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THE ART OF



Symbaroum

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The Art of Symbarium

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Preface

THE BOOK IN YOUR HANDS is composed of images and short texts from the tabletop roleplaying game SYMBAROUM. Ever since we launched the game in Swedish (2014), players and fantasy art lovers have asked us to produce a stand-alone art book; with the international translations into English (2015), French, German and Italian (2016) the requests grew even more frequent. So here it is, THE ART OF SYMBAROUM.

The images showing the world and creatures of Symbaroum have been developed in chorus with the written descriptions - the images illustrate the texts as intimately as the texts support the art. This close relationship between art and text can probably be understood in light of the fact that we, the artist and the writers, have created and fantasized together for more than three decades. So, welcome to what is truly our vision; welcome to the world of Symbaroum.

/Team Järnringen

† Symbarvum







THUS SPOKE AROALETA

“... and the day dawned, when the spawn of the Serpent took to arms, when the crimes of countless days must be counted and atoned for, horn by horn, fang by fang. And the sinners wept with blinded eyes, they moaned with severed throats, they fled on fractured limbs. And Symbaroum fell, into dreamless sleep ...”







In the ruins of Symbaroum a dream sight revealed
a well, a cauldron, a sinkhole.

Out of its depth a blightling came sidling,
filth forged in flesh, cruelty carved in bone,
a decoction of the World Serpent's marrow.

The blight beast ogled me hungrily
and in its burning eyes I saw the death of all.



"One thing is certain: as long as there are untouched ruins elsewhere it would be foolish to enter the dark areas of Davokar. For my part, I would rather die than go on the hunt for mystical sites like Dakovak, Saroklaw or the place which have been called The Mother of Darkness, Symbar. To blindly fumble for gems in a sack full of vipers, toxic thorns and famished leeches, well that is an enterprise which only a lunatic can find alluring..."





The Huldra was a voice, a bone-white mask and two embers that flared hotter than both the fire and the eyes of the cryptwalker. "How dare you?" The question was an accusation, as if I was guilty of unspeakable crimes. "It is not a lone bear that sleeps, whose fur you unwittingly tug at; it is all bears and all other beings to add; a slumbering horde fed on anger and shame. And you come here carrying a crowing rooster and a decoy ..."

She pulled the figurine from my grip, eyed it at arm's length, then gave it to her serious friend and asked him to throw it into the deepest trench of Lake Volgoma. Then her gaze turned back at me: "For a thousand years she has slept. Her nightmares have been violent but manageable. You are not to blame yet you are guilty just the same, and blame aside, your suffering will neither be milder, nor greater than any others. When Symbaroum awakens."





