

SYMBAR

Mother of Darkness

THE FOURTH EPISODE IN THE CHRONICLE OF THE THRONE OF THORNS

"A field drenched in blood, dressed in darkness,
where bodies lay rotting, in rolling landscapes of death.

The victors, triumphant yet weeping, for humanity's fall,
and the dread of it all, for the blight-stricken earth,
wind and water.

With shackles of rootlets and creepers,they fettered the spawn
of darkness unborn, and chanted the taint into slumber."

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Symbaroum

FREE LEAGUE

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The turning point of the chronicle!

IT MAY SEEM DELIBERATE THAT this particular episode of the Chronicle of the Throne of Thorns is the first to be written after Järnringen's merger with Free League Publishing. But the fact that the dramatic turning point of the series coincides with a key event in the history of the Symbaroum franchise is nothing but a happy coincident, a stroke of luck that has allowed us to spend even more time and love making Mother of Darkness a worthy high point in the series.

So, it is finally time for the players and their characters to live the dream of every fortune hunter, explorer, and ambitious highborn: discovering Symbar – the darkened heart of the old empire. Perhaps this is where their goals will be realized, whether they seek treasure, fame or insight into the history of the region and the world. Provided, of course, that they survive the journey to the depths of Davokar. As writers of this chronicle we hope that the expedition ends well, but it would be wrong of us to lie about its many varied and ruthless challenges. All we can do is wish you good fortune, and hope that all of us will soon be joined in the dark embrace of Mother Symbar!

Enjoy!

FREE LEAGUE PUBLISHING



JOURNEY TO THE TEMPLE OF EXALTATION





GAME MASTER'S SECTION

1 THE SHADOW OF SYMBAROUM 58
Rise, Fall and Slumber 59
Factions 64

2 RUINS 72
Prisoners of the Death Crater 72
Dawn of the Black Sun 78

3 EXPEDITIONS IN DAVOKAR 86
Missions 87
Movement in Davokar 89
Events 92
The Treasure of the Ruins 95

4 NEW MECHANICS 101
Additional Rules 101
Artifacts 102
Miscellaneous 104

MOTHER OF DARKNESS

5 INTRODUCTION 108
Background 110
The Structure of the Adventure 111
The Player Characters 114

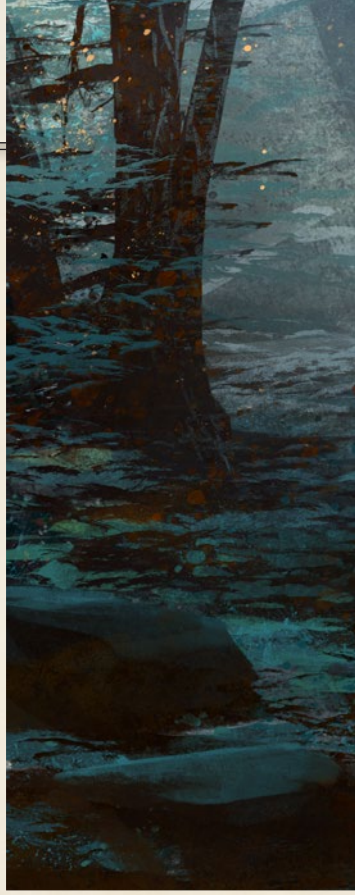
6 ACT 1: PRELUDE TO THE EXPEDITION 116
Game Opening 116
Planning the Expedition 119
Scheming 123
Suggested Scenes 126

7 ACT 2: TO SYMBAR 129
The Hunting Parties 129
Routes 133
Symbar's Surrounding Area 139

8 ACT 3: SYMBAR 143
Factions 143
Overview 168
The Imperial Palace 172
The Crown Ship 180
The Mother Tree 190
Castle Thorn 203
Special Events 216

9 AFTERMATH 224
The Journey Home 224
Developments 226
What Comes Next? 227

The Forests Darken...



Every journey into Davokar is hazardous; with time, the risk seems to steadily grow while easily accessible treasure becomes more and more scarce.

... AS DO THE WATERS AND THE PLAINS.

Neither the subjects of Queen Korinthia nor the clans of Davokar have taken the warnings seriously enough. Many have ignored them completely; others have dismissed them as attempts by witches and elves to keep the forest's riches for themselves. The hunger for the fruits of the forest has outweighed fear and caution; the wells of blackness that have opened in humanity's wake have been wrongly attributed to the inherent evil of the wilds. And no hunger has been greater than the lust to find the heart of the ancient empire – to find what the witches call The Mother of all Darkness. To find Symbar.

THE REASON FOR the search varies; as does the nature of the desire. The vast majority believe the last seat of Symbaroum to be the greatest source of treasure and knowledge in the region, but can content themselves with other destinations as long as Symbar seems too difficult to find, too dangerous to visit. For others, the site and its legendary Throne of Thorns have gained such renown that the hunt overshadows everything else; it has become a symbol of supremacy, chosenness and ultimate victory. Regardless of whether the throne even exists, or holds any actual power beyond the superstitious convictions of the Ambrian people, its temptation is so great that it has already lured hundreds of fortune hunters straight into the murderous maw of Dark Davokar.

With the developments following the adventure The Darkest Star, and the spread of the presumably accurate directions to the ruined city of Symbar, the hunt is really about to begin: the hunt through a forest whose darkness thickens and deepens, for a site that will surpass everyone's expectations in terms of treasure as well as knowledge and danger.

This book delves deep into the wilder and darker parts of Davokar. You will learn more



about the region's ancient history; about the fall of Symbaroum, the emergence of the Iron Pact, and the time that has elapsed between then and now. The information and insights are divided into three sections – a first one meant to be read by both players and Game Masters, followed by a Game Master's section with exclusive information and new rules, and finally the epic adventure Mother of Darkness which takes the players and their characters to the black heart of the forest: the ruined city of Symbar. If they make it that far.

The opening section is actually a traveler's journal, written by the expedition leader Vidina and found tied to a raft drifting near River Eanor's estuary into Lake Volgoma. It is intended to be read by both players and Game Masters, and is meant to serve several purposes. First and foremost, Vidina's experiences will offer an understanding of what traveling through the wilder parts of Davokar might be like, giving the Game Master a point of reference when describing the environment and when designing homebrew adventures. It is also important that the players realize that their characters must be well prepared for the journey, and that they appreciate the severity of the threats they may encounter. Last but not least, the journal includes a few entries which provide clues for solving certain challenges the player characters may face when/if they reach Symbar.

As usual, the Game Master's section is divided into several chapters, some of which should be familiar to those who have read and played previous episodes. A first chapter offering insights into the history of Davokar and Symbaroum is followed by a presentation of the game world's factions – what goals, means and relations that distinguish those who might become the player characters' allies or, more likely, competitors. Next up are descriptions of two ruin areas complete with maps and non-player characters, which may be used as a basis for standalone adventures or to enrich the group's long journey to Symbar. The section ends with a couple of chapters covering alternative rules regarding excursions into Davokar, followed by new traits, powers, elixirs, creatures, artifacts and more.

The final section of the book is devoted entirely to the adventure Mother of Darkness and its three acts: a first in which the player characters make their preparations; a second introducing the competitors and the more or less nightmarish journey; and a final act describing Symbar itself and what might happen there. If the player characters survive the visit, they will have encountered the legendary Throne of Thorns. But doing so is extremely dangerous, at least before it has been restored to its former glory – something that cannot be done without deeper knowledge of the priesthood called the Order of Dakothnic, whose members recently became known under a different name: the Dark Lords...

With wishes of a trouble-free journey and a safe return, the undersigned Recruit is entrusted the task of leading the expedition to, and the exploration of, Excursion Object: the Temple of Exaltation.

The Recruit is responsible for planning the route, procuring equipment/supplies and recruiting personnel; a fund of Six Hundred and Fifty silver thaler is at his/her disposal and deemed sufficient for the task, including a License for Excursions into and Exploration of the Forest of Davokar.

The expedition to and from the Temple of Exaltation shall be carefully documented, all discoveries recorded and findings registered. Upon return, any discoveries shall be reported and finds submitted to the employer. A monetary remuneration of One Thousand Silver Thaler will be paid once the employer has approved the debriefing; the remuneration may be halved in the event of dubiousness.

Under no circumstances is the Recruit allowed to disclose the identity of the employer; this contract must be kept in such a way that no unauthorized individual can gain knowledge of, or access to, its contents. Should the employer's identity be revealed as a result of the Recruit's actions, the contract shall be considered void, and the Recruit called to account.

Violina
Recruit

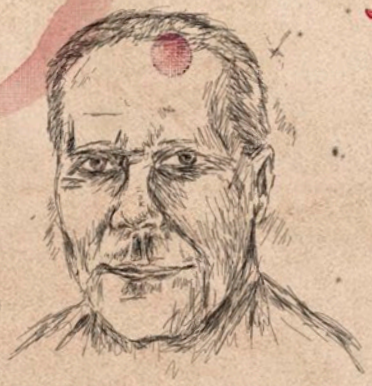
Sesario Karnak
Employer



SECTION 1:

JOURNEY TO THE TEMPLE OF EXALTATION

In the Hold



He's awful. Loathsome. Not only slimy and arrogant – there's something vile behind his smile. Sure, he seems sincere in seeking a cure for his beloved's affliction. But why the secrecy? Why the Temple of Exaltation? And why the blackness in his eyes?

One thing is certain: he has no intention of paying me in full. So, it's only right that he gets no more than half the spoils of the expedition. That's how it'll be: I will write in the expedition journal after my entries here, and leave out whatever I want to keep for myself! Same with the finds.

The decision to leave Alavan in Kastor seemed obvious at the time, but less so now that I'm at the Hold. No matter how annoying he can be, no matter how dangerous the journey will prove, I can't stop worrying. Hopefully the Baron's enforcers will stay true to their word and leave him alone till I return. Because return I will.

Helin and Rann were waiting at the Ruin, but the other members are yet to be recruited. Will ask Alagai, of course, if I can find him; I'm trusting Helin to find another two or three candidates, preferably a skilled hunter and tracker. My first task will be to secure a guide. Shouldn't be a problem with the resources available to me.

Recruitment

Not a strong start. The guides I had in mind are unavailable – Arval and Fonsiul out on missions; Beor dead (killed by ferbers). Got a tip about a newcomer, a barbarian from clan Zarek. He was blasted drunk and disgustingly handsy. I'll keep looking.

Spoke with Lysindra about the map. Might have been a mistake, but it was a risk I had to take (she's getting 40 thaler when I get back). She has doubts about the whereabouts of our destination and the route I've planned for us. A search in the Legation archives and talks with the regulars at the Salons suggest she's right – about the corruption in the area as well.



By the way, in the archives I found a reference to a ruin called the Shrine of the Exalted. It comes from a lone fortune hunter who returned from deep within Davokar, incoherent and "feral" (whatever that means). A vague account at best, but full of darkness and death. It included a drawing of the medallion she wore, found during her travels. Not exactly encouraging in its design...

In any case, I'll need to bring a priest along, or a black cloak. Or a witch. Someone who can handle the black blight. Wish Yerola was here. Or Sarvola. Will have to ask Elfeno. A young, talented person in need of experience would be ideal; qualified, but not cocky. Better a theurg than a black cloak.

"Good luck finding a reliable guide at Thistle Hold; most of them will stab you in the back or find other ways to screw you over. The loyal ones are exceedingly rare and even more expensive."

Deceived

Got my Explorer's License today. Ridiculously expensive – good thing the swine is paying: over two hundred thaler for one month. I hope it will be enough time, otherwise there'll be a fine to pay when I return. That aside...



Damn people. All of them. Humans, goblins, changelings, everyone. Damn Malga! I was sure she was the right guide for the job, but then she started questioning the route. The new one. Suggested a stupid, westward semicircle around Jerak – straight through the area everyone says is the new feeding ground of the liege troll Gunagan. As if I didn't know.

I hope no one will miss her. Well, aside from her true employer, whoever that was – she wouldn't say. Could be Goldengrasp, although it isn't like her to mess up that badly. Who else? Has my own esteemed employer been shooting off his mouth? The sun temple? Someone I met at the Salons of Symbaroum? Not likely. I was very careful.

Must clean up. Then quickly find another guide and get going. Risky to stay at the Hold after this.

Departure

Now I just need some carriers. Will sort that out in Karabbadokk. Didn't dare to stay any longer, and after Malga's duplicity was exposed, it would be best to avoid further recruitment in Thistle Hold anyway. The question is, can I trust the ones already hired?

Usula is an experienced guide of some renown, even better than those I had in mind, though more expensive and worn out; she returned from the forest only yesterday.

The sun priest Erdan seems competent enough, and eager to please in every way. His vanity is a nuisance, but that's youth for you, and it will no doubt fade after a few days in the filth of Davokar. I'm more doubtful about Orgai. Despite his lowborn stature, he has already started questioning my leadership – not explicitly, but I can see it in his face. I do need someone to interpret any finds and symbols we come across, and the fact that he is independent from Ordo Magica is certainly an advantage. But he must be kept in check.

At least I can trust my guard team. Rann and Helin are beyond reproach, and in the three excursions I've made with Alagai I must have saved his life three or four times. The new additions are Morea (archer, tracker) and Harlar (alchemist, sapper) – both recommended by Helin.

Back in the saddle!

WITH THE GOBLINS)

Worrying. In Karabbadokk I left the recruitment of carriers to Helin while I inspected the mules' packs. The bottle of Purple Sap is missing; I KNOW I packed it and where I put it – along with the herbal cures and the dose of Elixir of Life that Father Elfeno gave me. I have been wrong before, of course, especially under pressure. And it might have fallen out, I suppose.

I haven't told the others. Best to keep it close to the chest so as not to warn a potential traitor to be more cautious. Will have to keep an eye on Morea and Harlar in particular. Could have been anyone, really, depending on what they are after or what a third party (Malga's employer?) might offer as a reward...

Damn it!

In the margins of this section you will find a number of rumors about Davokar. They reflect what many are saying in the taverns and squares of Ambria, often in whispered voices. Half of them are likely pure fiction, and the rest littered with misinterpretations or exaggerations. But who knows, maybe there is a grain of truth to be found in some of them after all.

Day 1 in the forest

The first major conflict with Orgai settled, no more than halfway between the edge of the forest and the River Eanor. He started grunting and moaning during my presentation of our route to Karvosti, but didn't say anything until we faced a slight setback – an old, starving mosey monk hiding in some bushes, waiting for death. Now our pretty-boy theurg has less to be vain about, after the fumes of the monk burned his milky white skin, but it wasn't so bad. The monster ran off, and the acid was soon washed away in a nearby pond.



However, Orgai argued that it was the unwise choice of route that caused the incident, that we should have stayed on the caravan route that traverses the Skull Rapids. I refused to discuss it, just kept staring him down while he went on about ranger patrols, caravans and safe night camps. When he finally stopped blathering, I told him like it is: "Shut up or face the consequences of a broken contract." He had another go about the woods growing darker and the delicious breakfast bread at Gray Wade Crossing.

It ended with a slap in the face. Or didn't end – he can forget about getting any bread with his gruel before we head out!



Day 2

The first casualty today – one of the carriers. Her name was Ugl- something. Or Ulg-. I think. A pity, since she was apparently both strong and skilled with the axe. "A survivor," as the leader of the carriers (Olfions) remarked, without seeing the irony in his statement. Anyway, the beast that slew her didn't care about her character. It was a marlit, which is surprising in itself; we weren't more than an hour's walk from the Eanor, and I've never heard of marlits hunting in these parts, at this time of year. "Davokar darkens," muttered the swellhead, followed by a faint: "Told you so..."

To be clear: Orgai isn't wrong, except that it is always improper to question one's expedition leader. I heard Helin reprimand him during this morning's trek, hissing threateningly, something like: "Far fewer expeditions have perished because of rage trolls and elves, than due to idiots who don't know the importance of following orders!" That's true, but still, he is not wrong...

Had it not been for our slimy employer's orders to keep our excursion secret, I too would have preferred the caravan route. The memory of my meeting with him, the Slimeball, still pops into my mind from time to time. Even in my dreams. Again: the mission itself seems reasonable, justified. It is he, as a person, that bothers me. I have met obnoxious nobles before, even blight-stricken ones, but none less pleasant than the Duke of Mervidun.

Must see this for what it is: a well-paid job to save Alavan, for someone I will never have to see again. That is all.

"Oh yes, you needn't go very far to hunt marlit these days. Don't know why, but they are coming further and further south, mark my words!"

Day 3

Spent the night at one of the Karits' encampments. Empty, as expected. Everything points to the rumors being true – that the clan is in crisis, with many of its members having joined the High Chieftain, while the rest have scattered and headed east. I hope Yerola is among the former. Kora and Aroun too. Maybe I'll see them when we pass Karvosti.

Otherwise a slow day. Everyone has been quiet, focusing more on the surroundings than on their aching muscles and each other. That's usually what happens: when someone dies, the others realize where they really are: in Davokar, where every step may be your last. The cool, fragrant air under the foliage; the rays of the summer sun above; the silence that is only broken by the rustling leaves and the moss creaking softly beneath our boots – none of that matters. The true darkness of Davokar cannot be dispelled by light or beauty.

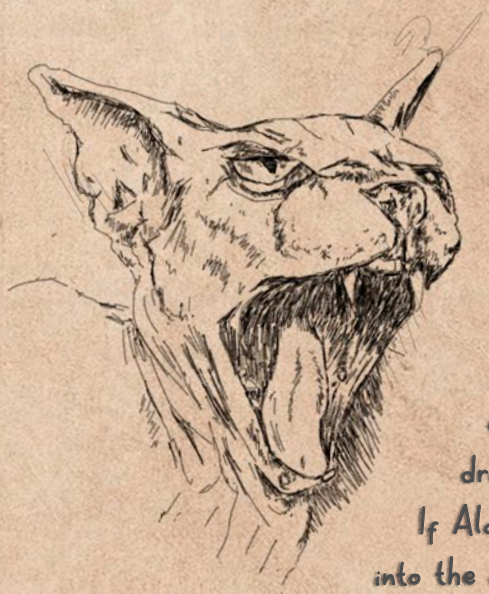
Now I'll sleep, peacefully. I'm taking the dawn watch tonight; then I might as well write an entry in the Slimeball's journal, before waking the others.

