

THE QUEEN OF THE LOST VALLEY



BEASTS & BARBARIANS
Umberto Pignatelli

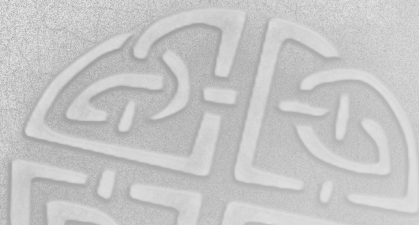


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BEASTS & BARBARIANS



BY UMBERTO PIGNATELLI

A Sword and Sorcery Savage Worlds adventure for a party of four Veteran characters

The pass through the Iron Mountains has been impassable for months due to the bandits of Justaios the Rebel. But this cannot stop an enterprising merchant like Jannah the Red, who has discovered another long-forgotten pass on an ancient map.

Savage barbarians, breath-taking escapes and a strange lost paradise await you, in the deep secluded valleys of the Iron Mountains where no civilized man has set foot in centuries. Are you ready to face the Queen of the Lost Valley and put your hands on her mythic treasure?

This booklet includes a Book of Lore expansion on the Iron Mountains, their savage people and a host of strange forgotten places.

BEASTS BARBARIANS

A Sword and Sorcery Savage Worlds setting

BY UMBERTO PIGNATELLI

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Printed in USA

INTRODUCTION

A Note on Abbreviations

To save space, several abbreviations are used in this book to refer to other books of the *Beasts & Barbarians* line. They are listed below:

GE: Beasts & Barbarians Golden Edition

BOD: Beasts of the Dominions

JCT: Jalizar, City of Thieves

TB: Tattered Banners

Welcome to *The Queen of the Lost Valley*, the sixth adventure of the *Beasts & Barbarians* Savage Words setting.

To play this scenario you need a copy of the core rules of *Savage Worlds* and *GE*. You'll also find *JCT* useful, but it isn't essential.

This scenario is for a party of four Veteran heroes, with some experience (45-50 Experience Points is the optimal level), but it can easily be modified, following the Golden Edition instructions, for parties of different size and experience.

You can play it with characters of your own, or download for free a party of pre-generated heroes from the same store where you found this product, or customize the archetypes found in the *Archetypes of the Dominions* and *Jalizar* free supplement.

If you haven't got gaming terrain at your disposal, you will also find gaming stones and several copies of Burst Templates handy, to represent specific terrain features in fights.

Parts in italics are intended to be read aloud or paraphrased by the Game Master to the players.

Now, if you intend to play this scenario, stop here: the following sections are reserved for the Game Master.

Otherwise, if you plan to run this adventure, go on, and prepare to venture into the savage territories of the Dread Sea!

CHARACTER REQUIREMENTS

This scenario requires that the party has some proficiency in Swimming and Survival, plus someone with a decent skill in Tracking. In the central part of the scenario heroes with good social skills (high Charisma and Persuasion) will have a chance to shine.

As always, combat being common in the Dread Sea Dominions, a couple of decent fighters are more than welcome in the adventure, as are heroes with Healing and Lockpicking.

Having a sorcerer or a Lotusmaster in the group could be useful, likewise a hero with Knowledge (Arcana), but they aren't necessary.

This adventure has some connections with the Disciples of the Black Temple, which appeared in *BOD* as a player character option. The presence of such a hero in the scenario will make it a little easier and allows the GM to create the basis of a storyline involving the terrible Vutal-Ra.

BACKGROUND FOR THE GAME MASTER

There is a valley, deep in the Iron Mountains, completely secluded from the outside world, its very existence ignored by most. It is a weird place: there is a lake in the middle of it, with thermal springs on the bottom granting it a warm, jungle-like climate. Strange beasts and plants, belonging to a forgotten past, dwell there.

But they aren't the strangest things in this place: at the far end of the valley, sculpted into the very rock of the valley's walls, there is an enormous temple. It is the House of Asgorath, a great Kyrosian sorcerer of times of yore. Due to his evil experiments and practices, he was forced to flee from his homeland centuries ago and brought with him a host of slaves and his beloved (and equally wicked) wife Shakti.

Today the temple is inhabited by a tribe of olive-skinned people, the descendants of the Kyrosian slaves who followed their masters into exile. They live in total isolation from the rest of the world, ruled by a caste of priests exerting power in name of Asgorath, who is considered a God, the only one still worshipped by this people.

Asgorath still lives in the depths of the temple, in his forbidden rooms, but he has been immersed in a deep sleep for countless centuries and nobody, apart

from his High Priest, knows that he is real and still living.

This is the way life has been in the Lost Valley for countless centuries, but all that is going to change soon...

PART 1: DEATH IN THE IRON MOUNTAINS

HOT BLOOD...

Now that the northern pass of the Iron Mountains is controlled by the brigands of Justaios (see *TB*, page 15), no merchant dares cross the Iron Mountains to reach Jalizar by land, everybody preferring a longer, but safer, journey by sea. This cuts off a large part of the profits, but it is the safest way. Obviously there are some daring souls who prefer to risk their lives for the sake of gold...

Do you know the saying about redheads being trouble?

Well, it's absolutely true. You should never have trusted Jannah, the gorgeous merchant woman of Syranthia, when she proposed the plan to you. But you did. A red-haired beauty and an enterprising merchant, she found an old map showing a forgotten pass through the Iron Mountains and decided to exploit it.

"If we manage to reach Jalizar with our cargo before the other merchants, the price we'll get will repay us for all the risks... and I will be very grateful to you," she added with a very explicit smile.

These words and the feminine wiles of Jannah were enough to persuade you to join her expedition, with its wagon full of goods, as guards, a decision you now regret.

After five days of harsh marching in the wet snow of the Iron Mountains, you trespassed on the territory of a savage tribe of Nandal barbarians. They tracked you tirelessly and finally managed to corner you, on a rocky ledge on the verge of a deep chasm.

You are surrounded on three sides, with the chasm at your back. The Nandals, painted in war colors, grunt to psych themselves up. You can see the whites of their eyes and they are totally wild. With a last frightening growl they attack, spitting saliva and brandishing stone axes.

You must fight for your life!

The scenario starts with a combat, and a bloody one! The battle area is a rough square, 18" by 18", representing the ledge. The western side is the wall of the mountain, too steep to be climbed, while on the eastern side there is the chasm, very deep, with a cold mountain river running at the bottom.

The northern and southern edges are partially over the chasm (the 9" on the east), while the 9" on the west represents the path from where the heroes (and the Nandals) came.

Place the heroes and the wagon (see below) within 3" of the eastern edge, roughly in the middle.

The Nandals are divided into three groups, each roughly a third of the total number. Place the first group within 3" of the northwestern edge, the second at the same distance from the southwestern and the

third one loosely dispersed within 6" of the western edge. Their goal is to surround the party, blocking any escape route.

The tactic of the barbarians is simple: the middle group charges into melee, while the first and the third pepper the heroes with javelins and slingstones before charging into close combat. Of the three groups, the first one starts already psyched up (see Stone Claw Nandals stats).

The fight ends when all the barbarians are dead or after six rounds (whichever happens first). Go on with the next section.

(M) Stone Claw Nandal Warrior (3 per hero): See page 61.



Jannah (1): See page 63.

TERRAIN AND PROPS

•**Deep Snow:** The ledge is covered by deep, fresh snow, making movement very difficult. Consider the whole area to be Difficult Ground. The Nandals ignore this effect due to their Mountain People Special Ability.

•**The Wagon:** The wagon contains the wares of the small expedition plus all the belongings of the heroes. It is a sturdy wooden box, six feet tall. On the battlefield it is a 2" by 3" area, and is pulled by two strong horses (see SWD page 138 for Riding Horse stats, raise Strength to d12+1). Characters can jump on top of the wagon and be on clear ground (and gain +1 to attack rolls and Parry for being on higher ground). Otherwise they can hide behind it, because it grants Medium Cover and has Toughness 9. The horses being terrified and the snow very deep, a Riding (-2) or Driving roll is necessary to make them move the wagon by 1" plus an extra 1" if they score a raise.

...AND COLD WATER!

The scenario presumes the heroes defeated the Nandals. If they are still locked in melee, reword the following part.

The blood of the enemies stains the snow and the sweat surrounds you in clouds of vapor. You are still standing, alive, but it isn't over yet: from behind a rock, a greater band of Nandals appears, probably the whole clan.

There are several dozen of them, and they are led by a mighty warrior, an ugly monster scarred by fire. For a single moment there is total silence on the ledge, broken only by the whispering of the wind. Then the scarred Nandal shouts and all the clan charges toward you shouting!

The enemies are simply too numerous to be beaten: the only thing the heroes can do is try to put down as many as they can before dying. To keep tension high, ask the players what they want to do, but don't deal Action Cards.

The Nandals are only few steps from you when a deep, grumbling sound is heard, over your heads. Everybody, even the charging brutes, stops and looks upwards. A large bank of snow has detached from the mountainside, probably due to the shouts of the Nandals, and is falling down. You shout, the Nandals shout, but nobody can be heard over the incredible sound of the falling avalanche!

The heroes, Jannah, the wagon and the Nandals are struck by the full force of the snow, and thrown from the ledge, down into the cold water of the river.

Each player must immediately make a Vigor roll or be Shaken by the impact with the cold water. With a critical failure they also suffer a level of Fatigue from thermal

shock. Shaken heroes can act normally in the scene below, but suffer -2 to all actions until they recover or the scene ends.

The river is deep, cold and strong-flowing: you, the Nandals, the horses and the wagon are swept away by its incredible force. You can only try to stay afloat while you hear Jannah shouting over the noise.

The scene below is handled with a variation of the Chase rules. Unless otherwise stated, Swimming is the Chase skill. Ignore complications and Range rules but deal Action Cards as normal. During each round run the miniscene described below.

Flotsam. If a hero is dealt a face card he spots a piece of floating wood which he can grab with an immediate Agility roll that doesn't count as an action. If he does so, he receives +2 to Chase rolls from Round 1 to 4.

Round 1 – Dragged Away! The heroes are moved away by the current. They must make a Chase roll otherwise they suffer a level of Fatigue. In addition, if they don't remove their clothes and armor, at the end of the chase round they will be totally soaked, transforming them into a death trap! From round 2 onwards any Swimming roll suffers a penalty equal to the double of the Armor value of the armor. For example a heroine wearing medium armor (+2) suffers -4 to all Swimming rolls. Taking off armor doesn't require a roll but counts as an action (causing a multi-action penalty to the Chase roll).

Round 2 – Sharp Stones! The heroes are gathering momentum in the water, and what is worse, they are dragged against razor-sharp stones. During this round the characters can decide to use Agility (-2) in

place of Swimming. If they fail the Chase roll they suffer 2d6 damage due to impact with stones. At the end of the round tell the players the roar of water is getting louder and louder...

Round 3 – Oh No, Rapids! The cause of the terrible sound is that the heroes are entering a zone of rapids. During this round the heroes can use Strength (-2) in place of Swimming as the Chase skill. If they fail the roll they suffer a level of Fatigue. If they roll a critical failure, they suffer a Wound.

Round 4 – Into the Mouth of the Earth! Past the rapids the characters may think that the worst is over... nothing could be further from the truth: the river narrows moment by moment and the heroes continue to gather speed. Suddenly the river seems to end, but in truth it is swallowed by an enormous funnel! Heroes must make a Fear check, in case of failure they are so terrorized by the sight of their impending doom that they forget to take a deep breath before being thrown into the darkness (-2 to rolls for the next three rounds), if they score a raise they manage to full their lungs gaining +1 instead.

Round 5-7 – Underground River! The characters are in an underground river, dragged along by the force of water, with absolutely no air to breathe. They must make three Chase rolls, which they can roll on Vigor (-2). Every failure inflicts a level of Fatigue. This can lead to Exhaustion but a further level applies the Drowned status instead of death (see sidebar).

At the end of the seventh round, read the part below.

Suddenly the river emerges into the open again, and you tumble down a tall waterfall,

into a small lake. The water flow there is slower and you finally manage to crawl out of the river.

In one way or another, you have survived.

Every character surviving the chase (not Drowned) should be awarded a Bennie.

DROWNED!

Heroes suffering a third level of Fatigue in water are Drowned. This means their lungs are full of water and they are considered dead, but can be revived, by pushing the water out. This is considered a Dramatic Task, based on Healing. A second hero can help the first by rolling on Healing, Strength or Agility. If the saviors manage to score four successes in six rounds the victim coughs, and opens her eyes, alive. She will be Fatigued for the rest of the day, but apart from this, she will be fine.

The saviors should be rewarded with a Bennie.

Dramatic Expedient. *The Drowned status is meant to create a challenging situation, not to kill a character because a player missed some Swimming rolls. For this reason even if the Dramatic Task fails the hero sudden coughs, spits out water and opens his eyes. He is alive but suffers a level of Fatigue and receives one Bennie less for the next two sessions.*

PART 2: THE LOST VALLEY

A STRANGE PLACE

The heroes can finally assess the situation.

You catch your breath and help Jannah come out of the water.

The girl is fine, maybe even too fine: "Etu's tits!" she curses, red hair falling over her eyes. "The wagon! We lost the damned wagon! I am ruined!" And she starts kicking the mud in frustration.

She is right: the force of the water carried away the wagon with its cargo, including the greater part of your gear and, most importantly, the provisions.

There is no trace of the Nandals either. Probably they were caught in the avalanche and weren't dragged into the river.

You look around. You are in a valley, with very tall mountains all around. They are so steep that even a mountain goat wouldn't be able to climb them. The waterfall where you came from is several dozen yards tall, with water pouring out through a large hole at great pressure. There is no chance of leaving the vale from that direction either.

The water creates a small pool, where you landed, which becomes a river flowing south, into a dense jungle. You hear sounds of birds and the buzzing of insects coming from the plants.

It is hot and damp here, very different from the freezing cold of the mountains.

The valley goes south for several miles, before turning right, so from your current position you cannot understand its real size.

You look at the sky. It is late afternoon; you have at least a couple of hours before dusk.

Lost Gear. To decide what they actually lost ask each player to decide what items were on the wagon. They don't erase these items from the character sheet but mark them with a dot. For now they are missing.

Then assess what they are wearing. If the heroes discarded their armor it is hopelessly lost, if they kept it on it is automatically saved.

Then each player must make a Swimming or Agility (-2) roll (player's choice). He manages to keep one item of what he was wearing plus one per success and raise. Very small items (amulets, rings and similar) count as half an item. Really big items (great axes, bows or two-handed swords) count as two items. Countable items (such as arrows, sling stones etc.) are considered as one item, but only 1d6 projectiles are recovered (the roll can ace).

What to Do Now? The heroes haven't the faintest idea of where they are. As the valley is completely secluded, they haven't heard of it. Sooner or later the party must decide the course of their actions. The most logical thing for the party to do is to follow the stream into the jungle to see if the valley has an exit of some sort.

Below are detailed several encounters the party will have.

IN THE JUNGLE

You walk cautiously under the shadows of the plants. The air is thick and smelly of life, and you are forced to strip off what remains of your winter clothes. Apart from the birds you hear the howl of some beast, but it seems far away even if the walls of the valley make strange echoes. You spot no road made by human hands, but you find a path made by some beast. You hear a faint growl nearby and realise that it is your belly rumbling with hunger.

Being thrown into cold water and beaten against the rocks makes you hungry, if you survive, and the party feels ravenous. They have no provisions, so it is the right

moment for some Survival rolls, which can be cooperative. As per the standard rules with a success they find enough food for a single person (mainly nuts, berries and roots), while with a raise they find food for five persons (the hunter kills a couple of small striped monkeys). Fatigued characters eating properly can make a Vigor roll to recover a level of Fatigue (+2 to the roll if the party starts a fire and cooks something).

A successful roll also tells the character that this jungle is quite similar to the Kyrosian one, if he was ever there, even if plants are somewhat different (due to many years of isolation).

The jungle also offers good opportunities for a Lotusmaster to find some rare specimens (see sidebar).



LOTUS OF THE LOST VALLEY

The jungle of the lost vale enjoys a unique climate, so various types of Lotus grow in it. A Lotusmaster can try to find something useful by spending two hours and making a Lotusmastery roll. Characters with Survival can help him, making a cooperative roll at -2. For each success and raise draw a card from the Action Deck and check the table below. Unless otherwise specified, you find one dose for each success and raise. Note that if there are helpers in the search, the total roll of the leading hero tells you who actually did the finding: an even result means the leading character found the plants, an odd one means that a randomly selected helper did it.

Critical Failure. *If the Lotusmaster or one of the helpers rolls a critical failure he puts himself in danger. He must immediately make a Notice (-4) roll. In the case of failure he falls into a hidden crevasse and suffers 2d8 damage.*

CARD

LOTUS FIND

- | | |
|------|--|
| 2-3 | Striped Orchid. <i>A marvelous flower, striped black and white. Any Lotusmaster knows (Lotusmastery roll) that it is very dangerous. Picking it with bare hands causes the victim to suffer the effect of a Fast poison Power cast with skill d8. A single dose counts as Refined Lotus and if used to cast the poison Power grants +2 to the skill roll.</i> |
| 4-7 | Giscamon's Sword. <i>Small, pointed mushrooms growing only over monkey dung after a full moon. They owe their name to the famous Lotusmaster Giscamon. A single dose, if used in any Lotus concoction, doubles the basic duration.</i> |
| 8-10 | Etu's Navel. <i>Very light moss, growing over the dew-soaked webs of jungle spiders. They are so called because they resemble a</i> |

feminine navel. Each dose counts as Refined Lotus and grants +4 to any healing or succor Power they are used for.

J

Emella's Crown. *A purple flower, growing only in the shadow of a lightning-struck mangrove. It owes its name to the legendary princess of Jalizar. In the grass around the flower PCs can spot (Notice roll) the skeletons of small animals. The Lotus emits a hypnotic smell. Any character within two yards of it must make a Vigor (-2) roll. In the case of failure he will fall into deep sleep for 2d4 hours (the roll can ace). If used to create a potion with a mind controlling trapping (such as puppet), count the basic duration in days instead of in rounds.*

Q

Dancer's Eye. *The roots of this small bush, if cut, reveal an internal red "eye". If consumed raw, a single dose requires the user to make a Vigor roll. In the case of failure the victim suffers one non-soakable Wound, while with a success he gains a Wild Die (or raises it by one die step) on all Agility and Agility-linked rolls. The effect lasts for a day. A single dose if used on any boost trait Power on Agility or an Agility-linked skill grants +4 to the roll.*

K

Rukhra Moss. *This pudding-like, disgusting moss is used as a nest by the small, but dangerous, Rukhra spider which digs a hole inside it (heroes need a Lotusmastery or Survival (-2) roll to know this). Any character picking it up without precautions must make an Agility (-4) roll or be bitten by the spider; if bitten, the character must make a Vigor roll or suffer one level of Fatigue for a day. Rukhra*

Moss has psychotropic effects: it counts as Refined Lotus and any concoction using it also grants the imbibers the effects of the divination Power.

A Umangyu's Tusk. *This waterborne bulb develops a long, thick rush, very similar to an elephant tusk (Umangyu is the elephant god of Kyros, see B&B #2 - Citadel of the Winged Gods). It is found only in streams (a Swimming roll is required to get it). The pulp of the Elephant Tusk can be desiccated to create a special filter, useful to purify Lotus Concoctions. Preparing it requires a Lotusmastery (-4) roll. A properly prepared Elephant Tusk Filter grants the Lotusmaster the effects of the Wizard Edge (reduces the Power Points cost of Powers by one per raise on the arcane skill roll). The item is now considered part of the Lotusmaster's bag of the alchemist and lasts until the bag is lost. Being very rare, only a single tusk is found. It is highly prized by Lotusmasters and can be sold for 500 Moons (double that or even more in Gis).*

Joker Lucky Find! *Draw two other cards, ignoring any other Joker. You find both types of Lotus.*

THERE IS SOMETHING IN THE WATER!

You continue to hike through the jungle for several hours. The river isn't far away and you constantly hear its sound, now reduced to a gentle murmur because the strength of the stream is greatly reduced. The temperature is even hotter, mosquitos and flies torment you. In particular Jannah seems upset.

"Umangyu's dung!" She curses "Not only have I lost all my wealth, but I am doomed to be eaten alive by these vermin!" She vigorously slaps herself, trying to shoo the nasty beasts away.

"I must be the most unfortunate woman in the southern Dominions..." she continues.

You are almost ready to make her stop complaining when the girl shouts: "By Etu's lips! It's my wagon!"

Among the trees you can see the river. In the middle, half submerged in the water, there is the unmistakable shape of Jannah's wagon.

The river in this area is quite placid, but the water is murky because of the muddy bed. On closer inspection the cart is wrecked, it stopped floating on the water because it struck a rock which smashed it, probably ruining much of the cargo, but there may be something still salvageable. One of the horses is still attached to the wagon, dead, its swollen body floating nearby.

Reaching the wagon isn't very difficult. The shallow water is five feet deep, more or less, and so there is no need to swim, the characters can simply wade. But there is hidden danger: the wagon and the dead horse have attracted a dangerous predator: a River Stalker, a very large snake, which is currently eating the carcass from beneath. When the heroes approach the wagon the beast, disturbed, silently swims toward them to defend his meal.

The battleground is the river section, 18" wide and long as you wish (12" should be enough). The wagon (2" by 3") is placed in the middle. The Stalker's tactic is quietly moving (opposed Stealth vs Notice roll to gain the Drop) near the approaching heroes. If it manages to Constrict one

(see creature's description) the victim is also considered to be underwater with no chance to swim (he can hold his breath for half his Vigor die type in rounds before taking a level of Fatigue per round).

River Stalkers are very territorial so the creature fights till death. Once they have killed the monster, if the characters examine the body, with a Survival roll they understand a couple of things: first that it is a huge specimen, very big even by Kyrosian standards; and second that it has long teeth, which should not have, being a constrictor. The River Stalker is in fact one of the fruits of Asgorath's experiments.

The Wagon. After defeating the beast the heroes can finally plunder the wagon. The bad news is that the goods are totally destroyed, as are provisions and any item vulnerable to water (such as books and similar). The good news is that the rest of the party's gear is on the wagon. Players roll a d6 for each item they previously specified being stored on the cart. Unless a 1 is rolled, the item is found and is safe. Characters with the Luck Edge roll d8, d10 if they have the Greater Luck Edge.

Jannah is disheartened again by the discovery: with the destruction of the wares, her dreams of riches are definitely over.

(M) River Stalker (1): The Stalker is a Henchman. See page 63.

TERRAIN AND PROPS

•**Shallow Water:** Heroes wading are considered to be in Difficult Ground and suffer -2 to both attack rolls and Parry. Characters wanting to swim can do so, and move at normal swimming Pace (half Swimming die type in inches), plus in addition they

fight using the lower die of Fighting and Swimming. Shallow water is also dirty, so Notice rolls through it suffer -2.

•**Wagon:** The Wagon is normal ground, but isn't very stable. Anytime a character on it rolls a 1 on the skill die of an Agility-linked skill he falls off into the water nearby.

OLD DEVIL

The sun has almost disappeared beyond the mountains' tops. After finding the wagon you are a little more confident than before. All of you except Jannah, of course. The girl has sunk into a deep melancholy and there is nothing you can do to make her feel better. You should decide what to do for the night.

Let the players do some roleplaying with Jannah, trying to cheer her up. In addition the heroes must decide where to camp. With a successful Survival roll they can find a good clearing not far away from the river, if they fail they must be content with sleeping on the riverside, looking out for snakes and other dangers.

After the camp is made something happens.

You are eating your meager food, when you hear a voice coming from the jungle "You, son of a scurvy dog! Drop your face in the mud and worship me!"

The words are spoken in Kyrosian, using archaic words. If no character speaks that tongue, substitute the phrase above with meaningless words.

Then the voice continues, this time speaking in Syranthian. And then continues, in other languages. The phrases make no sense, but they are almost always curses (see Old Devil Curses sidebar).

If some hero is bold enough to enter the jungle and check the origin of the voice, he has a surprise. On a branch he finds a large white parrot, with a tall plumed crest and an impertinent stare.

"Who is this old devil?" Jannah says seeing it.

The parrot has a foul tongue but he is peaceful, even friendly.