Fathers, mothers,
young and old
left us here in the dark,
in the cold

Running, fighting,
all life ahead
I'd rather remain,
here with the dead

Silent, frozen,
never dry
We are alone
to quietly cry



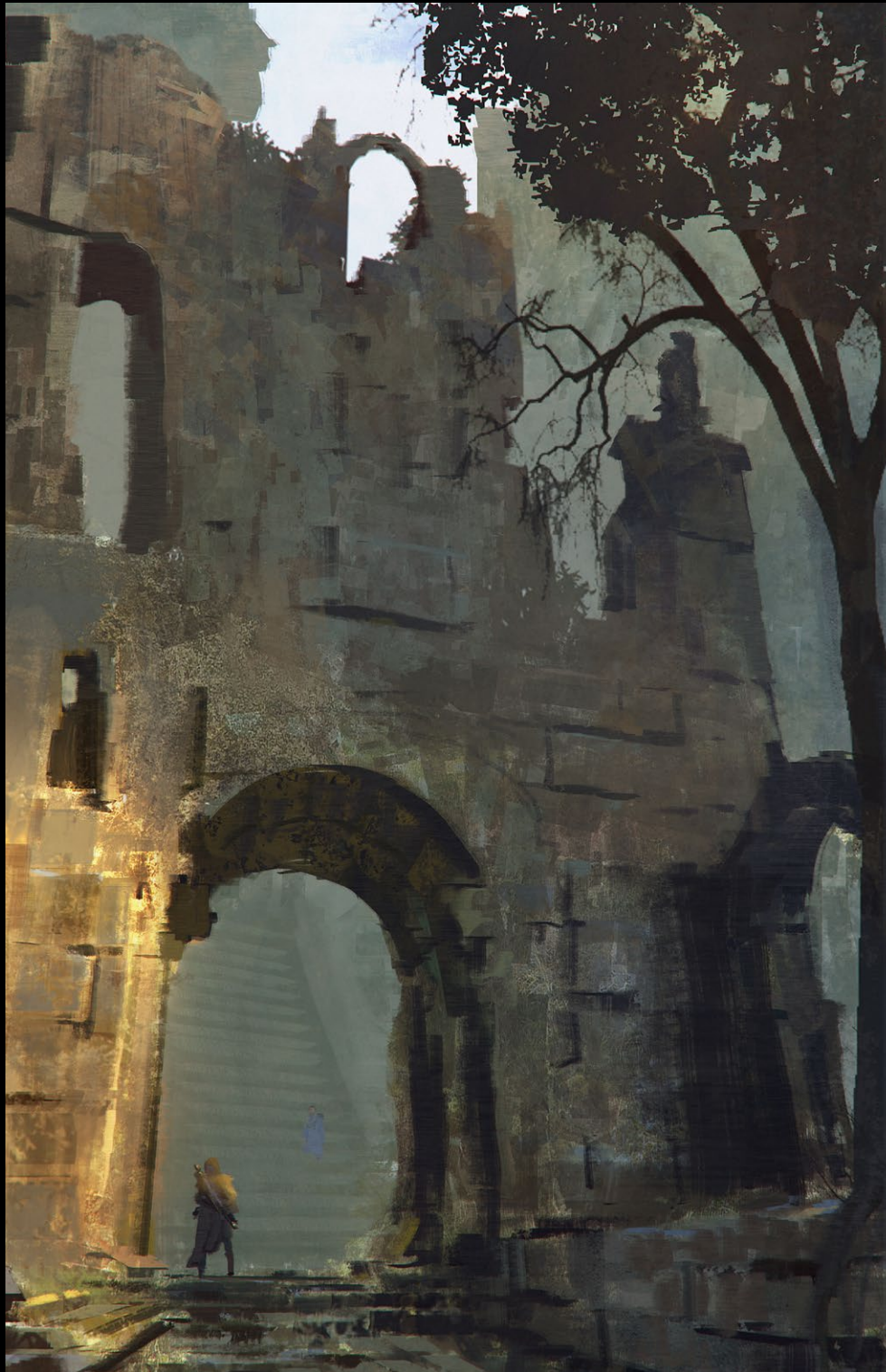
ON SPIDERS

In the tales of the clans, the spider is portrayed as one of Davokar's most noble and powerful beings, at least from an historical perspective.

The legend of the Spider King is well-known also among Ambrians – a ruthless warlord who ruled the woods some five centuries ago; member of a monstrous clan of spider-like humanoids.

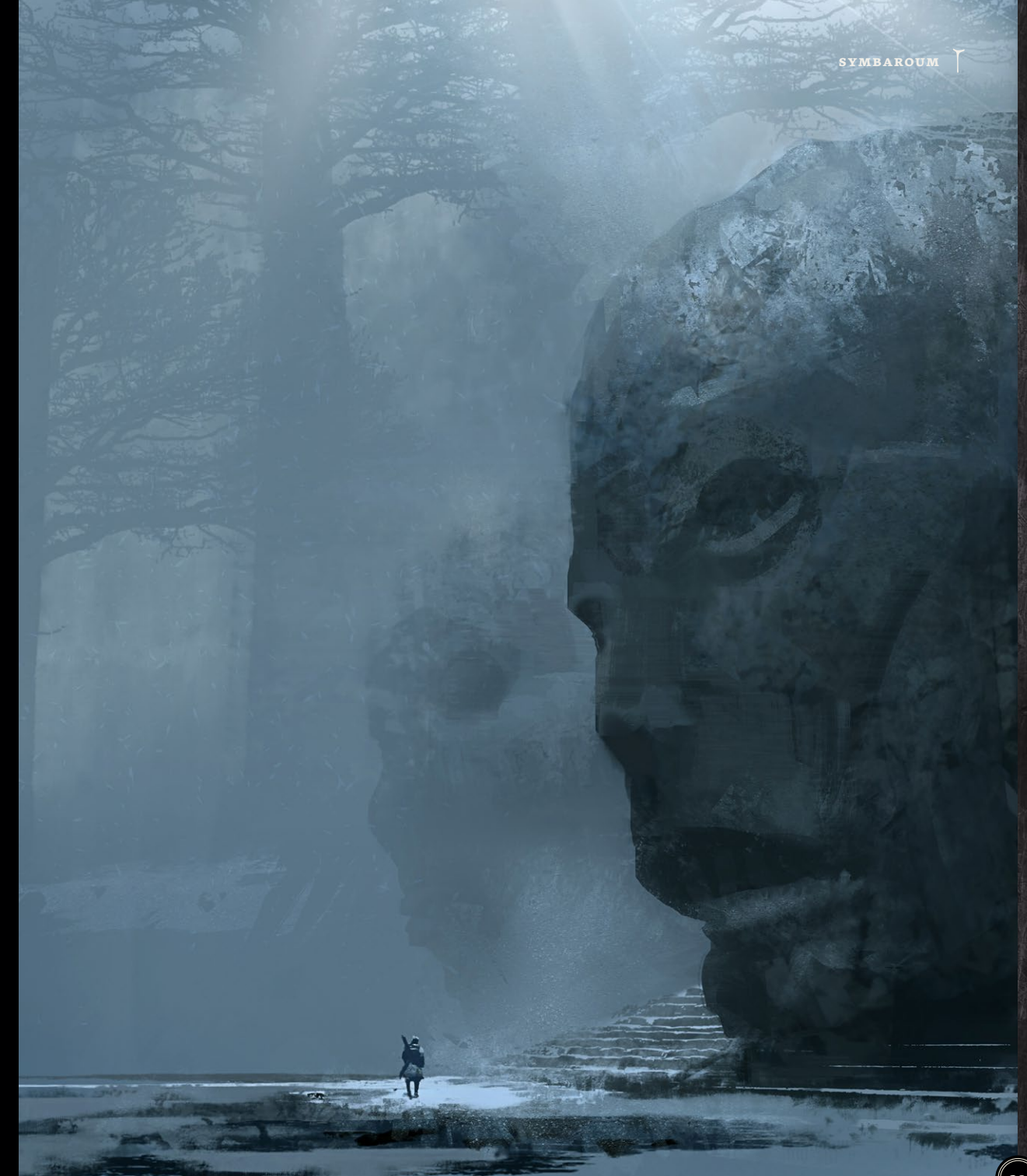
The legends also imply that this monstrous clan lives on in the depth of Davokar, and that there still exist giant spiders and toad-monsters descended from the monarch's hordes.