Day 4

If yesterday was nice and quiet, today was anything but. It's been a long time since I was this close to death – three times in a single day, no less. If it hadn't been for Ugleg, Harlar and Alagai, yesterday's entry might well have been my last.

It started at noon, after the morning trek. Ugleg, one of the carriers, hurried over with panic in his eyes, hissing, "Quiet, quiet, danger!" I still don't understand how he could know, but we put out the fire and hid in a crevice, with the mules in the back. Just a moment later a patrol of ten or twelve barbarian warriors passed in the distance; must have been the Sovereign's Oath, a scouting party perhaps.

Next person to save my life was Harlar. I knelt to drink from a small stream, but before the water touched my lips, he kicked me in the rear so that I almost fell in. Pissed me off at first, until I turned around and remembered that I'd ordered silence after our encounter with the barbarians. Besides, his eyes said it all: he gave me a stare of warning, pointing downstream along the bank, toward the cadaver of a freshly killed fawn. A quick examination was enough to rule out predators and common diseases; it had likely been poisoned, possibly from the water.



Last but not least, I have Alagai to thank for my continued existence. We were just about to set up camp for the night when we suffered the first serious predator attack of the journey — a large flock of mare cats, led by a scarred and abnormally large female. We formed a cluster, the warriors on the outside. It was cramped and chaotic, and I was pushed, fell forwards, and dropped my sword in front of the leader beast. If Alagai hadn't leapt forward, plunging his knives into the animal and wrestling her to the ground, she would have sunk her teeth into my neck.

Trying to recall who was behind me as I fell. I think it was Rann. Maybe Orgai. Whoever pushed me, I hope it wasn't intentional, but either way we must become better at clustering up. This won't be good enough against more dangerous beasts, deeper in the forest.

Day 6

Two days without much to report. Well, last night there was something sneaking around our camp. Possibly fairies, but more likely just some small animals – Morea had a look before setting off, but couldn't find any tracks. Also, two of the carriers have fallen ill; they're puking and shitting like goblin babies, maybe because of something they ate but probably just a bad case of the runs.

Despite the sick ones slowing us down, we reached the Malgomor this afternoon. We should be almost precisely due south of the Earth Towers, but there's some disagreement as to where we are in terms of longitude. It doesn't matter; we just have to follow the river to Karvosti, for supplies and a few days of rest.

Had another fight with Orgai, by the way. It'd be one thing if he came directly to me with his reluctance to go near Karvosti, but when he's trying to influence the others behind my back... This may end badly. For him.



Day 7

Today we've been walking along the river, on the south side. Not too close, of course; we're trying to keep a distance so that we can barely distinguish its rumble from the other sounds of the forest. It's not just predators we must look out for. The High Chieftain's troops may be allies of the Queen, but they might very well decide to stop us, not least because Morea apparently comes from one of the northern clans. And we must make sure to avoid the enemy's forces as well.

"If there's something you want to know about the ruins of Symbaroum, ask the goblins. Their stories may be difficult to interpret, but they can lead you to amazing treasure!"

Interesting lunch break today. I sat down with the carriers, and though the conversation didn't exactly flow (only Olfions and one of the others speak decent Ambrian), they seem to know a thing or two about the Temple of Exaltation. There is, of course, no guarantee that the place they're talking about is the one we seek, but I'll keep questioning them during tomorrow's breaks and report what I've learned. Based on what they told me today, the ruin in question seems to have an extremely colorful history.

Day 8

Was forced to cower and hide twice today – first to avoid a group of mounted rangers, then twenty or so barbarian warriors double-timing it east, many of them clearly wounded in battle. It should be noted that Ugleg was once again the first to notice the threats. He seems to be tremendously astute. Maybe I should promote him, have him partner up with Usula?

So, the carriers' information about the Temple of Exaltation. Or, rather, their legends. Fairy tales. They say that for a long time, the place was a permanent outpost of the Iron Pact, where local goblin tribes were free to make camp during journeys, hunting trips or in the event of emergencies in the area. But then "the mountain shook and the earth cracked"; the building collapsed and a chasm opened to the Underworld (or "the Dark Below," as Olfions put it). The elves disappeared (swallowed or relocated), and the darkness has kept spreading ever since.

It's still unclear whether they are describing the right place, or whether the legends are even true. Also uncertain when this was supposed to have occurred – at first Olfions said "many generations"; and then, when I demanded clarification, "don't know, maybe a hundred Queen's years." Must look into this on Karvosti, if I can find someone suitable to liquor up for questioning...



Day 9

Army camps to the east, west and south. There's a mound under construction to the north, westwards from the Obala Creek; they have also started erecting a wooden palisade nearby. With our license in order, we had no problem getting access to the plateau. Finding a place for the tents at the pilgrim camp went just as smoothly. Few treasure hunters, even fewer pilgrims. The Black Cloaks have taken over the sun temple after the Knights of Dead Prios went down the path of vengeance.

Edrafin is still here, but it's getting late; will see him in the morning. A maximum of two glasses wine, stut or hubble per person is the order of the evening – a balanced dose of mental and physical recuperation. More carriers are having stomach problems; one got really sick, but hopefully the powder I bought from Teresma at the Longhouse will do the trick. Tried asking her about the Temple of Exaltation or "The Shrine of the Exalted," but she had never heard of it.

Another thought: the purpose of the expedition is to find something that might help the ailing Queen Mother, and yet the Slimeball never said our journey had the Queen's blessing. Instead he demanded that the expedition be kept secret, especially his own involvement. And if the goblins are correct – why would there be a cure of any kind in a place swallowed by darkness? If we didn't need the thaler to pay off the debt, to remove the death threat, I would honestly consider tearing up the contract. There's a lot that doesn't seem right.

Day 10

Rann has a deep cut across his neck; got into a fight with an Ambrian fortune hunter over a game of Prios' Sun and was slashed by the opponent's drunken friend. The opponent is now locked up safely at the Stronghold. Rann was bleeding heavily; he's feeling faint, but has not lagged behind, even though we kept a fast pace during the evening's walk. We've made camp now, south of the mound. Exciting day tomorrow.

Haven't found out anything more about our destination, but Edrafin assures me that the Sovereign's Oath won't stop us. He doesn't know their views on the matter, but he has talked to several groups who have ventured into Baiaga territory and returned, despite encounters with the Blood-Daughter's warriors. So, we continue as planned – north via Serand's to the Sinkhole, before heading almost straight north-east until we reach the stream which Goldengrasp calls the Slay Waters (after a former colleague who died there).



As for myself, I'm tired. Strange that a day's rest can have that effect. I've heard others say that the fatigue is at its worst immediately after a longer rest, but never experienced it before. I just hope I haven't caught something from the carriers. Should have bought more of Teresma's powder.

"I heard the Sovereign's Oath is cleaning out all ruins north of Karvosti, even the ones in the deep. All of them! Seriously, they'll strip all of Davokar of treasure and artifacts!"

Day 11

We've made camp about halfway to Serand's, sooner than planned. No Sovereign troops thus far, but Rann is weak and I'm feeling a bit off as well. Run-down.

Didn't mentioned it earlier, even though it had already crossed my mind, but I'm starting to suspect that we're being followed. Maybe I'm just imagining things, but even before we reached the Malgomor, there were a couple of occasions when I heard sounds that seemed out of place, wrong somehow – a distant bang and a thud, and a scream. Then there were the quiet footsteps around our camp, though Morea couldn't find any tracks. And now, as we set up camp, I could swear I caught the scent of cooked food wafting in the south-west wind, extremely faint and only for a moment.

I spoke to Usula; she couldn't smell anything, said the hunger was playing tricks on my mind. And she didn't seem worried about anyone following us. Granted, I never told her about my previous observations, but with all that experience she too must have noticed the sounds, just not deemed them noteworthy. Got to trust her judgment; must assume that she's loyal – if I can't rely on my guide, I'm doomed anyway.

Day 12

How wrong can a person be!? I'm so furious I can barely write.

I don't know what to think, and I'll never be able to prove any of this, but either Edrafin was seriously misinformed or much too optimistic. Or maybe he lied, paid by whoever wants to see me fail.

We are one hour south of Serand's Pyramid, hiding in an abandoned hut that reeks of troll and mold. But Rann and Morea aren't here. The Sovereign warriors we encountered forced us Ambrians to turn back, along with the carriers; the commander asked me to tell our countrymen about "the Blood-Daughter's mercy and goodwill toward the people of the Tyrant Queen." But our barbarian companions were treated differently.

They were savagely beaten before our eyes, accused of treason, of fraternizing with the enemy instead of joining the new army of Symbaroum. Just as we were pushed away, firmly and without a hint of kindness, a chuckling, rune-covered warrior took out his primitive tattoo kit – probably to initiate Rann and Morea into the Sovereign's Oath.

I will not have it! Both shall be freed, tonight!

Day 13

Must be brief. Followed. Thanks to Usula the extraction went easier than anticipated – she snuck up, slit the camp guard's throat, freed Rann and Morea, and escaped without the warriors noticing.

Note 1: they must have underestimated our ability; thought we wouldn't dare come back.

Note 2: I was a fool for ever doubting Usula's loyalty!

I've decided to head east, not only because of Gunagan's hunting grounds in the west, but also because Usula and I are more familiar with the terrain around the Sun Temple and up north. We can find places to hide. Also, I already know two or three spots that would be perfect for an ambush, when/if the Sovereign warriors catch up to us.

Now, onward through the night.

Day 14

We may have managed to shake our pursuers, or at least bought us some time. A few hours before dawn we reached a brook that crossed our path, shallow enough that we could walk on the bed, follow it toward the Ravens. We moved slowly; there were no stars in the sky, so we stumbled through complete darkness. Had to stand still for almost a glass after Usula noticed the sound of beating wings coming from above. We couldn't see it, due to the darkness and the foliage looming over the brook, but it sounded big. Huge. Much bigger than a wraith owl.

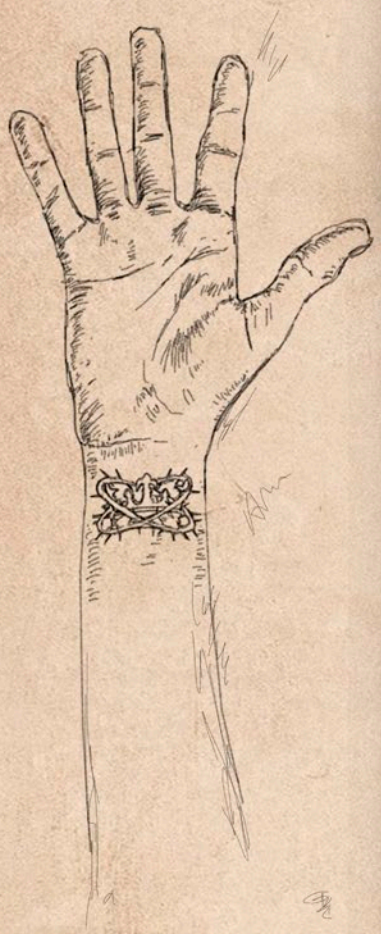
It is now noon and we've finally dared to take a break, after backtracking and keeping a close watch on the way we came, from some bushes roughly forty paces away. So far everything is calm and quiet, but I noticed something else – the waybread is moldy. It shouldn't be possible, not this soon, not the way we have kept it. And sure enough: there are tiny holes in the fabric, barely noticeable but certainly done on purpose. The question is when. Back at Marvalom's where we bought the "waybread"? Before leaving the Hold? Or on the journey?

Must discuss it with someone. My gut tells me I can trust Rann and Helin, but nothing about who might be a traitor. Orgai bothers me to no end, but doesn't that speak against him being a planted saboteur? And Usula... It was awfully convenient that she happened to turn up at the Hold, but if she wanted to sabotage the expedition, why save the two warriors from the Sovereign's Oath? Maybe she's the one I should talk to.

Day 16

Not much rest these past few days, yet we haven't gotten very far – chose route and terrain for the purpose of shaking the Sovereign's Oath, not to gain ground. But we've left the Sun Temple behind and turned north. We passed at a distance; only Usula and I snuck closer – it's now dominated by the Sovereign's Oath, with a few Knights of Dead Prios held prisoner. And with squires and a couple of priests as their slaves. Can't imagine the First Revenger will let this go unpunished...

The journey is taking a toll on us, slowly but surely. Two of our three mules are limping from pushing through the rough terrain, and several of the carriers are still plagued by stomach problems (one of them in particular, whose fever won't come down). Morea has a fever too, probably from her infected tattoo – where Rann has a red crown entwined with thorns, she has one sticky with puss. The exhaustion can also be seen in Orgai and Erdan; the swellhead no longer has the energy to complain or make faces, while the previously so vain sun priest has let his hair become tangled and dirty, his acid burnt face coated with the filth of the forest.

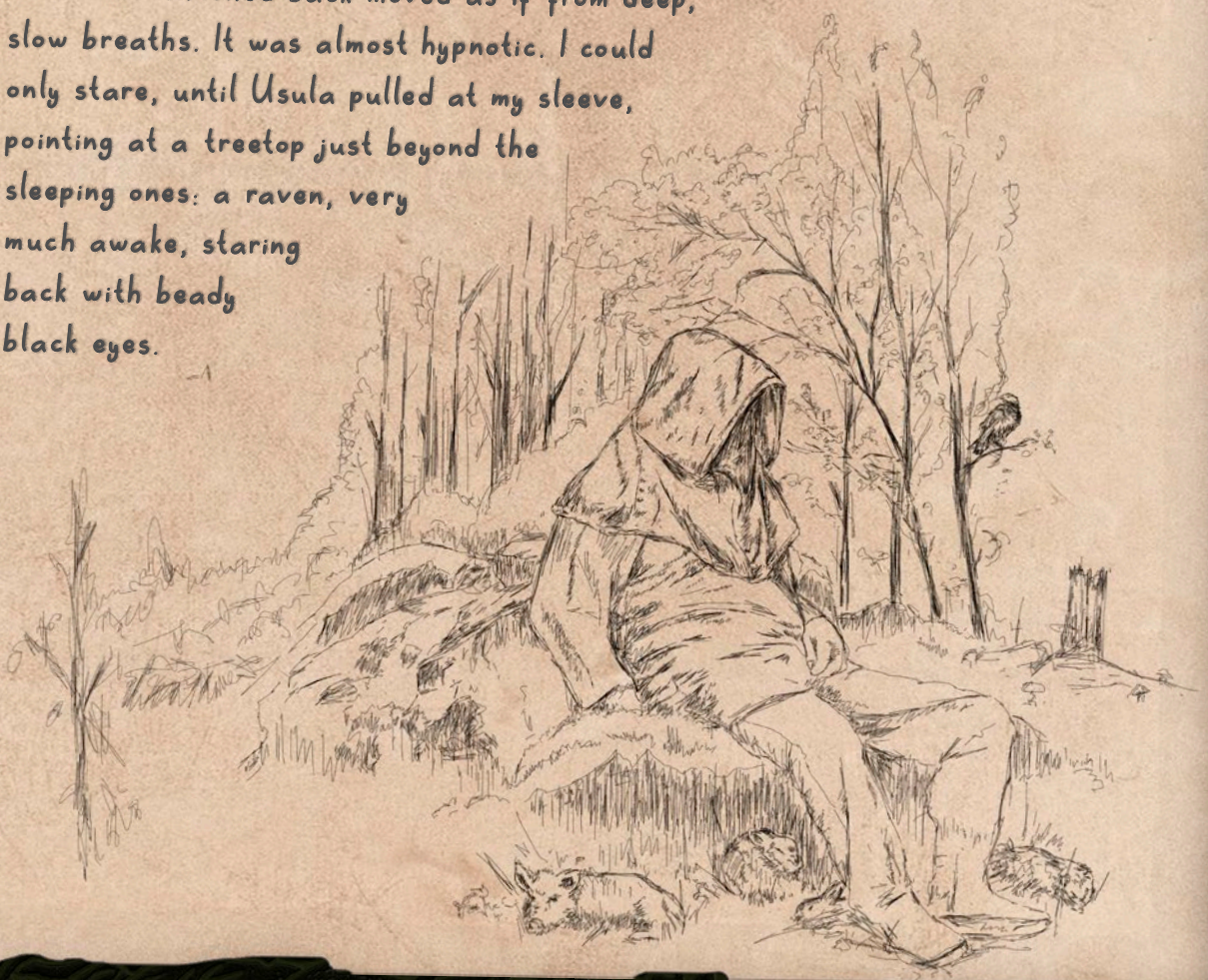


Then again, so far we have actually been lucky, especially considering the situations we've faced. Hard to believe so many of us are still alive.

Day 17

Had a real Davokar moment today, the kind Alavan would have loved – incomprehensible, inexplicable and therefore deeply unsettling. Usula gestured us to stop and waved me over, pointing through the misty darkness at a figure sitting on a mossy rock, surround by sleeping animals – including a couple of hares, a mink and a wild boar piglet.

We didn't dare to go closer. The figure's head was covered by a blanket-like hood, leaned forward as if the person (creature?) was asleep; I thought I saw a beard, but it could have been long, unkempt hair. The hunched back moved as if from deep, slow breaths. It was almost hypnotic. I could only stare, until Usula pulled at my sleeve, pointing at a treetop just beyond the sleeping ones: a raven, very much awake, staring back with beady black eyes.



