have to watch out for.

as gods by barbarians, yeti, orcs, and others, yet the wendigos themselves have no interest in being worshiped, beyond the convenience of a flock in which they can gestate new wendigos.

Wendigos often use predatory beasts, savage monsters, and natural dangers to harry and weaken their victims, delighting in driving their prey to desperation. Harassment by bears and crows, attacks by brutish humanoids and local monstrosities, and random landslides and weak ice characterize the travels of those being stalked by a wendigo. Only once its prey is exhausted and starving does the cruel outsider finally strike.

Wendigo Psychosis

When a victim suffers a wendigo's dream haunting or foolishly walks upon the wind with one of these spirits, he contracts this supernatural disease. Rarely, those who resort to cannibalism out of desperation can contract this strange disease as well, although curiously, those who accept cannibalism as a way of life do not suffer this fate.

The incubation period of wendigo psychosis is 1 day, and inflicts 1d4 points of Wisdom drain each day the victim fails a DC 23 Will save. During this time, cannibalistic visions become more and more vivid and personal, and often involve family members and friends. Wendigo psychosis cannot reduce a creature to a Wisdom lower than 1, but once this point is reached, the victim seeks out his own kind to kill and consume.

Once a victim actually commits an act of cannibalism, a wendigo spirit is called from the Void Between Planes to inhabit the victim's body. The victim takes off at a run, and in 1d4 rounds sprints up into the sky at such a speed that his feet burn away into jagged stumps. The transformation into a wendigo takes 2d6 minutes as the victim races through the sky at a speed of 600 feet, during which only a *miracle* or *wish* can halt his impending death and the resultant birth of a new wendigo into the world.



PRELUDE TO THE FALL

A PREVIEW OF CURSE OF THE CRIMSON THRONE

Arunelord has risen and been cast down by a band of stalwart heroes. Great deeds were accomplished, great trials weathered, and great sacrifices made. Yet as bands of demoralized giants scatter into the mountains and Varisia licks its wounds, it becomes clear that the region's trials are not yet over. For to the east, in the great and fashionable metropolis of Korvosa, a new evil stirs. It is time for a new group of heroes to take up arms and stand against one of the most dangerous threats of all: that which wears a crown.

SPOILER WARNING: If you intend on playing in *Curse of the Crimson Throne*, be warned—the contents of the next few pages are about as filled with spoilers as you can get!

BEHIND THE THRONE

Hundreds of years ago, as the nation of Ustalav was recovering from the rule of the Whispering Tyrant, the threat of an invasion of orcs from the neighboring Hold of Belkzen was ever on its residents' minds. For generations, the county of Tamrivena held strong against the orcs, with its standing army of rangers and the tactical genius of its leaders more than a match for the orc hordes. When command of Tamrivena fell to Count Andachi, however, it

quickly became apparent that he had not inherited his father's and grandfather's gift for tactics. Mile by mile, the orcs bit into Tamrivena, and Andachi's desperate requests to the government of Ustalav for reinforcements grew mired in bureaucracy. Even his prayers to Desna seemed to fall upon deaf ears. And so it was with a desperation born of fear that he fell back upon his ancestors' one-time patron—Zon-Kuthon, god of pain and darkness. In short order, his prayers were answered, in the form of a powerful and gifted mercenary from the north named Kazavon. Kazavon promised Count Andachi glory and safety from the orcs, should the Count cede him command of Tamrivena's army. At his wits' end, Count Andachi granted Kazavon the forces requested.

Kazavon was good as his word, and in 4043 AR he drove his new army into the Hold of Belkzen. He slaughtered the orc hordes, driving them back up into the high mountains and shattering their warlike spirits. On a rocky spur in the heart of formerly orc-controlled lands, Kazavon turned his army's attention to the creation of an immense castle, a place that would come to be known as Scarwall. From there, Kazavon claimed the newly liberated region of Belkzen as his own realm.

Giddy over their unexpected salvation from the orcs, the people of the southern nation of Lastwall sent a band of diplomats to Scarwall with tidings of thanks. It was then that Kazavon's true nature manifested. He had an army and a nation to call his own now, and the defeat of the orcs had only aroused his bloodlust. He murdered the diplomats, then turned his army against Lastwall itself. Those under his command who balked at this new directive were painfully executed and raised as undead by Kazavon himself—if they were lucky.