Any character involved with him must make a Reaction roll, with the following modifiers:

Old Devil Reaction Modifiers Table

FACTOR	MODIFIER
Beast Master or Beast Bond Edge	+2/per Edge
Giving him food (double for nuts)	+2
Charisma Modifier	+1/2 Charisma Modifier
Good/Bad role-play	from -4 to +4

If a hero scores a Helpful or better result, Old Devil adopts him. He stays on his shoulder, eats food from his hand and so on. Being a very independent beast, he is an Ally but he is run by the GM.

Old Devil is one of Asgorath's Sons, as the party will discover later, and is very, very old. The beast will reveal his utility on several occasions during the adventure.

After this encounter the night passes without further incident.

(M) Old Devil (1): See page 61.

OLD DEVIL'S CURSES

Here follows some examples of Old Devil's favorite curses. The beast knows dozens of languages and never repeats himself. Be sure he speaks the most salacious taunts at the worst moments possible...

"Head of a rotten rat, vomit your puny soul on the ground!" (Syranthian)

"Fat pale bitch! Even mangy dogs won't mate with you!" (Ivory Savannah Tongue)

"Lords of the Cage, I offer you these slaves for your pleasures!" (Old Keronian)

"Hulian and Hordan dressed in rags! You stink like an Etu priestess after Open Doors night!" (see B&B #2 – Citadel of the Winged Gods for reference).

THE SCOURGE OF ASGORATH

The day after the heroes continue the exploration of the valley.

You continue marching in the jungle and the temperature becomes hotter and damper step by step. You sweat abundantly and the air is permeated by a veil of fog. It smells as bad as the mists of Jalizar.

"It isn't fog." Jannah says mopping her long red hair "Fog is cold. This is more like... vapor. Smelly vapor."

The girl is right. After some moments the jungle opens and you are on the shores of a small, foggy lake. The river you followed till now enters the lake. The disgusting smell and the heat come from the water of the lake which is even bubbling. The water is murky, with a color reminiscent of rotten eggs, but this doesn't prevent marvelous water lilies, large as carts, from growing on the surface.

Let the heroes make a Common Knowledge roll. Characters who have travelled a lot (GM's discretion) roll at +2. With a success they understand that the peculiar climate of the vale depends on thermal springs at the bottom of the lake.

Let the party discuss the discovery and explore the lake a bit, then go on with the following.

You are busy assessing the situation when you hear something in the jungle nearby. A small, dark-skinned man bursts out of the foliage. He is almost naked, apart from a loincloth, and looks absolutely terrified. He stares at you with amazement and stutters in very broken Kyrosian. "It's... It's behind me!"

A couple of heartbeats later a deep roar shakes the ground. The jungle literally explodes in a shower of leaves and branches as a terrible beast jumps out of the thicket. It has the lean black body of a panther but has a single pointy horn, the size of a short sword, on its nose. And it is large as an ox.

"Oh no!" the dark skinned man shouts "The Scourge of Asgorath!"

The nightmare beast roars and pounces on you!

The party must fight against the biggest terror of the valley: the Scourge of Asgorath, one of the biggest, meanest and oldest experiments of Asgorath, the God of the Vale. The fight occurs on the border of the jungle near the shore of the lake. The battlefield is a square 13" by 13". The west side represents the jungle, while the east side is the lake's shore. Both areas are considered Difficult Ground.

Place Rakos, the fugitive, in the middle of the battlefield. He is prone. Heroes who specified helping him must be placed in

contact with him. Place the other heroes in random positions.

For each hero, roll two d6. The first result must be read clockwise from the position of Rakos to determinate their position, and the second one represents the distance in inches from the fugitive. So, if for example 3 and 4 are rolled, the hero is placed at 3 o'clock, 4" away from Rakos.

The Scourge is very powerful and has no natural enemies, so he charges toward the heroes without any caution.



Scourge of Asgorath. See page 63.



Rakos. He is Panicked and weaponless. Each round he can roll on Spirit to recover, but even if he does he only uses Defend or Full Defense options. See page 62.

TERRAIN AND PROPS

• **Almost Fallen Tree:** There is tree hanging dangerously over the battlefield. It is 1" wide and 10" long. It starts in the western side and crosses the battlefield at 45 degrees northward. Characters can walk under it without problems, but if a character is daring enough to climb on it (with an Agility or Climbing (+2) roll) he can use it to jump directly onto the back of the monster (gaining the Drop).

RAKOS

When finally the party manages to kill the monster, go on with the following.

"You killed the Scourge of Asgorath!" the brown-skinned man says, eyes wide open in amazement. Now that you look at him with more attention, you notice that his loincloth is made of silk and there are jewels on his arms

and ankles, even if they are battered and covered in mud.

"What are you? Men or gods?" the man continues.

Then he sees for the first time Jannah and whispers: "Shakti!" and then steps back, eyes in awe.

Any character with knowledge of the Kyrosian tongue recognizes the word: it means "fox" in the language of the Land of Elephants, but maybe it is a common exclamation in the man's bastardized tongue.

The heroes will ask Rakos a lot of questions.

After a moment of stupor and awe, the man quickly recovers his composure and answers as best he can.

Below you'll find some of the commonest questions the party will ask, with answers.

Q: What is this place?

A: This is the Valley of Asgorath, who rules and watches over us, and his Sons, who are his blessed people and live in his House.

Q: Who are you?

A: I am Rakos, son of Karios, and I am a prince among my people. I find myself temporarily sent into the jungle due to some misunderstandings with my older brother, Skoran.

Q: Is there a way to leave this damned valley?

A: No. The mountains are too high and steep to be climbed, and even trying to do so is against the law of Asgorath.

Q: Who is this Asgorath guy?

A: He is our god, the Shaper and Lord. The legends say he brought us, his people, into the Valley to save us from a great calamity. Now he sleeps, deep in his House and the priest rules

in his name. (He speaks in a slightly ironic tone, if the heroes make a Persuasion roll or do some good role-playing he continues). In truth I am convinced that Asgorath is only a legend, or if he existed he is long dead. The priests use his name to keep the people in fear.

Q: You spoke of the House of Asgorath. Is it a city of some type?

A: I don't know what a "city" is. But the House of Asgorath is a safe place where our people live, protected from the dangers of the jungle.

Q: About the beasts. There are very strange beasts there...

A: They are sons of Asgorath too. The Great Shaper used his power to change them. In the past they were peaceful as lambs, but after the god retired to sleep they became wild and savage. The Scourge of Asgorath, which lies dead at your feet, was the most dangerous one. In killing it you did a great deed for my people.

Q: Do you think we can go to the House of Asgorath? How will be received?

Q: Of course you can. You must! Everybody must know that the Scourge is dead! You will be heroes! And... (Notice roll (-4), with a success the character quickly stares at Jannah, but he doesn't continue).

After few moments a daring plan takes form in his mind: exiled from the House of Asgorath by his older brother Skoran, the High Priest of the Valley God, Rakos hopes to use the heroes to seize power.

Rakos insists on cutting the head off the Scourge and bringing it away as trophy, then he is ready to lead the party to the House of Asgorath.

PART 3: IN THE HOUSE OF ASGORATH

ASGORATH

Heroes with an historical or arcane background (Sorcery and Lotusmastery) could have heard the name of Asgorath. These characters are allowed a Knowledge (History) or Knowledge (Arcana) roll with -2 to remember the information below. Characters of Kyrosian origin roll without penalty. Note that every level of knowledge includes the previous one (so if a hero scored a raise he also knows the info on the success entry).

HISTORY RESULTS

Success. *The name Asgorath rings a bell. There was an Asgorath rebellion in Kyrosian history, before the Iron Empire. If you are not wrong it was about 1120 AF, meaning dozens of centuries ago. Asgorath was some sort of rebellious prince or something.*

Raise. *Asgorath was a powerful warlock, the chronicles say, who dared to challenge the authority of the Autarch. A savage civil war started, lasting three years, and in the end Asgorath disappeared from the history books. Some sources say he was executed, others that he fled in exile. Whatever the truth, there is no trace of him or his bloodline in the history of the Dominions after that.*

Two Raises. *Asgorath wasn't a Kyrosian, he was a foreigner and a wicked man. Stories say that the rebellion against the Autarch started because Asgorath used his evil powers to "toy with the powers of life", whatever that means...*

KNOWLEDGE ARCANA RESULTS

Success. *Asgorath is one of the legendary Forbidden Names. Sorcerers of such great power and evil that even the memory of them must be erased. There are also stories*

that he was one of the Alchemists of Gis, stripped of his rank for some unknown fault. He took shelter in Kyros, where he restarted his evil experiments, then disappeared during a rebellion.

Raise. *In times of yore there wasn't such a sharply defined division between Lotusmastery and Sorcery, and true masters of magic often dabbled in both arts. Asgorath was one of the last ones taking this forbidden path.*

Two Raises. *Asgorath isn't a true Kyrosian name: its root is Keronian and means "Master of Shapes". Probably more a self-imposed title. Asgorath is said to have visited Caldeia where he dabbled with ancient sorcery and learned a form of forbidden magic.*

BONUS FOR DISCIPLES OF THE BLACK TEMPLE

If a player character is a Disciple or a Renegade of the Black Temple (see BOD page 106) he knows additional information if he scores at least a success on the Knowledge (Arcana) roll.

Asgorath was a very old disciple of Vutal-Ra, the Lord of the Black Temple. He sat at his feet learning his art. Then he betrayed the Lord and fled, stealing something very important from him (the character doesn't know what). Several centuries passed but Vutal-Ra never forgets: even today, someone bringing the head of Asgorath to the Black Temple will be rewarded behind imagination...

POWER STRUGGLE

Rakos leads the party through the jungle, northward. He is a talkative man, and, despite the language barrier he manages to communicate quite well: he is the type of man who loves hearing the sound of his own voice.

You march till late afternoon, always following the river's course. Suddenly the

jungle ends and you discover you have reached the far end of the valley. In front of you there is a breathtaking vista: carved into the very rock of the mountain, there is a massive stone portal, leading directly into the heart of the mountain. Two enormous statues, their features too battered by weather to be recognizable, stand on the sides of a great stone gate.

"Behold!" Rakos say with a showy gesture "The Temple of Asgorath, home of his Sons."

The entrance is on top of a gentle slope, which is covered by intensively farmed terraces. A narrow path, snaking among the fields, leads to the stone gate. You notice the river you followed till now disappears in a sort of large stone grate at the base of the terraces, becoming subterranean again.

The fields, given the late hour, are deserted, and only a couple of guards are watching the gate. Before entering Rakos asks the heroes to show the head of the Scourge in plain sight, and at the same time he asks Jannah to put a hood on her head, to cover the mane of red hair.

"This is very rare among our people, and could cause some turmoil."

AT THE GATE

Rakos leads you to the gate, marching with a bold attitude. Now that you are nearer, you notice that it is made entirely of black stone and is more than five yards tall. The guards, dressed in loincloths similar to Rakos' and adorned with plumes, point their spears against your friend.

"You! How you dare to show your face at the holy doors of the House of Asgorath?" they spit.

This if a good moment for the heroes to do some role-play. Showy and arrogant behavior is recommended in this case. But it is Rakos who has the last word.

"Step aside and let pass the gods come from the waterfall, the defeaters of the Scourge of Asgorath!" He says.

The guards stare wild-eyed at the greasy head of the giant panther you killed and, trembling, move away, lowering their spears. You can enter freely into a vast courtyard, illuminated by torches. A couple of large statues look upon you from the top of a flight of steps.

Soon a crowd of the Sons of Asgorath gathers, staring at you in a stupor. They are as brown-skinned as Rakos, with morbid features and brown eyes, and are lightly-dressed.

"Kyrosians!" Jannah says under her hood "They look like Kyrosians!"

These people must have never seen people like you, with such exotic skin colors, and some even try to touch your garments.

"People of Asgorath!" Rakos thunders in front of the crowd "These mighty heroes are sent from our god: they freed us from the Scourge!" and with a flamboyant gesture, he shows the severed head of the monster to the crowd.

The Sons of Asgorath are in deep amazement, and some of them fall on their knees in awe, thinking of their brothers and sisters, sons and fathers killed over the past centuries by this terrible beast.

At this point a sharp voice, hard as whip crack, is heard.

"You! How dare you enter the House of Asgorath again?" Speaking is a tall, ascetic man with a pointed beard, dressed in heavy

robes and holding a staff. A priest of some type, and he is surrounded by a number of acolytes.

"He is Skoran, High Priest of Asgorath, and my older brother. He hates me." Rakos whispers.

"Not only did you break your exile by coming into the House of Asgorath again, but you and your pale followers committed a terrible sin, killing His most favored son. Guards – take them!"

At this order the guards and Skoran's hirelings step toward you, drawing weapons!

Let the players decide how to react and let them do some role-play, but before blood is shed, Rakos reveals his ace in the hole.

"Stop!" he shouts "Asgorath sent these men! And he didn't send them alone!"

With a quick gesture he removes the hood from Jannah's head, showing her red mane to the crowd.

"Bow in front of Shakti reborn, the Queen of our god!"

Rakos points a finger toward one of the statues in the middle of the courtyard: she has an unmistakable similarity to Jannah, including flashy red hair.

The people of Asgorath, including the guards, bow in front of the girl.

Only you, Rakos and Skoran are standing up, staring at each other with hate.

THE CHAMPION OF ASGORATH

Skoran can be surprised, but he recovers quickly. He narrows his eyes, like a snake ready to strike and continues.

"You bring us great news, Rakos," he purrs, "But they must be tested."

"If these strangers are envoys of our god, they must show their valor. Bring them all to the Hall of the Bronze Door!"

Let the heroes make a Notice roll. With a success they see a muscular, veiled figure approaching Skoran, whispering some words in his ear, and sneaking away. He is Gwaat, Skoran's servant, who is going to prepare the braziers (see below). Gwaat can be used as a replacement final enemy of the scenario if the heroes kill Skoran in the next cene (see sidebar), otherwise he will back off the High Priest for the remainder of the scenario.

Driven by the crowd and surrounded by the guards, you are brought to a vast hall in the depths of the temple. The corridors are lit by torches and it is clear that the Sons of Asgorath live in the temple as if it were a city. You understand why it is called the Hall of the Bronze Door: a massive gate made of golden metal shines on the opposite side of the room. It is engraved with the shapes of large snakes, which have a vaguely hypnotic effect. The shadows are dissipated by some bulky, snake-shaped braziers emanating a golden light and an intense odor.

Skoran steps in front of the gate, and then, facing the crowd and the heroes, he speaks.

"So, strangers, who of you will test his strength against the Champion of Asgorath?"



The party must choose one of their members (the best fighter is a wise choice) to fight against the Champion.

The other players begin as spectators, but they'll surely have plenty to do to help him.

When the hero is chosen (from this moment on he is referred as the Contender), the crowd murmurs and leaves a large space in front of the door for the fighters.

"Champion of Asgorath!" Skorán thunders, raising the staff in front of the door. "Come to fight the strangers!"

The Bronze Door slowly opens. It is dark and smoky on the other side and you struggle to see anything in it. Then you spot it: first it is only a vague shape, which becomes quickly clear. It is a warrior, covered in armor of shimmering bronze and armed with a strangely shaped spear. Showing an amazing turn of speed for the bulk he is wearing, the Champion bursts out of the door, charging toward you (point at the Contender)!

The zone where the two fighters engage is a rough square 9" by 9", with the Bronze Door (3" wide) placed in the middle of the northern side, but the hall is much bigger (24" by 36"). On each corner of the square there is one of the Snake Braziers (see below). A fifth brazier, the dark one, is placed in the dark room beyond the Bronze Door, 3" away from the main combat area. Only the Champion and the Contender begin the scene in the fighting square. Skorán is placed 3" away from the western side. The other characters are randomly placed within 6" from the fighting square, and at least 6" away from Skorán.

Finally, place the guards, equally divided, within 3" of each brazier (excluding the fifth one). These guards are close followers of the High Priest and don't represent the total of all guards present in the hall. The other soldiers stay neutral for now. Also Rakos, being an opportunist, stays neutral in this scene.

Skorán is totally focused on keeping the Champion alive (see below) so he doesn't respond to any attacks, he only defends himself. The guards do the same: they do nothing unless the braziers are attacked, in this case they intervene to protect them.

If the party directly attacks the High Priest, it triggers the *Guards! Guards!* Event.

The Champion of Asgorath fights the Contender without a word, and it is immediately clear that there is something strange about him: he is unnaturally strong and fast and doesn't suffer from wounds. In fact the Champion is only an illusion, created by the mesmeric powers of Skorán and magnified by the effect of the Lotus burning in the braziers. The party can help their friend in the fight by distracting the High Priest and overthrowing the braziers.

The fight ends immediately when the Champion of Asgorath is defeated. Even if the round is not complete, stop it and go to the next scene.



Champion of Asgorath. See page 59.



Skorán, High Priest of Asgorath. See page 64.

(M) Soldier of Asgorath (2 per hero). They are the close followers of Skorán. See page 64.

TERRAIN, PROPS AND EVENTS

• **Black Brazier in the Dark Room:** There is a black brazier, full of strong Lotus, concealed in the dark area beyond the Bronze Door. It is 3" away from the door and can be spotted with a Notice roll. It has Toughness 4 and given its pot-shape must be smashed. Destroying it is enough to exploit one of the weaknesses of the Champion of Asgorath (see page 59).

• **"Guards! Guards!":** If the characters attack Skorán (see below) this causes additional guards to intervene. Two more Soldiers of Asgorath per hero join the fight. They are scattered among the crowd, and are placed 2d6" away from the fighting area.

• **Old Devil:** If the beast is with the party, in the first round he flies high over the ceiling (remove him from the battleground), then in the second round he flies in a circle around a brazier (to point it out to the party), then during the fourth round he tries to distract Skorán flying around him and shouting foul courses (counts as Taunt).

• **Skorán's Concentration:** The High Priest is keeping his concentration to maintain the special spell creating the Champion. Concentration is broken as per the normal disruption rules (see SWD page 103). If the heroes manage to do this with a Trick or a Test of Will this causes no retribution, if they physically attack him this causes the guards to intervene (see "Guards! Guards!").

• **Snake Braziers:** Each brazier is 1" by 1", shaped like a coiled snake with an open mouth. It is full of smoking, intoxicating Lotus. Any character within 1" of it must make a Vigor roll or be Shaken. Each Brazier has Toughness 5 and can be disabled by smashing it or overturning it with an Agility roll. Two disabled braziers are enough to exploit one of the weaknesses

of the Champion of Asgorath (see page 59).

• **The Crowd:** The whole room is filled by the crowd of commoners watching the fight. They don't intervene in any manner, but hinder the scene. All the hall, apart from the fighting square and 3" around it, is considered Difficult Ground due to the spectators.

DIVERGENT PATH: SKORÁN KILLED

The adventure plot supposes that the party defeats the Champion of Asgorath without killing the High Priest, but it is very likely, especially with action-oriented players, that Skorán is killed.

In this case several things happen:

1) Rakos immediately runs to the body of the brother, stealing the treasure room key and the Ring of Asgorath. Then he declares that Skorán died because he offended the God of the Valley. He declares Jannah Queen of Asgorath.

2) Gwaat, Skorán's twisted servant, is seen escaping quickly. Rakos orders the guards to chase him, but the hunchback knows the secret passages of the House too well and disappears. He is the one kidnapping Jannah in the "A Scream in the Night" scene and from this moment on he becomes a Wild Card.

THE QUEEN OF ASGORATH

The Champion disappears in puff of smoke, leaving a smell of corruption and dead leaves in the air. The crowd is astonished, and even Skorán is deeply impressed.

Rakos, quick as a snake, exploits the moment to directly address the people.

"Sons of Asgorath! The trial is ended, the Champion is defeated and we have a new queen!"

Then, picking up a sword from the ground, he raises it and shouts "Hail Shakti, Queen of Asgorath!"

"Hail Shakti, queen of Asgorath!" the crowd echoes, raising its arms.

Only Skoran and his followers stay silent. The people stare at you and them.

Then, after a moment, the High Priest kneels and surrenders. "Hail Shakti, Queen of Asgorath!"

At these words, the hall explodes in loud cries of joy.

Amazed, Jannah stares at her new subjects!

The Contender (or whoever caused the destruction of the Champion) must be rewarded with a Bennie.

The queen is quickly surrounded by maids, who take her away. The heroes are also gently taken away by other servants: they are undressed, their dirty garments are removed, and they are taken to hot baths where beautiful girls clean their bodies, cure their wounds and massage their aching muscles with perfumed oils, plus attending to their other personal needs. Finally, they are given new, clean garments (mainly silken tunics, loincloths and bikinis).

In game terms the party is cured of all their Wounds and recover a level of Fatigue.

There is a large banquet scheduled for the evening, so the party can use the time chatting with the servants, and resting a

little bit more (so recovering another level of Fatigue and all their Power Points).

During this time Rakos cannot be found anywhere: he is busy making contacts with his old followers, preparing his plans for the night. Also Skoran is missing: he is deep in the secret passages of the House making his own plots.

When the heroes are ready, go on with the next scene.

THE BANQUET

The banquet hall of Asgorath is a large one, with two roaring fireplaces. It's choked with people, mostly notables of the city, who stares at you with a vast array of feelings on their faces: respect and veneration in some cases, suspicion, fear and even open hate in others.

Rakos has already arrived. The young prince of Asgorath seems to have taken back his power: he is neatly dressed and surrounded by a group of men, clearly his followers. He waves at you expansively and makes you seat near him.

On the opposite side of the room Skoran sits, surrounded by his acolytes, brooding at you with a deep scowl.

"Take care" Rakos whispers "My brother isn't known to pardon offenses easily, and beating his Champion offended him pretty well."

Rakos is going to continue speaking, but he is interrupted: a gong sounds, and the Queen of Asgorath makes her entrance into the hall.

You knew that Jannah was pretty, but the Queen of Asgorath is some sight: her hair, cleaned and brushed, is a flaming mane, and her luscious figure is gorgeous in a gold and silver bikini. A light silver crown, made to

resemble a coiled snake, rests on her head. She is the embodiment of royal beauty.

You are open-mouthed, and you aren't the sole one: everybody, including the High Priest of Asgorath, bows in front of Shakti, with true veneration in their eyes.

The queen comports herself very well: she gently nods toward her people while maintaining her royal composure. The brash merchant girl you knew seems to have been replaced by a true queen.

You are starting to think she is too taken by her role to remember you, but when nobody is looking, she winks at you.

The banquet starts with the various notables paying their respects to the queen, and then it diffuses into a festive occasion. This is mostly a role-playing situation, with the players interacting with the various notables and persons. To make the situation more interesting, each player should draw a card from the Action Deck and be involved in the appropriate mini-scene detailed below. Otherwise, the GM can freely use them to create impromptu situations. The mini-scenes can require some skill rolls, remember to apply a -4 to +4 modifier to social activities depending on the role-play of the players. If two players pick the same card, it means they are involved in the same situation. After each player has run his scene, go on with the next part.

The events are resolved in initiative order.

BANQUET EVENTS TABLE

Deuce – Ran the Provoker. This handsome, muscular man is seeking a way to make himself a name. He approaches a hero, first in an amicable way, then he provokes him (Taunt d8). If the hero loses the Test of Will, the character is forced to attack the provoker (attack at -2 if Ran scored a raise). Ran is quick to grab a long spit (Str+d6, Improvised Weapon) and use it to stab the hero. There is another spit nearby that the hero can take to defend himself. If the fight goes on for more than three rounds the guards intervene. Use the Soldier of Asgorath stats for Rakos, raising Fighting to d8 and adding the Quick Draw Edge. In addition, Ran being a real snake, any wound inflicted by him is healed at -2.

Three – Narlok the Drunken Widower.

The character has the misfortune to seat near Narlok, a minor noble who gets drunk at the beginning of every feast and then starts telling a sob story about his wife Ana who got lost in the lower levels of the House, never to be seen again. An old woman sitting nearby the hero whispers to him that everybody knows that Narlok's wife escaped into the jungle with her lover. In truth Narlok's story is both true and useful: his wife was caught by some evil creature lurking in the shady halls under the House. If the hero pays heed to him through his very long sobs, he ends by saying that his wife died "for the spider on the wall". He becomes so loud and agitated that other guests have to pick him up and take him away from the banquet. Narlok is speaking the truth. If during the "In the Forbidden Rooms" scene, the heroes end up near Shakti's Tomb (Queen entry), they roll with +4 to discover the secret door because of this clue.

Four – A Shadow Among the Pillars.