After circumventing the strange scene, we continued through a stretch of forest that felt more peaceful than usual. Might have been my imagination, or maybe I was just lulled by the sense of harmony radiating from the creature on the rock. Or maybe Orgai is right and the creature we saw was one of the Elders, one of the shepherds and wardens of the forest. On the other hand, this is Davokar – the creature and the animals may just as well have been fortune hunters that poked around in the wrong ruin or angered the wrong arch troll...

Day 18

Orgai is an absolute idiot! We made camp in the outskirts of what must once have been the city of Alkor, with clear orders to ignore the ruins. The swellhead protested, saying that we should investigate the rumors circulating the Hold that Karlomei Mederen has gotten lost around here, in the city's old sewers. When I shook my head, he blurted out other rumors about hidden treasure chambers and "power-laden blackwater." Like a fool, I had him take the first watch as punishment for his insolence. Naturally, he went off on his own.

Rann, Helin and Morea have gone to bring him back. I wanted to go as well, but everyone objected, and they're right – the expedition leader and the guide must never knowingly expose themselves to risks that others can handle. But I have a gnawing feeling in the pit of my stomach. Davokar always finds a way of punishing stupidity, and the swellhead has certainly earned it... I just hope no one else will have to pay the price.

By the way, I'll have that talk with Usula while we're waiting, about my suspicions as well as how to ration our supplies. I expected that we would have to hunt, fish and pick berries and mushrooms. But with the amount of bread lost, the plan needs updating..

"The spiders are taking over Davokar again, just like they did in the days of the Spider King. You know what arachs are, don't you? Like, his soldiers. They've recently been spotted near Serand's Pyramid."

Day 19



Rann is dead. Spiders. Tricklestings, Orgai said; bigger than that, according to Morea. The latter is badly wounded, pale as snow and shaking with chills, as if she wasn't weak enough already from the tattoo. Harlar and Usula are trying to help. Erdan is also at her side, immersed in prayer, but I doubt she'll make it through the day.

It is noon, and we have stopped at a small lake, fairly certain that the spiders aren't following us. Fled from Alkor in panic – Helin and the swellhead came running with Morea hanging between them, wild-eyed with fear. One of the already injured mules squealed and collapsed shortly after setting off, unwilling to stand; must have twisted an ankle again. I ordered the carriers to pick up the animal's bags; then we left her there, as a peace offering to anyone hunting us.

Helin is inconsolable; the murderous glances she's throwing at Orgai are even more hateful than my own. But we can't lose him as well; he must live, for now. Don't know whether his silence is due to fear or regret; hasn't said a word since he returned, barely raised his gaze from the figurine he brought with him from his moronic jaunt. Can probably rule him out as a traitor after all. Wrong – he is a traitor, but in the service of his own greed, not someone else's. Will resume my conversation with Usula this evening, after last night's abrupt interruption...



Day 20

Morea departed tonight; the Elixir of Life did nothing. She died with a curse on her lips, spoken in her native tongue. I didn't understand, but Alagai translated: "By Oroke, I damn you, wretched Orgai, son of the Black Queen, to suffering, to a slow death and an eternity of torment." The Black Queen? Maybe she was the traitor after all?

Usula understands and shares my suspicions, especially after I told her about the purple sap and the moldy bread. But she didn't blame any specific individual. We considered them all: Helin, Harlar, Alagai, Erdan, and the swellhead; also spoke briefly about Olfions and the carriers. We agree that no one stands out – none can be ruled out or condemned. Maybe it really was Morea, fueled by some kind of hatred toward Ambrians in general, but it doesn't feel that way. Might be time to set a trap; something an infiltrator couldn't help sabotaging.

Must also mention that we came across some blackland today, near a Baiagan campsite. The place was as empty as the rest of the area; it's probably true that Clan Baiaga has splintered as well, after years of internal conflicts – apparently Tharama convinced much of the clan to head south and join the High Chieftain, while the rest went to the Sovereign's Oath. Anyway, Usula and Erdan were able to take us around the tainted area. We should arrive at Jerak before tomorrow night.

Day 21

It was probably good that I listened to Orgai for once and turned east before we got too close to the Sinkhole. There is something about this place, in the air and in the water – something rotten, a sour tinge. Usula shares my assessment that this area south of Jerak is darker than it was just six months ago. Erdan seems to agree. He's been singing prayers all day, in an almost whispering tone of voice.

The baiagorn Alagai and I fought off (severely blight-marked with fur oozing with what looked like tar) was yet another sign. With the Baiagans gone, it seems the Sovereign's Oath has failed to monitor the sinkhole and what emerges from the deep; maybe we should consider taking the route through Arshaka and Odaban on the way back.

After half a day's march east, we are now headed north-east to the Slay Waters. Already three weeks in the woods and maybe four or five days to our destination, provided that we manage to stay on course. There are two landmarks to look out for once we reach the creek, visible from above the foliage – The Crimson Cliff with its deep red, glassy veins, and the broken tower that Goldengrasp called Barlegor's Bell Tower. (Maybe this is where the bell in Kastor came from?)



"We're done for! Clans Karohar and Baiaga have already been disbanded, almost all of the them defecting to the Sovereign's Oath. The same will happen to Zarek and Odaiova, and then we can forget about Davokar."]

Day 22

Sometimes you've got to admire this forest. Sure, it is to be loathed and feared for all the death it causes, all the darkness it shelters. But it can also be beautiful beyond words. Saw a colossi today. It's the second time in my life that I've seen a wild specimen up close. The damp night air lingered over the moss and leaves, making everything glitter in the sun that gently burned the humidity away. Erdan had the morning watch and heard it from a distance. Looked pale as a ghoul as he woke us up. On Usula's command we gathered around two large boulders, pressing ourselves against the rock, and watched it coming towards us, knocking down trees with steps that shook the ground. It went straight past us, close enough that I could touch its bark-like skin. But I didn't; I was busy keeping Orgai in check.

In contrast to that experience, the afternoon was a tough one. We reached a marsh with a black lake at its center. Or rather a pond. Good to see the sky again, but Usula thought she spotted King Toad tracks, so we made a pretty severe detour. She led us through the deepest part of the marsh, as the toads' usual prey was unlikely to go that way. Feels like I'll never be dry again, and I could swear our two remaining mules have been throwing hateful glances at me all night, as if they're just waiting for me to fall asleep so they can put their plan into action: stomping me to death.

At this very moment, that doesn't sound too bad...

Day 23

I survived the night, and yet another day of walking. We're heading into the dark, into the territory of predators and trolls, and it shows. Now it's time for Usula to prove herself, probably Erdan and Orgai as well. We have found tracks 

Day 26

They caught up with us. The Sovereign's Oath. Knocked me unconscious. I woke up yesterday, on and off, too dazed to grasp the situation. Feel better today. Well, not really. A summary of what happened (according to Usula and Alagai), followed by a status report:

We were attacked by Sovereign warriors, first with arrows and javelins, then they came charging (that much I can remember). Everyone took up arms, even the carriers. Fought bravely but suffered heavy losses. Then suddenly the attackers were fired upon from behind, by a third party. Usula took charge: ordered Harlar to carry me as we all fled, all who still could. A couple of warriors pursued us, but they were soon brought down by Usula and Orgai (who took control of the enemy's will and made them run the other way); most of the other warriors were busy fighting our guardian saints. None of us got a glimpse of the latter.

The situation is grim, the morale low. We reached what must be the Slay Water; our saviors have not made themselves known. Alagai and the priest are gone, presumably dead; only four carriers remain, including the sharp-minded Ugleg, but not Olfions who was reportedly cleaved by a heavy axe blow. A mule fled in the same direction as us; it is packed with elixir, water and food, but only enough for a couple of days.

So: Helin, Harlar, the swellhead, the guide, four goblins, and I, roughly two weeks' march from the edge of the forest (as the dragon flies), against merciless Davokar and possibly a group of vengeful barbarian warriors...

Even though we are only a day away from our destination, I suspect that Edrafin's deceitful promise will be the death of us all.

DAY 27

Sent Usula up a tree when the sun was at its highest. On learning that she could see both the Crimson Rock and Barlegor's Bell Tower, we all just nodded silently. That she could see a thin column of smoke rise from where the Temple of Exaltation should be was enough to raise an eyebrow, at least for me. It doesn't make things worse, just more interesting – if someone is already there, that means there's hope that they'll be friendly, or even helpful.

I've been thinking more about the attack, particularly about who it was that came to our aid. And why. Could they have been members of some forest-dwelling goblin tribe, wanting to protect their kin or simply to combat the Sovereign's Oath? Perhaps it was an Iron Pact warband, but if so, one must wonder why they let us go. The more likely explanation is that we have been followed ever since leaving the Hold, by a group who do not know the way to the ruin and need us to guide them. That would also explain the traitor's activities; he or she has made efforts to weaken us, but not actually stop us from continuing.

If that is the case, it will of course be particularly interesting when we reach our destination. Will the freeloaders let us live, or aim their arrows at us this time?

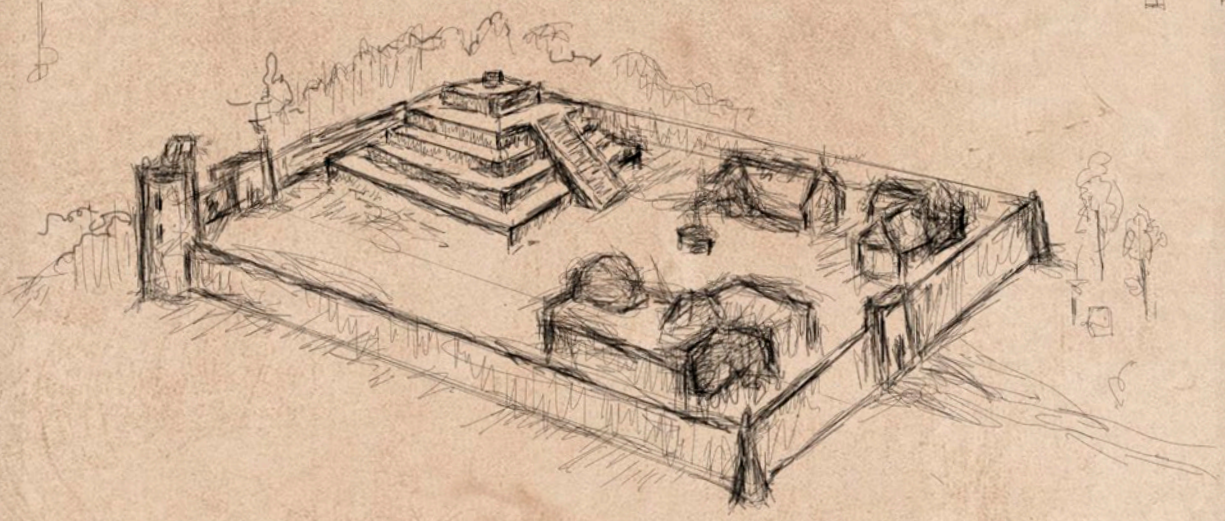
Day 28

We have arrived.

Before starting this journey, I had a very different idea of what writing those words would be like. But I'm alive and approaching the moment of truth: in a couple of hours we should know if all hope is lost or if we have an actual chance of making it back alive.

We have stopped on a ridge south of the ruin. Haven't seen any sign of the blight Goldengrasp warned me about, not in the air, nothing visible to the naked eye – just a remarkably well-preserved, walled set of buildings, overgrown with winding greenery. One of them looks like a ziggurat, but small, maybe fifteen meters wide and ten meters high. And, as I said, we were not the first to arrive. The intruders cannot be seen from here, but the smell of their campfire is unmistakable, and someone has recently cleared the trees near the wall.

I'm going over there now to negotiate. For our lives.



DAY 28, EVENING

Negotiation tomorrow. The felled trees have been used to build a palisade of horizontal logs in front of the gateless opening in the wall. I called out when I was roughly ten paces away, waving Harlar's dirty white handkerchief, and they immediately responded. A man, Ambrian, croaking voice. I explained the situation: we've suffered losses, are short on food, and are willing to work hard for modest pay and company on the way home. Moreover, I pointed out that we are followed by another group seeking the ruin; together we stand a better chance of holding them off.

Didn't get much of an answer, except that their leader was busy but would be notified and come back with a decision. I am to look for a burning lantern at the top of the wall, and return alone for negotiations when it appears. If it appears.

Seems that we'll have to spend another night under the tree crowns. We've started eating the moldy bread, cooking it into porridge so as not to get poisoned or sick. Usula wants to backtrack a bit and try to catch a glimpse of our pursuers, if they are even there. But I stopped her. No point in poking the bear now that our rescue is within reach.



"Even if a ruin is said to be haunted by a primal blight beast or immersed in the darkness of The Eternal Night, it may be worth a visit. Everything changes fast in Davokar!"

Day 29

Night falls over Davokar, and for the first time since leaving the High Chieftain's cliff, there is a wall between me and the forest. Almost three weeks in the wild, north of Karvosti, with an Explorer's License that expires in two days. Half the members of our expedition are dead, the rest now formally contracted by Ordo Magica's Kurun Chapter, members of Master Rigor's exploration party.

I seriously doubt that the man I negotiated with really was this Rigor. He did wear an order medallion with the master's mark, but looked more like a warrior or hunter in the guise of a wizard. He's young too.

But it doesn't really matter: our new colleagues also suffered heavy losses on the way here (diseases and poisoning, they said), but managed to arrive with all their baggage. A provisional contract was drawn up: in return for serving as loyal members of Rigor's expedition (with all that entails in terms of work, protection and foraging for food), we get one fifth of the profits to split between us, in addition to any knowledge/information obtained. My repulsive employer will not be happy, but it is a good deal, probably offered out of fear of having to fight both us and the group that seems to be at our heels.

There are six of them (plus two carriers), all Ambrian, all armed with bow and sword, possibly with a mystic in this Rigor. There are five of us, plus four carriers, in worse shape but probably more capable. We could take them, but it would be bloody and risky. I think we'll have to be satisfied with this and make the best of the situation.

Day 30

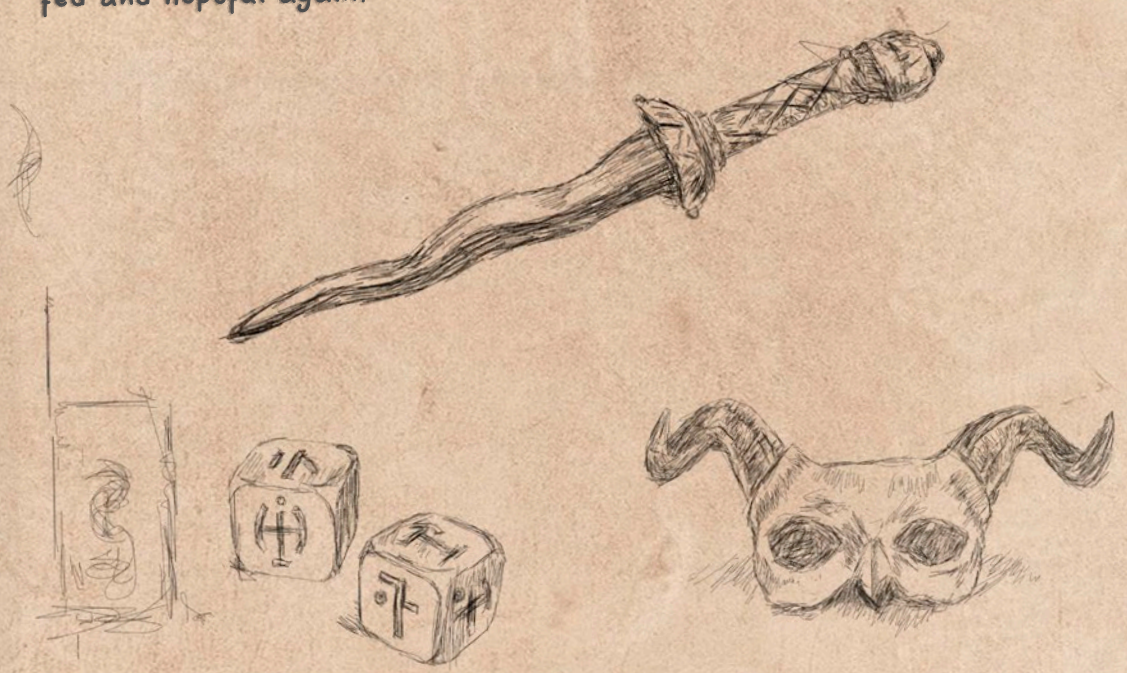
Our pursuers have made themselves known, marked their presence, with not one but three campfires burning in the night. Surely an attempt to confuse us, scare us off, but it's good to know where they are.

Recognizing the threat at hand, Rigor assigned four men to guard and scout duty: me, Helin, Harlar (with his firetube) and a woman who calls herself Monai. The others are divided into two digging teams – one focusing on the rubble and debris in the basement of what must have been the main building, the other tearing up the floor of the pyramid. I went inside the latter during a break; it must be the Temple of Exaltation – a single hall, empty but for an altar-like table of stone with a statue on it – a muscular human, naked and sexless, with its head tilted back. Nothing special about it, except there are imprints in its hands suggesting that it once was holding something.

Even if this really was a temple, nothing indicates what was worshipped. One hears legends about people worshipping daemons and abominations, but that is not the case here. A bit far-fetched, but maybe they worshipped humans? Or humanity?

Anyway, we got to inspect the finds Rigor and his team have dug up, assembled in an empty chamber on the ground floor of the main building. Haven't had time to take a closer look, but I'm pleasantly surprised. In addition to twenty or so scrolls in varying condition (hopefully legible after alchemical treatment), a large number of gold objects (some adorned with precious stones and ettermite inlays) and several curiosities have been found. The most interesting item was an orb of shiny black glass which immediately caught Orgai's attention.