Count Andachi watched, horrified, as his one-time general enacted a reign of blood and murder. Reaching deep inside himself, he finally found a spark of courage and gathered to his side the sorry remnants of his military reserves, marching west to Scarwall to demand Kazavon's surrender. The result was Andachi's head mounted atop Scarwall's tallest spire and the last shreds of Tamrivena's strength absorbed into Kazavon's army. Emboldened, the warlord expanded his aggression east into Ustlav.

For 15 years, Kazavon ruled a slowly expanding nation of slaves, victims, and horrors. The blasphemies perpetrated in Zon-Kuthon's name rivaled the atrocities committed not 100 years before at the hands of the Whispering Tyrant. Stories of fields of victims impaled for his amusement, mass executions, cannibal feasts, vampiric orgies, and worse circulated throughout the continent of Avistan. So great was Kazavon's military might and willingness to sacrifice his own soldiers that no army could reach the seat of the sadist's power.

Yet no empire lasts forever, and eventually, Kazavon was defeated. Using power and stealth, a secret cabal of soldiers, priests, and wizards managed to do what armies could not: they infiltrated Kazavon's realm and invaded Scarwall. The horrors they found there tested them to their limits, yet in the end they reached Kazavon's throne room and engaged the tyrant himself. It was during this battle that they stripped away Kazavon's human disguise, revealing the champion of Zon-Kuthon to be a blue dragon. The fighting was intense, but when the dust cleared, the leader of the cabal, a hero named Mandraivus, stood with his legendary bastard sword *Serithial* lodged in the dragon's heart. Although the heroes tried to destroy Kazavon's body, the dragon's skeleton was too suffused with malignancy and the evil of Zon-Kuthon—even as they watched, the bones twitched and writhed as they struggled to return to life.

And so Mandraivus ordered his surviving companions to dismantle Kazavon's skeleton and to each take a portion of the bones out into the world, keeping them hidden and safe. None would know where the other members went, least of all their leader, who vowed to remain in Scarwall to guard against the fortress ever being used by Kazavon or his minions again. Mandraivus's cabal died the same day Kazavon did, and as each of its members retreated on their own, the influence of Kazavon's evil finally waned.

Unfortunately, the removal of Kazavon from Belkzen left the region open for conquest. Bottled up for nearly two decades, the orc horde once again surged south, retaking more land than ever before. One tribe even invaded Scarwall and managed to murder Mandraivus, accomplishing with sheer numbers what the dragon could not. But, with the hero slain, the taint of the place was unleashed and echoes of Kazavon and his undead minions rose up in turn, slaughtering the invaders.

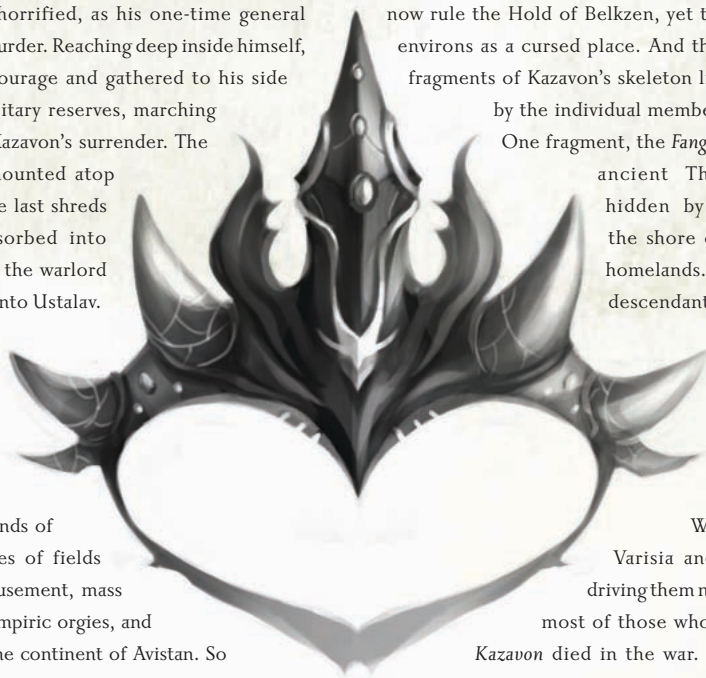
Such has been the state of things for several centuries. The orcs now rule the Hold of Belkzen, yet they view Scarwall and its environs as a cursed place. And throughout the world, the fragments of Kazavon's skeleton lie hidden away, scattered by the individual members of Mandraivus's cabal.

One fragment, the *Fangs of Kazavon*, lay within an ancient Thassilonian monument, hidden by a Shoanti shaman on the shore of his people's ancestral homelands. For hundreds of years, his descendants guarded and protected the *Fangs of Kazavon* from discovery, even though they eventually forgot why they needed to remain hidden, only that it must be so.