Let the hero make a Notice (-2) roll. On a success he spots a veiled shadow among the dark colonnades at the end of the banquet hall, which is spying on him. If the character tries to get him, the veiled one goes away. He is Gwaat, Skoran's servant. The character can try to follow him; in this case Gwaat awaits him behind a corner, throws a dagger at him (Throwing d8, Notice roll to avoid suffering the Drop) and then disappears down a dark corridor, leaving a musty scent (which can be a hint later in the scenario).

Five- Eight – Gossipers. The hero is sitting among courtiers, both male and female. Chatting with them, and making a Persuasion roll, he can gather some useful gossip. Roll a die and check the table below once for each success and raise. The person telling the gossip is briefly described in parenthesis.

d6

Gossip

- 1 "Rakos tried to steal the treasure of Asgorath. This is the reason for his banishment. He didn't tell you about the treasure? Really?" (*Slightly drunken courtier*)
- 2 "Skoran, the High Priest, is a fanatic, but his word can be trusted." (*Scarred warrior who drinks with moderation*)
- 3 "There are rumours of a passage leading outside the valley, but nobody has ever found it." (*Master of the farmers, a boisterous man*)
- 4 "Rakos is a respectful and trustworthy fellow, regardless of what the High Priest says. Oh, what I'd do to be his wife!" (*Pretty young lady with big eyes*)
- 5 "Skoran's servant, Gwaat, is always veiled because he is horribly

deformed. Rumours say that he is the illegitimate son of the High Priest and that his father used Asgorath's magic on him, twisting him forever." (*Fat, bearded courtier, who eats a lot*)

- 6 "Ever tried burning oil of Moon Fruits in a brazier? It is marvelous what it can do for your sleep and it smells so good..." (*Old noblewoman with not much in the attic*)

Nine – Tarro the Clumsy Servant.

This somewhat fatty serving man is one of the most ham-fisted people the party has ever seen and he is assigned to serve the chosen hero, making a real mess. First he spills wine over the hero (making him lose 1 point of Charisma for the whole scene), then he trips and falls with the face in the character's plate and third, he trips while holding a large cup full of hot soup. In the last case the hero must do an Agility roll, or suffer 2d4 damage from serious burning. After this last act of clumsiness, Rakos intervenes and order the guards to have him whipped. Tarro begs the hero to be spared. If the hero feels merciful and spares him, in the "Sleeping on Golden Pillows" scene Tarro, overhearing Rakos preparing his men for a murderous assault, goes bumping to the treasure room door to wake up the party (sparing them the surprise).

Ten – Dances, Music and Poetry.

During the meal there are music and dances. One of the heroes is asked to dance or (player's choice), sing a song of his homeland, or declare some verses. In both cases the People of Asgorath watch with curiosity and amazement at his performance. Dancing is made with an Agility roll, while singing is performed with a Smarts roll and poetry with Persuasion (all rolls at -2). For the last two, the Dancing Witch

or Poet Edges grant +2 to the roll. In the case of success the whole party receives +1 Charisma, while with a raise the hero is also rewarded with a Bennie.

Jack – “Drink with Me!” The hero is approached by a group of men, led by a pot-bellied fellow with a pointy golden beard and a large amphora full of strong red wine. He is Iarus, Master Brewer of the House. He challenges the adventurer to outdrink him. Refusing causes the hero to immediately lose a Bennie and be considered a sissy. If the hero accepts both Iarus (Vigor d8) and the character make a Vigor roll, on a failure they suffer a level of Fatigue, two with a critical failure. Heroes with Obese, Brawny or Habit (Alcohol) receive +2 to the roll. Then they make another roll at -1, then another one at -2 and so on, each time increasing the penalty by -1 up to a maximum of -6. The first character to be Incapacitated is drunk under the table. If the hero wins, he receives +1 Toughness and +1 to Soak rolls till the end of the night. Fatigue taken in this way is restored at the rate of one per scene (an Incapacitated hero wakes up Exhausted, during the Sleeping on Golden Pillows scene).

Queen – Tamala the Lusty Noblewoman. One of the adventurers catches the attention of Tamala, a woman of ripe beauty, scantily dressed, but with a veiled face. Tamala is looking for a romantic companion (of either sex!) for the night and if the hero flexes his muscles (Persuasion roll) she will admit him to her alcove during nighttime. If the card is black, Tamala currently has a lover, Gianza, who doesn't take well to the new infatuation of her woman. In this case the roll is an opposed one, against Gianza's Persuasion (d6). If he rolls 1 on the skill die he loses his temper, draws a dagger

and tries to stab the hero (use Soldier of Asgorath stats).

Being in Tamala's alcove assures a *very* interesting night, but also means that during the Sleeping on Golden Pillows scene (see page 30), the hero is away, and arrives on the scene after a while, on the heels of the attackers, with an extra Bennie due to Tamala's kisses.

King – “Tell the Tale!” The character is asked to tell of the battle against the Scourge of Asgorath to entertain the audience. He must make a Persuasion (-2) roll. With a success the tale is well received, for the remainder of the adventure the hero gains +2 Charisma towards the people of Asgorath. If he scores a raise, he is considered a fearsome warrior, receiving the Iron Will Edge till the end of the adventure (only toward the people of Asgorath). If he rolls a critical failure, the character is ridiculed and suffers -2 to Tests of Will, while the rest of the party suffers -1 Charisma.

Ace – “Mind Your Manners”. The character is the first to be served. The servants bring him a plate-sized circular mussel, with stuffed onions as a side dish. It is a delicacy of the valley, but also a gruesome sight: the interior of the mussel resembles a mix of innards and cerebral matter, and, to make things worse, it must be eaten with bare hands.

The character must make a Vigor roll to eat the stuff, if he has the Brave Edge he rolls at +2, the same if he is a Tricarnian (they eat similar things), but suffers -2 with the Yellow or Damsel in Distress Hindrances. With a success he manages to eat the food without wincing (and all the other party members gain +1 Charisma for the remainder of the scene), with a

raise he even asks for another one (gaining a Bennie in addition to the success effect), while with a failure he cannot manage to eat it, causing embarrassment to the other party members (-1 to the party Charisma for the scene). In the case of a critical failure he throws up (-2 to party's Charisma and a level of Fatigue).

Joker – Double Event. Draw two cards and try to combine the events.

THE TREASURE OF ASGORATH

At the end of the feast Rakos stands up and speaks publically to the queen. The scene as written supposes the High Priest is still alive, if he isn't change it accordingly ((another nobleman, Iarus the Master Brewer being the most likely holds the treasure room key).

Rakos rises to his feet and the noise in the banquet room ends.

"My queen," the young nobleman says "I hope you enjoyed the welcome of your people, after so many years of absence. Now, I am sure you want to see what is yours, don't you?"

Jannah curtly nods with a puzzled expression on her pretty face.

"I am speaking of the treasure of your husband! The treasure of Asgorath! The High Priest Skorán and his predecessors guarded it closely."

"Didn't you, my beloved brother?" Rakos says, with a cunning smile.

The priest stiffens his lips, but cannot avoid obliging.



"Of course, my queen. I hold the keys to the treasure room. Do you want to inspect it now?"

"Yes!" Jannah says, a big smile on her face ruining her composure. "Ehm... I mean... This is my will, if you please."

Then Jannah, Rakos and you leave the banquet room, led by the High Priest into the depths of the House of Asgorath.

During the trip Skorán is absolutely silent, so is his brother. The treasure room is near the queen's personal quarters, and is protected by a sturdy door. Skorán opens it with a key and lets the others enter.

The treasure room is marvelous: golden vases full of jewels, gems, precious silks, and engraved ivory pieces lie all around. Jannah looks at it wild eyed, and you can see the same light of greed shimmering in Rakos' eyes.

"Is my queen satisfied?" Skorán says, with a deep bow.

"Yes, I am." Jannah says, in a dreamy voice.

"Then I ask permission to retire," The High Priest answers.

"First hand us the key," Rakos says.

Without a word, Skorán gives the key of the room to Jannah and goes away.

When you are alone, Jannah drops her regal mask and looks around, eyes full of greed and wonder. "Rich! We are rich!" she says and dips her hand in a pile of gold pieces.

Jannah is totally absorbed in the wealth, but she isn't stupid. She plans to take all these riches with her and leave the valley, with the heroes' help of course. But this

isn't a plan that can be accomplished tonight.

"I think that the treasures will be safe, with you guarding them. Take this lantern and this bottle of wine. They'll help you pass the night," Rakos says.

"I suggest you lock yourselves inside," he adds, giving you Skorán's key. "I am pretty sure the High Priest won't try anything tonight, but it is better to stay on the safe side."

Then, with a last bow, he bids you a good night and goes away.

If the heroes ask Rakos to join them in the guard, he refuses.

"I have three wives, and I haven't seen them in days. I am pretty sure they missed me a lot," he smirks.

In truth Rakos has other, nastier plans tonight than visiting his women.

LANTERNS, TRAITORS AND SCREAMS

Jannah sleeps in a room nearby, with her handmaidens, but she doesn't want to leave the treasure unguarded, so she asks the party to sleep in the treasure room. On the other hand she also doesn't feel very safe in the royal apartments, so she also asks the heroes to stay with her. The most logical thing to do is splitting the party: the treasure room and the queen's quarters are quite close together.

In Jannah's room there are also two handmaidens, Ara and Mara, pretty girls who will be very happy to attend any need the mighty champions of their newfound queen may have...

A Divided Party. A hero could be busy with Tamala (see the Banquet scene, Queen entry, on page 27).

This means that the party is probably split even more. Ask every player where his character is before going on, this is important because this night isn't going to be a peaceful one: two plots are going to unravel, both against the heroes.

SLEEPING ON GOLDEN PILLOWS

The heroes guarding the queen can sleep on couches or comfortable chairs, while adventurers sleeping in the treasure room must improvise a makeshift bed somewhere, but there are plenty of pillows in the queen's quarters, so this won't be a problem. In addition they can pass the time having a closer look at the treasure (see sidebar The Treasure).

The scene below supposes the party posts sentinels, otherwise change it accordingly.

Now the long night begins. The heroes in the queen's quarters sleep well, while those in the treasure room are in grave danger.

Rakos gave them two items: a bottle of good wine and a lantern. The wine is perfectly good and probably the thing the players will concentrate on. The real threat is in the lantern. It burns a short but fat candle, which was cut in half, dug out with a spoon, and its insides stuffed with desiccated Moon Fruits of Celarna and sealed with hot wax.

Moon Fruits are a particular type of Lotus causing slumber. The candle is long enough to burn harmlessly till midnight then it will release its obnoxious drug.

Candle Inspection. Characters can detect the poison by closely inspecting the candle and making a Notice (-2) or Lotusmastery roll. Jalizaran Lotusmasters having Powers with the candle trapping (see *JCT* page 81) automatically detect the candle was tampered with. If the adventurers discover the trap in the candle in time they can ignore the Moon Fruits' effects below.

Tarro the Clumsy Servant. If a character in the banquet played the Tarro's event and spared the poor guy the whipping, before midnight someone knocks on the door. He is Tarro, with interesting news.

"Good master," Tarro starts, nervously playing with his ham-fisted hands, "I was busy cleaning the banquet hall some moments ago, and I overheard a conversation. Prince Rakos was speaking to a group of other men, his close followers. He said you must be removed before you acquire too much power. And this must be done tonight."

"They had swords and daggers, my lord," he adds uncomfortably.

Tarro's intervention is very useful: the heroes won't be surprised by Rakos now, and they must make one less Vigor roll due to the Moon Fruits Smoke, because they are alert now.

Old Devil. The parrot is smaller than the heroes, so he'll suffer the effect of the narcotic candle first. Only the character adopted by Old Devil can make a Notice (-2) roll. With a success they see the beast is on the ground sleeping. This gives them +2 to detect the sweet scent below.

Sweet Scent. After midnight, let any hero on guard duty make a Notice (-4) roll (+2 if they spoke with the lunatic old

lady during the banquet, see page 26, +2 if they spot Old Devil sleeping). With a success they smell a faint scent from the candle and quickly discover the threat, they make one less roll for Moon Fruits Smoke below.

Moon Fruits Smoke. If the heroes don't discover the trap in the candle, they inhale the fumes, and must make three Vigor (-2) rolls. For each failure they suffer a level of Fatigue, representing being drugged. If they are Incapacitated, they are totally asleep when Rakos attacks (see below). This Fatigue is naturally recovered after the combat at the rate of one level per hour, or it can be negated by a successful Healing roll (each success and raise remove a level).

After dealing with the candle's effects the treacherous attack occurs. Rakos gave the heroes the key of the treasure room because he made a copy of it long ago (this being one of the causes for his banishment).

TRAITOROUS ATTACK

The scene below supposes the heroes aren't aware of Rakos' plans. If Tarro alerted them they have time to barricade themselves inside, using furniture, and devise a proper plan.

Heroes not totally asleep (not Incapacitated) must make a Notice roll (remember to apply Fatigue modifiers).

If at least one of them manages the roll read the following.

You are dozing, surrounded by the treasure of Asgorath, when you hear a muffled clicking sound. The door of the treasure room you locked is opening! A man with a flashing blade in his hand peers inside, and you can

see a number of others in the corridor behind him.

"Now! Kill them all!" a voice shouts from the corridor. You recognize it! It is Rakos, the treacherous dog!

A savage battle is incoming! The combat area is a corridor, 2" wide and 18" long, going from north to south. On the eastern wall, 6" from north, there is a 1" by 1" door, leading to the treasure room. On the western wall, 6" from the south, are the queen's quarters.

The treasure room is a square 9" by 9" with no other exit apart from the door leading to the corridor, while the queen's quarters are quite complex, but only the antechamber, where the heroes guarding Jannah are sleeping, is considered: it is a 9" by 9" room, connected by doors to the other rooms of the royal apartments.

Rakos and his murderous friends are placed in front of the treasure room, ready to go inside and slaughter everyone. Being quite numerous, they fill the corridor. Rakos, the coward, is placed in the middle of the group, and won't cross blades with the group (he has seen what they can do); he will limit himself to encouraging his men (see below).

Place the heroes in the treasure room or in the queen's quarters according to where they decided to stay. If a hero is staying with Tamala (see page 27) he will arrive after 1d3+1 rounds, from behind the attackers, gaining the Drop.

During the first round deal Action Cards only to the Rakos and his men and to any hero awake in the treasure room. From the second round on, characters asleep automatically wake up, apart from the ones In-



capacitated by the smoke, who must make a Vigor (-4) roll each round to wake up, Exhausted.

The battle ends when two thirds of the opponents are defeated. At this point Rakos and the other survivors escape into the dark corridors of the House of Asgorath. Before the adventurers can decide to chase them, go on with "A Scream in the Night".

The heroes' bad night is only beginning...

In the unlucky case that the party is defeated, the adventure isn't automatically ended, read the "Defeated by Rakos!" sidebar.

(M) Rakos' Follower (3 per hero). Use the Soldier of Asgorath stats. See page 64.

(M) Rakos. See page 62.

TERRAIN, PROPS AND EVENTS

• **Treasure Room Furniture:** The treasure room contains a couple of armoires (1" by 2" on the tabletop and Toughness 7), which can be pushed against the front door to bar it (add +2 to the door Toughness).

• **The Treasure in Combat:** The central 4" by 4" area contains the treasure. It is considered Difficult ground, and any hero near it can freely grab a prop to gain +2 to Tricks or pick up an assorted jewel or heavy object to throw (Damage: Str+d4, Range: 3/6/12, -1 to Throwing rolls).

• **Doors:** The door of the treasure room is very sturdy (Toughness: 9), while the one of the queen's quarters is average (Toughness: 7). As the doors are only 1" wide one a single man can keep the opponents at bay, so the attackers will make Push attacks to move away any hero directly guarding the treasure room door. Up to three attackers

can make cooperative rolls to push away a guarding hero.

• **Rakos' Exhortation:** Rakos is a coward at heart but knows how to motivate men. In addition to his Command Edge, as an action he can make a Persuasion roll. For each success and raise all allies within his command radius gain +1 to his attack rolls.

• **Rakos' Escape:** Rakos should not die in this scene. Keep one of his Bennies aside. Whenever the situation is getting bad, he can spend it (as if he were On Hold) to run away down the corridor at maximum running Pace. As partial compensation for the escape of the opponent, the nearest hero receives a Bennie.

A SCREAM IN THE NIGHT

The last of the opponents falls, with a scream of pain, while the others disappear into the dark corridors of the palace like scared dogs. In the complex, the men of Asgorath are better at running than at fighting. You catch your breath and wipe the blood from your blade on the body of one of the fallen. That son of a hundred fathers Rakos! When you get your hands on him, he'll regret his treason.

You are mulling murderous thoughts, when suddenly a scream of rage and terror is heard. It comes from the queen's apartment! You rush inside as if pursued by a hundred demons and what you see freezes your heart. One of the two handmaidens, Mara, lies on the floor, her neck twisted into an unnatural position. Her sister, Ara, weeps quietly nearby. The room is a mess, as if a savage fight happened in it during the few moments you were busy fighting Rakos' men.

"It... it came from behind a curtain." The poor girl stutters, pointing a wall decorated by a heavy tapestry.

"Mara tried to protect the Queen... but it killed her."

The heroes will probably ask the shocked girl who that “it” and “she” are, and more important, where is Jannah.

“Gwaat, the twisted son of Skoran, took the queen. He took her to the Forbidden Rooms: she’ll never come back! My sister sacrificed her life for nothing!” And then she bursts into tears.

If the party examines the wall behind the curtain carefully, they find a cleverly concealed secret door. With some effort it opens, revealing a dark corridor.

If the heroes want to see their friend again, they must follow the trail while it is warm.

You are deciding what to do when you hear shouts coming from the rest of the House.

“Traitors! Traitors! They are killing our queen! They must die!”

You recognize the voice, it is Rakos, and from the number of people echoing his words he is bringing all the armed men of Asgorath with him. You had better leave.

The heroes, if they haven’t done so already, can try to grab something from the treasure before they leave, but given the hurry, they roll with -4. Mara has no intention of coming with them, she wants to remain to mourn over her sister’s body. If the party wants they can take her with them. She is a Commoner (see *GE* page 166) with Healing d6, but this costs them a Bennie for non-heroic behavior.

THE TREASURE OF ASGORATH

Fill Your Pouches. *The vast hoard piled in the treasure room is worth a look by any adventurer. Bringing all the stuff away will require a couple of beasts of burden or at least six strong porters. It is mainly composed of jewels, coins and object d’art from ancient Kyros, so ivory, emeralds and gold are the base of the treasure. The total value of the hoard is around 20,000 Moons, but probably the heroes will only have time to grab something and escape.*

In game terms, every hero pillaging the treasure must make a Smarts roll; characters with a merchant or jeweler background receive +2 to the roll, as does any hero with the Treasure Hunter Edge (the bonuses stack). The roll is made to determinate the Base Value of the treasure, representing the ability of the adventurer to pick up the most precious (and lighter) things leaving the most cumbersome (and less precious) behind. Consider a Base Value of 250 Moons for a failure; double it for a success, doubling it again for a raise and so on up to a maximum of 2000 Moons’ worth for two raises or more.

At this point only greed is the limit: if the hero wants to stay under his Encumbrance level, he only has the Basic Value, otherwise he can get an additional Basic Value per level of Encumbrance level he decides to have.

Example. Shangor the Barbarian rolls a success for Base Value (500 Moons). He decides to take up to one level of Encumbrance in treasure. This means the Northlander warrior carries 1000 Moons worth of stuff. A worthy haul if he manages to keep it till the end of the night...

DEFEATED BY RAKOS!

If Rakos' men were very lucky, or the party a little careless in their security, it could happen that they are defeated by the traitorous prince. In this case he behaves in a very pulpish manner: instead of giving them the coup de grace, he orders his men to throw the party into the Pit of Darkness (see page 36), where the hideous creature living there will take care of them. Obviously he takes from the party any weapons and clearly precious items (the only chance to get them back is taking them from his dead body at the end of the scenario).

After the Pit. *If the heroes survive the Creature of the Pit, the third encounter they'll have in the Forbidden Rooms is a group of Soldiers of Asgorath (1 per hero), who are cautiously following some tracks. Eavesdropping on their words (or directly questioning them after defeating them), the party discovers that Jannah was kidnapped by someone, probably Gwaat, soon after their battle with Rakos. The prince of Asgorath needs the girl to hold power in the House, but if the party finds her first...*

PART 4: THE SLEEPING GOD

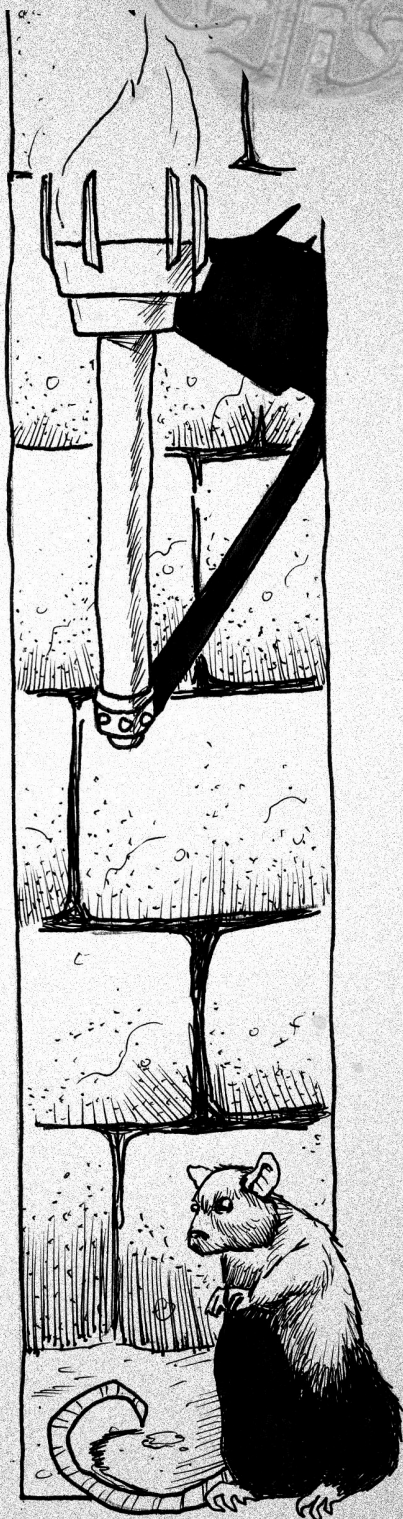
IN THE FORBIDDEN ROOMS

You grab a torch from the wall and step into the dark passage, closing the door behind you. You hear the muffled voices of the warriors of Asgorath from the other side of the wall, while they try to open it.

The door can be easily blocked from the inside, and the scenario supposes the heroes do it, gaining some time.

The corridor where you are is musty and festooned in cobwebs. The air smells of long-dead things. But the most important thing is that it is dusty and this makes following tracks quite easy: the mysterious kidnapper of Jannah has impressively large feet, and seems headed into the depths of this cursed place...

The party is now in the Forbidden Rooms, the part of the House known only to Asgorath and his acolytes. In the past, being surprised in this part of the temple was an offense punishable by death and even today, given the dark things



lurking there, nobody dares use these passages, apart from the High Priest and his close followers.

The heroes must follow Gwaat's tracks through this dangerous place. This is handled in an abstract way, through Exploration Rounds. During each exploration round (each more or less fifteen minutes long) the party makes a Tracking roll, which can be cooperative. For each success and raise they gain an Advancement Token, to a maximum of two. With a critical failure they get lost, losing a Token. Whenever they have ten or more Tokens it means they reach their quarry, and you can run the final scene of the adventure, the Awakened God.

In addition, during each Exploration Round draw a card from the Action Deck and check the encounter detailed below. Certain encounters can occur only if the heroes are deep enough in the Forbidden Rooms, this being represented by a minimum/maximum number of Advancement Tokens the party should have. If the group doesn't meet the requirements, use the next entry from the Redraw Encounters (see below).

Redraw Encounters. It may happen that the same card is drawn more than once during the exploration. When this happens simply run the first Redraw Encounter detailed below (see page 51). When it happens again run the second one and so on.

Old Devil Remembers. The parrot was a pet of Asgorath for some time and remembers these corridors very well. If the heroes pay attention to him, Old Devil cooperates with his Smarts to help the Tracking roll of the party.

DEUCE – PIT OF DARKNESS

Minimum Tokens: 2 (or being thrown in by Rakos, see below)

This vast dark room is filled with piles of filth, old bones and similar discarded stuff. The floor under your feet is littered with rubbish, old bones and even more disgusting things and the smell is unbearable.