Need to sleep now, only four glasses to my next shift. Feels good to be fed and hopeful again.



Day 31

Shared the dawn watch with Harlar. Our so far invisible besiegers are clearly watching us, or they wouldn't have sent the message that landed inside the wall, tied to an arrow which, judging by the angle of impact, was fired from the west:

"Vidina, we have your priest, Erdan. Let us in. Together we can defeat the plunderers and take over the ruin; we'll split everything equally between our groups. You have until sundown tomorrow to decide. Or Erdan dies, then the rest of you."

The offer is too good to be true. And Erdan. On the one hand he is my responsibility as leader of the expedition, and he has never done anything to displease me; on the other... I honestly don't know if my feelings for him are strong enough for this to be an effective threat. Sure, Rigor doesn't seem entirely trustworthy either, but at least with him I know what I've got, and his group is not strong enough to stab us in the back without risking their own lives and limbs.

Only told Harlar, and he agrees: we must ignore it, both the offer and the threat. Focus on the digging, which after today feels even more promising. They dug up two new glass orbs in the main building's basement, one crimson and one golden. Orgai says they are mystically charged, like the black one. This could turn out quite well for us!

"Everyone says the Throne of Thorns is in Symbar, but no one knows for sure. It could be in some palace or temple somewhere else, maybe even here in Ambria!"

Day 32

Two important notes from this eventful day.

First, regarding the excavation. Orgai's digging team has broken through to a basement section that's entirely intact. There is a gate of stone, locked or just wedged, which according to Orgai is "emitting darkness" (Rigor agrees but not very convincingly; becoming more and more sure that he is not Rigor, or even mystically trained). There's also a crack leading down (just like the goblin legends said!). Deep, judging by the echo. May well connect to the Underworld.

Last but not least, there were clear signs of a recent visitor; someone who came from the crack, rummaged through two of the chambers (without doors), and slipped back into the dark. Our next step will be decided over the morning porridge.

Second: Erdan will be alright. My conscience and sense of duty triumphed over reason, and tonight I decided to rescue him. Orgai wove a mystical cloak over Helin, concealing her from outside senses, and she walked out into the forest. When she found the prisoner, he was neither bound nor gagged; he was drinking tea with two other sun priests and the guide Fonsiul, known to often work for Mayor Nightpitch. They were accompanied by a group of black cloaks, five or six from what Helin could see. I am not conv

Another arrow, another message: "Your time is up; the priest is dead. You have one chance to save yourself. Join us, or we will send more than just arrows over the wall – you will all die, from the black taint of Davokar!"

No deadline this time. If Helin is right about their numbers, they'd hardly dare to attack us. Will have to wait and see if they make good on their threat and, if so, what it means...

Day 33

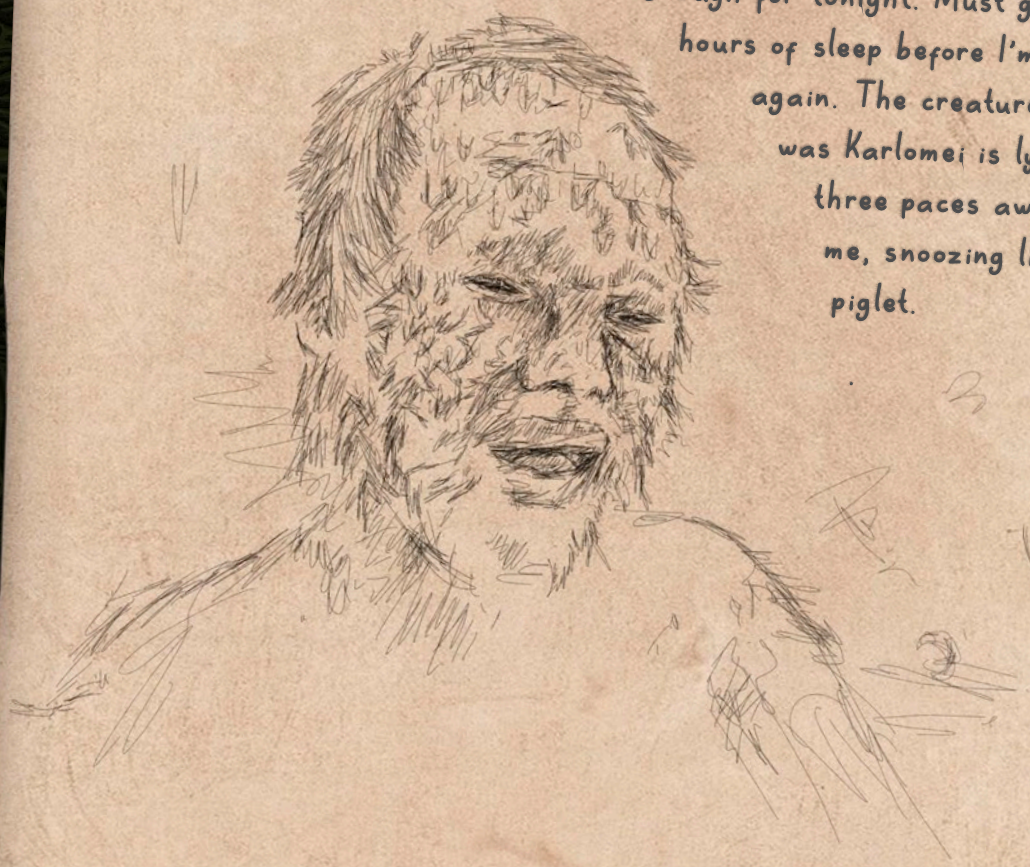
What a turn this expedition has taken. Only a few days ago I was nearly beaten to death; waking up, I almost wished that I had been. But now!

The breakfast meeting was perfect; relaxed, great discussions and plenty of smiles, as if we had been a joint expedition all along. Orgai claims to know how to open the stone door in the basement, with corruption; by placing one's palm in the imprint of a hand at the center of the gate – if the body is already corrupted the door swings open, otherwise one must first expose oneself to corruption. Sounds ridiculous, but maybe he knows what he's talking about. Anyway, the door must remain closed, not only because of the strong corrupting energies the swellhead senses from the other side. Usula spent hours with her ear to the gate, and she believes there are Night Swarmers in the chamber, possibly more than one swarm.

Instead, an expedition was sent down through the crack. I was part of it; Helin and Harlar took watch along with three of "Rigor's" warriors. Long story, but with two high points. Usula and I found another way to the surface, through some cracks into a basement with a flight of stairs leading to an earth-covered hatch in the ceiling; with our swords we could easily cut our way up into the daylight. Didn't inform Rigor, only Orgai; good to have an alternative escape route if things go sour.

The craziest part is that we have added another person to our party, someone both Orgai and Usula recognize as the noble Karlomei Mederen, who supposedly got lost in the sewers of Alkor. He has... been transformed.

We found him deep down in the darkness, sitting naked in what can best be described as a "nest" of various items and curiosities. Well, he wasn't really naked – his skin is now covered with scales, off-white with black markings, with tufts of beard and hair poking out between them. His eyes are coated with yellow puss and he seems unable to speak, likely a combination of his hideously swollen tongue and an impaired mental capacity. He must have strayed here through the Underworld, somehow, corrupted by its darkness but still hungry for antiques and treasure.



Enough for tonight. Must get a few hours of sleep before I'm on watch again. The creature that was Karlomei is lying only three paces away from me, snoozing like a baby piglet.

Day 34

Just as I was falling asleep it struck me: the glass orbs we found are just large enough to match the imprints in the alter statue's hands, and there was another imprint in the table top, between the feet of the statue. At this moment I wish that insight had never crossed my mind.

It is past midnight. Three carriers are dead and my conscience has taken a serious walloping, but we have added two urns filled with jewels, a chest of gold coins, and a few more curiosities to our collection of treasures. It is in fact Orgai and Rigor who should feel the weight of guilt, not I. The former pointed out that the globes could be a key that opens a hidden room, but also that it could be extremely dangerous to use them without knowing how to do it correctly. Rigor's solution was to order a carrier to set the globes in place.

Orgai was right. The first attempt ended with the goblin being knocked to the ground by a wave of corruption so powerful that she was blight-born and we were forced to slay her. And yet we had another carrier give it a try. Same result. But the third attempt had a happier outcome; a crashing click echoed through the hall as the goblin placed the yellow globe in the statue's left hand, the crimson one in the right, and the black one on the table between its feet.

Was it worth it? No, definitely not. Do I regret not protesting strongly enough? Absolutely. If I could turn back time, would I have done things differently? Probably not...

Day 35

Two obvious facts: I am a gullible fool, and I love Orgai. Or loved, I guess ...

I was awakened before dawn by a sound, dizzy with exhaustion from the night's treasure hunt. Went back to sleep. Woke again. Fell asleep. It wasn't until one of Rigor's men removed the stakes and let the logs roll away from the wall opening that I really opened my eyes.

We had all been asleep, even Usula. Still drowsy, we rushed outside: our "colleagues" had taken off with mules and everything through the small gate in the north, and blocked it from the outside. But not before opening the main gate; black cloaks and theurgs could already be heard charging from the woods.

We could surrender, or try to flee over the northern wall, but I was too consumed with rage – I wanted to kill Erdan and his companions; I wanted to hunt down Rigor and carve the eyes out of his skull. And everyone was looking at me. What happened next was pure instinct.

After grabbing our bags and weapons we hurried into the main building, to the stone door in the basement. Usula tried to protest as I started pulling on it, but then we heard Orgai say: "You go, I'll lead the welcoming committee to the surface." I saw his point; he could make himself invisible and slip away from priests and night swarmers alike. But I haven't seen him since.

Once the gate opened, the rest of us fled down into the Underworld, went through the crack to the basement, and continued to the surface. And there we are now, waiting for our brave mystic, listening to the abominable howls echoing through Davokar, from what were once the servants of the sun god. Possibly from Orgai as well. Maybe he finally got the slow death and eternal torment that Morea cursed him to...

"Abominations and blight beasts? Many are huge and monstrous, oh yes, but there are also little ones that are just as dangerous. And most dangerous of all are the ones that can't be seen..."

Too late for regrets, and guilt never helped anyone in the depths of Davokar. We'll stay a bit longer, to give our hero a chance, but then the hunt is on. They are lugging loads of baggage with unruly mules in tow. We've got Usula and a burning desire for revenge. I'd put my money on us.

DAY 36

Stopped for the night, not far from our prey, little more than one hourglass according to Usula. Orgai never showed, but his sacrifice will not be forgotten. Must notify his father, the Baron, once I return to the Hold, will have to make up a truly heroic story in his memory. The swellhead! Must also contact the Dowager Baroness of Mederen. The creature that was her son followed us smiling into the Underworld, but not through the crack; he probably returned to the place where his nest used to be, before we stole the building material. I don't care, but maybe his mother cares enough to show her appreciation in the form of a reward.

Rigor is headed south after almost a full day's march east, deeper into the dark, probably because of the Sovereign's Oath's activities further west. If I were him, I'd aim for Odaban, then pass the Malgomor, go south to the Eanor, and continue along (or on) the river to Kastor.

The question is when should we strike, and how. Without provisions the hunt will be hard and particularly dangerous – the search for prey often ends with you yourself being targeted by predators. We must attack soon, without scaring off the mules. There are fewer of us, but we eclipse them in skill and can take them by surprise. It can work. It WILL work!

Day 37

None of us have been in these parts before; we have no idea what to expect. There are many signs of the forest's darkness, but no serious threats so far. Passed by a glade with a rotting elk carcass; it looked normal, at least from a distance, but the trees around it were bleeding darkness. Or sweating, rather – shiny black drops slowly trickling down the trunks. Right before sundown we saw the remnants of what may have been the entrance archway of a mansion or castle, now broken and tilted. The ground around its base was heaving up and down, roughly twenty or thirty paces in all directions; it was throbbing, sort of bubbling, as if a horde of hyperventilating creatures were breathing at different rates beneath a thin layer of moss.

Hunger is starting to affect us. There are lots of berries, roots, carob pods and other things that look edible, but Usula won't let us touch them. I've seen the carriers secretly eating some of them, without being affected. But Alavan says a substance can have different effects on different people, let alone different races. Usula implies something similar.

Tomorrow's the day. By now they should be confident that they're not being followed. We will move in a western curve to avoid any traps and scouts in their track, and attack just as they're unpacking and setting up camp for the night.



"I'd never go off into Davokar without a human taster, never! Berries and herbs can look and taste exactly like plants in the plains, yet be poisonous enough to kill a horse!"

Day 38

Not much to say. Everything went wrong. We never even reached our prey. Instead we were attacked on the way there.

Harlar is dead, his skull crushed by a troll's foot. Usula too, I don't know how. Two of the carriers were also slain by the rage trolls. As for me, I was dragged away by Ugleg, bleeding and barely conscious. Watched helplessly as Helin fought the last of the beasts. She almost didn't make it. Too weak to keep writing.

Well, I must also mention that I've probably killed Howla. One of the rage trolls wore a necklace. That necklace! With a smooth moonstone set in a rough silver nugget – the one Alavan got from our mother, and later gave to Howla when she walked off into the forest to die. Sure, another rage troll may have taken the necklace after she died, but my gut tells me otherwise; that Howla survived the goblin hibernation and woke up as a rage troll, hungry and without memories; thus, I stabbed my parrying dagger through the neck of a friend who saved my life countless times.



Now. Now I'm done.

Day 39

Only moved short distances today. Long breaks. Me, Helin, Ugleg and what turned out to be his sister, Ilofil. Helin is bandaged in six places, including her left eye. Mostly minor wounds, but one looks really bad, like it's poisoned or maybe even infected with corruption, dark-edged in a way that lacerations usually are not, no matter how deep. Unclear whether the herbal cure will help.

Personally, I was hit in the leg with a dirty axe. Feeling dizzy from a punch on the nose that sent the back of my head crashing against a rock. I just want to sleep, just lie down and let Davokar take me. "To die in your arms on some starless night...," or however the poem goes, the one Alavan's always reciting. I usually find comfort in the fact that I've been in worse situations in my life, that whatever happens will never be as bad as the time I was Uhux's prisoner. But not now. I've never been closer to the afterlife than I am at this very moment.

As I see it, we only have one chance of surviving this. The mere thought makes me want to fight and scream and vomit with every fiber of my being, but to stop trying is not an option. This is Davokar, and if I've learned anything from all my hours at the Salons of Symbaroum, listening to braggarts and actual veteran explorers, it's this: whatever happens, never EVER give up.

So, we must catch up with Rigor. We must beg him and his people for mercy and help. We must offer them everything we own, anything we have to offer, for a chance of leaving the forest alive. It will be the worst humiliation I've ever endured, but we've just got to grit our teeth and hope that it succeeds. It's the only way I'll ever get my hands on those traitors' eyes!

Day 41

Two days. Moaning, staggering, limping. We must be leaving a trail, one that will be noticed by some bloodthirsty beast. But we're alive. There are no more herbal cures, both Helin's stomach and my own are churning after having taken dietary advice from Ilofil. Every sip of water is a gamble. But we are alive. And we're getting closer to our potential saviors and, if my calculations are correct, to Odaban. That opens new doors for us. This time of year, there are always fortune hunters in the area around the ruined city, especially around the southeastern sector known as Akkona; maybe we won't have to beg after all, or at least not kneel before the treacherous swine.

But there's little time. We won't survive another two days. Helin's wound looks really bad – it is bleeding grayish-green puss and the blackness is spreading. Now we could use that bottle of purple sap. Damn Erdan. Damn people. All of them.

Day 42

I am warm. And fed. Don't know who we have to thank for that, but I refuse to thank Davokar. I thank Prios, although the group of sun god worshippers we killed at the Temple of Exaltation must have been really lousy ones for us to be blessed in this way.

It is roughly one hourglass since we caught up with Rigor's little band, in what must be the western borderlands of Odaban. They are dead. All of them, to the last goblin. Well, except the mules which were calmly feeding on the grass, tied to separate trees, with the bags on the ground.

"Everyone about to die from starvation in Davokar is visited by a warden of the forest. The good ones are saved, the evil ones left to die. The question is how the warden defines good and evil..."

There were humans and goblins lying all over the place, most of them still wrapped in their sleeping blankets, but with purple skin, their bodies and faces twisted as if frozen in the middle of a seizure.

None of us are knowledgeable enough to figure out what killed them, but we trust that Ilofil will be able to determine whether the food they left behind is contaminated. We have eaten and settled down into what must have been a grand, now sunken Symbarian salon, where we made a fire. Helin and I both have miracle-working Elixir of Life in our veins; Helin also consumed two doses of purple sap.

It's been a long time since I cried like I'm crying now.



Day 43

Halfway to the river Malgomor. Nothing to report, except that our little quartet (plus three mules packed with treasure and supplies) are feeling better. The elixirs helped, but just as importantly, everyone is genuinely starting to believe that we have a chance. A chance to enjoy a view without tree trunks, to sleep in a bed, or at least on a fairly even surface. Over forty days in Davokar; seven or eight to go. If Prios favors us.

We carry on as planned. If survival were our only priority, we should build rafts once we reach the Malgomor and follow the river to Lake Volgoma. But we have endured too much to risk a confrontation with the troops of the High Chieftain or the Sovereign's Oath. Sure, the former would no doubt take good care of us, but it is unlikely that they would let us keep our finds, now that the Explorer's License has long since expired.

No, we continue south, to the Eanor, and from there we follow the river to Kastor where we can breathe easy again. Alavan can keep us hidden until I'm strong enough for a meeting with the Slimeball. In Yndaros or Ravenia. Preferably Ravenia. Wonder what he will say about the things we have found? Whatever ailment has afflicted the Queen Mother, I can't imagine that anything we're carrying would be able to cure her. The contents of the scrolls, perhaps? Or one of the artifacts. But that is his problem, not mine.