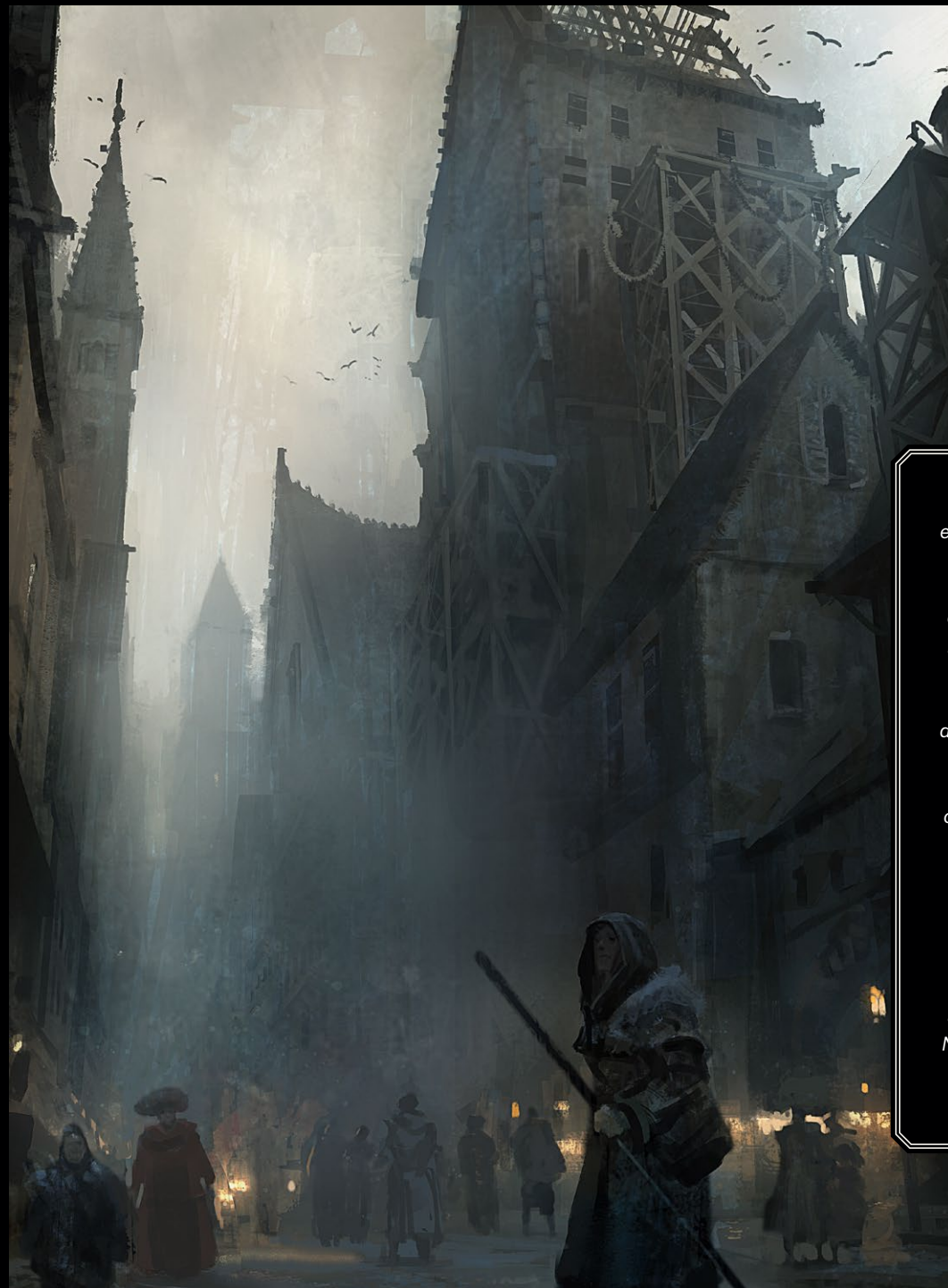
THUS SPOKE AROALETA

*"... and king upon king
sent his people to die,
in wave upon wave
over rolling plains;
men and women on
whose broken hulls,
an imposing realm
was built. Such was
the foundation of
Symbaroum: built
with flesh and blood."*



I Ambria & Davokar





"Strengthened and enlightened, we begin again, the children of Alberetor matured into the mothers of Ambria. The sorrow that blackens our hearts will be delivered in tears of hope and joy, not of grief and despair. We shall harvest the fruits of earth and forests, we shall harness the force of rivers and mountains, we will rise higher than ever before. To the pleasure of Prios we shall ascend to a place where there are no shadows, where darkness is no more. Because we are the people of Korinthia Nightbane and we will never be vanquished!"