This room has three access points: two narrow passages on the walls, plus a trapdoor in the ceiling, through which the people of Asgorath throw down unwanted things, such as deformed children, assassins, and so on. If the heroes were defeated by Rakos they will be thrown into the pit through the trapdoor (see "Defeated by Rakos" sidebar on page 35). Given the mass of rubbish, it is very unlikely they get hurt (4d6-10 damage, with an Agility roll to halve it).

This cursed place is inhabited by one of the oldest creations of Asgorath: a monster with no name apart from the Creature of the Pit, used as a threat by the mothers of the People to scare their children.

You are still trying to accustom your eyes to the darkness, when you see something moving in the shadows. It is large, very large. Stomping clumsily toward you, there is one of the worst visions you have ever seen: it is a lizard, big as a horse, whose massive head is surrounded by a mane of slimy tentacles, like those of an octopus. But the worst thing is the face of the monster: it is that of a beautiful girl, even if devoid of any intelligence. The monster walks toward you, a terrible hunger in its eyes.

The Creature is too big to leave the pit through the passage so she is permanently trapped here. She is hungry for meat, whatever its nature, and attacks the heroes on sight. If the heroes defeat the monster,

they find a strange jewel on her neck; it is the Collar of Rashana, one of the True Treasures of Asgorath (see Sidebar on page 49).

Battleground. The room is roughly round-shaped, 6" in radius, with two 1" wide openings at two and nine o'clock, reading the perimeter clockwise. Detecting them requires a Notice roll, due to the filth covering them. Put up to four piles of garbage (use MBT) in the room. They are Trash Piles (see *JCT*, page 141).

If you don't have access to that book, consider them Difficult Ground. With a successful Notice roll, a hero rummaging through them can find a Small (Str+d4) or a Medium (Str+d6) Improvised Weapon respectively with a success or a raise.

The place is in the Dark light condition unless the heroes have a source of light of some type.



Creature of the Pit (1). See page 59.

THREE – BRIDGE OVER THE WATER

First you hear the rumble of water, then the corridor where you are opens into large room, divided in two by an impetuous river. You stare into the waters: they are dark as the blood of a demon, or maybe it is only the color of the bottom of the channel. Luckily there is a passage to the other side: a brick arch, covered by moss and apparently not very solid.

The party arrives from south and must cross the passageway to reach the northern side of the room.

Every hero walking on the bridge must draw a card from the Action Deck, two

if they are Brawny or Obese. If more than one hero walks on the bridge at the same time each character must draw an additional card per hero above the first on the bridge (i.e. if three heroes walk on the bridge at the same time they must draw two additional cards each). When a club face card is dealt, the bridge crumbles, and every character on it must make an Agility roll to jump to safety: if the number rolled is odd, the character jumps on the southern side of the room; if it is even, he finds shelter on the northern side. With a failure he grabs onto the edge of the bridge (use odd and even as above to determinate on what side he grips) and can regain solid ground with a Strength (-4) roll, which can be cooperative if he is helped. If he fails this roll as well he falls in the cold waters, and suffers 3d6 damage before his comrades can help him out!

Divided Party. Once the bridge is broken, the party is split, unless they find a way to cross over a gap six yards wide. The group on the northern side keeps the current number of Advancement Tokens while the group on the southern side has one less. They advance separately, but at the end of each Encounter each group can make a cooperative Smarts (-4) roll. If both groups manage to succeed at the roll they rejoin, keeping the higher number of Advancement Tokens.

FOUR – CELL DWELLERS

This hall is so long that the end cannot be seen from the start. You enter through a large wooden gate, and the tracks of Gwaat, clearly stamped in the dust, cross it without any deviation to the other side, where a similar gate stands.

You look around while crossing the room. The place was a prison of some type, where

Asgorath kept the most dangerous of his experiments. Hanging from the ceiling there are several metal cages, at different heights and of different sizes, but some of them large enough to contain a tiger. Luckily, they are all empty, even if in some of them can be seen weirdly shaped skeletons among the metal bars. The sides of the long room are supported by large pillars, beyond which are placed several cells, with odd circular grates to close them. You wonder what type of beasts lived in this place, and, more importantly, if they are still around.

Something still lurks in the cells with the circular grates. They are rats, sort of, mutated and twisted by the Lord of the Valley's games, and then contemptuously discarded and left to die. But these creatures didn't die easily: stronger and faster than average, they prospered, and now a colony of them lives in the cells. When the heroes reach the middle of the room, they see dozens of hungry eyes peering from the cells' interior: in few heartbeats the beasts rush out, without a sound apart that made by their clawed paws, running toward the party like a dark tide!

There are too many beasts to be fought: the heroes should run for the nearest exit and bar the door behind them. This is a Short (5 rounds) Chase, based on Agility. Since the heroes are in the middle of the room, they can decide to run in any direction they want, but if they go back, they don't earn any Advancement Tokens during this Encounter.

Swarm of Critters. Use the standard Complication rules, but, as the Cell Dwellers have no ranged weapons, use the following range table.

Cells Dwellers Range Table

CARD	ATTACK
2	<i>Out of Range.</i> No attack possible.
3-7	<i>Long Range.</i> The swarm must make a Fighting (-4) attack to deal any damage.
8-10	<i>Medium Range.</i> The swarm must make a Fighting (-2) attack to deal any damage.
J-Q	<i>Short Range.</i> The swarm must make a Fighting attack to deal any damage.
K-Joker	<i>Swarmed!</i> The swarm automatically deals damage. The victim suffers -2 to the next round's chase roll.

Bone Whistle. If the heroes found a bone whistle elsewhere (see Encounter Five below), and sound it, they discover it has a tremendous effect against the beasts. For each round of continuous sounding (this doesn't count as an action), a randomly selected swarm of Cell Dwellers drops the chase and scuttles back into the darkness.



Swarm of Cell Dwellers (1 per hero +2). See page 65.

FIVE – GWAAT'S HIDEOUT

Maximum Tokens: 5

What a lucky find! You've spotted a strange door in a corridor, concealed behind a moldy tapestry. It is locked and both the lock and the

door's hinges are relatively new and in good shape. A strange find for this place, isn't it?

The door can be opened with some skill (Lockpicking (-1) roll) or by force (Toughness: 7). If the party enters, read or paraphrase the following.

You see a small cubicle, with a bed, an armoire, a table and a brazier to cook and for heating purposes. The room is filled with the disgusting reek you recognize as belonging to Gwaat.

This place is the hideout of the main servant of Skoran, where he can live secluded from the rest of the people of Asgorath. On the table there are still a piece of stale bread and a chunk of meat that the heroes can eat, and the armoire shows the signs of a hasty search. Gwaat was in this room briefly earlier, to look for an item that could help him to reach the depths of the Forbidden Rooms, but in his haste he missed it. What he is looking for is a black, dirty cloak, currently lying carelessly discarded under the bed.

In a pouch wrapped in the cloak there are two items.

The first is a bone whistle, which, if sounded, makes no noise. With a Knowledge (Arcana) or Survival roll it can be recognized as a tool used to produce sounds which cannot be heard by humans, but only by particular types of beasts (for example dogs). In this particular case the item can be very useful during Encounter Four.

The second is a silk scarf, perfumed with a very intense concoction of some sort. Characters with a healer or Lotusmastery background, with a Common Knowledge roll recognize the smell as those of some

drugs used by embalmers when working with corpses, to avoid throwing up from nausea. Wearing the scarf will be *very* useful during the Ace encounter below.

The room has another exit, an oval shaped passage, going deeper into the Forbidden Rooms. Gwaat surely took it with Jannah; if the party decides to continue the pursuit along this passage they gain +2 to their next Advancement roll.

SIX – A DEVIOUS TRAP

You entered this round room through a low-ceiled corridor and it is totally empty apart from a closed grate on the opposite side and a strange lever near it. You peer through the bars and you see a flight of stairs on the other side, going up. You quickly inspect the lever. It is made of ivory and the handle is shaped like a snake's head.

The grate is made of thick iron bars (Toughness 10) and there is a flight of stairs on the other side, going up. There is a lever, with an engraved handle resembling a snake's head, near the grate, which can be pulled down.

It seems obvious that the lever opens the grate. Nothing could be more wrong: pulling the lever triggers a trap which lets the party fall down into a second room on a lower floor. The room below is flooded with mud and several underground herbs grow in it. The real problem is that the mud is four yards deep, and behaves exactly like quicksand.

Quicksand! Heroes in the mud go down automatically by a third of their height each round, unless they stay perfectly still: in this case they must make an Agility (-2) roll each round, on a success they don't sink any further that round. If a character

is fully submerged he starts drowning: he must make a Vigor roll each round or suffer a level of Fatigue. This can lead to death.

There are two ways to escape this trap.

The first is receiving aid from someone outside it, who must have a rope and throw it to the unfortunate victims. At this point both the victim and the savior can make a cooperative Strength roll (-2 if the victim weighs more than the savior). For each success and raise the victim goes up by a third of his height. When he is totally out, one more success on the Strength roll (or a Climbing roll by the victim) is enough to get out of the trap.

The second is pulling the lever further down: doing this triggers a second mechanism which opens a conduit which empties the mud from the lower room, at the rate of one yard per round. This can obviously be done easily by a character still outside the pit, otherwise the heroes must try to grab the lever in some way (using a rope with a Throwing (-2) called shot, the *legerdemain* Power or something similar).

The Voices in the Dark. The devious little creatures (see Jack entry) lead the party into this room after helping them avoid another Encounter, then they try to persuade them to pull the lever. When the party is entrapped they jump in the mud (they can walk on it given their light weight and the Wall Walker Monstrous Ability) and try to eat the faces of the heroes (bite attack with the Drop). Being talkative little fellows, they congratulate themselves on their cunning and tell the heroes they have no chance of pulling the lever again to be freed from the mud...

Old Devil. If Old Devil is with the party he can help them substantially. He knows that the lever is dangerous and keeps blabbing "Lever! Lever!" to stop the heroes pulling it. If the party falls in the trap he still yells "Lever!" to tell the heroes how to escape the trap. If the heroes are totally stuck and the whole party is dying, the GM can allow the old parrot to sit on the lever and pull it down with his own weight, saving the group.

Opening the Grate. The real way to open the grate consists of pulling down a metal ring cleverly concealed in the wall near the door, so that a Notice (-4) roll is required to spot it (the Treasure Hunter Edge applies).

If the party doesn't trust the gate and goes back they cannot gain Advancement Tokens this round.

SEVEN – THE HEADLESS WARRIOR

You enter a room with a small round altar in the middle. Near it there is a shapeless mass, maybe a heap of bones. Somewhere there must be water too, because you hear a constant dripping.

The mass is in fact a human skeleton.

In life, he was a bold warrior of the people of Asgorath who dared venture down here, exploring the Forbidden Rooms. He was killed by some large beast which smashed his head, and devoured it, leaving the rest here for some unknown reason.

The body still carries several useful things: a bronze long sword and a short sword in matched sheaths, a rope (15 feet long) tied multiple times around its waist like a

belt, and a couple of torches put in it. They could be handy for the party.

EIGHT – ROOM OF DISSECTION

Your steps echo deeply in this vast dark room. Several stone slabs are placed in it, whose purpose cannot be misunderstood: they are dissection or torture tables, complete with manacles and other restraining devices. Although they haven't been used in a long time, the dark stains on them are clearly recognizable; blood, from dozens, maybe hundreds of victims, who shed it in some unnamable experiment. There is still a sensation in this place, of pain and blood, seasoned with the unmistakable flavor of madness.

This place was one of the many laboratories of Asgorath, where the Lord of the Valley toyed with life to create his own puppets.

On the far sides of the room there are two alcoves.

The northern alcove contains a table, on which are still lying several strange-looking knives and blades. They are rusty and stained by time, but still usable (they count as Small Improvised Weapons). On the far end of the table there is a leather-bound tome, full of accurate sketches of the anatomy of several human and animal corpses. Characters with the Sage Edge recognize immediately that similar books are only found in the Great Library of Syranthia and are of great value (around 1000 Moons). It weighs 10 lbs.

In the southern alcove there are instead half a dozen large jars made of glass. They are covered in dust and the contents aren't clearly visible unless someone wipes them off. Curious heroes will regret it: each jar contains the body of man, a woman, or

even a young boy or girl horribly twisted, where the limbs, the head or even the thorax are swapped for those of an animal. So we have a man with a tentacle in place of his head, a woman with two snakes in place of her arms (very similar to Caudru, see *BOD*, page 56) and a young girl's head upon the body of a giant insect). The creatures are so repulsive that seeing them requires a Fear (-2) roll: in the case of failure the character is Nauseated for the next three Encounters. Smashing the jars and destroying the abominations is an act in accordance with the spirit of pulp, so a hero doing this should be rewarded with a Bennie.

NINE – STAIRS OF MADNESS

You are going down a flight of stairs which apparently leads to the floor of an ample room. But, after walking some steps, you understand that something strange is happening: looking around, your perspective changes and another set of stairs begins, this time on the ceiling, which is connected to other ones, each more mad and impossible to reach than the previous one! By the gods! What hell of a place is this?

The party can now see the entire room: it is a labyrinth of passages defying gravity and reality, as made by a mad architect (or like an Escher room). The problem is that the party cannot go back now: to do it they would need to walk back on a staircase which now is impossibly long. The only thing they can do is go on, trying to reach the opening in the opposite wall, which means walking on these mad stairs.

In fact the stairs are an illusion, a very well-crafted and subtle one. Any attempt to traverse the inverted stairs in a rational way (for example using grapples and climbing) is doomed to fail (consider the hero attempting it as rolling a Failure in

the table below). Instead heroes trying to walk on the inverted stairs have a surprise: they can do if they *believe* in it!

In game terms every hero trying to cross the room must make a Spirit (-2) roll each round and check the Stairs of Madness Table below. Some results allow gathering Stairs Tokens, this representing the character advancement through the room.

Heroes can gain modifiers to the roll as it follows:

FACTOR	MODIFIER
Closing the eyes	+1
Arcane Resistance or Iron Will Edge	+2
Jumping or using Ropes	-4
Grasping hands with a friend	Characters make a Cooperative Roll

Crossing the Room! When a hero gathers six or more Stairs Tokens he is on the other side of the room and understands that it is only an illusion! With a simple word he can release his friends from the

magic and gains a Bennie. Any damage suffered during the trial is illusionary and disappears when the enchantment is broken. The party also gains an additional Advancement Token.

All the party defeated! In the dire case that all the party is defeated (this could happen if they are killed or if all the group simply decides not to move) they wake up, a couple of hours later, in a corridor in another part of the Forbidden Rooms. They are Fatigued and lose a Bennie, but apart from this, they are unharmed. They must also halve their current number of Advancement Tokens because they have no idea of where they are or where the tracks of Gwaat are.

Dispel. A hero with the *dispel* Power has a real chance to shine in this situation. The enchantment of the room is cast with Sorcery d12 and the Wild Dice. If the hero wears the Ring of the Chosen of Asgorath or the Collar of Rashana, he receives +2 to the dispelling roll. In case of success, the magic of the room disappears immediately, like fog under the sun (consider the hero as per “Crossing the Room!” above).

Stairs of Madness Table

SPIRIT ROLL RESULT	EFFECT
Critical Failure	<i>Falling down!</i> The character has the sensation of falling down, and he actually does! He suffers 3d6 damage from falling and loses two Stairs Tokens.
Failure	<i>Blocked!</i> The heroes cannot advance, he is totally paralyzed. He must do an immediate Fear Check. He doesn't receive any Stairs Tokens.
Success	<i>Vertigo!</i> The hero manages to cross a part of the room, gaining a Stairs Token, but his stomach turns upside down. He must make a Vigor roll or suffer a level of Fatigue, which lasts for ten minutes.
Raise	<i>I can do it!</i> The hero manages to defy his own preconceptions, and walks a good part of the path, gaining two Stairs Tokens.
Two Raises	<i>For my will is strong as yours!</i> The hero manages to exert his will over the entire room. Not only does he obtain three Stairs Tokens, but during the next round all the party rolls at +2.

TEN – THE FACE DOOR

You are forced to stop in a corridor. Your path is blocked by a massive stone door, upon which is carved a human face, big as a whole man. The visage on in is beautiful and repulsive in the same time, because it is disfigured by pustules, each of them cast in metal. You are pretty sure G'waat passed through it with Jannah, but how did he manage to open it?

Heroes can recognize the statue with a Common Knowledge (-4) or Religion roll, as a representation of Javalasta, a minor god of pestilence (see *JCT*, page 152). The door has no apparent keyhole or handle, but the “pustules” on the face seem to be some sort of buttons: pressing them in the right sequence causes the opening of the door. On the other hand, using the wrong sequence triggers a deadly trap.

There is an inscription at the base of the door, written in Imperial Syranthian (so every hero can read it) saying:

“When you kiss the God of Pestilence,

Fear his stare and hear his words

Because his thoughts are always with you.”

The buttons in total are seven and are placed on the following parts of the face of the god: lower lip, right eye, left ear, right cheek, middle forehead, right chin and right nostril.

The right sequence can be devised from the inscription: “when you kiss” means lower lip, “fear his stare” means right eye, “hear his words” means left ear and “because his thought” means his forehead.

Heroes can try to determinate if one or more of the buttons seems to be less

used from the others: with a successful Lockpicking or Repair (-2) or Notice (-4) roll, for each success and raise, the GM should rule out one of the buttons. The hero receives +2 if he has the Thief or Treasure Hunter Edges (they stack), but this doesn't help to determine the correct sequence.

Pushing the buttons in the wrong sequence causes the trap to trigger after the fourth button is pushed: seven blades spring out from the pustules' points, attacking any character in Reach 2 of the door. Each of them has Fighting d8, and deals 2d8 damage (and has the Drop the first time the trap is triggered) and return into the door after few moments. Cautious heroes pushing the pustules with a staff, a spear or other similar tools can freely experiment from out of harm's way.

If the party pushes the right sequence the door opens (and it reveals itself to be *really* thick) and they receive an additional Advancement Token (in addition, the player first understanding the right combination should be rewarded with a Bennie).

If the heroes decide to avoid the door they must go back and find an alternate route (they lose two Advancement Tokens).

JACK -VOICES IN THE DARKNESS

You are in a dark room, studying the tracks of Gwaat on the floor. They are confused and two options are equally possible: he took the right corridor or the left corridor. Which is the correct one?

While the group is debating they hear some voices speaking from the darkness.

First Voice: *"Look, Toraa, they are debating like fishes on the hook."*

Second Voice: *"Yes, Goraa, they are risking their silly stupid lives: there is a trap in one of these corridors."*

Third Voice: *"Shut up, you idiots! Only we know the path that stupid Gwaat took!"*

First and Second Voice (in respectful tone): *"Yes, Naraa"*

The strange voices cannot be identified, the three creatures speaking are very careful to not be seen and, given their nature, they are very good at hiding. Instead they love to talk. They are telling the truth: one of the passages, the right one, contains a trap and Gwaat took the left one, and will share this information with the party, if properly addressed.

If the heroes enter the right corridor they must make a Notice (-2) roll, or fall into a concealed pit, with rusty spikes on the bottom. It is twenty feet deep, and deals 2d6+2 damage from the fall, plus 2d8, AP 2 from the spikes.

If the heroes take the left path they are safe.

The Voices in the Darkness continue to follow and chat with the heroes, trying to win their trust, but always remaining unseen. They know the Hidden Rooms very well, and through their suggestions the party automatically avoids the next Encounter.

Then, when the party is more or less confident of them, they lead them to "A Devious Trap" (see Six entry).



Voices in the Darkness (3). See page 66.

QUEEN – QUEEN SHAKTI

Minimum Tokens: 4

You are cautiously advancing along a corridor festooned in cobwebs. The only notable thing about this section of corridor is a strange carving resembling a spider on the wall.

If a player paid heed to Narlok's sob story about his lost wife (see *The Banquet*, page 24) this should catch his attention: he receives +4 to the Notice roll below.

The whole group is allowed a Notice (-2) roll. The character holding the light source, if present, rolls without penalty. With a success they notice the flame of their torch flickered, as if in the presence of an air current, but no other passage is present.

With further investigation they understand that the source of the current is a secret passage concealed in the wall! The passage can be opened with brute force (Strength (-2) roll) or by finding the opening mechanism (Repair or Lockpicking (-2) roll): rotating a lamp holder nearby to unlock the door.

A narrow passage leads into the darkness. Following it with silent steps, you reach a small room, with walls of black marble, from which comes a faint light.

Then you see a spooky scene. In the middle of the room there is a decorated stone slab, upon which rests the body of a marvelous girl with copper-red hair. The features of her face cannot be mistaken, they are the same as the statue you saw when entering the

House of Asgorath only half a day ago. She is Shakti, Queen of Asgorath, dressed in an ivory bikini. Three marvelous black pearls in particular catch your eye, they are fixed on a web-like ornament on her neck and shimmer like the eyes of a demon.

There is a passing resemblance between Shakti and Jannah, but on the visage of the Queen of Asgorath there is an expression of deep cruelty that even death cannot cancel.

The girl seems to be sleeping, but it is clear that there is no life in her limbs and, even stranger, the luminescence in the room comes from her body.

At the feet of the stone slab there is something else: the corpse of a woman, dead for some time, even if there is no sign of a wound upon her. She is poor Ana, the wife of Narlok. In fact, the cause of Ana's death is Queen Shakti herself. The wife of Asgorath, to follow her husband into his centuries-long sleep, administered to herself the Black Lotus of Eternity, a very rare substance which should keep her in suspended animation for centuries, but if the dose is wrong it causes death, although preserving the body as if freshly dead. The Black Lotus of Eternity, consumed in such massive doses, caused Shakti's body to become a death trap: touching the flesh of the queen of Asgorath with bare hands means being affected by the same poison.

Examining Shakti's body, with a Lotusmastery or Healing (-4) roll it is possible to find signs of the Black Lotus: the body stays perfectly preserved, but the eyelids turn deep blue, almost black, and the flesh under the nails darkens, all symptoms that Shakti's body manifests.

Lotus of Eternity. Characters touching the bare skin of Shakti, maybe to deprive

her of the pearls, suffer the effects of the Lotus. This very rare and dangerous substance can be deadly if not quickly treated. Luckily, given that the concoction has passed through the body of Shakti, and aged for a while, there is some chance for the hero to survive.

Unless the thieving character is using gloves, removing the pearls without touching the body of the Queen of Asgorath requires an Agility (-2) or Lockpicking roll per pearl, if the hero explicitly says he tries to avoid skin contact. If he misses even only one roll or carelessly touches the corpse, a minimal quantity of Lotus of Eternity passes through him.

Rule-wise, this is the *poison* Power cast with d12 and a Wild Die. It is Fast (Time Interval 1 Minute). Note that as the poison is quite famous, the roll to recognize it (see *GE* page 87) is made without the usual -4 penalty.

Surviving the Lotus of Eternity isn't a trial for everyone: a character doing so reveals a constitution out of the ordinary and develops a partial immunity: he permanently gains +1 to Vigor rolls to resist Lotus-based poisons.

The jewels upon Shakti's body are very precious (500 Moons each) and of negligible weight.

KING – THE DREAMING EYE

Minimum Tokens: 4

You spot a faint light coming from below a door in a long corridor. The door leads to a room surrounded by a colonnade. In the middle of it stands a large golden brazier upon which lies a large gem, a ruby the size

of a baby's heart, which shimmers with red light.

Among the columns, sitting cross-legged on the ground, there are several creatures, apparently sleeping, each of them with a scimitar on its lap. They seem to be men, very tall ones, apart from their incredible elephants' heads!

The gem is the Dreaming Eye, one of the True Treasures of Asgorath (see Sidebar on page 49) and the elephant men are its guardians. The gem triggers a strange vision in whoever picks it up, making him totally helpless (he is considered automatically Shaken with no chance to recover until the vision ends).

Taking the gem has another effect too: the elephant-headed men immediately wake up and attack the party without saying a single word. They first try to attack the character holding the gem. The other heroes can defend their companion using the Full Defense maneuver on him (in this case they cannot attack and retain their basic Parry against attacks toward their foes).

(M) Elephant-Headed Man (1 per hero).
See page 60.

ACE – THE PRIESTS OF ASGORATH

You smell a slightly sweetish odor while advancing along a narrow, low-ceilinged passage, which covers something less pleasant. The claustrophobic passage finally opens into a slightly larger corridor, lined by tall statues, too old to be recognizable.