Day 45

We're south of the Malgomor River. Stayed a few extra hours on the southern bank. Took a bath with clothes and everything – a long one. First, I scrubbed my clothes with sand, then my body. I've never felt this clean, especially now that the clothes are dry.

That was yesterday. Today everything nearly went straight to Lyastra. We bumped into a Karitian hunting party. They lay in ambush, unaware of the contents of our bags, but probably excited anyway, about the chance to capture four slaves and three sturdy mules. But instead of attacking, they simply stood up, watching silently as we passed them by. At first it made no sense, but then I recognized one of them – a woman from the battle against Goured's warriors, at the old outpost. She must have recognized me too, from a distance, and restrained her brothers and sisters. She gave a brief nod, probably because she saw the sister of the rightful chieftain of Karohar rather than the expedition leader Vidina.

Either way, they let us pass. And if I know the Karits, they'll send word to other clan members about us traveling south, as neither threat nor prey. They might even watch over us. Perhaps this means we'll actually make it through. I'm starting to have faith. Dangerous but true. I'm going to make it!"

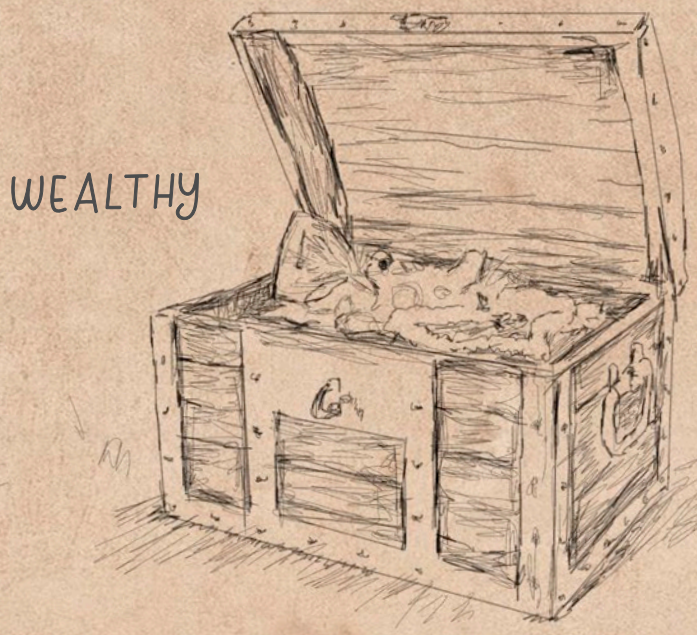
DAY 47

The walk between the rivers went without a hitch. We arrived at the river Eanor just before sundown, not far from its northern source, approximately two days north of Melima. Now that I have almost stopped worrying, I can't help thinking about the future. A payment of at least five hundred thaler, in addition to the almost one hundred thaler that remains of our funds (outstanding payments to the deceased) and a hefty sum from selling the finds I manage to stash away. The scrolls, the glass orbs, the other artifacts and most of the curiosities must be handed over to the Duke, but there should still be enough for me to get the thousand silver coins I was promised.

"You'd think most expeditions meet their doom in the depths of the forest, but that's not the case. Most perish on the way back, near the edge of the forest – due to starvation, diseases or carelessness."

We will have a tidy sum left once the dept is settled. If I know Alavan, he will want to finance an expedition to try and find Goriol, but most of it will probably be spent on hiring capable people to provide ingredients for the drugstore – herbs, mushrooms, animal parts, etcetera – so I won't have to go out into the forest myself. At the moment it feels like a month or two of rest is all I'll need before heading back out. But it would be nice to have a choice.

After some deliberation, we have decided to continue on foot and stay on the north side until we pass Melima. You never know with free settlements; all of a sudden they have been taken over by robbers, attracted some terrible monster, or had their entire population blight-born. Mustn't let our guard down until we see the light shining through the tree trunks that mark the southern border of Davokar.



Day 48

What should I say? What should I feel? All I know is that I was close. So close.

I've bandaged my wounds, as best I can with a crushed right hand. But I'm still bleeding, internally and externally. I don't think Prios owes me any more miracles.

Have to stop writing. It hurts so bad I'm about to black out. Is this how the journal ends?

Date 49

Apparently not. The sun rises and I am still alive.

But I'm dying. My chances of surviving another day are extremely slim. I have made a small raft, with stones as a stabilizing weight on the underside. Once I'm finished writing these final lines, I will wrap the journal in layer upon layer of leather and oilcloth, then tie it to the raft and send it downstream.

Whoever is reading this, I hope you are among the few who are still capable of kindness and compassion. Half of the gems wrapped alongside the journal are yours either way, but in return I ask that you convey my account to Solara's Drugstore in Kastor. Ask for Alavan; give it to him, and no one else. He is my brother and deserves to know what happened to me. Not least how I died.

Sadly, my death lacks any form of glory, heroism or any signs of destiny. Helin must simply have fallen asleep on her watch, sitting by the fire.

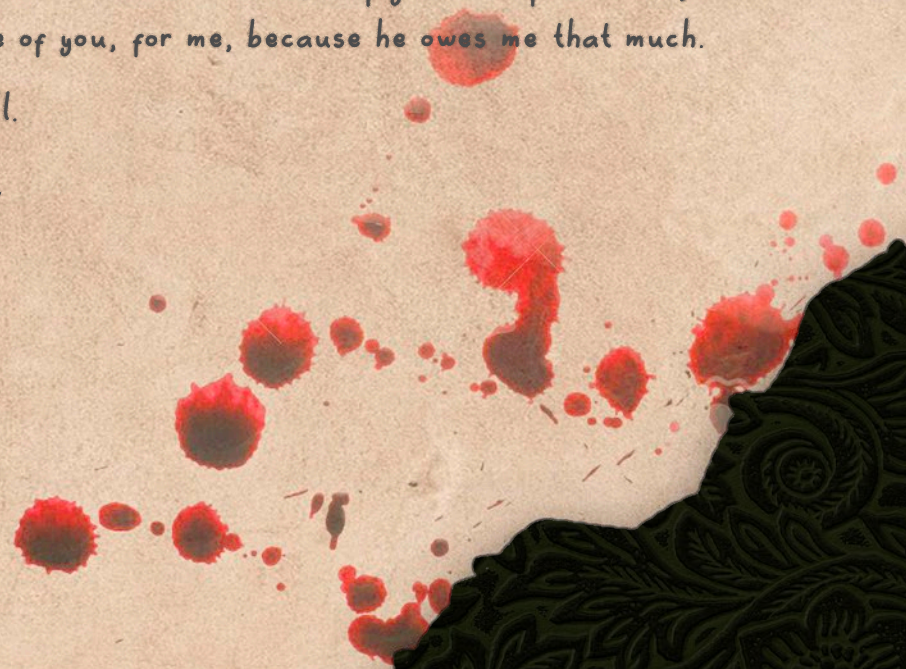
And the rest of us were sleeping too heavily to hear it coming. The she-bear, beset by something, possibly what is known as a Glint among the barbarians.

When I woke up the beast had already bitten Helin in the neck, hoisted her up, and shaken her so badly it cracked her spine. Ugleg and Ilofil sat up, and before I had unsheathed my sword they were dead, stomped, crushed. I was next – she threw herself at me, more or less impaling herself on the sword I was holding. But she didn't die right away. She bit and slashed and ripped and tore, everywhere.

Alavan, I'm sorry. Use your part of the gems to clear the debt, and I wish you all the best in life. Know that I am proud of you, as mother and father would have been. And if you ever find Goriol, tell him to take care of you, for me, because he owes me that much.

That is all.

Farewell.





LARNA WAVED TO her darlings, but only little Lie noticed, skipping along beside her big brother like a calf in springtime. The children could go ten paces into the woods, and not a meter more. They had hesitated, she and Orben, when they were offered to take over the small farm at the edge of Davokar. But the fertile soil and the sturdy palisade persuaded them. And anyway, they did not have much choice – she an Ambrian, he of clan Odaiova, both of them orphaned and destitute. Despite the dangers of the forest, the offer was actually more than they could have hoped for; much better than daythaling in Thistle Hold.

Alavar and Lie disappeared from view. An anxious knot took hold in her stomach, but the smile lingered on her lips. As Orben always said: *"We can't keep the yung'uns locked up; they need to live in order to learn, and learn in order to survive!"*

She was just about to go inside when a scream pierced the morning mist. As she was running, she tried to analyze it: it was Lie's voice, but whether it was a shriek of terror or excitement she could not tell. The answer came as soon as she saw them, crouching in a sea of dew-kissed snow weed; *"Mother look, someone painted the flower!"*

Larna slowed down and forced a smile. It was truly remarkable, clearly a snow weed flower but with its petals matte black rather than white. Hardly dangerous, though. Not a threat.

At least that is what she thought until Lie pulled the black weed from the earth and the ground trembled; a moment later it was heaving so violently the children fell over.

Larna grabbed the kids, got them up, and ran. She did not look back – not at the sound of the creature breaking through to the surface; not at the hoarse, polytonic howling that soon drowned out Lie's sobs; not at the sound of the furious steps, the heavy furious steps...



SECTION 2:

GAME MASTER'S SECTION

The Shadow of Symbaroum

THE FOREST OF Davokar is vast and varied, its history shrouded by rumors, legends and superstition. To rely on sweeping statements about its ruins, creatures and other phenomena is not only unwise; it can also be downright deadly. Moreover, the forest is ever-changing – what is true of a certain ruin or area today may tomorrow turn out to be false. This often makes fledgling travelers believe that the forest has a malevolent will of its own; that Davokar itself wants to present them with unexpected and preferably insurmountable challenges. But more experienced explorers and treasure hunters usually come to realize that Davokar is like the world at large: preconceived notions and blind convictions do more harm than good – especially when the stakes are high and the outcome is a matter of life or death. The key is to prepare for the worst, and never stop fighting.

AS GAME MASTER, you are responsible for describing Davokar and the player characters' travels under its foliage, and bringing its diverse and seemingly capricious nature to life. The content contained within this section is meant to help you do just that, but must not be seen as a series of dictatorial decrees. Sure, most of the accounts are linked to events that take place in the adventure *Mother of Darkness* and previous episodes of the *Throne of Thorns*, but that should not stop you and your group from making changes and additions to suit your playstyle. By now, thousands of gaming groups have experienced the first three episodes of the chronicle, thereby influencing the development of both Ambria and Davokar in different ways. None of these disparate versions of *Symbaroum's* game world are more right than the others. The only thing that matters is that the gaming group finds their sessions around the gaming table engaging, entertaining and – ideally – breathtakingly thrilling.

In a book such as this, it is simply not possible to take all conceivable variations into account, and to minimize confusion we have decided on a certain line of development – the one we think is most likely given the adventures and general changes set out in previous episodes of the chronicle, particularly *Yndaros – The Darkest Star*. In some places we have added complementary text boxes with examples of how adjustments can be made when necessary, but you and your gaming group are obviously free to make any changes you like.

The opening chapter of the Game Master's Section consists of two main elements: first, an account of the ancient history of Symbaroum and Davokar, then a description of the situation within and between the powerful factions of the Davokar region, focusing on their respective development, goals, resources and relations.

The subsequent chapter presents two ruins the player character may encounter on their travels, or which the Game Master can use to create short homebrew adventures in Davokar. Apart from the ruins themselves, the text describes an already tense situation which the characters may become embroiled in, or exploit in order to establish themselves as rulers of said places.

Next is a chapter dealing with expeditions in Davokar, focusing on its wilder and darker parts. It provides examples of a wide variety of destinations, as well as descriptions of journeys, encounters, and treasure spread across various types of areas.

And, of course, the section concludes with new rules in the form of traits, elixirs, artifacts, creatures, and the like. Most of these are relevant to the adventure *Mother of Darkness*, but they can also be used to stage other stories in the game world of Symbaroum.

Rise, Fall and Slumber

MANKIND'S HISTORY IN the Davokar region is hardly clear-cut. The information is there, but it is scattered, fragmented and only accessible through cryptic, sometimes near incomprehensible, secondary sources. The few primary sources that could provide proper testimonies from various historical periods are unreliable and their stories clouded by the passage of time or poor mental acuity; whether it is an undead spirit, an eternity elf or an arch troll telling the story, they all have reasons to lie and a view of existence which the person receiving the information can never fully understand.

This account is as fragmented as the sources on which it is based, and certainly shaped by their poor reliability. The focus is on explaining the bits that are relevant to *Mother of Darkness* and the *Throne of Thorns* as a whole, not on presenting a complete record of historical truths. More and clearer details about certain key events will probably be presented in future episodes of the chronicle, but you – the Game Master – are essentially free to add, subtract and adjust things according to your own preferences. And do not forget that truths are seldom mutually exclusive; even if something in this or a future book differs from what you have already established, you will no doubt be able to reconcile these differences thanks to the uncertainty that always surrounds so-called historical facts. History is never set in stone – it is forever in motion.

ARRIVAL

There is much to suggest that humans came to the region from another world. The elves of the Iron Pact have always argued that this is the case, and many of the paintings, writings and carvings found in Davokar and east of the Ravens indicate roughly the same. The barbarian legends also say something along those lines, in more or less cryptic terms. Furthermore, many people point to the huge stone ships resting in the ashen deserts of the East – vessels that could not possibly stay afloat, but may have traversed the darkness between the worlds by mystical means.

Most Ambrian scholars, whether members of Ordo Magica, the Sun Church or other organizations, are highly skeptical about these assertions. The predominant view is that humans have always existed on this world, possibly on a distant, lost continent. The sources that say otherwise are discounted in various ways. The elves are assumed to be lying in order to present themselves as the rightful rulers of the world, and the paintings and texts are thought to reflect the ancient belief that humans are gods who have come to seek dominion over the plains, mountains and forests – a belief that supposedly was common in earlier cultures and also echoed through later eras.

But most people, of whatever persuasion, agree that the island known as Landfall is central to the early history of humanity – a rocky isle that is reportedly impossible to visit; the waters are treacherous, as is the air, and all attempts to reach the island by mystical methods are said to have failed. Reaching Landfall and uncovering its secrets is a dream shared by the rich and powerful as well as less prosperous fortune hunters, although it is usually overshadowed by the dream of Symbar and its legendary Throne of Thorns.

Landfall and the East

The isle of Landfall will be discussed further in future episodes of the *Throne of Thorns*. However, those who cannot wait to learn a bit more about it and the land east of the Ravens, commonly referred to as the First Realm, can look up the eBook titled *Report 22:01:08* which is available for free download on Free League Publishing's *Symbaroum* page.

Garavarax

Those who have read *Karvosti – The Witch Hammer* already know that the "Lord of Karvosti" was indeed a mighty giant named Garavarax, often called Arvarax in legends. Very few people are aware of this, however, which is why you should also be familiar with the official picture painted by scholars and storytellers. To learn more about the giant Garavarax and his relationship with mankind, see page 39–40 in the book *Karvosti – The Witch Hammer*.

THE FIRST REALM

Some describe it as a city state, others as the capital of a great realm, but regardless, the city of Asbarast (possibly Esberest) appears to have been the heart of the civilization that emerged beyond the Ravens. According to Ambrians who have visited the place, either on the Queen's initiative or their own, there is virtually nothing left of Asbarast, not even ruins, either above or below ground. The only exceptions are the three city walls, partially crumbled but still doggedly defying the ravages of time – the outer wall roughly the height of five men, the middle one twice that, and the inner one so towering that even the Palace of Yndaros could hide behind it (except for the Central Tower).

There are those who argue that parts of Asbarast's population had access to what is called Pure or Raw magic – creative powers untainted by corruption or other negative side effects. And some legends do support this claim, including a verse by Aroaleta that mentions *"a city beyond mountains and vales, where the power was pure as freshly fallen snow, where Wratha was blind and deaf, lost in carefree sleep."* Others dismiss this as a lie, rooted in the myth of humanity's divine omnipotence. The critics' main arguments are twofold: first, that the lands that once sustained enough people to populate Asbarast are now a barren wasteland of ash and dust; second, that the civilization in question eventually banned the use of mystical powers except for *Symbolism*.

No matter how much the scholars disagree on the underlying reasons, there is complete consensus on what caused the downfall of Asbarast. It was not abominations or Dark Lords that forced the people to flee, nor some deadly epidemic – it was the earth that died, withered, became infertile, turned into desert, despite being crossed by rivers and awash with rain. It is estimated that hundreds of thousands of people, possibly more than a million, migrated across the Ravens to make a new home for themselves in the undulating moorlands that today are covered by Davokar.

DIVISION

The new country was vast and fertile, full of virgin fishing grounds and farmlands. The exodus across the mountains seems to have divided the people early on, when the heads of various powerful families and factions brought their followers along and found their own areas to control. Many legends describe Ambal Seba as a kind of spiritual or cultural center for humanity's conquests, with its leader Cidriana (High Priestess, Queen or possibly Elected Regent) as a partly unifying force.

However, in the centuries that followed, the humans suffered greatly at the hands of the power that ruled the land before them. Opinions vary as to who this might have been – there is talk of great troll realms, nature spirits and even a giant named Arvarax – but whatever the case, this power was supposedly based on the cliff today known as Karvosti. Cidriana is said to have negotiated a treaty that gave humans the right to cultivate the land in exchange for sacrifices and a promise never to develop weapons or powers with the intention of harming Kavosti. This allowed a large number of petty kingdoms to be established near rivers and lakes, on mountain slopes and moors – about twenty according to some, between fifty and a hundred according to others. The cultural beings who already inhabited the region, by the grace of Karvosti, were more or less violently pushed aside. Some say the trolls were particularly brutalized, nearly wiped out, and that those who survived fled underground.