When Cheliox invaded Varisia and defeated the Shoanti, driving them north into the Cinderlands, most of those who knew about the *Fangs of Kazavon* died in the war. Those few who retained knowledge of their history hoped and prayed that they would remain hidden, helplessly watching from afar as the city Korvosa was built over their lands, and a castle built above the hidden vaults that kept the *Fangs* safe.

So it remained, until the day a curious queen found a hidden chamber in the Vaults of her castle. The Curse of the Crimson Throne Adventure Path begins in Korvosa, not long after the king dies and Queen Ileosa takes control of the city. A bitter, cruel woman to begin with, her evil tendencies are magnified a hundredfold when she discovers the *Fangs of Kazavon* hidden below her treasure vaults and becomes corrupted by them. Kazavon's spirit has had hundreds of years to gestate within each of his skeletal fragments, and in Queen Ileosa that spirit finds fertile soil. It infests her, transforms her, and in so doing merges with her to become something new, with all of the queen's evil fantasies and goals becoming her actual desires. Yet she knows that easing and reshaping Korvosa into her own personal paradise is not something she can do overnight. She needs to give Kazavon's power time to grow inside her soul, and time to set into action several plans and events that, over the course of the months to come, will transform Korvosa into something befitting her cruel desires.

And so the stage is set for a party of young and untested adventurers to stand before a new evil. The fate of Korvosa and the future of Varisia is in their hands.



THE HARROW DECK

One of the themes that runs through *Curse of the Crimson Throne* is the Harrow, a deck of cards used by Varisians to tell the future. The Harrow is intertwined not only with the region's history, but with the game itself, with the 54 cards of the deck divided into six suits symbolizing the six attributes every character is built around—Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma. Each of the six parts of *Curse of the Crimson Throne* takes the strengths and weaknesses of one of these attributes as a theme, and during play, the Harrow deck itself plays a key role in helping, or perhaps even hindering, the PCs as they progress. In the game itself, the Harrow deck becomes a recurring theme of destiny, fate, and doom; one the PCs must choose to heed or ignore.

THE ADVENTURES

Edge of Anarchy

by Nicolas Logue

Levels 1–4

After having their fortunes told by a mysterious Varisian woman, the PCs come together to strike a blow against one of Korvosa's petty crimelords. Among his stolen treasures, the PCs discover a brooch that belongs to Queen Ileosa. Yet before they can attempt to return it, the King of Korvosa dies from a sudden illness, throwing the city into anarchy as an untested queen takes the Crimson Throne. The PCs find themselves recruited to help get the lawlessness back under control, quelling agitators calling for riots, taking care of rogue city guards attempting to build gangs, tangling with a sinister necromancer's minions, and even investigating a strange woman who may have had something to do with the king's untimely death.

Seven Days to the Grave

by F. Wesley Schneider

Levels 5–7

The plague has come to Korvosa! In an effort to maintain order, the queen establishes a new military group called the Gray Maidens. At the same time, a mysterious sect of "plague doctors" emerges to combat the disease—but whose side are they really on? In the process of undertaking missions for the increasingly harried Church of Abadar, the PCs discover that these plague doctors are actually spreading and encouraging the illness, and are doing so on the orders of none other than Queen Ileosa herself! Yet what can a band of burgeoning warriors and spellcasters do against the queen of an entire city, particularly once she realizes they're on to her? As the PCs must begin thinking about their own skins, the plague worsens, with the queen ordering the entire island of Old Korvosa quarantined and left to rot.

Escape from Old Korvosa

by Richard Pett

Levels 8–10

Hunted by Queen Ileosa, the PCs are forced into hiding. Soon after, rumors surface that Korvosa's seneschal, thought to have perished in the riots that consumed Korvosa after the king's demise, may yet live. Signs indicate that the one man in Korvosa who may hold the secret to dethroning Ileosa is somewhere deep in quarantined Old Korvosa. Worse, the PCs aren't the only ones after him—the Queen's Gray Maidens and a group of mysterious assassins known as the Red Mantis both want him dead.

Old Korvosa is in anarchy. The seneschal is nowhere to be found, but it soon becomes apparent that he has been captured by the Arkona family, the self-appointed rulers



of Old Korvosa. The PCs must seek out old allies thought lost and navigate the alleys and roofs of urban chaos if they hope to rescue the seneschal before the Queen's agents find him. Yet the Arkonas themselves hide a secret that may just make them the most dangerous group in all of Old Korvosa.