The sweetish odor is stronger there, and you start feeling a little dizzy. Between each



statue there is a niche dug in the wall, where a still figure stands, one per niche.

They are old embalmed corpses, their fragile faces preserved with the use of some forgotten drug, and their garments are quite familiar; they resemble those of Skoran. These men are the old priests of Asgorath, who served their master in life and continue to serve him in death. At the opposite end of the corridor there is a door, lit by two candles in wooden holders, which trembles like tears in the eyes of a virgin.

The dead priests stand still till the party enters the room, then they animate and attack, drawing old daggers from under their robes and trying to stab the party!

Due to the sudden attack and the strange air in the room, the heroes must make a

Fear check. Characters failing the roll don't suffer the standard fear effects, instead their opponents seem to become stronger, gaining +1 to Fighting and damage rolls.

Battleground. The corridor is 5" wide and 12" long on the north-south axis. It has two 1" wide doors on the south side (where the party came from) and on the north side (where the group is headed). The corpses are placed in 1" by 1" niches, five per side.

Only in your Mind! In reality, the Priests of Asgorath never move from their niches. They are only visions caused by the strange lotus used to prepare their bodies. For this reason they cannot really be killed. Only disbelieving them works (see their description).

(M) Old Priests of Asgorath (2 per hero). See page 62.



JOKER – THE FOUNTAIN OF THE LION AND THE SNAKE

Your steps are guided by the tinkling sound of water. The sound comes from a small room with two entrances (one where the party comes from, and another one on the opposite side), to be precise from a stone fountain placed on a wall, a piece of art shaped to resemble a lion's head with the mouth open. Rather disturbingly, the tongue of the lion is replaced by a snake, and the water is pouring down from this.

Despite the fountain's appearance, the water is perfectly fine and very refreshing. Characters drinking from it recover a level of Fatigue. In addition, having fresh water to clean wounds is a benefit: if the heroes make healing rolls while standing in this place, they roll at +1.

THE TRUE TREASURES OF ASGORATH

Asgorath was a sorcerer and an extremely powerful one. He had little consideration for jewels, gems and coins, in fact he left them in the upper part of the palace. What he really treasured were items of power. Some of them are still lying somewhere in the Forbidden Rooms, the lower part of the House, and the party has a chance to find them.

For ease of consultation, they are all described below:

COLLAR OF RASHANA

This collar, made of alternating silver and gold rings, is a precious and beautiful item, but nobody can misunderstand its purpose: it is a slave collar. Engraved with ancient symbols, it is an object of power. Asgorath gave it to Rashana, his favorite concubine, to protect her from his wife's vengeance, but it wasn't enough: Shakti used Asgorath's magic to transform her into the Creature of the Pit. The collar is magical and grants the wearer the Arcane Resistance Edge, but it is also a tool of slavery. Asgorath, as a free action, can use the puppet Power on the wearer, spending no Power Points. This effect ceases only when the collar is destroyed (it has Toughness: 5) or removed (by winning two consecutive grappling attacks against a possessed victim). The protective power of the item can be discovered with a Knowledge (Arcana) roll by examining the symbols on it, but nothing short of the detect arcana Power, cast with a raise, can detect the enslaving spell on the jewel.

DREAMING EYE

This large, red jewel emanates a faint glow, and seems to be full of something like mist. Anyone picking it up for the first time is seized by a sort of vivid dream, which is lived from the perspective of the gem.

Dreams of the Past. *The vision is divided into scenes, each lasting a round, during which the holder is totally defenseless. The*

holder can decide to succumb to the vision or to resist it with a Spirit roll. For each success and raise, the vision lasts two scenes less. The vision can be restarted by taking the gem in hand again.

1. The gem is in a large temple on the top of a pyramid, surrounded by chanting people. Suddenly the night full of stars is broken by a light and something, a mountain of fire, falls down to the ground.
2. Everything becomes white and then blue, as if water covered everything.
3. There is the sensation of an enormous quantity of time passing. Then a young man, with blonde hair cautiously sneaks onto the top of the pyramid and grabs the gem with avid eyes.
4. From that moment on the gem is kept in a dark laboratory, where inhuman shadows dance on the walls, while the young man does strange things with dead bodies.
5. A battle, a terrible one, is fought pitting Kyrosian warriors one against the other. In the distance the shapes of elephants can be seen. The young man is leading one of the armies, his men fight under a lion's head banner, their opponents bear a white elephant insignia. (With a Common Knowledge roll the hero recognizes it as the banner of the Autarch of Kyros).
6. The young man, now in his maturity, is on horseback, in company of a red haired woman. The two of them are leading a caravan of slaves into the mountains. He frequently looks back, as if fearing being chased.

The scenes above summarize the recent history of the gem: originally an artifact worshipped by Keronian priests, it survived the fall of the Dread Star, was found by a young man (Asgorath), who used it for his own purposes, twisting and mutating human beings. Discovered, he fought against the Autarch of Kyros and was forced to flee

into the mountains with his wife, Shakti, and a host of slaves.

Ending the vision grants the user an extra Bennie. In addition, the gem is a powerful receptacle of power for a character with the Sorcery Arcane Background. To fully understand this the mage must make a Knowledge (Arcana) roll. For each success and raise he discovers the following things

Success. The gem holds part of the true power of Asgorath. Throwing it against him could kill him (see Asgorath weaknesses on page 57).

Raise. The gem contains three Powers. They are boost/lower trait (twisting the body), legerdemain (touch of power), shape change (twisting the body into bear, giant snake or giant bat form). Note that legerdemain and shape change cannot usually be taken by sorcerers. The owner of the gem can freely use the Powers contained in it, using its own Arcane Skill and Power Points, but they cost him one Power Point more than the normal cost.

Two Raises. The Powers in the gem can be learned by the mage through continuous mental contact with the Dreaming Eye. Each week of mental contact the sorcerer must make a Smarts and a Vigor roll, both at -2. If he scores a success or more in the Smarts roll he gains a Learning Token, two with a raise or more. When he gets three Learning Tokens he automatically learns one of the powers (his choice). If he fails the Vigor roll he suffers a level of Fatigue, which isn't recovered until the mental contact with the gem is interrupted. A character Exhausted in this manner permanently loses a die step in Spirit. Interrupting contact with the gem forfeits all current Learning Tokens. After learning all the three Powers contained in the gem, the sorcerer also permanently raises his Knowledge (Arcana) skill by one die step.

BEDRAW ENCOUNTERS

Encounter 1 – Messed Up Tracks.

The tracks of Gwaat cross a particularly dusty room in this round. If the card drawn is red, this makes following them particularly easy (+2 to the Tracking roll in the following round). If it is black they are very messed up (-2 to the Tracking roll next round).

Encounter 2 – Scuttling Sound. Pick a randomly selected hero (or chose a character with the Yellow Hindrance if he is present in the party). He hears a sudden scuttling sound in the darkness and must make a Notice (-2) roll. On a failure he doesn't understand what it is and his reaction unnerves the rest of the party (-1 to Smarts-based rolls during the next Encounter). With a success he recognizes the source as a small rodent, while with a raise he is so relieved to discover it to be a rat that can reassure another character, making her gain a Bennie.

Encounter 3 – Pursuers' Patrol. While the heroes are following Gwaat's tracks, Rakos isn't idle: he ordered his men to bash down the door protecting the secret passage in the queen's chamber and sent a patrol of soldiers to pursue the heroes, while he gathers the rest of the soldiers. The heroes meet these men.

(M) Soldier of Asgorath (1 per hero)+1.

Encounter 4 or more – Dreaming Eye. If the party hasn't yet played the King Encounter use that (ignoring the token requirements), otherwise nothing happens.

THE AWAKENING

Finally the party reaches Gwaat. The following narrative text presumes that Skorán is still alive.

(If the High Priest is dead, rework the scene below. Gwaat speaks to Jannah, who is bound and gagged, telling her that if she truly is Shakti reborn, Asgorath will wake up and avenge his father's death.)

You understand you are near your prey when you hear voices coming from nearby. Cautiously, you reduce your pace to a panther-like step and advance, weapon in hand, till you find a double door, ajar, engraved with the head of a lion. The voices you heard come from inside.

"Finally, my son, we'll see if this girl is what she claims to be!"

You recognize the voice; it is Skorán, the High Priest!

"I don't understand, father. Why are we doing this? Why not just kill her and keep power for ourselves?" a rasping voice answers, which you understand is that of Gwaat, the god-cursed kidnapper. So it is true, that abomination is the offspring of the High Priest.

"Fool! You never trusted my words, did you? You thought Asgorath was only a legend! Asgorath is here, sleeping, waiting for his queen to wake up! If she really is Shakti reborn, we can have him back!" The voice of Skorán is that of a fanatic now.

"Help me open the sarcophagus!" he says.

A moment of silence passes, a deep grunt, and then you hear the sound of something very heavy being moved.

"For Asgorath!" the raspy voice of Gwaat says, amazed.

"Yes" his father answers "For Asgorath."

This is the right moment for the party to intervene. When they open the door they see the following scene.

It isn't a very big room, but it is magnificent: white marble on the floor, the ceiling and on the columns, all inlaid in gold. The walls are a marvel of engraving, telling the story of the Lord of the Valley: you briefly see pyramids, elephants, the clash of armies and finally this vale, as it would have been before the touch of man.

There is a sensation of power, in this place: something old and sleeping, but strong and dangerous, very dangerous.

Your eyes quickly scan the room: you see Jannah, lying on a sort of altar. She is bound but alive and kicking, throwing furious looks at her captors. They stand not far away, on the other side of the room, Skorán and his deformed son-servant, staring with awe at a man sitting in a sort of throne carved out of a massive stone in the wall. The strange sarcophagus was protected by a stone cover, which now lies discarded nearby.

Even at this distance there is a sort of sheer magnetism in this figure, attracting your attention. He is a muscular man in his forties, blonde and handsome. He is sleeping, but nevertheless his presence towers over the room.

"Mighty Lord of the Valley!" Skorán says: "Your wife, Shakti, is here in front of you! Powerful shaper of life, take your legitimate spouse! Asgorath, wake up and purify your kingdom of traitors and infidels!"

The party now basically has two options. They can rush in, trying to stop the rite before anything happens, or they can sneak inside, using the cover of the columns, trying to approach Jannah's slab without being seen. In the first case they have a free round (as if in Hold) in the next scene, while in the second they must make a Stealth roll. In the case of success they can start the next combat wherever they want in the room, in cover of one of the first four columns of the room (counting from south), on the side of their choice.

FLASHING BLADES IN FRONT OF A GOD

Nothing happens at the words of the High Priest, at least nothing that he expected.

Instead you hear footsteps behind you and turn around.

"Good, good. What is this place? Well, you are all gathered there. This saves me the effort of driving you out separately." There is Rakos on the threshold of the hall, surrounded by a host of soldiers.

"You!" Skorán says, seeing his hated brother. "How dare you!" He thunders.

"Enough chit chat!" the treacherous prince answers. "Kill them all and bring the queen to me!"

The final battle of the scenario is going to happen now, and it will be one the players will hardly forget!

The hall of Asgorath is 24" by 24" with a large door (3" wide) on the middle of the southern wall. On the opposite side, there is the 3" by 3" sarcophagus, dug into a

single massive stone slab, where Asgorath rests.

The altar where Jannah is bound is placed 8" south of Asgorath's sarcophagus. Place Skorán and Gwaat at your discretion between the sarcophagus and the altar.

On both sides of the room there is a line of very thick columns, six per side (see below).

Rakos and his men begin within 3" of the southern door. As always, the traitorous prince stays well protected among his soldiers.

The heroes are placed according to what they decided to do at the end of the previous scene. In case they hesitated too much, place them 3" away from Rakos' men.

The tactics of the bad guys are as follows. Two thirds of Rakos' swordsmen try to engage the heroes, while the other third tries approaching the altar to capture the queen. Rakos' archers pepper Gwaat and Skorán. The first one tries to gain time by using his *summon ally* Power (he evokes two illusionary lions, making them emerge from the carvings on the walls, see SWD page 138 for stats) or try to reach the magical engravings on the floor (see below) to activate them.

Rakos tries to stay protected by his men, for now.

Only play a single round of combat, then stop (leave the battleground as it is, you will restart the battle shortly) and go on with the next scene.



Rakos (1). See page 62.



Skorán, High Priest of Asgorath (1). See page 64.

(M) Gwaat (1). See page 60.

(M) Rakos' Followers (3 per hero). Use the Soldier of Asgorath stats. A third of them are skilled archers armed with bows, with Shooting d8 and the Trained Thrower (Bow) Edge. See page 64.

TERRAIN, PROPS AND EVENTS

• **Columns:** There are twelve massive columns, six per part, on the room's sides. They are 2" by 2", and count as Heavy Cover. Being so sturdy they have Toughness: 12 but they *don't* have Heavy Armor, this means that a strong enough attack can make them fall down. Unless the attack was made to make it fall in a precise way, the direction a column falls in is determined by rolling a d12 and reading it clockwise. The column is 2" wide and 5" long. Any target in harm's way must make an Agility (-2) roll or be caught by it, suffering 3d6 damage, AP 3.

• **Magical Engraving:** On the floor surrounding the altar there is a series of magical engravings. They are 2" wide and start from the northern wall 4" east from Asgorath's sarcophagus, go south for 10", run around the altar and go back to the northern wall, 4" west of Asgorath's sarcophagus. A sorcerer standing on this glyph can awaken its power, making him able to create a *barrier* of greenish fire on all the engraving, with a simple Sorcery roll and spending no Power Points. The barrier is of a fiery nature (2d4 damage) but it is only an illusion (opposed roll between caster's Sorcery and victim's Spirit – if victim wins she is immune to damage). Any other sorcerer in contact of the engraving can try to suppress the spell with a Sor-

cery roll, which becomes an opposed roll if both warlocks are in contact with the engraving. If someone wins with a raise, the opponent is also Shaken.

• **Jannah's Altar:** The altar is a stone slab 2" by 1" with four metal rings on the corners. It has Toughness 10 and grants Medium Cover (Heavy if crouched behind it). Jannah was hastily bound with a rope, which can be untied in two rounds, minus one per success and raise on an Agility roll. Alternatively it can simply be cut through with two successful Fighting attacks (against Parry 4). Freeing Jannah nets the hero a Bennie.

THE FATE OF ASGORATH

You are fighting savagely, trading blows with your opponents and spilling their blood on the floor, when a low voice, almost a whisper, is heard.

"She... is... not... Shakti."

Suddenly everyone stops, swords blocked. You, Rakos and his underlings, even Skorán.

Asgorath spoke. He opens his eyes, of an amazing blue, and stands up.

"Where... is... Shakti?" he asks again.

"My lord..." Skorán stutters "She lies in front of you!"

"No!" the age-old sorcerer rumbles, with a cavernous voice. "She is not Shakti!"

He raises a hand, as if turning away a mosquito, and Skorán flies away, as if driven by an invisible force, crashing against a column.

The god of the valley takes another step.

"Where... is... Shakti!?" He asks again, this time with a murderous voice.

And then he starts to kill.

Asgorath, the God of the Valley has woken up after dozens of centuries and he has only one thing in mind, his wife. He will tear apart whatever stands in his way to find her. He doesn't know that the woman he loved is dead, after trying to follow his husband into his sorcerous sleep.

Asgorath starts 3" away from his sarcophagus. Place Skorán, if still alive, in contact with the nearest column. He is on the ground, Shaken.

Every character in the room must make a Fear check. Extras failing the roll will be Panicked and will make for the door. Wild Cards and Henchmen suffer effects as usual.

Asgorath is half asleep so luckily he isn't in control of all his sorcerous powers. He will simply attack the nearest target, killing him, and then passing on to the next. If he is wounded by someone, he quickly diverts his attention from the current opponent and deals with whoever dared hit him.

The Lord of the Valley knows if someone is wearing the Collar of Rashana, and as a free action will activate it (see sidebar on page 49).

The fight ends when Asgorath is dead.



Asgorath, God of the Valley (1).

See page 57.

SITUATIONAL MODIFIERS

• **Collar of Rashana:** The Lord of the Valley knows if someone is wearing the Col-



lar of Rashana, and as a free action will activate it (see sidebar on page 49), gaining an unexpected ally in the fight.

• **The Dreaming Eye:** This item, being the original source of the powers of the warlock, is one of the few things Asgorath fears. The first time he sees someone with it in hands, it counts as an Intimidation roll. From this moment on the character with the gem becomes his main target.

• **Rakos:** During this fight Rakos finally joins the combat actively. Being a coward at heart, the first thing he does is trying to kill Skoran, then he'll make a vow of submission to Asgorath (draw a card, if it is red the God of the Valley spares him). He is a very despicable character. Any hero killing him will receive an immediate Bennie.

• **"Shakti is dead, Asgorath!":** If one of the players answers, in-character, to the Lord of the Valley, telling him the truth, that the queen is dead, Asgorath stops for a round, howling his rage to the world. The daring hero gains a Bennie, but from that moment on Asgorath benefits from the Berserk Edge.

• **Old Devil:** If the foul-mouthed parrot is with the party, and the party has the Dreaming Eye, he starts shouting "The Eye, brickhead! The Eye, brickhead!"

GM's TIP: WHY SLEEPING?

GMs and players alike, at the end of the scenario, may ask themselves why Asgorath and Shakti went to sleep.

Asgorath is a sorcerer, and an extremely powerful one. Forced to flee from Kyros, he lived hidden in the valley for several centuries, freely using Lotus and magic on others, but also on himself, acquiring strange powers beyond those of a mortal sorcerer. Then, simply for spite, he decided to put himself to

sleep so that his soul could visit other realms of the universe, such as the dimensions where demons live, and maybe find powers strong enough to contend with his older and more powerful enemies (mainly Vutal-Ra, Lord of the Black Temple, see BOD page 105).

But he slept for far longer than he expected. His wife, Shakti, wanting to continue to live with him, took the same drug her husband took, hoping to be preserved and wake up, still young, with her husband. Unluckily things went wrong, Shakti died and Asgorath's sleep became almost eternal...

THE END

Asgorath, the God of the Valley, falls on the ground dead. His body twists as dozens of shapes, of beasts and creatures you have never seen pass, over his skin like water in a river. Finally, all stops and only a puddle of disgusting black liquid lies where the age-old sorcerer was before.

But it isn't over yet. As if shaken by the death of its creator, the House of Asgorath starts trembling, stones fall down from the ceiling, and pillars collapse.

Jannah shrieks in terror when a terrible crack is heard: the stone of which Asgorath's tomb was made is now broken, and there is a passage behind it!

Leaving the falling temple to its doom you run inside. It looks like a cavern of some type, and is shaken by the strength of the earthquake like the innards of a drunkard. You run through it, ignoring danger, till you hear the sound of water flowing.

The passage ends over a chasm; at the bottom of it there is a river, flowing strong.

"Oh, no!" Jannah says "Not again! Don't tell me we have to jump!"

Without giving her time to say anything else, you grab her by the wrist and jump together into the cold water below.

The underground river is the same one that the party used to enter the valley. It crosses all the vale, goes underground in proximity to the House of Asgorath, and then reappears to surface at the foot of the Iron Mountains, on the eastern side, somewhere on the border between Zandor and Ekul (wherever the GM thinks it best for future adventures).

The heroes survived and have quite a story to retell. If the GM feels really evil he can make them make a Swimming roll. For each success and raise they keep one level of encumbrance of Asgorath's treasure.

If they have Shakti's pearls they are safe, and you should not forget that Jannah was jeweled like a queen. Some of the baubles were lost during the kidnapping, the combat and the swimming, but she managed to keep enough to split with the heroes (1000 Moons in total).

Disciple of the Black Staff. Note that if a Disciple of the Black Staff is part of the group and managed to kill Asgorath he did quite a favor to his dark master. He will be probably adequately rewarded (or eyed with suspicion as a potential new threat), but remember that Vutal-Ra's gifts tend to be double-edged...

CREATURES AND NPCs



ASGORATH, GOD OF THE VALLEY

This age-old sorcerer is one of the most powerful of the past, and belongs to an era where the masteries of the Lotus and those of sorcery were intertwined. He is a master of shape-changing and a tremendously skilled sorcerer. Luckily for the heroes, being still half-dazed, he doesn't have access to the full range of his powers and his magical abilities are downgraded to the following profile.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d10, Spirit d10, Strength d10, Vigor d12

Skills: Fighting d10, Intimidation d10, Knowledge (Arcana) d10, Notice d8, Sorcery d10.

Charisma: +4; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 8

Edges: Attractive, Combat Reflexes, Improved Nerves of Steel, Level Headed, Loincloth Hero, Martial Artist, Noble.

Hindrances: Arrogant, Bloodthirsty, Enemy (Vutal-Ra and many others), Vow (find Shakti).

Gear: Loincloth.

Special Abilities

• **Far Touch:** Asgorath will is so strong that he can project his own force at distance, with deadly effects. This is a secret he learned in his days as a Disciple of the Black Temple. Rules-wise he can use the *legerdemain* Power at will, with no need to roll, when making a barehanded attack (this applies only to his hands, not to special attacks due to the Master of Shapes Special Ability). This basically means that he can attack at Reach 10 with a fist doing

Str+d4 damage. If he rolls 1 on the Fighting die, regardless of the Wild Die, he cannot use the Far Touch the next round.

•**Master of Shapes:** Asgorath has consumed so many types of Lotus and is so skilled in twisting bodies that he can change his form, or part of it, without even thinking. In game terms, this means that anytime he is acting on a black card, at the beginning of the round, a part of his body mutates, giving him the capability below. Note that the new body part is totally independent and can make separate actions without incurring multi-action penalties of any sort, to a maximum of three additional actions (see the table

below). If a mutation affects the same body part as another one, the old one is cancelled and the new one is taken.

•**Weakness (Dreaming Eye):** Asgorath's original source of power lies in this eons-old gem. If he is struck with it (with a Fighting or Throwing roll) Asgorath immediately loses the capacity to use the Master of Shapes special ability. In addition, if he has Shapes active at the time, he must make a Vigor (-4) roll per Shape or he suffers a Unsoakable Wound. Each roll must be made at the beginning of each round until Asgorath scores a raise on it. Using the Dreaming Eye in this manner shatters it.

ASGORATH MASTER OF SHAPES TABLE

CARD

SHAPE

2	<i>Scaly Hide.</i> Asgorath gains +1 Armor each time this card is drawn (up to +3 Armor).
3	<i>Acidic Blood.</i> Asgorath's blood becomes an acid substance. Every time he is wounded or Shaken by a wounding effect, characters in close combat with him must make an Agility roll or be caught by an acid splash, suffering 2d4 damage. Armor protects but loses one point of Armor bonus.
4-9	<i>Lion Claw.</i> One of the arms of the Lord of the Valley becomes a vicious claw (Str+d8, Reach 1)
10	<i>Wings.</i> Asgorath develops a pair of huge wings. He can fly at Pace 4, Climb -2, or can use them on the ground to make buffet opponents. This counts as a Trick, based on Strength, affecting any character within 3" from him. If Asgorath wins with a raise the opponents are also thrown to the ground.
J	<i>Octopus Tentacle.</i> One of the arms of Asgorath becomes an enormous tentacle. It deals Str+d6 damage and receives +4 to Strength rolls for grappling purposes.
Q	<i>Stinger Tail.</i> The legs of Asgorath melt together (his Pace is reduced to 4 and he cannot run), but his lower torso transforms into a sort of scaly carapace, ending in a scorpion-like stinger. It can attack dealing Str+d6 damage and is considered to have the Improved Sweep Edge.
K	<i>Snake Arm.</i> One of the arms of Asgorath becomes a poisonous snake! It has Reach 3 and does Str+d4 damage, in addition the bite is acidic (Vigor (-2) roll or suffer another Wound).
A	<i>Giant Bat Head.</i> Asgorath's head mutates into a hideous giant bat's head. He cannot speak anymore but can produce ear-piercing shrieks! Count this as the <i>stun</i> power, using the cone template for area and Vigor as the Arcane Skill. 6 Power Points.
Joker	<i>Multiple Mutations!</i> Asgorath instantly recovers a Wound (or receives a Bennie if fully healed) and draws another card.



CHAMPION OF ASGORATH

This slender fighter is totally enclosed in bronze armor. Even his face is covered, totally concealed by the helm's mask. The armor and his weapon are engraved with snakes, the same as those on the Bronze Door of Asgorath, which seem to move and writhe when he fights.