This is not to say that humanity did not have its own problems. The early days were plagued by numerous conflicts with the Lord of Karvosti, who responded with force whenever some petty king appeared to have violated the treaty, killing ruthlessly and indiscriminately, sometimes entire villages and cities. Additionally, some argue that the region was tormented by two (if not more) insatiable dragons – Fofar and Sakofal, also known as the Destroyer and the Slaughterer. Last but not least, the wars for the region's resources became more frequent and deadly, as the influence of Ambal Seba diminished. The refugees from Asbarast were no longer one people, but many.

DARKNESS IS BORN

Not much has been written about the Kingdom of Symbar, at least not its early years, implying that its regents managed to avoid major conflicts with Karvosti as well as with human rulers. Based on what happened later, however, certain conclusions can be drawn. Unlike the other realms of humankind, the Symbarians ignored the treaty with Karvosti, and also managed to keep their mystical discoveries secret – most likely by developing concealing rituals and moving all questionable activities to the halls and passages of the Underworld. It is also clear that the notion of human divinity – mankind as the masters of the world and existence itself – was widely accepted at the time.

Perhaps it was their encounter with the might of Karvosti that gave rise to the belief that humans had lost some of their divine powers; maybe this is where the pursuit of exaltation was born? For

whatever reason, the Symbarians started abandoning *Symbolism* in favor of more aggressive mystical practices, without the guidance of the traditions that were later developed to reduce corruption's impact on the body and world. It seems that what are now known as blight marks were considered a status symbol, and that blight births were seen as a sacred sign. Along with the corruption grew a lust for power, and eventually Symbar (the name of both the realm and its ruler) raised his sights, hungry for more – more land to dominate, more people to rule.

The legends of Ambal Seba do not specify who orchestrated its downfall, but one theory that is becoming increasingly popular among Ambrian scholars points to early Symbar as the main enemy. Perhaps the guardians of pure magic discovered what the Symbarians were up to and demanded an immediate end to their activities, with threats of reprisals. Whatever the case, we know for certain that Ambal Seba was destroyed, quite literally, and that this event marked the birth of the Symbarian Empire.

THE CONQUESTS OF SYMBAR

The centuries that followed brought the expansion of Symbaroum – a Symbarian word meaning "the autocracy of Symbar." Sometimes it happened through wars of conquest, sometimes through diplomatic maneuvers, and sometimes through lesser kingdoms joining the empire voluntarily rather than going through a violent annexation. Why this did not spark a reaction from the power on Karvosti is a mystery that has caused many to speculate whether it perished early on, or whether it even existed in the first place. But maybe the majority of experts are right, in stressing that centuries of peace can make even the most paranoid ruler blind to threats and rebellious plots.

According to Black Cloaks and learned monster experts, this development caused the previously widespread veneration of natural spirits and wild animals to be replaced by daemon worship, probably because the Symbarians viewed abominations and other unworldly creatures as powerful versions of the chosen and exalted human form. As Symbaroum continued to grow, so did the zeal to free humanity from the inhibitions oppressing their divine being. Morphology, the study of the human being's shape and form, seems to have been predominant among the learned, and from it emerged the theourgical practices which were meant to set their divinity free: to ennoble, improve and strengthen the human physiognomy.

Many scholars refer to the war against Queen Serala-Han Urel and her vast kingdom in the

Timeline

The following timeline must be taken for what it is – based on questionable sources and highly contentious among Ambrian experts on ancient history. But at least it presents the most widespread version of history, giving a rough indication of when major, transformative events took place.

About 2100 years ago
The eastern city of Asbarast is abandoned and its people journey across the Ravens

About 2050 years ago
Ambal Seba is founded in a western valley and the people start spreading across the plains; the ruler Cidriana negotiates a peace treaty with the Lord of Karvosti

About 2000–1500 years ago
Humans claim dominion over the plains, constantly plagued by local wars, conflicts with Karvosti and predator attacks

About 1400 years ago
Ambal Seba is destroyed; the Symbarian conquest begins and their realm grows

About 1100 years ago
Queen Serala-Han Urel's armies are massacred; the Symbarian Empire reigns supreme over the moorlands

About 1000 years ago
The Eternal Night descends on Symbaroum.

About 950–900 years ago
The elves arrive and start combating the corruption; decades later they reach Symbar and the empire fights its final battle; Davokar is planted and takes root

About 800–600 years ago
Humans start to return; the clans are established.

About 500 years ago
The Spider King declares war on humanity; Serembar is elected the first High Chieftain of Karvosti.

About 480 years ago
The Iron Pact is formed, in the midst of war

About 450 years ago
The Spider King falls and the war is over; Lindaros is founded in the south.

About 350 years ago
The Kingdom of Alberetor is founded; Almara Argona becomes its first queen

About 200 years ago
The entire population of Lindaros is wiped out by a terrible epidemic.

About 40 years ago
The Dark Lords attack Alberetor and the Great War begins

About 20 years ago
The Ambrians arrive in the Promised Land, searching for a new home..

The Knowledge of the Learned

Player characters with the *Loremaster* ability will probably know much of what is mentioned in the section about the region's ancient history. The Game Master may let players with such characters read some or all of this text. A more ambitious alternative is to put together an abridged version based on what a specific character may know or have heard of – a summery which the player should then have access to while playing.



north as the Final Battle – that is, the battle that made Symbar the unrivaled human power west of the Ravens. After that, the emperors, princes and former warlords of Symbaroum had time to think about more than just the next conquest. The emphasis on spiritual and physical enhancement grew, and the importance of challenging oneself became vital for retaining one's honor, power and status. The animals, spirits and wardens of the wild were slaughtered – even abominations (many of them almost certainly blight-born Symbarians) were hunted down and slain by humans seeking to affirm their power and supremacy. But the unbridled development soon began to cause problems; problems that would only get worse.

THE FALL OF SYMBAROUM

Roughly one thousand years before Queen Korinthia Nightbane led her people to the Promised Land, Symbaroum began its steep and relentless decline. Evidence suggests that the destruction started at the heart of the empire and spread from there. The details are vague, but that corruption played an integral part in what happened can hardly be disputed. Legends credited to elves and trolls tell of princes who continued their reign even after they were thoroughly corrupted; priesthoods that made pacts with dragons who in their thirst for power allowed themselves to be blight-born; and areas where both land and water were so heavily tainted that all who lived there turned into ravenous daemons. The central authorities lost control; the Eternal Night fell over Symbar.

But apparently there were opposing forces as well – voices, even whole priesthoods, who had long warned of an imminent disaster; people and organizations who passed on the wisdom of Ambal Seba and did their best to reverse the development. Perhaps Emperor Symbar finally listened? There are tales, pictures and obscure scriptures indicating that the Emperor issued a decree forbidding all forms of *"magical/mystical manipulation of Creation"* under pain of death. Other sources mention the establishment of so-called Night Patrols – armed units who together with specially selected mystics (most of them presumably Staff Mages and Symbolists) were tasked with seeking out and destroying all corrupted creatures and sources of corruption. But Symbar's realm had grown far beyond anyone's control. The catastrophe could not be stopped.

There are different views on exactly when the other cultural beings in the region really started revolting against the empire. Some troll experts insist that the trolls never stopped opposing the humans; others claim that the arachs still lived in certain areas, sometimes cooperating with Symbarian provinces, sometimes involved in rebellions. Whatever the case, it is clear that mankind's dominance remained unchallenged until the darkness they had created started to overtake them. And then came the elves.

THE BATTLE OF SYMBAR

Though there may be reason to take the elves' accounts with a few pinches of salt, the ones about the darkest hours of the empire are largely consistent – especially as the stories are supported by human sources. The elves came to combat corruption, not humans. They found allies in arachs, bestiaals and trolls, but also among the humans who were already preaching moderation. Together they started a purge which led to even greater aggression from the hordes of the night. Consequently, even though they were not the elves' primary target, the humans were hit hard and ruthlessly, and so, desperate and terrified, they fled in all directions.

Those who believe that the power on Karvosti survived the rise and expansion of Symbaroum also claim that its ruler fought the elves, leading an army of beasts and abominations – probably because the newcomers seemed like more of a threat than the pact-bound humans. But the people of the west and their allies would not be intimidated, nor stopped; slowly but surely, over what must have

The Theourgs

The word "theourg" which is mentioned in this text is not to be confused with "theurg". Sure, both refer to priest mystics, but the former more precisely to the priesthood of Symbaroum, not to Ambrian worshipers of Prios. Read more on page 191.



Proving your dominance over nature was vitally important to the lords and priests of Symbaroum.

been decades, they advanced closer and closer to the Mother of Darkness, the high seat of Symbar.

If it is true that the Emperor had started taking measures against the corruption, he must have been dethroned or killed at some point during the war, because all sources agree on how it ended: the battle of Symbar was long and exceedingly bloody. Stories tell of elves, spiders, and bestiaals, against humans and abominations – tens of thousands killed. Even wilder legends add nature spirits, colossi and arch trolls to the elven army, and primal blight beasts, blight-born dragons and companies of undead sorcerers to Symbar's. But whoever fought and died, Prince Eneáno emerged victorious.

And Symbaroum fell, into dreamless sleep.

IN THE SHADOW OF SYMBAR

The battle was won, but the struggle of the elves was not yet over. The task of singing and weaving the region's remaining corruption to sleep and planting Davokar to bind the darkness with its roots must also have taken them decades. Some reports state that the trolls provided help, especially with the corruption that had seeped down and taken root in the Underworld. Numerous blight-born humans, beasts and primal blight beasts were lulled to sleep, covered by earth, moss and mycelium. They could have been killed, but Prince Eneáno's orders were clear: *"Let this evil that mankind awakened remain, in idle slumber; let it live on as a reminder of the gravity of our undertaking. What happened here must never be repeated. Nevermore!"*

More than a century passed before the first humans dared return to the lands of their ancestors. The elves would not let them enter the burgeoning Davokar, so they settled on its outskirts, divided into clans which had emerged during the years of exile, often based in what used to be provinces of Symbaroum. Wise from memories that lived on in stories, songs and plays, most of them submitted to the

elves' will without a fight. According to the stories of the Huldras, this was also when the already existing *Witchcraft* was refined – a form of mystical practice which the elves accepted, maybe even helped develop.

While the humans started to regain their former strength, the spiders and the spider people (the arachs) thrived under the ocean of leaves. Neither witches nor elves can explain exactly why Angathal Taar, better known as the Spider King, declared war on humanity, but many potential reasons have been theorized: good old lust for power, according to most Ambrians; self-preservation, according to many barbarians; a belief that the humans would repeat the sins of Symbar, claims the elven version. In any case, the threat of the Spider King accelerated the collaboration that had already started to form between the clans; the office of High Chieftain was established and the clans united under a common banner.

Perhaps it was the war that made the humans forget their agreement with the elves; the passage of time certainly contributed as well – the tales, songs and plays started to seem more like myths and pure fiction. In any event, the High Chieftains and their warriors and witches pushed deeper and deeper into the forest, in a way the elves could not accept. But after a few violent confrontations, Prince Eneáno chose a diplomatic approach; he walked alone to the High Chieftain's stronghold on Karvosti, where he made Agadan and his Huldra, Bovosin, understand the importance of preserving the slumber of Symbaroum. The Iron Pact was founded, during a meeting between ten clan chieftains and three elven princes, and the elves swore not to interfere in the war against the Spider King – a few decades later, the fifth human ruler of Karvosti, High Chieftain Maiesticar, was finally able to slay Angathal Taar and put an end to the war.

THE LONG REST

Having won the war against the spiders, with Iron Pact rings on their fingers or upper arms, the barbarian chieftains and witches were able to establish a new order of life, in harmony with both the elves and the growing forest at large. Some were less enthusiastic about this than others, and the change did not occur without protests and outright revolts. But nevertheless, the order that arose after the Spider King's death lasted for hundreds of years. There were exceptions, perhaps most notably the city state of Lindaros, which was founded shortly after the war and over the course of roughly two and half centuries managed to repeat enough of Symbaroum's mistakes to bring about their own destruction.

Davokar continued to grow vaster and wilder, as untamed wilderness always does. The trolls returned to the surface, the battered arachs hid in the depths of the forest, and both herbivores and carnivores thrived in the uncontrolled vegetation that blanketed the ruins of the old empire. The elves of the Iron Pact kept watch over particularly blight-stricken areas, warned the witches of budding threats, and put ravenous abominations back to sleep whenever they awoke. The ruins of what was once the Heart of the Eternal Night, the city of Symbar, required constant supervision and care. The seasons were not allowed to follow their natural course there; a state of perpetual summer was sustained throughout the year by a group within the Iron Pact called the Keepers of Symbar.

But no harmony lasts forever, not without discordant notes and raspy vibrations infecting its melodies. Reports differ on when the change first became noticeable. But though there are mixed opinions about what caused it, few people alive today would deny that Davokar is darkening – and at a time when the elves of the Iron Pact are becoming too few to maintain control, and barbarians and Ambrians alike are becoming increasingly reckless in their efforts to explore the forest and plunder its riches. Perhaps it is true that the darkness is returning, that old Symbaroum is twisting in its sleep, that Davokar is about to awaken...

Alberetor

Not all humans returned to the Davokar region. Among those who remained in their place of refuge were the founders of Lindaros and the people who had fled all the way down to the sparsely populated area which 350 years later would become the kingdom of Alberetor. You can read more about this in the book *Yndaros – The Darkest Star*.

Factions

AMBRIA IS REELING from internal conflicts between various factions and increased popular discontent with the authorities. Had it not been for the war against the Sovereign's Oath, slow-burning as it may be, things would probably look even bleaker. But there is no doubt that both Queen Korinthia and the Sun Church are facing serious challenges when it comes to restoring confidence and stability.

All conflicts that have been suppressed since the start of the Great War, that were set aside while the Queen led her people across the Titans and claimed lordship over the Promised Land, are beginning to surface. It is becoming increasingly acceptable to question authority, particularly in cities like Yndaros and Thistle Hold, but in the countryside as well. The government cannot as easily excuse their actions by referring to past accomplishments, or blame problems on the youth and growing pains of the Ambrian realm. Instead they are soothing the

The Iron Pact

More information on the Iron Pact can be found in *Karvosti – The Witch Hammer*, on page 40–41.

pitchfork-wielding anger of the people by calling for unity in the face of the terrifying barbarian threat from the north.

As for the people's feelings toward Davokar, not much has changed. Though individual citizens like to think that their decisions and actions are grounded in reason and rational deliberation, mankind has always been largely driven by two forces: desire and fear. And nothing has changed in that regard – people whose desire for treasure, knowledge or glory outweighs their fear of the forest are still going out there, hoping to satisfy their greed. The fact that Davokar is growing darker, and that savage Sovereign warriors now roam the forest, may deepen the sense of dread. On the other hand, the taxes imposed by the Crown and its representatives have increased due to the impending war, driving more and more people into poverty. To rely on a Queen who cannot even keep her own capital safe is for many not an option.

No, the events that took place during the adventure *The Darkest Star*, in the heart of the Ambrian realm, have left their mark. In this book we proceed on the basis of the development set out in the chronicle's third episode – the Queen is focusing on the war against the Sovereign's Oath and the search for the Throne of Thorns, which she hopes will restore the people's faith in her; the Sun Church's Curia has been fundamentally reshaped, with First Father Jeseebegai imprisoned and the schism between the Loyalists and the Reformists contributing to its demise; following the close-fought battle of Karvosti, the leaders of the Sovereign's Oath, headed by the Blood-Daughter, have withdrawn into what used to be the territory of Clan Yedesa. Should things have developed differently around your gaming table, you may have to consider whether the relations and strategies described below need adjusting, but there is one circumstance that is not easily altered, at least if you want to play *Mother of Darkness* with your gaming group.

In the weeks and months following *The Darkest Star*, a rumor is starting to spread, first in Yndaros, then in the other Ambrian cities and out into Davokar: Queen Korinthia has found reliable directions to Symbar and is preparing an expedition to locate its legendary Throne of Thorns! Whether her knowledge about Symbar's whereabouts came from the player characters or someone else, the rumor is completely true – once winter is over and the spring warmth has brought life back to the woods, a group of rangers and wizards will set out from Thistle Hold, under the leadership of the Royal Sekretorium. And they are not alone.

Numerous other groups have obtained the same information and are just as eagerly awaiting summer. This section offers a deeper insight into the factions that are currently dominating the Davokar region and that the player characters will encounter in the adventure *Mother of Darkness*. It focuses on the groups' goals, resources and relations – allies as well as enemies. The main purpose of these descriptions is to present a background to the adventure in this book, but the information can of course also be used as a basis for homebrew scenarios.

HOUSE KOHINOOR

No one knows what hides behind Korinthia Nightbane's porcelain mask, but many of those close to her are walking on eggshells, not knowing how to interpret their increasingly taciturn ruler. The truth is that she is devastated – she can feel the dream sliding over her palms, almost slipping through her fingers, about to be crushed against the polished granite floor of her palace.

She blames only herself, hence the silence. The plan is hers, as are the strategies, and her commanders and agents have done precisely what was expected of them. And it is too late to back out now. The only way to restore the love and trust she has lost is to ride out the storms and force her plan to succeed: she must conquer Davokar and ascend the Throne of Thorns!

The war against the Sovereign's Oath is one of two keys. The High Chieftain could never defeat them without her help; while as many as six clans have joined his side, they are not the most powerful ones in Davokar or even at full strength. This opens the possibility for Ambria to step in as the liberator of the clans, provided that the Blood-Daughter's troops can be subdued. At the moment there is a tense winter truce in effect, and the enemy has withdrawn north to encamp at the stone fortress of Clan Yedesa. Spies report that almost a third of their forces have vanished – further north, according to some analysts; others believe they are heading south through the Underworld to sneak behind Ambria's main force. In order to secure the plains, Korinthia has called back many of her own troops from Karvosti and positioned them on the fields east of Argona village, ready to march whenever needed.