A History of Ashes

by Michael Kortez

Levels 11–13

After rescuing the royal seneschal from the Arkonas' clutches, he reveals to the PCs that Queen Ileosa has become corrupted by the *Fangs of Kazavon*, and as if to prove it, the Queen miraculously survives an assassination attempt against her by the Korvosan Guard. In a fit of rage, she puts Korvosa under martial law, placing her Gray Maidens on patrols and beginning a brutal series of trials and executions. Emboldened, the blatantly evil queen now publicly wears the dragon's relics in a tiara called the *Crown of Fangs*. In order to defeat her, the PCs must seek out someone who knows about Kazavon and his weakness—he was defeated once before, but how?

Fortunately, the seneschal knows that the Shoanti once ruled this area, and that for many centuries they stood as the guardians of the fangs of Kazavon. Following his advice, the PCs flee Korvosa and head up into the Cinderlands to see what can be learned from the barbarians. Complicating matters, however, is the fact that the keepers of this information are the shamans of the Clan of the Sun, and having heard that Korvosa is weakened, these Shoanti are preparing to strike and reclaim their ancestral lands. In order to learn about Kazavon's weakness, the PCs must befriend the Shoanti, gain their respect and trust, and somehow stall them from attacking Korvosa. Once they've managed to do so, they learn that to defeat Kazavon, they must use the weapon that killed him once before—the magical sword *Seriththial*, a sword that hasn't been seen since the dragon's defeat hundreds of years ago, and is still hidden deep in the haunted fortress of Scarwall.

Skeletons of Scarwall

by Greg A. Vaughan

Levels 14–15

In order to recover the mystical sword that slew the dragon, the PCs must venture into the orc-torn Hold of Belken and invade Scarwall, Kazavon's ancient fortress. There they encounter countless undead and devils still in the service of Zon-Kuton, and might even find an unexpected ally and advisor in the form of Count Andachi's ghost. Yet the PCs are not the only ones seeking *Seriththial*—a group called the Brotherhood of Bones, knights of Zon-Kuthon, seek something else hidden in Scarwall. Neither the PCs nor the Brotherhood can hope to navigate the dangers of Scarwall on their own, and in order to reach *Seriththial* the PCs must join forces with the knights. Yet how far can they trust these allies of the very foe they seek to defeat?

Crown of Fangs

by Tito Leati

Levels 16–17

The PCs, armed with *Seriththial*, return to Korvosa only to find the city stifling under the crushing grip of martial law and the Gray Maidens, with capricious public executions and worse committed daily by the queen's command. In order to halt the madness, the PCs must infiltrate Castle Korvosa itself. Inside, they find ghosts, Red Mantis assassins, and the leader of the Gray Maidens herself, but no queen. In fact, Queen Ileosa has relocated to a ruined fortress from ancient Thassilon—the Sunken Queen. Here Sorshen, the Runelord of Lust, maintained a magical pool of blood that ensured her perpetual youth, and Queen Ileosa seeks to follow in her footsteps. The PCs must make their way through several levels of this ancient fortress, fighting through guardians and traps both new and ancient, before finally confronting Queen Ileosa and smiting the *Crown of Fangs* from her brow with *Seriththial*'s edge. But even once Ileosa has fallen, the story is not yet finished. For Kazavon's spirit has grown stronger during his time with Ileosa, and as the queen is defeated, the dragon emerges to face the PCs in person...

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RISE OF THE RUNELORDS

VALEROS

MALE HUMAN FIGHTER 14

ALIGN NG INIT +10 SPEED 30 ft.

DEITY Cayden Cailean HOMELAND Andoran

ABILITIES

20	STR
22	DEX
16	CON
13	INT
8	WIS
10	CHA

DEFENSE

HP 123

AC 28

touch 19, flat-footed 22

Fort +14, Ref +11, Will +5

OFFENSE

Melee +3 frost cold iron longsword
+24/+19/+14 (1d8+12/17-20 plus
1d6 cold) or
+3 frost cold iron longsword +22/+17/+12
(1d8+12/17-20 plus 1d6 cold) and
+2 short sword +20/+15/+10
(1d6+4/19-20)

Ranged +1 comp longbow +21/+16/+11
(1d8+5/x3)

Base Atk +14; **Grp** +19

SKILLS

Climb	+19
Intimidate	+17
Ride	+23
Swim	+16

FEATS

Big Game Hunter^B, Combat Expertise, Greater Two-Wpn. Fighting, Greater Wpn. Focus (ls.), Greater Wpn. Spec. (ls.), Improved Critical (ls.), Improved Initiative, Improved Two-Wpn. Fighting, Power Attack, Quick Draw, Two-Wpn. Defense, Two-Wpn. Fighting, Wpn. Focus (ls., ss.), Wpn. Spec. (ls.)