In fact the Champion is only an illusion, created by the powers of Skoran and magnified by the effects of the Lotus burning in the braziers.

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d10, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d10, Intimidation d8, Notice d8.

Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 8/7; **Toughness:** 9(3)

Edges: Combat Reflexes, Counterattack, Frenzy, Quick.

Hindrances: -.

Gear: Bronze engraved spear (Str+d6, +1 Parry, 2 hands, Reach 1), bronze engraved armor (+3).

Special Abilities

• **Invulnerability:** The Champion can be Shaken, but not wounded by any attack not covered by his weaknesses.

• **Weaknesses:** The Champion has three weaknesses: Skoran losing concentration, half of the snake braziers being knocked out, and the black brazier being knocked out. When one of these weaknesses is exploited, the Champion loses his Invulnerability Special Ability, when a second one is exploited he becomes a Henchman, when all the weaknesses are exploited he disappears in a puff of smoke howling with pain. The Champion also disappears immediately if Skoran is unconscious or dead.



CREATURE OF THE PIT

Asgorath loved his wife Shakti, but wasn't immune to feminine charms. In particular he was attached to a concubine called Rashana, a slender, pale beauty. But Shakti was a jealous and cruel woman: playing with the tools of magic of her husband, she twisted the perfect body of the poor girl, transforming her into a monster. Then the queen of Asgorath threw her into a dark pit, laughing. From that day, the concubine became the Creature of the Pit, living on the castoffs of the people of Asgorath.

The Creature of the Pit has the body of a large scaly lizard and four strong legs, but the most impressive feature is the head. Surrounded by a mane of long tentacles, the monster retains the beautiful visage of Rashana, the last mockery of the cruel Queen. The Creature is almost immortal, this being a curse more than a blessing.

Variable Number of Tentacles: Rashana is a nasty opponent and can do a lot of damage to the party. To keep the game balanced, consider she has one tentacle per party member +2, plus one per Rank of the heroes above Veteran. So a group of four Heroic heroes will face a Creature of the Pit with 7 tentacles.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6 (A), Spirit d6, Strength d10, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d6, Notice d6.

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 11(2)

Gear: Rashana's Collar (see page 49).

Special Abilities

• **Armor +2:** Scaly hide.

• **Creature of Darkness:** This monster has lived in total darkness for so long as to be perfectly adapted to obscurity. She ignores

any illumination penalties, but is very sensitive to light; in the presence of a strong source of light she suffers -2 to attack rolls. Light-based Tricks and Tests of Will (like intimidating her by wielding a torch) receive +2 to the roll.

•**Hideous Aspect:** The Creature of the Pit is so horrible that she causes a Fear check to anyone seeing her.

•**Mane of Tentacles:** The beast has learned how to use her long tentacles to capture and strangle her victims. She can make a number of attacks up to the number of tentacles she has (see above).

A tentacle has Reach 3 and deals Str+d4 damage. Tentacles can be hit with a Called Shot (-2) and have Toughness 7. Any damage roll beating their Toughness automatically severs one (but doesn't cause a Wound or Shake the Creature).

•**Size +3:** The Creature of the Pit has more or less the size of a horse, but she is longer and less tall.

•**Weakness (Face):** The face of the Creature of the Pit is that of Rashana: feminine, beautiful and absolutely devoid of any intelligence. In addition, it is her weak point. A Called Shot (-4) to the face ignores any Size and Armor modifiers of the Creature (base Toughness: 6) and receives the customary +4 damage to head attacks.

GWAAT

The personal servitor of Skoran, this man is literally bulging with muscles, in particular on the shoulders, so much so as to look deformed. He always wears a hood covering his face because he is horribly deformed, as if the flesh of his visage had melted and solidified again. People whisper that Gwaat is the illegitimate son of Skoran, and this is true; the High Priest tried using Asgorath's magic on him, but he failed and

now Gwaat is reduced to his current state. Gwaat speaks very little, and always in whispers. He is constantly surrounded by a stink, partly due to his mutation but also from his antipathy for water. He is mad as a hatter, and only Skoran manages to keep him under control.

Gwaat is a Henchman.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d12, Vigor d10

Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d8, Lockpicking d6, Notice d8, Stealth d10, Throwing d8.

Charisma: -2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 8

Hindrances: Loyal (Skoran), Ugly.

Edges: Assassin, Brawny, Combat Reflexes, Nerves of Steel, Thief.

Gear: Dagger (Str+d4, Range: 3/6/12), loincloth, hood.

Special Abilities

•**Really Big Hands:** Gwaat has enormous and very strong hands with which he loves strangling his victims. He gets +2 to all Fighting and Strength rolls connected to grappling (for hitting, opposed rolls and damage). His favored grapple attack is Called Shot to the head, which he makes at -2 due to the bonus above. In total, his grappling the head causes Str+4 damage.

•**Skunk:** Gwaat is constantly surrounded by a stinking aura, which causes him -2 to Stealth rolls (if not masked by stronger odors).

ELEPHANT-HEADED MAN

One of the many experiments of Asgorath was trying to combine human bodies with animal ones. The elephant-headed men were the fruits of one of these experiments. Absolutely loyal, nobody knows what goes on in their heads, because these servants are mute.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d6, Stealth d6.

Gear: Bejeweled scimitar (Str+d8), silk loincloth.

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 7

Special Abilities

• **Hardy:** This creature doesn't suffer a Wound for being Shaken twice.

• **Size +1:** This creature is basically a man, but taller and gaunter. Don't be fooled by his thinness: he is very strong and robust.



JANNAH

A redheaded, gorgeous girl, Jannah is the only daughter of Jarbal of Syranthia, a famous merchant. Her old father lost everything due to the treachery of his cousin and died in poverty. Jannah swore to restore the former wealth of her family, and she will do *anything* to fulfill her vow.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Climbing d4, Driving d4, Fighting d6, Notice d6, Persuasion d8, Riding d6, Survival d4, Streetwise d6.

Charisma: +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 6(1)

Hindrances: Curious, Greedy, Vow (restore the family's wealth).

Edges: Attractive, Level-Headed.

Gear: Bronze curved short sword (Str+d6), bronze dagger (Str+d4, Range: 3/6/12, ROF: 1), light leather jacket (+1, torso only), wagon with horses and wares.

Special Abilities

• **Redhead:** "Redheads are trouble" the saying goes, and Jannah is a redhead to the core. If a character within 6" of her rolls a critical failure, he cannot spend a Bennie to reroll it. As partial compensation, the character immediately receives a Bennie.

OLD DEVIL

Parrots live a long time, but Old Devil's life is incredibly long even for a member of his race. Totally white, with a crest of white plumes, there is always a mocking light in the eyes of this creature. Asgorath found him in a Tricornian ship decimated by pestilence and that was four centuries ago, the sorcerer used his powers to increase the already remarkable intelligence of the beast. The beast is very cunning and never forgets what he hears. Sometimes he repeats phrases in Ancient Keronian, belying a lifespan that no human being can ever hope to achieve. Old Devil is bad-tempered, but his gruff behavior doesn't prevent him from getting attached to people.

Note for the Game Master: Old Devil can become a permanent companion of the party. He has visited almost all the known world in different eras, and his capacity to randomly repeat phrases he's heard can be an excellent plot device for future scenarios.

Old Devil is a Right Hand.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d12 (A), Spirit d8, Strength d4, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d6, Notice d10, Stealth d6, Taunt d10.

Edges: Danger Sense, Dodge.

Hindrances: Loyal, Mean.

Pace: 2; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 4

Special Abilities

• **Age-Old Memory:** Old Devil is exceptionally good at recalling words he has heard, even hundreds of years ago, and can repeat them perfectly. Naturally, being a beast, he doesn't know what he is saying. Any time the GM decides it is appropriate, Old Devil speaks. Draw a card from the Action Card and look secretly at it. If

it is red the phrase spoken has some relevance to the current situation and gives a useful hint, if it is black it is totally out of context.

• **Beak:** Str.

• **Flying:** Old Devil flies with a Pace of 6" and Climb -2.

• **Foul Mouthed:** Old Devil knows curses of every possible type in every language and is very spiteful. He gains +2 to any Taunt roll.

• **Size -2:** Despite being quite big for a member of his race, he has more or less the size of a dog.

OLD PRIEST OF ASGORATH

This old, brittle mummy was in the past a priest of Asgorath. Faithful in life, faithful in death, the saying goes, and it is ready to open its red glowing eyes and come back from the realm of death to protect the palace of the Lord of the Valley.

Actually, the old priest of Asgorath is only an illusion in the mind of the victim, a strange effect of inhaling the substances used to embalm the corpse.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d8.

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 5

Edges: Counterattack, Quick.

Gear: Bronze Dagger (Str+d4), austere robes.

Special Abilities

• **Creature of the Mind:** The Old Priest of Asgorath exists while his victim believes in him. Immediately after being Wounded or Incapacitated, an Illusionary Opponent forces his victim to make an opposed Spirit roll (the illusion rolls with +2): for each success and raise the Old Priest im-

mediately recovers a Wound and becomes unshaken. Wounds inflicted through Disbelieving (see below) cannot be recovered.

• **Illusionary Wounds:** The wounds inflicted by the Old Priests are only illusionary and disappear after successfully Disbelieving all the Priests. If a hero is Incapacitated by Illusionary Wounds he wakes up, Fatigued, after ten minutes.

• **Weakness (Disbelieving):** If the victim of the Old Priest has reasonable grounds to assume his enemy is an illusion he can make an opposed Spirit roll against the illusionary opponent: if he wins, the Illusionary Opponent becomes Shaken from a wounding effect, with a raise the illusion shatters.

As a rule of thumb the victim of a Priest can make the roll every time he is wounded by the Illusion.

An additional roll can be made at the beginning of the round if a hero is wearing something to protect the nose (like a scarf or a piece of cloth) which prevents the hallucinogens from working properly. The perfumed scarf of Gwaat (see page 39) is imbued with a particular concoction which grants +2 to the roll. Disbelieving rolls can be made in cooperation with any other hero who has successfully Disbelieved another Priest.



RAKOS

Of slightly less than average height, Rakos is a well-built man with brown skin, black hair and intelligent eyes. He is one of the two princes of the House of Asgorath, but being the younger one, he will never rule. He deeply hates his older brother Skoran and is a greedy, treacherous man, who will do anything to obtain power and the treasure of the city.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d8

Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d8, Lockpicking d8, Notice d8, Persuasion d8, Stealth d8, Streetwise d8.

Charisma: +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5;

Toughness: 6

Hindrances: Greedy.

Edges: Command, Counterattack, Level Headed, Noble, Thief.

Gear: Bronze short sword (Str+d6), bronze dagger (Str+d4), loincloth and jewels, lockpicks.

RIVER STALKER

River Stalkers are large, anaconda-like snakes. Excellent swimmers, their favorite tactic is constricting the victim, preferably underwater, to end the fight quickly. They are mainly found in Kyrosian riverbeds, especially near the city of Chalat (see *BOD* page 60). This specimen is unique: it is the offspring of one of the experiments of Asgorath, the God of the Valley, who fitted it with two long fangs.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6 (A), Spirit d8, Strength d12+1, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d8, Swimming d10, Stealth d10

Pace: 2; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 9

Special Abilities

• **Aquatic:** Pace 8 in water.

• **Bite:** Str+d6.

• **Constrict:** If the River Stalker hits its target with a raise, it means it entangled her in its coils. A constricted victim automatically suffers Str+d6 damage, unless she manages to break free by winning an opposed Strength roll with the snake (which rolls at +2). Note that maintaining a constriction doesn't count as an action. A River Stalker can have constricted at the same time a number of victims equal to

his Size -1 (so a Size 3 snake can constrict up to two people at once).

• **Size +3:** A fully grown River Stalker can be more than ten yards long.



SCOURGE OF ASGORATH

This enormous black panther, fitted with a sharp horn on its nose, has terrorized the valley for several centuries. In the past one of the favorite pets of Asgorath, it went wild and acquired a taste for human flesh. The Lord of the Valley used his powers to abnormally extend its lifespan and increase its size, but did nothing for its intelligence and the beast isn't particularly smart.

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d6 (A), Spirit d8, Strength d12+2, Vigor d10

Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d8, Intimidation d10, Stealth d8

Pace: 7; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 7

Special Abilities

• **Claws:** Str+d6.

• **Fearful:** Any creature seeing the Scourge of Asgorath for the first time must make a Fear check.

• **Horn:** Str+d8. AP 3.

• **Pounce:** The Scourge can leap 1d6" to gain +4 to its attack and damage. Its Parry is reduced by -2 until its next action when performing this maneuver, however.

• **Size +3:** The Scourge of Asgorath is large as an ox.

• **Scourge:** The creature can make two claw attacks per round without any penalty, or a single horn attack.

• **Terrible Roar:** When the Scourge roars, lesser beings flee in panic. The roar counts as an Intimidation roll, made against any target in a Large Burst Template centered on the Scourge.



SKORAN, HIGH PRIEST OF ASGORATH

This tall and ascetic man is the oldest of the two princes of Asgorath, and the real ruler of the House. A true believer of Asgorath, he was instructed by his predecessor, who received the same knowledge from his predecessor and so on, back to Asgorath himself. He knows many of the secrets of the House, but certainly not all of them.

Mesmerism: Skorán, like the High Priests before him, is a mesmerist and all his powers are basically illusions. A power with a mesmeric trapping can be resisted by a Spirit roll opposed by the casting roll. In the case of failure, the illusion is so real that the victim suffers -2 to all Trait rolls while under the spell. If he is successful, he sees through the illusion, becoming immune to all the effects of the power. Casting the spell costs 1 Power Point less (minimum 1).

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d10, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d6, Knowledge (Arcana) d6, Knowledge (Religion) d8, Notice d8, Stealth d8, Sorcery d10, Taunt d6.

Charisma: +4; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 7/6; **Toughness:** 6

Edges: Arcane Background (Sorcery), Charismatic, Improved Level Headed, Noble, New Power, Power Points, Priest.

Hindrances: Vow (follow the will of Asgorath).

Powers [20 PP]: *entangle* (paralyzing gaze), *fear* (horrific images), *slumber* (sleeping gaze), *stun* (hypnotic gaze), *summon ally* (medium swarm, twisted servant, giant snake – they are only illusions, they vanish the first time they are Shaken).

Gear: Staff of the High Priest (Str+d6, 2 hands, +1 Parry, Reach 1, counts as a Sorcerer's Staff), holy robes, Ring of the Chosen of Asgorath, treasure room keys.

Special Abilities

• **Ring of the Chosen of Asgorath:** This ancient golden ring, set with a fire opal, has for centuries been the symbol of power of the High Priests of Asgorath. It is quite valuable (1000 Moons) and can be used to reflect the light like a miniature mirror (+2 to Smarts-based Tricks).

SOLDIER OF ASGORATH

Regardless whether his allegiance is to Skorán or to Rakos, this fighting man is quite skilled and prefers light weapons and no armor.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d6, Notice d4, Shooting d6, Taunt d6, Throwing d6.

Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 7/6; **Toughness:** 5

Edges: -.

Hindrances: -.

Gear: Bronze sword (Str+d6) and small shield (+1 Parry) *or* bronze tipped spear (Str+d6, +1 Parry, 2 hands, Reach 1), bronze dagger (Str+d4), loincloth.

STONE CLAW NANDAL WARRIOR

Nandal is a Northeim word meaning “mute”, because these primitive cavemen are incapable of human speech, given the particular shape of their throat. When communicating among themselves, they use a mix of grunts and gestures. They live in caves in the North but sometimes wander south, looking for food, mates, or

simply warmer climates. The Nandals are fierce and bloodthirsty, with prominent jaws and sunken eyes. These stats are specific for the warriors of the Stone Claw tribe, a clan living in the southern part of the Iron Mountains. The Stone Claws paint their right hand in gray before going to war or hunting and are quite advanced for Nandals, employing slings and javelins, usually made of fire-hardened wood.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d8, Intimidation d6, Notice d6, Survival d6, Throwing d6, Tracking d4.

Charisma: -4; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 8(1)

Edges: Brute.

Hindrances: Bloodthirsty, Ugly.

Gear: Reinforced stone war club (Str+d8), sling (Damage: str+d4, Range: 4/8/16) or fire-hardened wood javelin (Str+d6, Range: 6/12/24), thick gray furs (+1).

Special Abilities

• **Grunting Brutes:** The Nandals grunt as one to get psyched up for a fight. At the beginning of a fight and before any Action Cards are dealt, a group of Nandals acting on the same Action Card makes a group Spirit roll. For each success and raise the group receives one Nandal Fury Token. At the start of each round the Game Master can use one of these tokens to let the whole group gain +2 on Intimidation, Fighting or damage rolls for the current round. Only a single token can be used each round for each group.

• **Mountain People:** The Nandals of the Stone Claw know very well how to live in the mountains. For this reason they don't consider snowy and mountainous terrain as Difficult Ground.

• **Size +1:** The Nandals are bigger than men.

• **Stone Claw:** As a rite of passage to adulthood, the males of this clan have to severely hammer their left hand against a particular rock at the bottom of a holy cave, even self-causing fractures and broken fingers (-2 to fine manipulation tasks left-handed); on the plus side, the hand is so hard and calloused, that it is considered a natural weapon dealing Str+d4 damage.

SWARM OF CELL DWELLERS

These huge gray rats have incredibly shimmering eyes and large, almost comical, ears. But don't be fooled: they bite hard as wolves and are ravenous for meat, whatever its origin.

Swarm: Swarms are treated just like a creature. Swarms cover an area equal to a Large Burst Template and attack everyone within it every round. When a swarm is wounded, its size decreases to a Medium Burst Template (see the Split Special Ability for smaller size swarms). Another hit reduces it to a Small Burst Template and a third one disperses it.

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d8 (A), Spirit d12, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Notice d10.

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 6

Special Abilities

• **Bites:** The Cell Dwellers inflict dozens of vicious bites every round to their victims, hitting automatically and causing 2d6 damage to everyone in the template. Damage is applied to the least armored location (victims in completely sealed suits are immune). Note that during a chase this applies only on a King, Ace or Joker entry (see page 38).

• **Weakness (Sound):** Cell dwellers have an ultra-fine hearing, and for this rea-

son they are very sensitive to sound. Any sound-based attack or trick deals +2 damage or receives +2 to opposed rolls.

- **Swarm:** Parry +2; because the swarm is composed of dozens of creatures, cutting and piercing weapons do only half damage. Area-effect weapons work normally.



VOICES IN THE DARKNESS

Goraa, Naraa and Toraa were three brothers, sons of an important noble of the House of Asgorath. Chosen by Asgorath himself for an important experiment, they never came back from the Forbidden Rooms. The Lord of the Valley used them for one of his foulest experiments: he removed their bodies and put their heads on spider bodies! Goraa, Naraa and Toraa thus became the Voices in the Darkness, luring into deadly traps the unfortunate souls who got lost in the Forbidden Rooms using their words and promises. Physically very frail, they know a lot of the Forbidden Rooms and hate being seen by their victims until it is too late for them. They are very verbose and prone to argue with each other. Naraa is the oldest of the three.

Three Brothers: The Voices in the Darkness are considered a unique Wild Card entity with three Bennies. They have a Wild Die but only a single Wound each (which they can Soak normally).

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d4, Vigor d4

Skills: Climbing d12, Fighting d6, Notice d8, Persuasion d10, Stealth d12, Taunt d10.

Pace: 4; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 4

Special Abilities

- **Bite:** Str+d4.

• Dwellers of the Forbidden Rooms:

These creatures have dwelled in the Forbidden Rooms for centuries and know every corner of them. They receive +2 to Stealth rolls while in the area. If the heroes capture one of them, they can use him as a guide (gaining +2 to their Advancement roll, see page 35).

- **Size -2:** The Voices in the Darkness are large as cats.

- **Small:** Attacks against the Voices suffer -2 to their roll, due the diminutive size of these creatures.

- **Wall Walker:** The Voices in the Darkness can walk on inverted surfaces and only make Climbing rolls in extreme situations. They can also walk on dense liquids (such as slime) as if on normal ground.

BOOK OF LORE: IRON MOUNTAINS

This expansion of the Book of Lore gives further hints about the central mountain range of the Dread Sea Dominions.

POLITICAL IMPORTANCE

The Iron Mountains cross the entire Dominions from the north, where they touch the shores of the Drowned King Sea, to the south, where they sink into the depths of the Brown Sea. They effectively divide the known world into two parts, East and West and it is only thanks to them that first the Iron Empire, and later the Valk hordes, conquered the whole Dominions in few seasons of war.

The main features of the Iron Mountains are their impenetrability and extreme savagery. The passes are few and difficult, and prone to disappear due to snowdrifts

and avalanches. The safest ones from a geological viewpoint often hide other, more grievous dangers: dens of brigands, Nandals and the Mountains Tribes in the safest cases, much darker things in others.

The truth is that, even after several thousand dangerous trips among the mountains, they are largely unexplored: unknown valleys, rivers and even forgotten cities can exist among the peaks and the deep, dark ravines.

GEOGRAPHY

If you pay heed to the word of the Sages, the Iron Mountains have a mixed origin: they pre-date the Dread Star Fall, if such a remote era can be even imagined, and during that period they were probably nothing more than rolling hills, eroded by centuries of winds from the eastern steppes. Then, when the Dread Star fell, the same cataclysm which created the



Dread Sea, it caused a corrugation of the land nearby, and in few hours the rolling hills were gutted from the inside when large spikes of underground rock came out from the depths of the earth, creating the Iron Mountains.

It is an outlandish theory, but if you ever have the chance to visit the Great Library of Syranthia and talk with Natarian of Gilaska, a Sage well-versed in mountain lore, he will show you a practical example by throwing a large stone in a basin full of mud. The effect is quite convincing, but remember to pay attention to your clothes.

Despite being known as a single mountain range, the Iron Mountains are actually divided into three rough sections: the Northern Range, from the Drowned King Sea to the Gray Route (see below); the Middle Range, from the Gray Route to Mount Syros (which is more or less on the border between Faberterra and Syranthia); and finally the Southern Range, from Mount Syros to the Brown Sea.

This is both a political distinction and a geographical one because the three Ranges are fairly different, as explained in the next paragraph.

GM'S TIP: HOW HIGH ARE THE IRON MOUNTAINS?

Given that nobody, not even the Sages of Syranthia, knows an accurate way to properly measure the height of the mountains, no actual height is given, but it can be estimated from weather and flora below. The GM can simply decide how tall the mountains are according to the needs of his plot.

But, if you really need to know the numbers, use an average height of 9,000 feet in the heart of the mountains, with some rare peaks even going to 12,000. The top of Mount Syros (see below) should be 15,000 at least.

WEATHER

The weather of the Iron Mountains can be summarized in a single word: bad.

But to be precise, several differences exist: first, the western side of the mountains, due to the presence of the warm Dread Sea, is generally more temperate, this being reflected also in the flora and fauna.

The eastern side, on the other hand, is exposed to the cold winds coming from the Valk steppes and, as the old Jalizaran saying goes, is "Cold as a pox-marked whore's bed".

Abundant snowfalls are common on all the ranges and in every season, even in summer. Snow arrives, unannounced, in few hours and this has caused the death of a number of incautious travelers.

On this topic, while traveling the mountains always look out for snowdrifts, mudslides and avalanches. The hunters of the Mountain Tribes, for example, never go out of their tents when the sun is warm after a week of snow and, absolutely, talk

with low voices: nobody really knows the reason but shouts and high tones seem to provoke avalanches. The mountain tribes in particular think that the Silent Gods (as they call their deities, see below) hate chatting and unnecessary words, and for this reason punish whoever goes babbling in their realm.

Two other features are peculiar to the Iron Mountains: lightning storms and demon wind.

If you have witnessed and survived a lightning storm, you will surely remember it: they are more common in the southern range, where the air tends to be drier. Announced by a sudden stillness of the air and black clouds, they manifest as a strong wind and then dozens of terrible lightning strokes, hitting and destroying anything. There is very little a man can do when such an event happens, apart from finding a hole to hide in. Luckily, there are quite rare and usually short, apart from in the proximity of Mount Syros, where they are quite common (see below).

Demon Wind is even rarer but more dangerous: it can happen that from the cold peaks in the heart of the mountains a cold wind starts to blow. It is so cold that everything it touches freezes on the spot: herbs, bushes, trees, even animals and people.

When Demon Wind blows the only thing to do is hide in a strong, safe place (a hut or even better a cavern) and start a big fire. It usually lasts only a single night, but leaves a trail of devastation behind it.