The second key is to get to Symbar first, or at least take control of the ruined city before someone else does. This may be a purely symbolic move, but what is sovereignty if not the illusion of control? If Ambrians and barbarians alike knew that Korinthia of House Kohinoor had won the hunt for

Sources of Information

The adventure text (page 110) includes suggestions on how the player characters and other factions may have obtained directions to Symbar. If the gaming group played *The Darkest Star* with the same characters that will now tackle *Mother of Darkness*, they will probably have access to the sketch which Kullinan Furia drew based on the map he saw on Emperor Symbar's funeral ship (see *Yndaros – The Darkest Star*, page 160).

The fortune hunter Elmendra and her former colleague, the spiritualist Herangoi, are also described in *The Darkest Star* as possible information sources, and this book adds yet another one – the Sovereign's Oath, who have already found the city and are currently making their way to its ruined imperial palace.

The Throne of Thorns – Campaign Overview

You can download an eBook called *The Throne of Thorns – Campaign Overview* free of charge at Free League Publishing's *Symbaroum* page [www.freeleaguepublishing.com]. There you can read more about the factions and what happens to them during the years in which the *Chronicle of the Throne of Thorns* takes place. It also includes more information about Wyrtha, Wielda and Wratha, the three forces which, according to the elves and barbarians, describe the world's most fundamental conflict – the one between civilization and nature.

the heart of Davokar, seized control of its secrets, and fulfilled the prophecy of Sarkomal, they would also be convinced that she, and she alone, is the most powerful ruler in the world. In such a way, she could reach her goal of incorporating Davokar into her realm, and securing her people's safety, freedom and love!

The only ray of light in Korinthia's darkness, the thing that stands between her and utter despair, is that the Sun Church has been divided and the Curia weakened. She cannot take all the credit herself, but that she soon after its dissolution allowed the Curia to re-emerge with Anabela Argona as the new First Mother was probably a winning move. Whoever deserves the credit, one thing is certain: her main domestic opponent has been neutralized without triggering a full-scale rebellion. In comparison, the discovery and crushing of the so-called Vearra Alliance was absurdly simple (see *Yndaros – The Darkest Star*, page 49). With the decline of the Sun Church, only one clear and significant foe remains: the Sovereign's Oath. And in that battle, she does not stand alone.

Even though Tharaban lost his son in the inferno at the Cathedral of Martyrs (see *Yndaros – The Darkest Star*, page 103), the alliance between Ambria and the High Chieftain lives on. The barbarian strongman's thoughts on the future are unclear to her, but right now he seems both grateful and docile; he claims to have accepted Ambrian rule and has agreed to become her vassal once the war against the Sovereign's Oath has been won. Korinthia also regards the Sun Church's Reformists as her friends, although she does not trust them completely – Anabela Argona seems loyal to House Kohinoor, but the rumor that the elves' former envoy in Yndaros, Elori, has joined Sarvola and Deseba the Old (in the pious Duke Ynedar's Ravenia, no less) could very well mean that they have entirely different allies in sight. Whatever the case, they are too weak to be either a threat or a helping hand, which is why it does not keep her up at night.

But she does have problems sleeping. Often. Her breaths come in shallow gasps, her shoulders tensely raised. There is a lot at stake, and the moment of truth approaches as the rising warmth melts the winter's icy grip on the forest.

THE SOVEREIGN'S OATH

It was hardly surprising that the triumphant march through Davokar would encounter obstacles at Karvosti, yet it has caused more problems than the leaders of the Sovereign's Oath had anticipated. Since the events of *The Darkest Star*, Chieftain Razameaman of Saar-Kahn, his colleague Rábaiamon of Gaoia, and their figurehead, the fifteen-year-old Blood-Daughter, have had to deal with uprisings among the subjugated people of the north and suffered losses in men and morale due to the difficulty of supplying their vast barbarian army during the winter. For a long time, they have also had to manage without the guidance of Odralintos, as the lindworm went into hibernation back in late autumn.

For the time being, the Blood-Daughter and her father are staying at the magnificent stone fortress of Yedesa, roughly a week's forced march north of Karvosti. Some twenty thousand warriors are also encamped there, while five thousand have been sent north to quell revolts and hunt down deserters. Rábaiamon is somewhere entirely different, along with the recently awoken Odralintos, now in the shape of a fearsome drakworm. Just a couple of months prior to *Mother of Darkness*, some hunters from clan Enoai discovered something that might tip the balance of power in favor of the Sovereign's Oath: directions to Symbar.

It took another month or so before the three leaders received reports that Symbar had indeed been found, but by then an army of three thousand warriors was already marching northeast, toward the black heart of the forest. Many died along the way, from exhaustion, diseases and corrupted nature; even more when they arrived, in battle against the Iron Pact and the darkness woken by their presence. But at the start of *Mother of Darkness* they are still almost four hundred strong, encamped on the northeastern outskirts of the city, under pressure from Rábaiamon and Odralintos to rid the ruins of both the darkness and the nature binding it, and to clear the way to the imperial palace.

The plan is first and foremost to secure the high seat of Symbar and its legendary throne, and then secure and explore the rest of the ruins. If successful, the Sovereign's Oath could rightly claim to have restored the Symbarian empire, with the Blood-Daughter as its rightful ruler. Whether or not that would unite the barbarian clans remains to be seen, but Karvosti would undoubtedly lose much of its significance as the region's center and its leader much of his unifying influence. The clanfolk would have a decision to make – to rally behind a descendant of Symbaroum, sitting on its imperial throne, or put their trust in a figurehead who gets his influence by being backed by a usurping invader.

It may take some time, but to the Sovereign's Oath the outcome seems certain.



THE REFORMISTS

Anabela Argona is terrified, not because she has failed, but because the plan she and other leading Reformists have devised seems to be working. Their objective remains the same: to bring about a new order in Ambria, in both a spiritual and mundane sense. But what remains to be done is both difficult and extremely dangerous for everyone involved.

First, common people must be made to see that the Prios of War described in the book The Lightbringer is a misinterpretation of the Lifegiver and his word, created by Alberian rulers who needed a clear, bellicose counterweight to the Dark Lord's hordes – an opinion which in itself constitutes devastating allegations against Queen Korinthia. This change is already underway, and after taking office as First Mother, with Korinthia's blessing, Anabela has continued to support the spread of this opinion by ordering priests and the Black Cloaks to tone down the rhetoric and violence against "heretics" – ostensibly, to restore calm within the church, but actually to allow the belief in the Young Gods to gain ground.

Secondly, Father Sarvola's reputation as a champion of The Young Gods must continue to grow. He is already well-known throughout the realm – the nobleman who used his inheritance to serve the Sun God; constantly accused of heresy by *"the apostles of war,"* constantly hounded and derided, but always fighting for "universal love" against the authorities' condemnations and demands of submission. Rumors are fleeting and humans inclined to follow symbols of power rather than their hearts, which is why Sarkomal's prophecy cannot be ignored. There is a risk, however, that Korinthia may regain her people's love and trust if she were the one to fulfill it, and that must not happen. That Sarvola is preparing to lead an expedition to Symbar is thus more about frustrating Korinthia's efforts than taking the Throne of Thorns for himself.

When the time comes, two things will happen. Well aware of her baggage as a longtime member of the Curia that represented the Prios of War, Anabela intends to step down as First Mother in favor of Father Sarvola. Then Korinthia must be dethroned, with force if needs be, and her Reformist nephew must take up the mantle; Duke Ynedar of New Beretor has his flaws, but seems more suitable in every respect compared to the warmongering Queen. And all this must be achieved without raising Korinthia's suspicion while she is still powerful enough to strike back.

The Reformists are gaining more and more followers within the Sun Church – not just among the older members who remember a time before the Exaltation, but also among the young who grew up in contact with the barbarian belief system, under a priesthood demanding blind obedience and extreme zealousness. They have also initiated collaborations with the witches and the more diplomatically inclined faction within the Iron Pact, in order to make allies but also to learn more about Creation in general, and Davokar in particular. By no means can they match the military might of the Ambrian army, nor the Knights of Dead Prios who still consider them their primary target. No, their objective cannot and will not be achieved through violence, but through love and forgiveness, which will eventually turn Queen Korinthia's warriors into theirs.

THE BLACK CLOAKS

Although the Twilight Monastery in the Titans is also feeling the increased influence of the Reformists, the Black Cloaks remain loyal to the Lawgiver. Even with the new First Mother ordering leniency toward "heretics," very few members of the monastery dare to openly support Father Sarvola, for fear of violent reprisals. What one must understand is that the current developments are filling Brother Eumenos and his loyal followers with sheer, unadulterated dread – they are convinced that the heresy will be the finishing blow to the Sun God, thereby paving the way for the darkness of The Eternal Night.

As far as the order's leadership is concerned, the only way to save Prios and his creation is to open people's eyes to the pernicious lies peddled by the henchmen of darkness, by apostates like Sarvola and Korinthia, and black-minded creatures like the High Chieftain, the Huldra and the elves of Davokar. The Black Cloaks' main objective has always been to identify and combat the darkness growing among their fellow citizens. During The Great War, this meant exposing defectors, sorcerers and heretics who refused to abandon their faith in the Young Gods; in Ambria, new types of cultists, worshipping witches and monsters, have emerged. But this seems an increasingly hopeless task, as more and more of the kingdom's rich and powerful are joining the ranks of The Eternal Night. Worse still, the people's faith is dwindling. The villagers who once rejoiced in the arrival of the Black Cloaks, who cheered as heretics were cleansed on the Lawgiver's pyre, are now just as likely to react as a hateful mob, ready to defend the darkness with stones, pitchforks and fists.

No, the residents and agents of the Twilight Monastery have few allies left. More than ever, their fight for Prios and humankind against The Eternal Night must be conducted in utmost secrecy. For the majority who are still committed to the Lawgiver, life revolves more and more around their own salvation – sacrificing everything to save the dying Prios, however hopeless the prospect. The most important thing is to stop the Queen, who seems bent on leading the world into darkness; a monarch who many Black Cloaks believe is not Korinthia Kohinoor at all, but a puppet installed by the Dark Lords, possibly replaced during her years of captivity. Their work must be done covertly, of course, but the prime objective of Eumanos and his closest adherents is to overthrow the Queen of Ambria. Perhaps her reign must finally end by means of assassination.

Black Cloaks who sympathize with the Reformists tend to keep it to themselves, but they are certainly not passive. By loyally carrying out sabotage missions and attacks, they are working hard to infiltrate the order's inner circle, while at the same time delivering regular reports to the First Mother – a deadly game of treachery that has already claimed many lives, but is necessary for the Reformists to prove the rumors that Brother Eumenos is involved in subversive and even treasonous activities.

THE CHURCH OF DEAD PRIOS

The Knights of Dead Prios are in decline. Of the almost two hundred Templars who swore allegiance to First Revenger Iakobo Vearra, barely a hundred are still alive – the other Enforcers have laid down their lives in battle against abominations, heretics and elves, to spend eternity kneeling in the lifeless dust of the Sun God.

As their brothers and sisters have fallen, those who remain have grown even stronger in their convictions. With the battle already lost, all that remains is revenge, particularly against the highest leaders of the godslayers, by any means necessary. No matter the corruption that follows, it is the sacred duty of the Enforcers to use mystical powers, strengthen their bodies, make pacts, or take any other measures in their quest for vengeance.

In the run-up to the adventure *Mother of Darkness*, the First Revenger has identified three main targets for his Enforcers: The Iron Pact, the Witches and the Reformists. The search for the Halls of a Thousand Tears, the legendary headquarters of the Iron Pact, has been going on ever since the church was founded; it is unlikely to succeed, as there are so few who know the way (see *Wrath of the Warden*, page 146). As for the witches, most of them operate out of the heavily fortified Karvosti, which is why the knights have to settle for tracking down clan witches still hiding among the southern clanfolk. The leaders of the Reformists have also proven hard to reach, entrenched as they are in Duke Ynedar's Ravenia. But it seems that the templars' luck is about to change...

Symbar, the Mother of All Darkness, is not only a worthy target in itself; it will also draw out many of the heretics at the top of the First Revenger's list.

THE WITCHES

There is still hope, a few glimmers of light in the darkness descending on Davokar and humanity. Yeleta has long seen it coming, aware that darkness must fall before a new day can dawn. But there is a risk that the dawn will never come; that this night will prove to be just as eternal as the doomsayers of the Ambrian Sun Church foresee. The situation is too far gone for the Huldra's previous diplomatic efforts to succeed; all she and her Keepers can hope for is to keep a few sparks alive through the night – sparks from which a new morning can rise.

One of these precious flames is Father Sarvola. The Keeper of Clan Vajvod, Kathman, has long been by his side; Yeleta would like to send more people, but Sarvola has declined, with reference to the hatred for witches that is still prevalent among the Ambrian people. High Chieftain Tharaban is also worth protecting, not least because the events of recent years have made him more inclined to heed the Huldra's advice. Last but not least, there are still a number of Ironsworn who can help lift the region out of the relentless darkness, elves who still believe in the sanctity of Creation, who protect and preserve the region's remaining nature gods, wise enough to recognize the link between violence and corruption.

Another important task is to stop the blackest of blackness from waking – the monstrous horrors that were born in the days of Symbaroum and cast into slumber by the magic of the Iron Pact, fettered beneath the roots of Davokar. The witches know where some of them are resting and are keeping a close watch on those places, often with the help of the few elves who still care about such things. But there are more, many more, and there is a serious risk that several of them lie buried at or near the ancient heart of Symbaroum: Symbar. That the humans are close to finding it could be

the end of all hope. Despite the dream sights which night after night remind her of the mortal risks she is taking, Yeleta sees no other way than to go to Symbar herself, along with the Keepers Amanmaar and Miralba. The battle for Symbar is hers; it is her duty to preserve the flickering flames of hope and prevent the monstrosities from waking, no matter the cost.

THE IRON PACT

Truth be told, there is not much left of the cohesive force that just a few years ago, with a well-coordinated mix of violence and diplomacy, opposed the rapacious rampage of the humans. Their decline started with the arrival of the Ambrians, and accelerated with the rise and advancement of the Sovereign's Oath. The humans' tenacity and strength of arms made all attempts at diplomacy seem doomed to fail; more and more Ironsworn have lost hope and joined the warbands harassing the troops of both Ambria and the Sovereign's Oath.

Another major problem is of course the growing madness that makes the Iron Pact's leader, Prince Eneáno, capriciously unreliable. His closest advisors are trying to keep him isolated and get the most out of his rare moments of lucidity, when he is not catatonic or screaming hysterically. But without the prince's unifying influence, the Iron Pact is inexorably falling apart.

Now that summer is just around the corner, and the hunting parties are gathering on the southern border of Davokar with their aims set on Symbar, the Iron Pact consists of twenty or so warbands operating without much coordination. Some of them are working with Ironsworn humans, others with ancient nature spirits or packs of predators, and some have contacted the underground realms of the trolls in the hope of spurring their rulers to action. In the Halls of a Thousand Tears, the attempts to alleviate the Prince's illness continue, while a number of terrifying insights slowly imprint themselves on the souls of the elder elves – the realization that they have lost control, that their life's work is being undone, that the wars in the west leave them without any hope of reinforcements, that mankind – and therefore the darkness – may gain dominance over Creation.

A handful of larger Iron Pact groups have long been stationed in various parts of Davokar, entrusted with particularly vital tasks. The largest one, possibly with the most important job of all, is the Keepers of Symbar who has been watching over ruined city. Its leader, Princess Geliael, accepted the assignment shortly after Davokar had taken root, and has since gone through her third hibernation. As a winter elf she is immensely powerful, but also fully focused on her task – to keep the nature in the area in perpetual summer bloom, so the protection against the darkness will not weaken. And perhaps this is why she and her chanting mystics were caught off guard by the Sovereign's Oath; maybe this explains why those who survived the barbarian onslaught do not know how to handle their current predicament? There are not many of them left, but together they are still a powerful force to be reckoned with, if someone can rouse them to action...

THE SACRED OF THE OLD BLOOD

The time has come for the Sacred of the Old Blood to pull back their hoods and present themselves to the world. For Duke Sesario and his daughter Esmerelda, the goal is the same as always: to prove that noble blood can never be corrupted, and to cure the undead condition that is slowly robbing them of their wife and mother, Abesina. They themselves are not yet ready to step out of the shadows, but the twenty nobles who, unaware of each other's identities, have joined the cult must now be mobilized – a decision they have made for several reasons.

One important reason is that Abesina is growing weaker and losing the will to fight; another is the inpatient hunger for power that burns in their flesh as a result of the corruption to which they claim to be immune. But above all: Symbar. They cannot risk such an expedition themselves, but everything they have read and heard indicates that the knowledge they seek may be found in the ruined city – knowledge about the nature of undeath and how to ennoble the already noble blood, which will finally gain them the power and respect they deserve, naturally with a resurrected Abesina by their side.

At the moment, the Sacred of the Old Blood has no clear allies or enemies. Its two leaders have spent the late winter increasing their efforts to recruit more nobles to their cause, mainly among youngsters who are already captivated by the myth of the sanctity of noble, or "pure," blood. For years, the cult has held secret meetings in cities like Yndaros and Agrella, usually at the initiative of some younger member, where youngsters take part in corruption-generating rituals with delighted giggles or arrogant smiles, for the thrill of it but also to prove their purity. The idea is that many of these will then be easily recruited into the cult, with promises of exaltation and power, and that, when the time is ripe, they will destroy their older relatives and together build a power base that allows Esmerelda to challenge her half-sister for the throne of Ambria.

Summery of the Factions

House Kohinoor
Wants to claim the Davokar region by crushing the Sovereign's Oath and taking control of Symbar. While awaiting reports from the ruined city, the Queen focuses on defending her realm and gathering information about the goals, means and members of other factions.