Combat Gear potion of cure moderate wounds (3); **Other Gear** +3 mithral breastplate, +3 frost cold iron longsword, +2 short sword, +1 composite longbow (+4 Str) with 20 arrows, silver dagger, amulet of health +4, belt of giant strength +6, gloves of Dexterity +4, ring of protection +3, cloak of resistance +2, backpack, lucky tankard, rations (6), 50 ft. silk rope, 50 pp, 17 gp

Born a farmer's son in the quiet Andorian countryside, Valeros spent his youth dreaming of adventure and exploring the world. For the past several years, he's done exactly that, having been a mercenary with the Band of the Mauler, a guard for the Aspis Consortium, a freelance bounty hunter, and hired muscle for a dozen different employers in as many lands. Gone is his youthful naivete, replaced by scars and the resolve of a veteran warrior. Although he possesses a keen wit, he finds the simplest, most direct approach is often the best, and has little patience for convoluted schemes or magical chicanery. While noble at heart, Valeros hides this beneath a jaded, sometimes crass demeanor, often claiming that there's no better way to end a day's adventuring than with "an evening of hard drinking and a night of soft company."

SEONI

FEMALE HUMAN SORCERER 14

ALIGN LN INIT +3 SPEED 30 ft.

DEITY Pharasma HOMELAND Varisia

ABILITIES

8	STR
16	DEX
12	CON
10	INT
13	WIS
24	CHA

DEFENSE

HP 50

AC 23

touch 15, flat-footed 20

Fort +5, Ref +7, Will +10

OFFENSE

Melee staff of fire +6 (1d6-1)

Base Atk +7; **Grp** +6

Spells Known (CL 14th, 15th evocation)

7th (4/day)—prismatic spray (DC 26)

6th (6/day)—c. lightning (DC 25), true seeing

5th (7/day)—c. of cold (DC 24), dismissal, teleport

4th (7/day)—d. door, g. invisibility, ice storm, u. off fire

3rd (7/day)—dispel magic, fly, haste, lightning

bolt (DC 22)

2nd (8/day)—invisibility, mirror image, resist

energy, scorching ray, web

1st (8/day)—burning hands (DC 20), endure

elements, enlarge person, magic missile, shield

0 (6/day)—acid splash, arcane mark, daze (DC

17), d. magic, light, mage hand, prestidigitation,

ray of frost, r. magic

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 10th)

1/day—dancing lights

SKILLS

Bluff	+24
Climb	+2
Concentration	+18
Listen	+3
Spellcraft	+17
Spot	+3

FEATS

Alertness (from familiar), Dodge, Extend Spell, Greater Spell Focus (evocation), Maximize Spell, Spell Focus (evocation), Spell Penetration, Varisian Tattoo (evocation)^B

FAMILIAR

Dragon (blue-tailed skink: as lizard, MM 275)



Combat Gear potion of cure moderate wounds, rod of empower metamagic, staff of fire (50 charges), scroll of fireball, wand of magic missile (CL 9th, 50 charges); **Other Gear** mwk dagger, amulet of natural armor +3, bracers of armor +5, cloak of Charisma +6, gloves of Dexterity +2, ring of protection +2, handy haversack, everburning torch, rations (4), 23 pp, 29 gp

Seoni is something of an enigma to her compatriots. Quietly neutral on most matters, bound by codes and mandates that she rarely feels compelled to explain, the sorceress keeps her emotions tightly bottled. Extremely detail-oriented—a trait that has led Merisiel to often call her a "control freak"—Seoni is a careful and meticulous planner who frequently finds herself frustrated by the improvised plans of her more companions. Yet Seoni has stuck by her comrades, a fact that continues to amaze and confuse Valeros, who often wonders loudly (although not altogether unappreciatively) about "the witch and her schemes."

CHARACTERS

MERISIEL

FEMALE ELF ROGUE 14

ALIGN CN INIT +8 SPEED 40 ft.