ON THISTLE HOLD

It has been said that the town in the shadow of the great forest is like a shielded island located where a foaming ocean breaks against jagged rocks. Ambria, unruly and beset by growing pains, would be the ocean; the unforgiving horrors of Davokar the rocks and the waves would be the flood of humans fleeing north from despair and misery.





*"Warmly welcome
to the Winged Ladle
– the inn that offers
heavenly dining,
divine drinks and
beds as soft as
clouds at down to
earth prices."*





"He who travels through Davokar should never forget where the green and the gaudy has its roots. Even the richest harvest feeds on decay and you have never seen a harvest so rich, nor a soil so black as the one in the shadowy halls of Davokar."





Dreaming I was carried to the hall,
fell with the leaves to mossy floors beneath eerie vaults.

I settled afore a regal seat, of human design,
from oaktree and pine, a terrible thorn-covered throne.

And carried by the seat a being,
the father of ruin and mother of hope, in flesh, in blood.





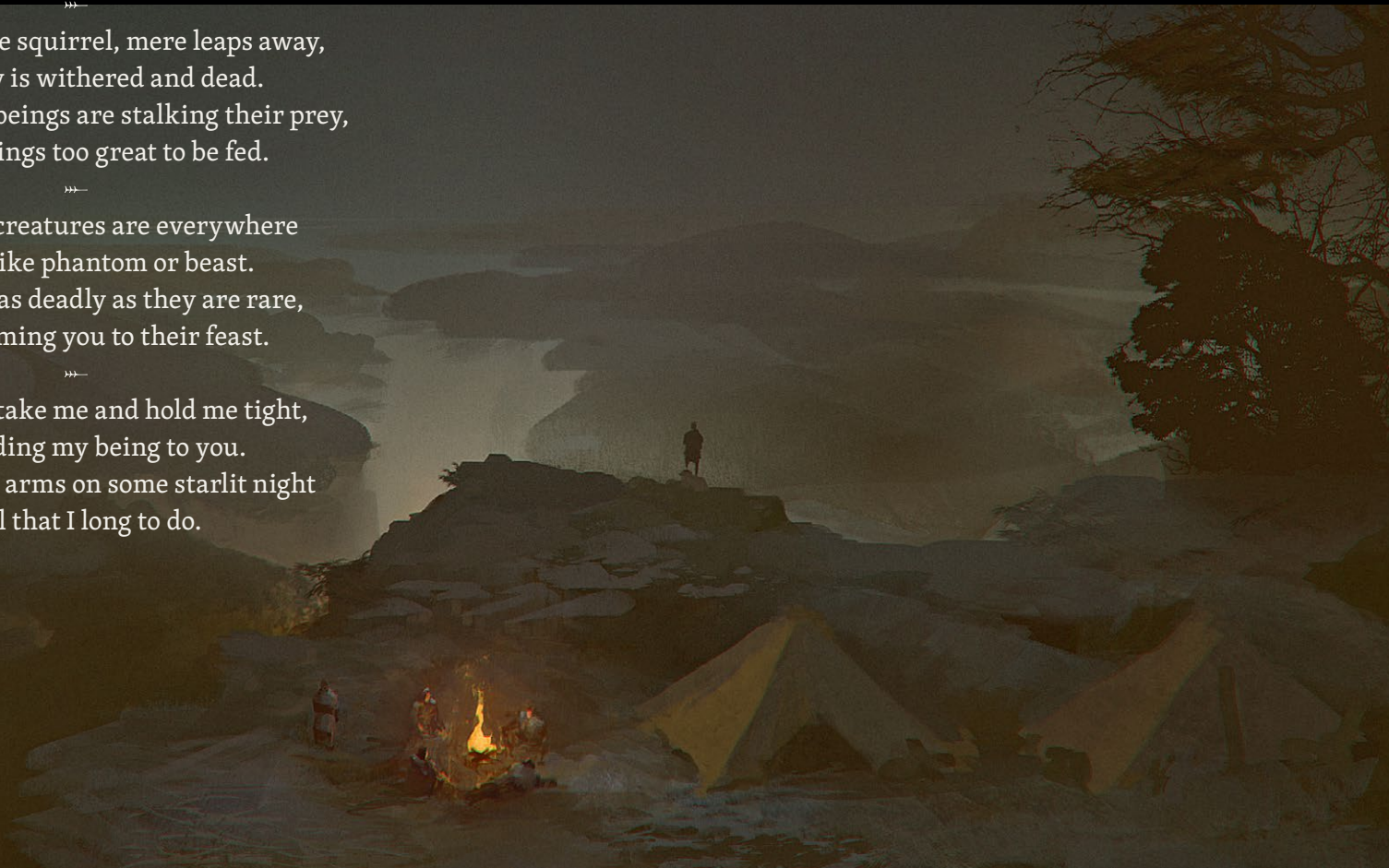
Shimmering curtains of golden rays,
a heavenly scent in the air,
everything dressed in a misty haze,
a realm so remarkably fair.