Stories say the Demon Wind is actually a Lhoban Dragon, brought to the Iron Mountains by the evil monks of the Monastery of the Black Flame (see below).

Mountaineers are able to predict the Demon Wind: if they hear a white woodcock singing during daytime, it means that the Demon Wind is going to come before nightfall.

In the same manner they think that wearing amulets made from marmot's skulls protect against lightning storms.

CAVERNS AND MINES

Below the Iron Mountains there is a second world: it is made of caverns, grottoes and the many mines which run under them like rat's nests.

Caverns are quite common throughout the range: some of them are simple shallow holes in the mountainsides, while others lead deep into massive rooms large enough to host an arena. There is even a story of a fabulous city, Skya of the Glowing Spires, which lies in an enormous cavern deep underground, but nobody can claim to have visited it.

Nandals in particular like to live in caverns, and in many old ones you can find traces of their strange paintings, which hint that probably the race of the grunting brutes is far older than the Sages of Syranthia think.

As for mines, it's no secret that the Iron Mountains are rich in veins of ore: iron, coal and gold in the Northern Range, copper in the Middle Range, and tin and silver in the Southern one.

The Iron Empire owes its ancient power to the mines of the north: the main

concentration of mines was near the Ironguard Pass, and in times of yore the slaves dug out several dozen tons of raw minerals each day. It was a harsh job, and slaves died like flies, but the Empire's flesh markets supplied them in an incessant flow.

Today, the mining activity in the Iron Mountains is almost dead: the Empire doesn't have enough resources to keep the mines active and the little iron still mined comes from the Borderlands (see *BOD*, page 8), despite its inferior quality.

The mines are left abandoned and strange things lurk in their gloomy corridors. There are even rumours that some mines are now inhabited by the offspring of the old slaves, who live in seclusion and protect their freedom savagely against any external influence.

The mines are vast and labyrinthine, and stories tell that, at least in the North, they are all interconnected. Knowing the right path, a man could enter a mine in Faberterra and exit in Zandor. But this is probably a legend: many greedy merchants got lost forever trusting "guides" who promised them a safe, quick route to Zandor passing through the mines, or even worse, some madman tries to enter the dreaded Iskondor (see page 86).

GM'S TIP: WEATHER IN PLAY

Storms, snow and bad weather are excellent tools in the hands of the Game Master; we don't want to transform your adventures into a weather forecast, but remember that bad weather can be used in a number of ways for your plots: snow can maroon the party in a desolate village in the mountains (where mysterious murders happen during nighttime), snowfalls can make them try an alternative route from a known pass (ending in some long-forgotten place) or a blizzard can make them take shelter in that cavern with the strange Nandal wall paintings...

From a mechanical point of view SWD contains all the rules you need (cold, hunger, thirst and so on) to handle bad weather, apart from Lightning Storms and Demon Wind, which are introduced below.

LIGHTNING STORM

Being caught in a lightning storm isn't a good thing. First, due to the wind, each unsheltered zone is considered Difficult Ground, second using any ranged weapon is impossible. But the real danger is being hit by lightning.

In each Large Burst Template area of interest (usually where the player characters are) draw a card from the Action Deck at the beginning of each round (or other suitable time interval). By default, lightning strikes if a black card is drawn, but positive factors reduce it to only Club cards, while negative factors raise the chance to any card except Hearts.

Negative and positive factors cancel each other, so if in an area there are two negative and one positive factors, the outcome is negative.

Positive factors are: characters with the Luck Edge, characters wearing a marmot-skull amulet (see below), characters with the environmental protection Power active.

Negative factors are: characters with a lot of metal (at least medium armor made of metal), characters with Bad Luck Hindrance.

Lightning Storm Effects Table

CARD	EFFECT
2-5	"That was Close!" Characters in the area must make a Vigor roll to avoid being Shaken.
5-10	"Close your Eyes!" There is a flash and a bang, heroes in the area suffer the effects of the blind Power, cast with a success. This blindness lasts 1d6 rounds.
Jack-Queen	"By the Gods!" The lightning actually hits the ground very close by: every character in the area is thrown 1d6" in a random direction and suffers 2d6 damage.
King	"Right on me!" Pick a character at random in the area. He is actually hit by the lightning, suffering 3d6 damage, AP 2, the attack is considered a Heavy Weapon and metal armor doesn't protect. The other characters in the area suffer 2d8 damage.
Ace	"Tyman's Arrow!" The lightning strikes strong and hard, as if shot directly from the bow of Tyman (see page 79). Pick a character at random in the area: he is hit by the lightning, suffering 2d10 damage, AP 4. If he survives, he is allowed a Spirit (-4) roll. In case of success, he isn't hit by lightning anymore (for the duration of this storm), with a raise or more the spirit of the lightning enters his body and he gains the capacity to call down lightning strikes, but only during storms and while outside. This counts as the bolt Power, using Spirit as the arcane skill and 5 Power Points which recharge very slowly: one per month.

DEMON WIND

Demon Wind is a gust of air so cold that it freezes everything it touches. It is rather visible; it seems like a white vapor running very fast. In game terms, Demon Wind causes 2d4 damage to whoever is caught in it per round. Armor doesn't protect from this damage.

Inanimate items also suffer the effects of the Demon Wind: if they suffer enough damage to be destroyed, they become brittle and a mere touch shatters them to razor-sharp shards, which cause 1d6 damage per 4 points of original Toughness of the item. So touching a tree (Toughness 8) causes 2d6 damage to the incautious hero touching it and then falls to pieces.

Demon Wind lasts from a few minutes to entire nights, and in this case the only thing to do is find a good shelter and huddle inside.

WEATHER SORCERY

The Mountain Tribes have few sorcerers among them, but those few are rather powerful and stories say they made a pact with the spirits of the winds and the Silent Gods. Here are some items and trappings available for such characters.

Marmot-Skull Amulet. It is true, an amulet made from the skull of a marmot protects the wearer from lightning storms (in gaming terms the hero cannot be selected as target of a lightning storm effect, but he still suffers damage if the whole area is hit). The marmot must be killed by the sorcerer creating the amulet on a sunny day with absolutely no clouds in the sky, and the cranium must be cleaned of all the fleshy parts with a stone knife. Then the ritual can be performed, with a simple Knowledge (Arcana) (-2) or Sorcery roll. Only characters coming from the Iron Mountains know how to create such an item. Marmot-Skull Amulets are only found in the Iron Mountains where they are Rare Items.

The Name of the Wind. Legends told around fireplaces in the camps of the mountain people say that sorcerers knowing the true name of wind can call the dreaded

Demon Wind upon their enemies. Learning this name isn't simple: only very old sorcerers of the mountains know it, and they won't reveal it easily. The same stories say that there is another way to learn this name; somewhere in the mountains there is a vale, the Throat of the Cold Demon, where the Demon Wind constantly blows. A sorcerer entering in it and battling the wind incessantly for three days and nights can manage to steal the name.

Rules-wise, learning the Name of the Wind allows the sorcerer to add the freezing cold wind trapping (deals 2d4 damage from cold as Demon Wind above and causes items to become brittle) to one non-damage dealing Power he knows, plus one per Rank of the caster – so, a Veteran sorcerer could apply the trapping to four specific powers.

The trapping can be used to add Demon Wind damage to a freezing cold stun (which doesn't deal damage itself), but not for a bolt, a blast or a burst (which deals damage).

The exact rules for battling the Cold Demon (and its real nature) are left to the GM, who can create a whole scenario about it.

FLORA AND FAUNA

Despite their rough and desolate appearance, the Iron Mountains are ripe with vegetation and animal life, the most notable ones are described below.

PLANTS

The Iron Mountains present a great variance in vegetable forms, depending on two principal factors: side and height.

Generally the western side of the mountains, being warmer because of the gentle influx from the Dread Sea, has richer plant life, while the eastern side, where plants must struggle against the cold winds coming from Zandor, is more sparsely vegetated but trees tend to be stronger and more resilient.

The lower slopes of the mountains are thickly forested: mainly with pines and chestnuts in the Northern Range, oaks and birch in the Middle Range and alder trees in the Southern Range. Going higher up, plants are gradually replaced by larches and the Gray Soldier. This particularly strong pine is much respected by the Mountain Tribes because it produces cones large as melons, very light-weight, which are used as fuel during winter, while their seeds are crumbled and mixed with honey to prepare high-energy sweetmeats.

On reaching the highest peaks, even the Gray Soldiers disappear, and only bushes and lichens remain: apart from Madweed, which is avoided by beasts and men alike because it causes folly in the eater, there

is the strong Guska Root, a bulbous bush with a juicy pulp, lightly alcoholic.

Nandals (and even the Mountain Tribesmen when starving) are fond of the Ragachuk Bush, a plant producing white, woody branches, absolutely inedible, but often populated by the Raga Worm, a long thin parasite which can be eaten raw or cooked.

A variety of lichens exist, but the commonest one is the Elder Scratch, a sort of dry fungus growing on the flat surface of sun-exposed stones, which is good for flu and curing leather.

Speaking of legends, everybody speaking with a Mountain Tribesman has heard of the mythical White Flower of the Snows, a crocus of the purest white growing only on fresh snow in remote places, and blossoming only once. It is fabled to be the cure for every possible illness and the sole antidote for melancholy.

Note that Lotus and fungi on the Iron Mountains' surface are very rare, but there is an entire world where they are common: the deep grottos and mines which extend into the depths of the ground.

The Miner's Bread is a large, round fungus commonly found in caverns, while the Dead Hand fungus always grows in groups of five and resembles the hand of a dead man crawling out from the ground. It is quite poisonous and stories say that if a person dies from eating it, he will come back from the grave to haunt whoever displeased him in life. Probably this is only a legend, but miners smash them every time they see one.

BEASTS

The fauna of the Iron Mountains is diverse as the flora.

The commonest animal on the peaks is the mountain goat. These small, sturdy beasts are the basis of the Mountain Tribes' economy, used for meat, milk, wool and skins, and the tribesmen even gather their fresh dung to fertilize their small mountain orchards and to dry for use as fuel.

Mountain goats exist in several breeds, both wild and tame, and the Tribesmen pay them great respect. There are stories that every wild herd has a Goat Guardian looking after it. This is a legendary creature, shaped like a large man but with a goat's hooves, legs and head, complete with long black horns.

Despite being peaceful, these creatures stealthily watch over the wild herds and will mercilessly kill any greedy hunter killing more beasts than they actually need. You won't see them, but you can hear them playing their long trumpets made from cave-wood trunks, which can be confused with the howl of the wind.

Marmots are also very common: these small, cute beasts live in large colonies. They are very intelligent and always keep a sentinel guarding while the rest of the colony grazes. In case of danger, the sentinel whistles and the entire colony disappears underground. Mountain Tribesmen hunt marmots for meat and fur. It is a hunt requiring a great deal of patience.

The mountains are also home to rabbits, deer, boar, elks (smaller than the Northeim breed) and other similar beasts.

Small birds of various types are also easily found: ice partridge, mountain woodcocks and the Iron Falcon, a beast famous for its acrobatic flying, but so savage that nobody, not even the master falconers of Jalizar, has managed to tame it. Apart from the falcon they are all hunted by the Mountain Tribes, always looking for meat.

Dangerous creatures also abound on the peaks: the most famous is the dreaded Winter Viper. This beast is a sort of woolly snake, only a foot long, of the purest white, making it almost impossible to spot in the snow. It isn't a real snake, because it is warm-blooded, but it has vicious fangs delivering a terrible poison that first numbs the part bitten and then rapidly causes gangrene and then death. A single antidote is known for the poison of the Winter Viper: a paste made with goat blood and the pulp of the Hunchback Staff, a particular fungus only growing in old mines.

Mountain cats are also common in all three ranges. They are gray-furred, so that they can hide among the rocks, and their fur changes to white during winter. Of various sizes, the biggest ones can be large as a small horse and have long saber-like teeth made to rend and kill. Each of these beasts needs a lot of meat to survive so they usually control a very large territory. Nandals sometimes keep them as pets (see below).

On the border of the animal and monster kingdoms there is the fabled Hulgroth; a hulking, furry brute, eight feet tall, it vaguely resembles a large ape, but it stands more erect, and has a baboon-like face, with a mane of long grayish hair surrounding a totally black face, with azure eyes without any whites. Hulgroths have clawed hands which are mildly poisonous

and are notorious for being skilled trappers. They dig pits two yards deep in hard snow and ice, and cover them with a layer of thin snow, making the trap almost undetectable. At this point they crouch nearby, waiting for prey to walk over the pit. When this happens they quickly rush out, jump in the pit and kill it. They aren't afraid of men, and some of them develop a taste for human flesh, making them dangerous.

There is a peculiar legend about Hulgroth, regarding the Hulgroth King. This strange creature has the appearance of a man. Usually he tries to pass as a lonesome hunter, and tries to gain admittance to a village. During nighttime he takes his original form and then slaughters his former hosts. The fear of the Hulgroth King is one of the many reasons why mountain people mistrust strangers. There is a way to recognize the Hulgroth King: despite assuming human form he leaves bestial tracks on fresh snow.

There are also plenty of beasts underground.

The most dangerous one is the cave bear: this gray-furred beast, a remnant of an archaic era, can be as much as four yards tall and defends its home with deadly ferocity. Travelers taking shelter in a cavern on the mountains should always explore it carefully, or they could be surprised in the dead of night by a bear which was sleeping at the bottom of it.

The greatest fear of miners is Cavebugs. These giant insects, similar to mantis, are larger than a man, and heavily armored with a thick carapace. They infest mines and caves, and live off almost anything: fungus, smaller insects and naturally man. Organized in broods, they are structured

in castes: there are workers (dangerous but manageable with a good weapon and some courage), warriors (very ferocious and territorial) and a single queen. An infestation of Cavebugs can easily depopulate a mine in few days. They have a very sturdy and lightweight shell, which makes excellent armor.

If you offer to buy a drink for a miner, from apart gaining his eternal gratitude, he'll surely tell you the tale of how he survived the Mine Specter. Probably he is lying, because nobody survives such an encounter. That said, it can happen, especially in the deepest caves, that you suddenly spot a couple of bluish lights somewhere. When it happens, start to run: it is a Mine Specter and it is coming for you. These creatures are giant centipedes, some of them as much as ten yards long, which eat almost everything. They are large enough to swallow a man whole. Usually they pass through periods of intense hunger, then when they are sated they go deep inside the hollows of the mountains and sleep for a long time, even years, or until some unlucky miner wakes them up...

PEOPLE OF THE IRON MOUNTAINS

This chapter describes the main human races living among the peaks: the semi-civilized Mountain Tribes, and the savage Nandals.

MOUNTAIN TRIBES

PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Civilized men use the expression "Mountain Tribes" to denote all the people living in the Iron Mountains. It is a rough generalization, because these peoples, also called Mountaineers, are very different, as a Northlander is different from a Syranthian.

Physically they have some traits in common: they are quite small (very rarely will you find a man taller than five and a half feet), brown skinned, with black hair and vaguely almond-shaped eyes. Men tend to be stocky and strong, while women are surprisingly lithe.

On the basis of these features, sages think that Mountaineers are a separate race, whose origin is debated: they could be slaves of the Keronians which took shelter from the Dread Star Fall, seeking refuge in the mountains (but this is in contradiction with the theory of the creation of the Iron Mountains) or another distinct race whose origin is still unknown.

That said, the physical characters described above are only the average. Despite being quite isolationist, centuries of raids, rapes and rare peaceful periods have caused some interbreeding with other races: for this reason among northern Mountaineers there are red and blonde hair and full beards, probably due to an influx of Northlander blood, while southern Mountaineers are taller, leaner and totally beardless but sport long moustaches, this being the effect of crossbreeding with Ekulians.

Regardless of the region they dwell in, they dress more or less in the same

manner: men wear thick wool trousers and heavy cloaks made of goat skins. Women often wear trousers like men, due to the hard work they have to do, but on official occasions or when pregnant use long wool gowns embroidered with semi-precious stones.

But the most important garment is the hat; of a roughly conical shape, it is made with oiled heavy leather outside and soft wool inside. It is very warm and also a sign of status among clansmen: the old ones and important persons wear very tall, almost comical hats, while commoners and lowlife wear short, rough ones.

Strangers should pay close attention to hats; often there are amulets and emblems sewn on them, carved out of goat bones and polished wood, with religious, protective or simply social meanings. For example an emblem carved with a bear symbol can mean that the wearer killed such a beast in single combat, while semi-precious stones usually have a family meaning.

Despite not having organized armies, every mountaineer is more than able to defend himself; they always have long gutting knives, used both to butcher animals and to fight, and long, heavy shepherd's staves. They use spears and bows for hunting and war, while slings are reserved to women (see below). Mountain men's spears are remarkable items: they have a broader, leaf-shaped, point than the customary Faberterran spear, and often sport engraved handles. They can be thrown remarkable distances, even without an atl-atl (which is unknown in the mountains).

As among them there are a number of woodcutters, the hatchet is also a common tool of war. Long swords are rarely found

among them, and they are usually reserved for clan chiefs.

Women are armed too, usually with a short and sharp knife, but modesty requires them to keep the sheath concealed under their garments. Women and young boys also use slings for hunting purposes, and carry them on the wrist. It is quite common to see a woman working in the orchard stop for a moment, quickly free the sling from her wrist, and kill a rabbit or bird with a well-aimed stone, for the family meal.

Men despise the sling, which isn't considered a true weapon, apart from some very poor Southern Range tribes, which have fully adopted them.

Mountaineers are fabled to be able to walk on snow without leaving tracks, treading lightly as mountain cats. This is an exaggeration, but they certainly have some skill in mountain walking, and have devised a clever type of snowshoes which make movement on the snow easier (see sidebar).

HERO'S JOURNAL: MOUNTAINEERS' GEAR AND CHARACTERS

Mountaineer Spears. *These remarkable items have the same stats as normal spears, but increased Range (5/10/20). They are usually bronze- or iron-tipped and cost 350 Moons. They are Rare Items outside the Iron Mountains and rarely sold to strangers.*

Snowshoes. *This clever footwear allows walking on snowy ground without any penalty. It is even possible to run, but at -1 to the running die. Continuous use is quite tiring, and characters must make a Vigor roll after each 8 hours of walking with snowshoes or suffer a level of Fatigue, which*

fades after a good night's sleep. They cost 150 Moons and are only available among Mountaineers.

Mountaineer Characters. *Mountain Tribes NPC have the Mountaineer Special Ability: they don't count slopes or mountainous terrain as Difficult Ground. As this is a very specialized ability it isn't worth an Edge. A Mountain People player character can have the same ability at the cost of one Skill point (which can be the one granted by illiteracy – see GE p. 62).*

SOCIAL STRUCTURE, WAR AND CUSTOMS

Mountain Tribes are organized in clans, which are made from the union of several families sharing the same blood. They obey a chief, who is advised by the elders of the tribes, in particular by the Wind Talker (see below). Despite the tribes being quite separate, sometimes during their history there appears the figure of a Shepherd King, a man chosen to rule over many tribes. Shepherd Kings usually don't rule by brute force; they are very wise men, with a reputation for fairness, who are called to act as mediators in disputes between clans. You haven't to ask the King's advice, but if you do you must do what he says.

Mountain Tribes historically have always had a bad relationship with nearby countries: being dispersed through many nations, they consider themselves part of none and fight fiercely against their neighbors. This has caused frequent wars with Ekram, Syranthia, Zandor, Faberterra and the Borderlands, which periodically try to conquer them.

On the other hand, Mountaineers fiercely defend their independence and often

come down from the mountains to raid and pillage the plains people's towns and farmlands.

In addition you must never forget that they share the land with another very dangerous population; Nandals (see below). More than one tribe of Mountaineers was slaughtered by the grunting brutes and the two races hate each other ferociously.

Mountaineers don't have a real army, the typical war host is made up of hunters and marauders, lightly armed, who move by night on foot or (rarely) on horseback (see below). They usually attack violently, stealing cattle, raping and kidnapping women, and torching whatever they cannot rob. Then they run back among the peaks where nobody dares to battle them.

Very rarely are they organized enough to be a real threat. The last great warlord born among the mountaineers was Korras, who was backed by the evil Monks of the Black Flame (see page 87 and *B&B #4 – Shadows over Ekul*).

Despite being isolationists, Mountain Men recognize and respect courage and will repay any kindness with a similar one. In the rare cases where they befriend strangers, you can be pretty sure that their trust is eternal: through a special rite, known as the Rite of Friendship, strangers are made part of the tribe, creating a bond that cannot be broken.

During the rite an actual member of the tribe (usually the sponsor), offers the Cup of Friendship to the new friend in front of the Holy Pole, with the rest of the tribe assisting. The cup is filled with steaming liquid, a mixture of herbs, milk, meat pieces, but also pebbles, small pinecones and similar. It has a mixed flavor: certain

mouthfuls are sweet, others sour. The aspiring friend must drink all of it, this representing that he accepts all sides of friendship, both the sweet and the bitter.

Being invited to such a ritual is a great honor but also a burden: after it you are effectively a tribesman, bound to follow their laws and customs. Refusing the Rite, on the other hand, is considered a mortal offense, so this can put you in a rather delicate position.

ECONOMY

The basis of the Mountaineers' economy is the herd. It is composed of their sturdy mountain goats, which they use for meat, milk and wool. They are also used as beasts of burden during the periodic migrations of the clans. Mountain people rarely ride, but when they do they mount small furry ponies, somewhat slower than the Valk breed, but very resistant to cold. Ponies are used for war: if you see a large herd in a village corral you can be pretty sure they are marauders of some sort, who use their mounts to quickly reach the rich plains, pillage and run back.

Men usually wander the mountains, moving from one small pasture to another, while women, the old and babies stay in villages.

Villages are of two types: permanent and semi-permanent.

The first are composed of crude stone huts, covered with dry mud and lichens, with a small hole on the top, through which passes the smoke of the central fireplace.

In the middle of the settlement is the Holy Pole (see below), usually made of stone, or, more rarely, a water well.

The oldest villages are surrounded by stone walls, but the security of the village is more dependent on where it is placed: usually in vales with narrow, easily defendable accesses, or on ledges accessible only by a wooden bridge, which can be quickly destroyed in case of assault.

Mountaineers always keep sentinels, even if you don't see them: over the centuries they have lost too many of their kind to Nandals' attacks and this has made them overcautious.

Around the village there is a series of small terraced gardens, where the women work hard to obtain some meager crops: mountain potatoes, turnips and several types of roots, which are the staples of their diet, paired with goat milk, butter and cheese.

Semi-permanent villages are made of tents, covered by several layers of oiled leather pieces. They have the same shape as the stone huts of the permanent villages, with the added advantage that they can be moved.

In the middle they have a Holy Pole too, but it is made of engraved wood and can usually be moved away quickly.

Around semi-permanent villages there is no cultivation of any sort and women resort to foraging to find vegetables.

Tribesmen usually don't use coins: barter is the common way among them to handle trade, as are promises. For a man of the mountains oaths are holy: if a tribesman gives you his word to repay a debt you are surer of being paid than if you had signed a contract with a Syranthian Merchant Prince.

Sadly this rule applies only between Mountaineers and recognized friends of the mountain people: strangers can be cheated without any remorse.

Being independent, Mountaineers need to be good craftsmen; they have many decent smiths, but no excellent ones. The reason is the quality of the materials: they don't mine but only pick up surface ore found in the mountains, which is second-grade stuff.

They are also good tanners and produce rough wool, but it is at carving that they excel: apart from their shepherd's staves, which sometimes are real works of art, they make exquisite sculptures in both wood and bone (rarely stone), usually for religious reasons or for knife handles.

Mountaineers don't know how to write, and passing knowledge and keeping the memory of the past alive is exclusively through an oral tradition. In particular Fire Keepers (see below) know and hand down stories to new generations.

BELIGION

Mountain Tribes are a very religious people. They worship a trio of deities, called the Silent Gods, because they don't speak – their words must be heard in the voices of the wind.

The Silent Gods are Tyman, Etulka and Graalak.

Tyman is the Hunter God, the Gray Archer. He represents the male principle; he rules over thunder, storms and war. Men worship Tyman over any other god. His rage is terrible and strikes men dead with lightning, which he shoots from his bow. He is represented as a muscular

warrior with a deer-horned helm and a bow. He is blind in one eye, which sees all that is invisible and secret.

Tyman gave men fire.