DEITY Calistria HOMELAND Varisia

ABILITIES

12	STR
26	DEX
12	CON
8	INT
13	WIS
10	CHA

DEFENSE

HP 65

AC 28

touch 18, flat-footed 23

Fort +5, Ref +18, Will +5
(+6 against enchantment)

Defense evasion, trap sense
+4, improved uncanny dodge;
Immune sleep

OFFENSE

Melee +2 keen rapier +20/+15
(1d6+2/15–20)

Ranged mwk dagger +19/+14
(1d4+1/19–20)

Base Atk +10; Grp +11

Special Attack crippling strike, improved
evasion, sneak attack +7d6

SKILLS

Bluff	+13
Disable Device	+14
Hide	+21
Jump	+29
Listen	+12
Move Silently	+21
Open Lock	+17
Search	+14
Sleight of Hand	+17
Spot	+14
Tumble	+25

FEATS

City Born[®], Dodge, Mobility,
Quick Draw, Spring Attack,
Weapon Finesse



Combat Gear potion of cure moderate wounds (2); **Other Gear** +5 shadow silent moves studded leather armor, +2 keen rapier, masterwork daggers (12), amulet of natural armor +2, boots of striding and springing, gloves of Dexterity +6, ring of invisibility, ring of protection +3, rations (3), masterwork thieves' tools, polished jade worth 50 gp, 15 pp

Merisiel's life experiences have taught her to enjoy things to their fullest as they occur, since it's impossible to tell when the good times might end. Just over a century old—still an adolescent as her people count age—she's already grown used to watching her friends grow old. She's open and expressive with her thoughts and emotions, and never hesitates to make them known when things go wrong. Never the sharpest knife in the drawer, Merisiel makes up for this by carrying at least a dozen of them on her person. She hasn't met a problem yet that can't, in one way or another, be solved with things that slice. While she's always on the move and working on her latest batch of plots for easy money, in the end it comes down to being faster than everyone else—either on her feet, or with her beloved blades. She wouldn't have it any other way.

KYRA

FEMALE HUMAN CLERIC 14

ALIGN NG INIT -1 SPEED 20 ft.

DEITY Sarenrae HOMELAND Qadira

ABILITIES

13	STR
8	DEX
14	CON
10	INT
24	WIS
12	CHA

DEFENSE

HP 94

AC 26

touch 11, flat-footed 26

Fort +13, Ref +5, Will +20

OFFENSE

Melee +2 holy scimitar +14/+9 (1d6+3/18–20)

Base Atk +10; Grp +11

Special Attacks greater turning 1/day, turn
undead 8/day (+3, 2d6+15)

Spells Prepared (CL 14th, +4 ranged touch)
7th—destruction (DC 24), quickened d. magic,
sunbeam[®] (DC 24)

6th—b. barrier (DC 23), heal[®] (2), greater d.
magic, heroes' feast

5th—f. strike[®] (DC 22), righteous might, slay
living (DC 22) spell resistance, s. monster V

4th—air walk, d. power (2), fire shield[®], f. of
movement, restoration

3rd—daylight, d. magic (2), prayer (2), remove
disease, searing light[®]

2nd—aid, b. strength, heat metal[®] (DC 19),
resist energy (3), spiritual weapon (2)

1st—bless (2), c. light wounds[®], d. favor (2),
sanctuary (DC 18), s. of faith (2)

0—detect magic (2), light, mending (3)

D domain spell; Domains healing, sun

SKILLS

Concentration	+19
Heal	+22
Knowledge (religion)	+17

FEATS

Combat Casting, Country Born[®], Extra
Turning, Iron Will, Martial Weapon
Proficiency (scimitar), Quickened Spell,
Weapon Focus (scimitar)



Combat Gear holy water (3), scroll of resurrection, wand of cure serious wounds (50 charges), wand of restoration (25 charges); **Other Gear** +4 chainmail, +4 heavy steel shield, +2 holy scimitar, cloak of resistance +2, periapt of Wisdom +6, ring of protection +2, backpack, gold holy symbol (with continual flame) worth 300 gp, rations (4), 42 pp, 5 gp

Possessed of a fierce will, pride in her faith, and skill with the scimitar, Kyra lost her family and home to raiders. Yet where another might be consumed by a thirst for revenge, Kyra has found peace in the Dawnflower and in the belief that, if she can prevent even one death at evil hands, her own losses will not have been in vain. While her faith runs deep, she does not see herself as an evangelist and saves her sermonizing for those with ears to hear her enlightenment—a virtue largely learned after many frustrating philosophical arguments with Merisiel and Valeros.

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Printed in China. PZO9006

US \$19.99

ISBN 978-1-60125-041-4

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