Butterflies soaring on wings so frail,
a fox cub is trailing a deer.
That squirrel is slumbering nose in tail,
so sure there is nothing to fear.

But close by the squirrel, mere leaps away,
all beauty is withered and dead.
There ravenous beings are stalking their prey,
with cravings too great to be fed.

Murderous creatures are everywhere
molded like phantom or beast.
And flowers as deadly as they are rare,
are welcoming you to their feast.

Oh Davokar, take me and hold me tight,
I'm yielding my being to you.
To die in your arms on some starlit night
is all that I long to do.





ON THE TITANS

The Queen's realm is framed by towering mountains on two sides – the wild and majestic Titans to the south; in the east the Ravens that grow taller and steeper the further south one travels. Aside from some mining colonies and the monastery of the Twilight Friars south of Yndaros, the Ambrians are yet to establish any noteworthy settlements in the mountains.



AMBRIA & DAVOKAR T





ON THE GUARD OF THE SLUMBERING WRATH

The stronghold of the High Chieftain has for centuries been protected by the Guard of the Slumbering Wrath, composed of the barbarians' best warriors. The clans take great pride in their Wrathguards and the chieftain whose warriors are biggest, strongest, quickest or most skilled is always treated with great respect during gatherings at the Thingstead.





HIGH CHIEFTAIN THARABAN

The High Chieftain of the clans has his seat on the plateau Karvosti, five days' ride northeast of Thistle Hold. Rumors describe him as either a skilled diplomat or a complete moron; alternately as a mighty warlord or a weak figurhead whose commands are dictated by the Huldra. Whatever the case, backed by the ninety-nine Wrathguards the fur clad Tharaban is a force to be reckoned with.







ON AMBRIAN SETTLERS

Of all Ambrians it is the settlers who have most contact with the people of the great forest. Today all land between the Titans in the south and Davokar in the north, between the Ravens to the east and the river Eblis to the west is considered to be colonized by Ambria. But Korinthia's ambitions are greater than that. Indeed, a dozen new settlements have been established in places still ruled by other powers. A majority of these can be found up to a day's travel past the tree-line of Davokar, for instance on the southern shore of Lake Volgoma or on the route between Thistle Hold and Karvosti.

"Is Davokar a being, a hungering and thirsting creature with moss for skin, streams and rivers for circulatory system and with a pulsating, commanding Symbar hidden somewhere beneath the greenery? After more than five years as an explorer I am inclined to answer in the negative: Davokar is not one creature but many, a horde of the woods whose soldiers have only one thing in common – they are opposed to every attempt to harvest, cultivate or intrude on their realm."







ON THE TRIBE KARABBADOKK

The members of the goblin tribe Karabbadokk living close to Thistle Hold are quite unpopular among humans. Their fiery temperament and strange ways of socializing have contributed to the disapproval: “*Hide the Boot*”, “*Tame the Ogre*” and “*Want a Smack, Molok?*” are party games that outsiders are reluctant to even watch. The only reason why goblins are tolerated in Thistle Hold is that they are practical when it comes to doing dirty work like draining marshes, emptying latrines and flailing about on scaffoldings.





ON WRATH GUARDS

The High Chieftain of Karvosti is guarded by a select number of warriors in the Guard of the Slumbering Wrath. Anyone who has met a wrath guard in combat knows that there is nothing drowsy about them. To damage a wrath guard is to wake its fury; to badly hurt an experienced guard is like summoning a furious aboar in human shrouding.

"The dwarves emerged as worms in the rotting carcass of the World Serpent and were given wit by Symbaroum's sorcerers, to make them better slaves. However, the birth of the people forever bound them to the world and its fate, and because of this bond they early on developed a forceful counterculture which still marks them. The dwarves keep their dreams to themselves and their voices echo with the fate of the world."





ON ALCHEMICAL WEAPONS

Alchemical weapons are still uncommon in Ambria. They are expensive and few; most of the fire tubes now used by sappers and panzer alchemists came with the caravans from old Alberetor. But this may be about to change. Much seem to indicate that grenades, fire tubes and missile batteries will become crucial when and if the Queen decides that the time has come to penetrate deeper into Davokar.



ON BOUNTY HUNTERS

During The Great War there were deserters, doubting that a victory over the Dark Lords was possible. To deal with the problem, King Ynedar, Queen Korinthias's father, placed a permanent bounty on the heads of the runaways. In doing so, he indirectly founded the guild of the Bounty Hunters. The tradition to pay for having fugitives caught lives on and nowadays the bounty hunters are often forced out into the forest of Davokar, where the most desperate – and also most valuable – targets tend to seek refuge.





ON THE ELVES OF DAVOKAR

According to barbarian myths, the elves arrived in the region north of the Titans as late as at the time of Symbaroum's downfall; some even say that it was the elf prince Eneáno who planted the forest of Davokar, hoping to bury the blight-stricken land of the fallen empire. Whatever the truth may be, the elves currently living in Davokar are all part of a holy guardian order, called The Iron Pact. They regard themselves as the wardens of the woods and with reference to ancient treaties they demand that both barbarians and Ambrians must stay clear of Davokar's depth and all of Symbaroum's ruins. Every violation of these treaties is regarded as an act of war.