Etulka is the Mother of the Herds, the Mistress of the Fireplace and the Three-Fingered Goddess. She represents the feminine principle, watching over life, reproduction, healing and houses. Women, old and young alike, worship Etulka. She is represented as a woman with horns and six breasts dripping milk. She has human feet but strangely deformed hands, each with only three fingers. She is both a merciful and ruthless deity: the touch of her hand can cure any illness, but can also bring terrible maladies. Etulka is probably the mountain incarnation of Etu.

Graalak is the Dark Beast, the Night Strangler and the Shadow Who Lurks Below. It represents night, the forces of the unknown and the death that is the end of whatever lives. It is also the god of the dark things lurking in the caverns under the mountains. Nobody prays to Graalak out of love, apart from wicked souls, but everybody respects it and pays it homage to avoid its rage. It is represented as a beast, usually a wolf or a bear, made of pure blackness and with strange tentacles on its back. Strangely there are representations of creatures similar to Graalak in many Nandal cavern paintings which suggests a disturbing thought: Graalak could be a real creature, a demon of some sort living in the depths of the mountains.

Graalak is also connected to ceremonial burials. The common custom is to leave the dead on wooden tables in the mouths of particularly holy caverns. Then they are consumed by elements or, more commonly, eaten by animals living nearby.

These rituals are seen as an offering to Graalak, which during nighttime leaves the darkness of the caverns to eat the dead, sparing the living ones.

Tyman and Etulka live in a palace on the top of Mount Syros (see below), but they can reach anywhere in the mountains, riding the winds. Graalak dwells in the deep caverns under the mountains and periodically tries to climb Mount Syros, but the arrows of Tyman's bow keep it at bay. When this happens, mortals only see terrible storms surrounding the great mountain.

Mountaineers worship the gods with Holy Poles. These are tall, thick structures, with three faces, similar to totems. Each face represents one of the gods. They have holes carved in them (usually in the mouths of the Gods) and are often adorned with bells, whistles and similar things (representing the ears, hair and navel of the deities). The wind, passing through the holes and whistles, produces every sort of sound, which are the voices of the Gods.

Mountaineers don't have an organized clergy, but there are holy men in almost every clan. In particular, two types of religious figures are very important: Fire Keepers and Wind Talkers.

Fire Keepers are almost all women, and usually very old. They have a task of great responsibility: keeping alive the holy fire of the tribe. Despite being obviously capable of kindling a fire, Mountaineers rarely do: instead they light a fire, especially for cooking, using the flame kept in a particular stone container in the hut of the Fire Keeper. The legends say that at the beginning of time Mountaineers were a unique tribe, and they had no fire. To save

them from the cold, Tyman shot one of his arrows on a dead tree, setting it afire. The Mountaineers fled in awe, but Etulka taught them to tame the fire and to use it to cook, to stay warm and for many other uses.

The first Mountaineers jealously conserved that flame, and when the clan split, the new tribe received a spark of the original fire and conserved it. That fire spread down the centuries, passing from clan to clan, and today it can be said that every tribe in the mountain is warming itself by the flames of the same ancient fire.

If the holy fire of a tribe dies it is a terrible bad omen, meaning that the gods have cursed them: the careless Fire Keeper is automatically banished but often this isn't necessary because, stricken by guilt, she throws herself in some deep ravine, finding a disgraced death.

Wind Talkers instead are usually men, but this isn't a rule set in stone. These holy persons have the ability of hearing the actual words of the Silent Gods in the wind. They report (and interpret them) for the tribe, giving them a great influence in the decisions of the clan. Usually they are also good actors, capable of falling into (or faking) a trance at will.

Some of them are wise people, trying only to do the best for the tribe, while others are opportunists and treacherous politicians who use their supposed ability to hear the gods' words to further their own agenda.

Finally, a few of them are actually capable of hearing the mysterious words whispered by the winds and can actually command the spirits of the air: these last are powerful sorcerers who prefer living in isolation from the tribes, passing their life

silently listening to the voices in the wind, or, in worse cases, using their terrible powers for nefarious goals.

NANDALS

Despite having their ancestral home in the cold North, a good number of Nandal clans live among the cliffs and in the caverns of the Iron Mountains. This chapter gives further details on this savage race.

PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The typical Nandal male is between six and seven feet tall, making them slightly bigger than men. They are very sturdy, with large bones and a bulge of overdeveloped muscles on the shoulders, giving them a vaguely hunched posture.

Females are only a little smaller.

Nandals living in the Iron Mountains have an ochre complexion and black shaggy hair. The underground clans (see below) are paler, with gray, almost white skin and milky hair.

They have black, sunken eyes and absolutely no chin, due to the peculiar shape of their jaws.

The most civilized clans wear animal skins and even crude boots, while the more savage ones are naked, but gifted with a thick natural fur.

Many clans practice ritual scarification, not only on the face, but also on the body, especially using fire, so it is common to see a Nandal covered in hideous scars.

HERO'S JOURNAL: GROWING UP AMONG NANDALS

A hero raised by Nandals can be a very interesting player character. Background-wise, he should take at least one of the following Edges/Hindrances: All Thumbs, Beast Master, Brave, Outsider, Savage, but there is no obligation to do this. However, he must learn the Nandal Tongue.

Nandal Tongue. *Rules-wise a character born among Nandals must learn their tongue. This language is considered his mother tongue (in place of Imperial Syranthian which must be bought separately). He can freely communicate with Nandals, allowing him at least a Reaction Roll instead of the customary mindless attack these barbarians make against civilized men. Only a character born among Nandals can learn their tongue, because this requires a special use of the vocal cords that cannot be learned later.*

Member of the Pack. *A character reared by the Nandals is considered part of the pack so he can benefit from the Grunting Brutes Special Ability when among his foster brothers.*

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Nandals are organized in clans, ruled by the strongest warrior. When the chief grows old, he is challenged by a younger, stronger male. These duels are usually to the death, and the survivor is the new chief of the clan.

Nandals are polygamous, with each male having more than one female: the concept of family and marriage doesn't exist among and children are raised collectively by the clan.

That said, Nandals are a dying race. For some unknown reason their women are becoming less fertile with each generation.

This is one of the causes (the other is simply hunger) of their frequent attacks against civilized men: they seek women for mating.

These unions are usually fertile and the offspring are true Nandals, as if the old blood were stronger than the civilized one. Unluckily, Nandal babies are quite a bit larger than human ones, so almost all the unfortunate mothers die in the first labor.

Some Nandal clans are also cannibals, and this makes them even more hideous and terrifying to civilized races.

Cannibalism usually doesn't apply to babies: if a Nandal clan finds a human baby, they may decide to raise him as one of their own. But the life of the Nandals is very harsh, and only a few foster sons reach adulthood. The survivors, on the other hand, are stronger, tougher and meaner than the other members of the clan or their civilized brothers. A hero who grew up among the Nandals can be a very interesting player character (see sidebar).

Nandals are often referred as "grunting brutes" due their inability to speak civilized tongues, caused by the shape of their jaws. They emit sounds, but nobody can really find a meaning in them, so they are classified as beasts.

This is false: the Nandals do speak; their tongue is made up of grunting sounds and mimicry, plus a great deal of empathy, which allows them to convey complex meanings. Learning this language is

impossible for civilized men (see sidebar), even for the Sages of Syranthia.

Another factor suggesting that the grunting brutes are really humans is their artistic ability: the caverns where they dwell and the walls of the mountains of their valleys are full of paintings and carvings, simple but surprisingly realistic, made by them.

The grunting brutes have a peculiar relationship with animals: they have a deep respect for them, and show a great deal of empathy, which becomes almost a familial bound with them. It is not uncommon in fact to see a pack of saber tooth cats hunting with a group of Nandals, or a clan sharing a cave with a bear.

This doesn't mean that they tame animals, just the opposite, they include them in their pack as a four- legged brother. The most civilized tribes are starting to tame beasts, in particular wolves and dogs (see GE, page 175), but the more the beasts are tamed, the less empathic is the relationship between them and the Nandals.

JUSTINUS LETTER

Recently a Syranthian merchant delivered a strange letter to Velastios the Old, eminent Sage of the Great Library of Syranthia. It is crudely written on bark sheets but contains important news.

"Dear Master, I apologize to you for the crude material which I must use to write you, but here in Iron Mountains I cannot find anything better and the scrolls I bought before leaving Jalizar are finished.

I am currently trying to cross the Iron Mountains with my friends.

We are sleeping, cold and uncomfortable, in a cave, where I made an amazing discovery: there are paintings there, representing people and beasts in the crude fashion of the Nandals, on all the walls. These savages are more intelligent than I ever imagined: they painted the sky too, placing with amazing precision the stars of the firmament. There is one of them, a very bright one, I never saw. Then, few paintings later, the same star is painted falling and the small shapes of men and beasts below are represented panicked and dying.

There cannot be any error: these paintings say that the Nandals witnessed the fall of the Dread Star, and this means they are far older than what we ever thought!

I would like to stop here for several days to study these old paintings further, but I cannot: tomorrow morning we'll get away as urgent matters require our presence in the southern lands.

I write directions to the cave at the bottom of this letter, so that you can send an expedition there to study the paintings.

In the hope of finding you well, your disciple and pupil

Justinus the Red"

SURFACE TRIBES AND UNDERGROUND TRIBES

Nandals living in the Iron Mountains have two very different lifestyles: surface tribes live in the deep valleys, frequently moving and migrating. They follow the natural migrations of their quarries (mainly deer, boar and mountain elk) and gather roots and other wild fruits of the earth,

They ascend or descend according to the season: in summer they stay high in the mountains, content with the quantity of food available, while in winter, when

hunger torments their bellies, they descend to the lower valleys to raze civilized lands or try their luck against Mountaineer villages.

They take shelter in caverns or caves, but they don't venture very deep into them and change their homes frequently.

Underground Tribes are just the opposite: these live in the depths of the mountains, in the network of caves, grottoes and old mines which run under all the Iron Mountains. They rarely see the sun, and for this reason they have pale complexions and grayish or even white hair. They live off what the caverns produce: insects, fungi and the multiform fauna of the underground. You can live side by side with a tribe of underground Nandals for years without even noticing them, until they decide to come out. As they are used to living in darkness, they are very reluctant to leave it: their eyes are delicate and the sweet caress of the sun causes them the pain of a dagger's stab.

So their decision to exit from the underground must have a strong motivation. Usually it is one of the following: basic needs or a religious compulsion.

Basic needs means one of two things: food or females.

A famine (or simply overpopulation) can force an underground clan to leave the security of their homes to find something to eat. Usually they stay in the outside world the bare minimum of time needed to restock, and then go back to the security of the darkness.

In the same way, if the clan is passing through a period of strong infertility (not

an uncommon thing among the brutes, as mentioned before) they organize raids into the outer world looking for mates, usually at the expense of their neighbors.

Religion compulsions are trickier: Nandals worship a very unforgiving god (see below) and they try in every way to appease him: sometimes their shamans declare that only a human sacrifice can keep the dark gods at bay, and in this case the warriors of the clans venture into the external world to hunt suitable prey. These expeditions can travel surprisingly long distances.

RELIGION

The grunting brutes of the Iron Mountains aren't a religious people in a traditional way. They worship the spirits of the beasts they hunt: the deer, the elk and the goat. They pay them homage through the paintings and graffiti in their caverna. They think that painting a beast on a wall in some way helps them in the hunt.

This form of religion is mostly harmless, but there is another cult that isn't: the wicked veneration of Graalak.

Graalak is the same deity known to the Mountaineers, which suggests that in the past there was much more contact than today between the two races. The word itself is a Nandal one (one of the few adopted into other human tongues) and means "hunter with tentacles".

The Nandals, unlike civilized men, know that Graalak really exists, and lurks somewhere in the caverns under the mountains. It is a hideous and tremendous creature, which must be appeased with blood sacrifices otherwise it may decide to creep out of its den and go hunting for itself.

The grunting brutes, especially the ones living underground, have a terrible fear of Graalak.

GM'S TIP: NANDAL CLANS SPECIAL ABILITIES

Nandals are different from clan to clan as civilized men are from one race to the other. To personalize them and make them interesting opponents, it is recommended to give them a Clan Ability. Some examples are listed below and the Game Master is encouraged to devise his own.

Note that all underground clans should have the Cavern Dweller Ability in addition to another.

ABILITY LIST

Beast Friend. *This clan lives in close contact with beasts. It has one or more animals, which obey its orders. The commonest are a pack of wolves (1 per two Nandals in the tribe), mountain cats (1 per 10 Nandals in the tribe, Henchmen, use Lion stats from SWD page 138, they deal Str+d8 damage with their saber-like teeth, but have only Size+1) or a single cave bear (Wild Card, use Bear stats from SWD page 135, raise Size to +3 and add the Hardy Special Ability).*

Cannibal. *This tribe has the hideous habit of eating men. They file their teeth (which are considered a Str+d4 weapon).*

Cavern Dweller. *This clan lives underground. Its members are pale skinned and with white hair. They see very well in darkness (as per the Low Light Vision Special Ability), but daylight causes them discomfort (they suffer -1 to all Trait rolls).*

Feral Hunter. *This tribe is made up of excellent hunters, and they are gifted with a superhuman sense of smell. They have Notice, Stealth and Tracking at d8.*

Madweed Eater. *This clan eats the feared Madweed, the herb which causes folly. They have frothing mouths, wild eyes and are totally mad. They gain the Berserk Edge and the Bloodthirsty Hindrance. In addition, whenever they draw a Deuce or Three from the Action Deck one of them, chosen randomly, succumbs to madness: if the card drawn is red he freezes, caught in visions (consider him to be Shaken), if it is black he attacks the nearest enemy.*

Scarred. *This clan burn themselves terribly with fire to show their courage. They are really horrible, cause Fear the first time they are seen and receive +1 to Intimidation rolls.*

Scavengers. *This clan has raided civilized men and learned to use their tools and weapons. They are fitted with crude medium armor (+2), shields and bronze battle axes. These items are in very poor shape, rusted and badly maintained, and are considered weak as bone for breaking purposes.*

Spirit of the Clan. *The members of this tribe are mute. They communicate only through a sort of short-range telepathy. They all have the Common Bond Edge (this means that all the Wild Cards' Bennies are shared by the tribe). In addition they have mental powers, created by their strange link. Choose two Powers from: beast friend, boost/lower trait, fear, mind reading, telekinesis and stun. They have an arcane skill of d4, plus one die step per 15 Nandals in the tribe. They also have 5 Power Points plus another five per 15 Nandals in the tribe. So a tribe of 30 Nandals has arcane skill d8 and 15 Power Points. Any member of the tribe can use the powers, but not more than a single Power can be used each round. The Nandals must be within five miles of one another to be part of the collective mind of the tribe.*

Stone Claw. *As a rite of passage to the adulthood, the males of this clan have to severely hammer their left hand against a particular rock at the bottom of a holy cave, perhaps even causing fractures and broken fingers (-2 to fine manipulation tasks left-handed), on the plus side the hand is so hard and calloused that it is considered a natural weapon dealing Str+d4 damage.*

Tainted Weapons. *These barbarians know that smearing their weapons in dung makes them vicious: wounds turn black and suppurate, and their enemies die like flies. They are usually armed with stone-tipped spears, hatchets and daggers made of bone or stone. Enemies wounded by a tainted weapon suffer -2 to any Healing roll (apart from magical healing), in addition any character suffering such a wound must make a Vigor (-2) roll or die in 2d6 days from septicemia. The only way to avoid this is by cutting away the infected flesh (with a Healing (-4) roll, in case of failure the patient suffers a non-Soakable Wound, two if the healer rolled 1 or less). Tainted weapons are only used for war, never for hunting.*

PLACES OF INTEREST

The Iron Mountains are largely unexplored, so there are many interesting and unique locations, which can be found and explored by the heroes. The most important of them are listed below.

THE ISKONDOR

The Iskondor is one of the most majestic engineering works of the Iron Empire: a tunnel passing under the Northern Range of the Iron Mountains, going more or less from Felantium to Northern Zandor.

Built by the will of Empress Iskara, Wife of Domestan IV the Dreaming, it was started in 2027 AF and required thousands of slaves and thirty years of work to be completed. Detractors say that the real reason for the Empress' determination to have this titanic work done was that the slaves were all bought from the Tricarnian slave pits of Iskara's family, making it extremely rich.

Whatever the reason, the Iskondor is one of the marvels of the world, like the Guardian of Askerios or the Great Library of Syranthia. At the two ends of the tunnels there are two fortresses, surveying the massive steel-reinforced gates protecting the access to the underground passage: they are simply called South Guard and North Guard.

Through them merchants can reach Zandor after a few days of marching. The tunnel exploited the network of old mines present in the mountains and there

was even an underground outpost at the halfway point, called Iskara's Rest.

The Iskondor was intensely used and did a lot for commerce, but all good things have an end; in 2451 AF, at the height of the Valk invasions, the Iskondor represented a threat for the security of the Empire, because if captured by the barbarians it would have allowed them to swarm into Faberterra.

So, when the Imperial Phalanxes left Jalizar during the Shameful Retreat (see *JCT*, page 26) they were the last to pass through the Iskondor and the passage was sealed behind them.

Because it was impossible to destroy such a work in a few days, Emperor Domestan XII asked Thurna Dhull, a powerful Tricarnian sorcerer attending his court, to do something to make the Iskondor impassable. The warlock bowed and obeyed: he reached the Iskondor in few hours using unknown means and then, after the last phalanx soldier passed, he entered the Iskondor and stayed inside for three days and three nights. Chronicles of the age say that the sky went dark over the Iron Mountains and horrible screams were heard coming from the ancient tunnel while the warlock performed his forbidden rituals.

"It is done," the dark sorcerer reported to the Emperor, and from that day the Iskondor became a haunted place.

Few months later a large Valk war host entered it, but they never come out. This was solid proof that Thurna Dull's magic worked.

Over the years the Iskondor was forgotten, the two fortresses lie abandoned, and

nobody knows what really happened under the mountains. It must be said that if today someone were to reopen the tunnel he would do a great service to the Empire.

There are wild stories on this topic.

Some say that the Iskondor must not be opened otherwise the things inside will swarm out.

Others say that the curse on the tunnel won't end till the death of the sorcerer who cast it, and given that warlocks live hundreds of years, you can bet that Thurna Dhull is still alive, even if nobody knows where he is.

The last story, the most widespread, is that there is an alternative route to the Iskondor, passing through the tunnels of an abandoned mine, but nobody really knows where it is...

THE DARK MONASTERIES

As players and GMs know if they played *Beasts & Barbarians #4 – Shadows over Ekul*, in the Southern Range there is a small but powerful community of evil monks, fugitives from Lhoban. They call themselves the Keepers of the Black Flame because they worship a strange artifact, a flame made of pure blackness, which must be fueled with human souls. In particular (and this is the scope of *B&B #4*) every century or so the flame must be given the soul of a Divided Man, a creature that periodically reincarnates.

The Keepers exert a strong power over the local Mountaineer clans, which are almost totally subjugated by them, and despite all

the efforts of the good monks of Ekul they were never rooted out.

Old Monastery. The Keepers of the Black Flame have a secret base, a monastery in the Lhobanite style, in the heart of the Southern Range, from which they rule the nearby mountains. The path leading to the monastery is a secret one, very well guarded. In the heart of the monastery lies the mysterious Black Flame, constantly tended by the elders of the cult.

New Monastery. *B&B #4* ends with the destruction of the Black Flame, the collapse of the Monastery, and a terrible curse upon all the Keepers and their followers, who become instantly blind.

But an evil so great never dies completely: it needs some years (from five to twenty after the end of *B&B #4* depending on the campaign's pace) but the surviving monks, who found a way to survive in a world of constant darkness, created a new monastery in a gigantic grotto in the middle of the mountains and slowly re-established their dark grip over the region. They call themselves the Seekers of the Night now, and they have two goals: first, find a way to re-ignite the Dark Flame, second, exact a terrible vengeance upon the adventurers who caused their defeat years ago.

And maybe these two goals are somewhat interlinked...

THE NAMELESS INN

There aren't many places for travelers to rest in the Iron Mountains, but the Nameless Inn is one of them. Situated on a pass or a mountain path of the GM's choice, this fortified structure is made of a large

stone building (the inn itself), stables, a hen-house and a well, all surrounded by a tall palisade. The Inn is run by Grelido, a bald man in his fifties, with a mysterious smile and strange tattoos on his neck. Nobody knows his real origin: some say he was a Borderland outlaw escaping from a bounty on his head, others say he was a Syranthian priest who abjured his old religion, but the commonest idea is that while he continues keeping the inn open and the lodgings good, his background doesn't matter.

Apart from Grelido there are three other persons in the Inn.

Lukya, a slave woman he bought from a Mountaineer tribe some years ago to keep his bed warm. She is mute because she had her tongue cut out and has a perpetual haunted stare. She is the cook of the Inn.

Marr, a very large boy with little brain and big muscles. He cleans the stables and the hen-house. He has a passing resemblance to Grelido, maybe he is his son, nephew or something similar. Grelido merely smiles when questioned on the matter and Marr is too much of a simpleton to understand the question.

Tarik, a lean man with thin moustaches and a drop of Valk blood in his veins. He is the factotum of the Inn, doing all the tasks that Lukya and Marr cannot do. He also acts as sentinel during the night and is a decent archer.

The Nameless Inn generally has a good reputation, but there are rumours, in the last few years, that people travelling on the path where it lies have the strange habit of disappearing. Probably this is only a coincidence, or maybe some very clever bandit prowls the area, but the strange fact

is that all the disappearances happen on nights when there is a full moon.

This isn't the strangest fact about the Nameless Inn: the Mountain Tribes, which are usually very upset when someone invades their territory, seem to tolerate it, or, as is whispered, they fear it.

There is definitely something strange about this place.

MOUNT SYROS

Mount Syros is by far the tallest and most intimidating peak of all the Iron Mountains. Situated between the Middle and Southern Ranges, it is so majestic that it can be seen even from the city of Syranthia, on days with a clear sky.

It owes its name to the hero Syros, the man who gave birth to the Syranthian nation. Syros did several great deeds: he defeated the legendary Giant Beasts of the Plains, turned away the Kyrosian invaders, chased off the Twin Warlocks of the Sea and pried open the Gates of the Great Library of Syranthia.

For all these feats he was made king by the people of the land, who called themselves Syranthians. Syros never died; when he felt the cold touch of death upon him, he bestowed power upon his council (which still rules Syranthia), left his people and ventured alone onto Mount Syros, never to return. The legend says that he sleeps somewhere on the top of the mountains, in a temple made of alabaster and tourmaline, and that he will come back to Syranthia in times of dire need.

The Mountaineers have a totally different story about Mount Syros: they say it is

the ancestral home of the Silent Gods: Tyman and Etulka live in a palace on top of it, while Graalak incessantly tries to reach the top to tear apart the other two. Legends say that if a man reaches the top of Mount Syros, avoiding the natural dangers and the ambushes of Graalak, and enters the palace of Tyman and Etulka the two Gods will ask him the Untold Riddle. If the man gives the right answer he will be granted a single wish, if he fails he'll bound to serve Tyman and Etulka forever.

Whatever the origin of these stories, Mount Syros is a very dangerous place: the top is frequently surrounded by clouds and lightning storms are very common upon it. Travelers must be prepared to find shelter quickly when passing upon or near it.

That said, there must be some truth to the various wild stories of temples and palaces on it, because in a certain light there is a curious shimmering on the mountain top, as if something was built on it.

In living memory, nobody has ever managed to reach the top so the exact nature of this construction is unknown.

THE ILHANI LAKE

This small blue lake is beautiful as the eyes of a maiden on the day of her betrothal. Positioned somewhere in the mountains, its waters are incredibly sweet

and refreshing, quenching the thirst and fatigue of tired travelers as if they were blessed by some magic.

In truth, there is strange sorcery at work in the Ilhani Lake. On starry nights, muffled sounds and voices are heard coming from the lake. Watching the surface of the water reveals an incredible sight: there is a small city in the reflection, alive with light, people and sounds. It is the fabled town of Ihani, which existed on the shores of the lake centuries ago before being wiped out by a war-party of bloodthirsty Zandorian mercenaries.

Looking the scenes in the water is harmless to the spectators, but don't touch the surface of the lake otherwise you will be dragged into the reflection!

Unless you find a way to get out before sunrise you will be trapped inside forever.

The strange power of the Ilhani Lake has caused the mysterious disappearance of many travelers over the course of the years and so the trail upon which it lies is generally avoided.