"Maybe it isn't very strange that the holds and forest castles of the Iron Pact always echo of sorrowful songs, lamenting over the fallen and withered. Davokar's elves grow fewer and fewer; not even an ever increasing number of abducted humans can fill the gaps in their lines. There is, however, a faint light in the gloom: more and more humans are willingly seeking to join the Iron Pact, and the elves working for alliances point out that there are even Ambrians among the hopeful."



"The tales of the creatures dwelling in Dark Davokar are a lot fewer than the portrayals of its nature, maybe because most people who encounter anything living in there quickly ceases to live. Most have probably been said by my former colleague and friend, Onedar Routefinder, who nowadays is imprisoned under the monastery of the Twilight Friars, swinging from hysteric outbursts to trancelike apathy. With my own ears I've heard Routefinder whimper about bloodthirsty, bone-pale elf warriors; about Symbaroum's predatory Wraith Guard; about possessed toad-monsters, tall as five men; and about something that he alternately called dragons, serpents and drackans.."





ON WITCHCRAFT

According to witches, the world is composed of winds, blood and all things growing, together forming the three hazardous paths a witch has to wander: the white path where wind wails and spirits howl; the red path of the slow-running blood; and the green path, overgrown by thickets and roots. According to the mythology of the witches, there are places where these three paths converge, such as the cliff of Karvosti deep inside Davokar.



"Not that I've seen one before", Vidina whispered, "but isn't that a Colossi?"

"Eliend is what the elves call them", the witch answered. "They come from far out west, beyond the steppes and the inland sea where the elves have their realms."

"How are they..." Goriol interrupted himself and started over: "I mean, are they plants or... well, creatures?"

"I believe they are built from flesh and blood, like us; only their hide has that vegetation-like quality to it. But even though I have seen the two eliends serving the Huldra up close, I cannot claim to know..."





ON PRIOS, THE SUN GOD

Prios is said to be everywhere beneath the heavens, and humans are tasked with cultivating His creation. Sadly, man has neglected this duty for a long time, which means that Prios has lost much of His strength, so much in fact that He is dying. But according to the sermons there is still hope. If humans strive to correct the error of their ways – if they work harder, extract more crops from the soil, harvest more and richer resources from forests and mountains, colonize more of the wilds – then Prios will grow strong again.

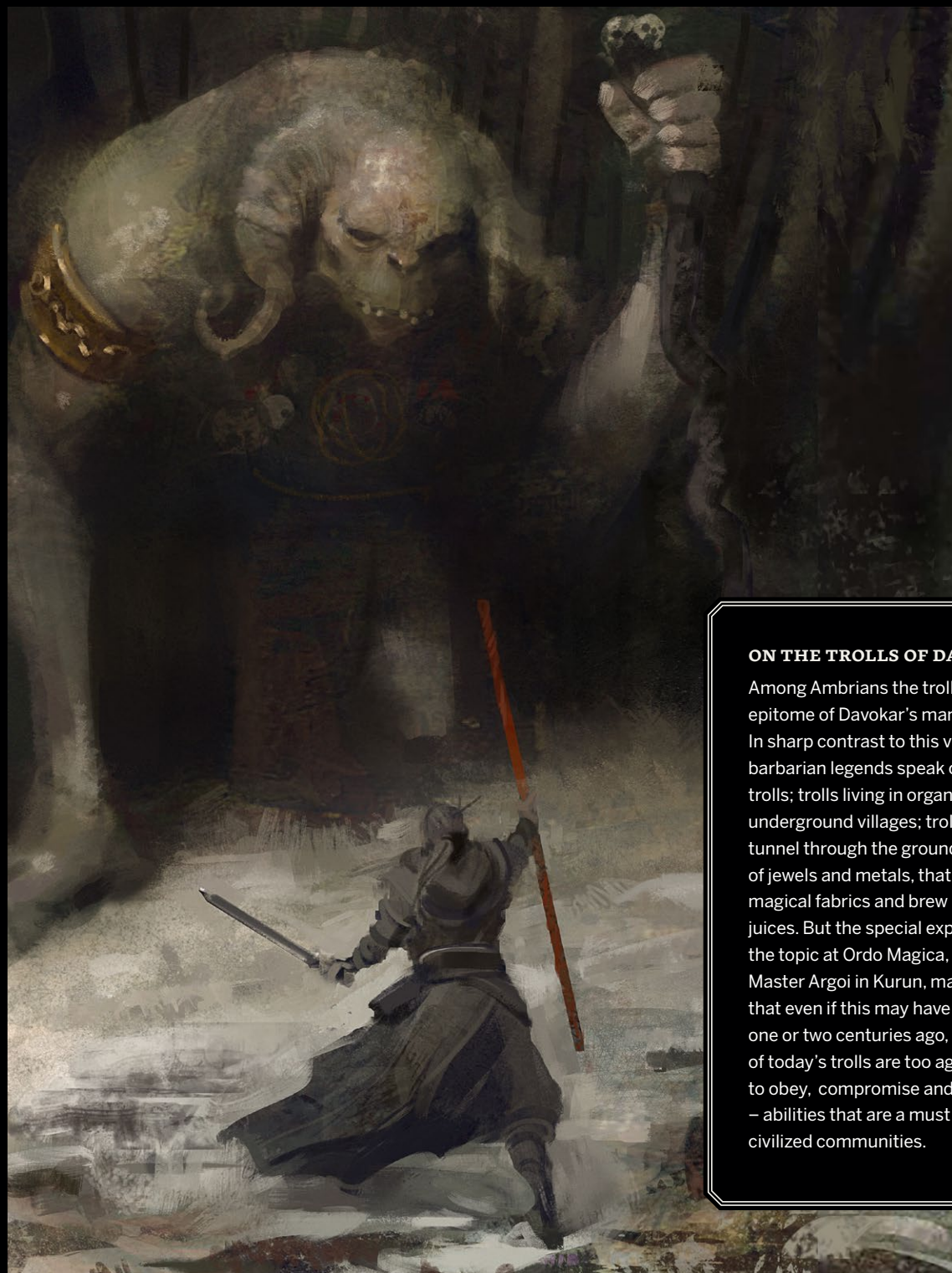




ON MYSTICAL TRADITIONS

It is widely accepted that the world does not only consist of matter, and it is obvious to everyone that there are individuals who can manipulate the flows of both material and non-material energies. The mystical traditions answer questions on how these powers are to be understood, how they may be taught as well as in what ways they are meant to be used. They have also worked out ways to lessen the dark side-effects of casting mystical powers and rituals. The powers not only manipulate but also violate the fabric of the world, something which makes the world strike back – in the form of corruption. This effect can be reduced with the help of the traditions.





ON THE TROLLS OF DAVOKAR

Among Ambrians the troll is the epitome of Davokar's many horrors. In sharp contrast to this view, barbarian legends speak of civilized trolls; trolls living in organized, underground villages; trolls that tunnel through the ground in search of jewels and metals, that weave magical fabrics and brew healing juices. But the special expert on the topic at Ordo Magica, Chapter Master Argoi in Kurun, maintains that even if this may have been true one or two centuries ago, a majority of today's trolls are too aggressive to obey, compromise and reason – abilities that are a must in all civilized communities.





...where night and day are without meaning,
where darkness shimmers and light gathers in shadows,
there stands the throne that again shall carry
a mistress, a regent, a peer of the divine...

EXCERPT FROM THE PROPHECY OF SARKOMAL

ON THE MARE CAT

The Mare Cat is justifiably hated and feared in villages along the southern border of Davokar. They roam around in groups of around ten individuals and attack at night by squeezing through cracks in the walls or by tunneling under them. Unlike other feline predators, such as the huge Kotka or the Fey Beast, the furless mare cat is armed with a grievous venom secreted from glands above the fangs – a potent and highly concentrated toxin that commands a high price where it can be purchased.





THUS SPOKE AROALETA

"... and at the dawn of days was Wyrhta, the power that creates.
Where Nothing had reigned supreme, Wyrhta gave life to All;
shaped here and there, spawned now and then,
formed the one and in chorus the other.

And where attraction arose,
the wild thrived and multiplied ...

... but out of the untamed Wielda appeared, the power that rules:
the power of willful violence, that bends here and there,
that curves now and then according to ideals and cravings;
that harvests the one and rejects the other.

With time, Wielda's appetite grew,
and the birth was inevitable ...

... because violence begets hate begets Wrath, the power that reacts.
Born of Wielda's hunger for Wyrhta's design, Wrath is everywhere and nowhere,
always close where mother meets mother,
always mounting in strength with the force of the violence.
The arrival of the black fruit is fated,
as inescapable as terrible ...

... and it happens, has happened, will happen again,
that Wrath grows boundless, furious, blind in her hunger.
It happens that the blackness grows flesh and spirit and the sharpest of claws,
that the fruit sheds seeds that poison the first,
in the aim to suppress the second.
Then dies All..."





“TWILIGHT FALLS. DAVOKAR DARKENS.” The goblin Fenya sounded calm, despite the flock of violings swarming eagerly around them – the nasty birds could predict bloodshed, they all knew that. Kvarek felt the sweat on his palms threaten his grip on the spear and shouted over his shoulder: *“Magdala, faster!”* The witch didn’t answer, lost as she was to the sinister harmonies of the ritual, her hands caressing the pillar’s grim stone face.

A loud rumbling echoed through the ruin, as if some giant creature had awoken and stood up from under layer upon layer of rock and soil. *“The witch said that abominations come at night,”* the goblin muttered. Kvarek’s knuckles whitened as he tightened the grip: *“No, only that they are hungriest after dark. They are not afraid of the evening sun, and not of...”* He was cut short by Magdala’s hoarse voice: *“The pillar has answered. I know where the mausoleum is.”*

Then, out of the ruins, the blight beast came at them, massive and roaring. Its claws scraped the rocky ground, scouring out deep sores oozing pure corruption, leaving drops of black, mercury-like mildew on moss and stones in its wake.

“We cannot escape this,” said Fenya. Magdala nodded agreement. *“Well then,”* Kvarek sighed, *“this is where we make our stand, for the right to the treasures of Symbaroum.”*



IN THE SHADOWY HALLS OF DAVOKAR grandiose treasures lay side-by-side with items that should not be touched. Unfortunately, it can be hard to tell one from the other without touching, and by then it is often too late.

Can this simple truth explain why master Cornelio, Ordo Magica's Chapter Master in Thistle Hold, has looked so grim lately? Is his troubled state of mind somehow connected to the reputed Tomb of Dreams, where his disciples have uncovered a grave site from the early days of Symbaroum?

Rumors are circling among treasure hunters and free explorers. Some attribute the Chapter Master's grim face to troubles regarding how to transport the treasure from the remote burial mound; others say that he worries about the Mayor's claims on transparency and tolls. But the older and more experienced suspect that there may be other explanations for Cornelio's dark gaze. And if they are correct, many more than Thistle Hold's wizards have reasons to fear what is to come...



THEY AVOIDED EYE-CONTACT. both of them focusing on the flickering flame that struggled for its life on the table between them. It wouldn't be long before darkness reigned supreme in their booth at the Salons of Symbaroum.

"You feel it too," she whispered to her friend and colleague. "Admit it."

"It... It's nothing, only the autumn coming. Damp and windy. Dark ..."

"Dampness, wind, darkness, they are all constant," she tried to explain.

"Autumn does not come in... swells..."

"Maybe you're falling ill," the friend remarked optimistically. "Maybe you..."

The candle went out, as if extinguished by the invisible wave washing over her, a wave that again made her stomach ache and her thoughts darken. She blinked, met her friend's gaze and forced a smile.

"You're right, there's nothing to worry about... just an ordinary autumn morning in Thistle Hold, just a..."

Her words died out, murdered by a clang that hadn't been heard in the town for more than four years – the clang of the alarm bell at the palisade's Northern Gate.



THE CHANTING OF THE CULTISTS came drifting with the breeze. Doraël-Ri had tracked them all the way from the settlement of Merel, at the border of Davokar.

A small, human child – one of few to survive the massacre – had asked how he dared to travel the woods alone. *“In Davokar you are never alone,”* he had answered. *“Not me, nor you, no one...”*

Aided by mystical rituals Doraël had managed to follow the cold tracks, but now the enemy was close enough for his friend and servant, the owl Strigi, to take over the hunt. He raised his black sword, took a deep breath and placed the Horn Mask over his face; vengeful spirits immediately flocked around him, veiling him from the world.

The sword quivered in his hand, hungry for tainted flesh and blood. *“Soon my dear, soon,”* he whispered. *“For this enemy, simpler steel will do.”*

He put the hallowed sword back in its scabbard and drew the shorter blade that had belonged to his sister. Soon he lunged through the forest, with Strigi soaring at his side. The first enemy fell before any of the cultists realized that the avenger had come.



THE EVENING MISTS COVERING THE PLATEAU made Selisa shiver where she stood in a small crowd of newly arrived treasure hunters before the Huldra. Serious eyes gazed out from behind the mask covering the Arch Witch's face, examining them one by one, measuring, judging.

"What is this?" Galar whispered softly. "We haven't done anyt..."

Selisa's discreet shin-kick shut him up. This was hardly a time for calling the Huldra's words into question. It was barely a time to breath. That feeling grew even stronger as the witch's gaze landed on Galar, and darkened.

"You..." Her voice was hateful, just as accusatory as the bony finger that soon was raised to point out Selisa's friend. "You are the quarry." The witch turned to her companion, a wrath guard with his hands resting on the shaft of his axe. "Take him away. All his companions too."

But before Selisa or Galar had time to react, before the guardsman had taken more than two steps towards them, the mist-covered silence was shattered by the clear clang of a lonely bell.

The Huldra winced, looking at the tower balancing on the edge of the plateau, only ten steps away.

"Too late", she hissed and turned back to those assembled before her.

"Now, plunderers, fight or die; the darkness you have awoken is here!"



THE MUDDY HILL STANDS in desolate majesty amidst the woodlands of Davokar. At its foot some hundred treasure hunters are crammed behind a simple palisade, seeking shelter from the dangers of the forest; wild animals, elves, and worse. You are met by muddy daythalers staggering towards their shacks for some sleep, while a few prospectors celebrate their findings on the Main Street - a couple of jerry-built houses with ostentatious exteriors in the middle of the camp.

Suddenly, the bellow of a wounded beast echoes through the woods.

"Did the sow frighten you?" A rugged woman in a leather apron approaches, holding a repeating crossbow in her arms. Half her face is covered by a mask of blackened silver. *"You better get used to it; the old lady refuses to die and keeps bothering us with her wailings."* She adjusts the mask and continues: *"They call me Silvercheek. I am the one to see if you are to purchase a claim. Come, this way."*

On the way to her office you pass a wooden pole sticking up from the clay, dressed in withered flowers. *"There lays Salindra, hoping,"* grins Silvercheek. Prayers have been carved into the rough wood, and the ground below is strewn with copper coins; meager offerings to appease the ancient forces of the forest, untamed and hungry...