The Sovereign's Oath
Wants to re-establish Symbaroum by uniting all barbarian clans under the Blood-Daughter's banner. The plan to conquer Karvosti is put on hold, until Symbar has been explored and made safe enough for the Blood-Daughter's arrival.

The Reformists
The Reformists' objective is to reshape Ambria according to the Lifegiver's message of fellowship, mercy and universal love, meaning that the current regime must be overthrown. In the short term, they must nurture the faith in the Young Gods while at the same time prevent their opponents from growing stronger, for example by gaining dominance over Symbar.

The Black Cloaks
Convinced that Prios is dying, the Black Cloaks wish to restore the Lawgiver's dominant position as the god of the people. While planning to topple/assassinate the Queen, they are doing everything they can to thwart her plans.

The Church of Dead Prios
Their sole purpose is to seek revenge on Prios's killers; nothing else matters, as The Eternal Night has already fallen on humanity.

The Witches
Wants to protect the few glimmers of hope they see in Sarvola, the High Chieftain and others, while at the same time preventing humans from awakening the monstrous horrors that slumber in the depths of Davokar.

The Iron Pact
The Ironsworn, whether elves or something else, always regard the protection of Creation as their primary function. But more and more of their members believe that hope is lost, and that humanity is a disease to which the only cure is violence.

The Sacred of the old Blood
The pursuit of knowledge and dark insights is still the main focus of the cult, but they will soon be ready to take risks – both by increasing their numbers and coordinating their efforts. Their long-term objective is to seize power in Ambria and, hence, the region at large.

Ruins

THE TWO RUINS presented in this chapter relate to different periods of Davokar's history. The idea is that the Game Master should be able to use them in a variety of ways, depending on the needs and preferences of the gaming group. One option is to let the player characters encounter them on their way to Symbar; another is to use them as a basis for a treasure hunting chronicle, perhaps along with the ruins introduced in *Thistle Hold – Wrath of the Warden* (page 58–70). In any case, it is important that the Game Master adjusts the challenges and adversaries described below according to the skill level of the player characters.

Prisoners of the Death Crater

ABOUT SEVEN CENTURIES ago, the ethnic group calling themselves the People of Kavaler heard rumors that humans were starting to return to the once fertile lands of ancient Symbaroum. Stemming from a rebellious clan that refused to bow to the central authority, they escaped the fall of the empire by fleeing to a remote valley in the southern part of the Ravens. Life there was hard, marked by scarcity and constant attacks from predators and monsters, so when the opportunity arose for them to go back, there were few who hesitated.

Decimated by starvation, disease and the hardships of travel, only three hundred individuals led by the Matriarch Vilmela reached their old territory. They found the lands fertile and the water fresh, just as the rumors promised, and immediately started building the fortified heart of their new settlement. The surrounding area was mapped, a local goblin tribe subdued, and some packs of predators driven away – largely thanks to the artifact that had previously allowed the clan to survive as rebels under Symbaroum's oppression. Vilmela was hailed as a hero; the People of Kavaler thrived and looked to the future with confidence.

But all good things must come to an end... When a murderous blight mist swept over the settlement, reeking of corruption and hiding a horde of raging blight beasts in its midst, the unsuspecting inhabitants did not stand a chance. Those within the wooden palisade of the fortress sought refuge in the residence basement, thinking they would be safe behind its blessed gates. But the mist seeped down through gaps and cracks, quickly turning them all into walking dead. Having wiped out the People of Kavaler, the mist moved on, leaving behind dead lands and an echo of corruption which persists to this day. The place was declared taboo when other returnees came across it many years later. It has remained undisturbed ever since, until recently...

A month or two ago, a young goblin named Uldo came to Thistle Hold determined to climb out of his brother's shadow. He comes from a tribe engaged

in close cooperation with a barbarian settlement, and while his brother has won the humans' respect as a scout and warrior, Uldo has been treated like a simple servant (or a slave, according to him). At Thistle Hold he started offering his services as a guide, promising to lead the highest bidding fortune hunter to several unexplored ruins, including the place which the clanfolk call the Death Crater.

The highest bidder turned out to be Dindra Starak, whom he led into Davokar shortly thereafter, with her companions Lagorn and Valmer at her side and the high-spirited mule Korinthia in tow. But with a guide who does not know the hubris and frailty of privileged nobles, it could only end in disaster. They did in fact make it to the Death Crater, but once they arrived, everything went wrong: now Dindra and Uldo are locked up in separate tower rooms, Valmer is dead, and the blight-born Lagorn wanders around inside the earthen rampart, howling with hunger.

How and why the player characters become involved in the story is for the Game Master to decide. They could be contacted by a worried relative of Dindra who was given fairly accurate directions to the place she intended to visit, or learn about the ruin in some completely different way, perhaps while investigating a ruin containing the written legend of Kavaler. And of course, the player characters may just stumble upon the Death Crater during their travels through the dark halls of Symbaroum.

OVERVIEW

All that is left of the Kavaler settlement is the fortress ruin, with razed towers and a surprisingly intact main building on barren ground inside an oval earthen rampart. The area is between 90 and 120 paces in diameter, and its soil is practically dead – apart from a few hardy little trees that have managed to take root, the ground is parched and dusty, unless a recent rain has turned it into mud.

The buildings are ten meters high at the most, and as such cannot be seen until one reaches the vast field of bushes and small, crooked trees surrounding the rampart. Those with exceptional eyesight can peer over the rampart from the tall pines growing a couple of hundred meters away, while the rest will have to climb the rampart – preferably without alerting the ferocious abomination currently ruling the ruin.

Player characters who approach the crater and pass a *Vigilant* test with the *Witchsight* ability can sense the corrupt energies still trembling in the air within the rampart. The effect has faded with time, but everyone inside must pass a *Strong* test each day or suffer 1 point of temporary corruption that does not leave the body until the person is removed from the affected area.

1. Earthen Rampart

The earthen rampart, on which there used to be a massive palisade, rises between five and seven meters above ground level. Except for some larger boulders, the soil is bare, porous and mixed with pebbles. Since it is virtually free of vegetation, there is a great risk that whoever tries to reach the top will cause a minor, or even major, landslide (see Arrival below).

2. North Tower

The north tower has lost its roof and top floor, so that only the ground floor and second level remain. Dindra Starak stays on the latter, alone and afraid, and blight-marked to boot, with only her group's equipment and a gagged prisoner to keep her company (see below). There are three ways in – the open doorway at the foot of the tower, the second story window which can be reached from the rampart, and a stone hatch in the floor of what was once the top level of the tower.

Simple mechanical traps of the bear trap variety (1D8 damage and makes a loud clattering noise) have been placed just inside the doorway and window. It takes a successful *[Vigilant +3]* test to spot them, and another one to proceed without triggering them. They can only be disarmed by someone with the *Trapper* ability who passes a *[Cunning +3]* test.

A person who enters through the doorway will see a stone staircase leading up to a closed trapdoor in the ceiling. The second floor is split into two rooms of equal size, one of them accessible through the stone hatch and the other through the window. Dindra is in the room with the hatch; she has rolled out her sleeping pelt and sometimes lights a small fire. In the room with the window lies a sleeping body, with its arms tied behind its back and a jute sack over its head (see Lin-Elil below). There is also a stone hatch that has not been used in decades (especially as the staircase below has collapsed) and cannot be opened without a loud scrunch and thud.

3. Central Tower

The tower in the middle of the courtyard is mostly intact, with the two upper floors and the roof still in place. The tower used to serve as the archive of the People of Kavaler, where they would store scriptures, etchings and items of historical significance. All three floors contain remains of what must have been shelves and cabinets, and

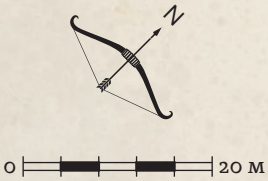
Other Core Books

In writing *Symbar – Mother of Darkness*, we assumed that the gaming group has access to the game's three core books: the *Core Rulebook*, the *Advanced Player's Guide* and the *Symbaroum Monster Codex*. If that is not the case, the Game Master must be prepared to adjust certain things related to rules and non-player characters.



THE FORTRESS RUIN

1. Earthen Rampart
2. North Tower
3. Central Tower
4. Barracks
5. West Tower



though most of what was stored there has been destroyed, player characters with enough time for a thorough search can try to find two items hidden among the debris (see The Treasure of the Ruins on page 95).

They can enter the tower either through the doorway or its gaping windows. There are stairs running along the inside walls, with no hatches preventing passage between levels. The top floor is reached through the stairs or the window facing the wall segment to the east. Uldo is up there, starving, dehydrated and scared to death of the abomination prowling by the foot of the tower.

If the player characters manage to get inside, it turns out that Uldo has little to offer, not even any intelligible information. Weak and delirious, he raves exclusively in troll tongue (requires *Loremaster* at adept level). Whatever the player characters say or do, he keeps repeating the same thing over and over:

"Swarming darkness. Biting, clawing, whirling darkness. Smothering, murderous darkness."

Uldo will die if he does not receive immediate medical attention in the form of mystical healing or a *Medicus* using an herbal cure. Should the player characters provide such assistance, the goblin will fall asleep, physically and mentally exhausted.

4. Barracks

The citadel that used to be the Matriarch's residence has collapsed, but the shell of the building where her elite warriors and servants lived is still mostly intact. The ceiling is cracked and much of it has caved in, and the wooden floor that once separated the building's stories has (just like the supporting joists) moldered away. So, behind the walls of stone is a single, echoing hall, roughly twenty meters wide and ten meters deep, with a stairwell full of debris leading to the basement. At almost exactly the center of the room lie the remains of poor Valmer, beaten to death by his blight-born companion, his bones stripped bare by night swarmers (see below).

At the foot of the stairwell is a miraculously well-preserved door of iron-fitted oak, coated with

mystical energies to ward off the region's darkness (same effect as the *Sanctifying Rite* ritual). The door could not stop the blight mist from seeping through the cracks in the ground level floor, but its energies have at least prevented the undead in the basement from reaching the surface.

The basement was built as safe place for the People of Kavaler's ruler and most prominent members, but was also used to store supplies – enough to keep the fort's inhabitants fed during a long siege. In addition to the door leading up to the barracks, there is a smaller one on the west wall, protected and preserved by the same magic. Behind it is a tunnel leading to a hidden stone hatch in the floor on the ground level of the West Tower.

While both doors are protected against the ravages of time, and bolted from the inside, they can of course be broken down by force – chopped up with an axe or equivalent, wedged open with robust breaking tools, or battered open with a ram. The Game Master decides what kind of success tests, if any, are required.

5. West Tower

What was once the western outpost of the fortress appears to be standing strong, but those who enter will see that the middle floors have collapsed and filled the ground with rubble.

A successful *Vigilant* test reveals that the pattern of rubble is a bit strange, tilted toward the center of the room as if there was a sinkhole. If the player characters start digging, they will soon find centuries-old bone fragments, teeth and accessories from what must have been a large number of individuals – people who tried to reach the shielded basement but fell victim to the abominations. Here, too, the player characters have a chance to find a valuable item, according to the rules for treasure hunting (page 95).

It takes roughly half an hourglass for two people to uncover the hatch in the floor. It is half-open, but the opening is blocked by large stones so that only pebbles and mud can filter through. As a result, the tunnel below is still fully passable.

ARRIVAL

If the player characters arrive in the area while it is still light outside, they can glimpse the courtyard from the edge of the forest, two hundred meters from the embankment. It is difficult to discern any details from that distance, but a large human figure is clearly moving around outside the Central Tower. A successful *Vigilant* test also reveals that the figure's aimless jerky movements do not seem normal.

After dark, the abomination cannot be seen from the woods, but a successful *Vigilant* test can instead reveal a feint light coming from the North Tower window.

To climb the palisade without being heard, the characters must put their feet in the right places. Those who fail a *[Vigilant +1]* test cause a minor landslide which attracts the attention of the blight-born Lagorn. In that case the abomination moves closer, growling ravenously, but will not attack until it is certain there is something for it to hunt.

Lagorn, abomination

Swordmaster Lagorn was loyal to House Starak throughout the Great War and later followed the family across the Ravens. As the war had cost him some mobility in his left leg, he was given a new post as young Dindra Starak's personal bodyguard. He loved her as if she was his own daughter, and did not hesitate to join her as she went off into Davokar, even though her father had expressly forbidden it. Lagorn remained unswervingly loyal, right up until the moment when the night swarmers descended on him with their corrupting effect.

The abomination is still wearing Lagorn's bear skin cloak, along with parts of his leather armor, but other than that, the once tubby, cautiously smiling warrior is almost unrecognizable. His body is emaciated, with dark gray skin underneath a layer of coarse bristles; his forearms end in hooks of bone, while the legs have gained another segment, like those of a goat. The creature's face has retained most of its human features, apart from the irisless eyes, the abnormally marked cheekbones, and the hanging jaw that makes its mouth as large as an open palm.

Manner	Moaning hungrily
Race	Abomination (human)
Resistance	Strong
Traits	*Acidic Attack* (II), *Acidic Blood* (II), *Natural Weapon* (II), *Regeneration* (II), *Robust* (I)
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 7 (+3), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 10 (0), **Quick** 13 (–3), **Resolute** 11 (–1), **Strong** 15 (–5), **Vigilant** 9 (+1)	
Abilities	*Berserker* (master), *Iron Fist* (master), *Man-at-arms* (novice)
Boons/ Burdens	*Slow*
Weapons, Strong	Claws 13, and acid damage 4 for 4 turns



Armor	Leather 3, +4 for *Robust* and *Berserker*, regenerates 3 *Toughness* per turn		
Defense	+1		
Toughness	15	**Pain Threshold**	8
Equipment	Belt bag with 2 doses of Herbal Cure, 2 thaler and 14 shillings; four gold rings that have melted together with the claws (value: 40 thaler if they can be chipped off)		
Shadow	Brindled darkness, like that of a bushy, black beard (thoroughly corrupt)		

Tactics: Like other abominations, Lagorn fights with little concern for strategy – he rushes headlong toward whatever prey he finds most tempting and strikes with his claws.

THE EXPEDITION LEADER

Cooped up in the North Tower is Dindra Starak. Exactly how long she has been there is for the Game Master to decide, but in any case, she is running low on supplies. Korinthia the mule broke away shortly after reaching the ruin, frightened by the area's dark aura, but luckily they had already brought the essentials to their camp on the second floor of the tower.

Dindra has always been arrogant and condescending toward "common folk," and that aspect of her personality has been amplified by the suppressed panic she is feeling – not least because of the blight marks growing under her clothes; violet calluses which are starting to develop a scaly surface. She demands that the player characters take up employment as members of her expedition, clear the area of all threats, and assist in gathering anything of value. The best way of loosening her tongue is to agree to her demands (honestly or not); otherwise it takes a successful *[Persuasive -3]* test for her to answer any questions.

She can tell them the following:

- They arrived x number of days ago (the Game Master decides) and chose the North Tower as their base. She was accompanied by the soldier Lagorn, the hunter Valmer and *"a goblin named... Something beginning with U."*
- There was no abomination at the time; they could neither see nor hear any evident threats. And so, after a night's sleep, the other members of her expedition started investigating the ruin.

In Davokar, the change from loyal companion to ravenous enemy can be both swift and... palpable...



- After a couple of hourglasses she suddenly heard wild screams. It sounded as if both Valmer and Lagorn were in violent agony. At that point they had gone beyond the Central Tower, to the larger building that is still intact.
- Shortly thereafter, everything went silent again. And then she saw it, the abomination, by the foot of the Central Tower, wearing Lagorn's bear skin cloak.
- She knows the goblin is also alive, sitting on the top floor of the Central Tower. He waved to her. Perhaps he is injured, or just too cowardly to leave his hideout with the abomination still outside.

Dindra Starak will not leave the ruin under any circumstances until it has been cleared of treasure, nor will she leave the tower until the abomination has been slain. Player characters who have come to "save" her will have to do as she asks, or possibly knock her out or drag her away screaming (which would make Lagorn violently curious).

THE IRON PACT AGENT

In the room next to Dindra's lies an Iron Pact scout named Lin-Elil. She is one of twenty or so elves who have accepted the task of regularly monitoring ruins that harbor corruption and are situated close enough to human settlements to attract taboo breakers.

She arrived at the Death Crater at dawn, just as the expedition members were preparing to investigate the ruin. With no time to send for reinforcements, she called out to them and was allowed to approach. Her attempt to explain why the area must not be disturbed did not only fall on deaf ears – the human leader she spoke with gave her a fierce scolding, red-faced and hissing through gritted teeth. Then she was hit in the back of the head and everything went dark.

From the moment she woke up – bound and gagged, with a bag over her head – her captor has provided her with a minimal amount of food and drink, but refused to answer when spoken to. Lin-Elil realizes that something has gone terribly wrong, but there is not much she can do, other than talk some sense into the woman.

When the player characters find the elf, Dindra will try to intimidate them into leaving her be, claiming that the elf tried to assassinate them and threatened that her warrior friends are just a whistle away. Should the player characters defy the noble, she will be furious, call them traitors, and portray herself as a prisoner among the *"enemies of the realm."*

Lin-Elil is weak with malnutrition and dehydration, but if the player characters help her reach the roof of the North Tower, she can use the elevated position to back them up with her bow. She can also help them understand that the abomination is not only wearing Lagorn's cloak: it is Lagorn, blight-born from something he encountered inside the ruin. Finally, in her pack which Dindra has hidden away, she has two doses of Purple Sap (page 121 in the *Advanced Player's Guide*), one dose of Wraith Dust and a Ghost Candle (page 152 in the *Core Rulebook*). If stats are needed for Lin-Elil, use Late Summer Elf (page 205 in the *Core Rulebook*).

NIGHT SWARMERS

What caused Lagorn's blight-birth and made a wounded Uldo flee up the Central Tower was a swarm of night swarmers. This creature is described in detail in the *Symbaroum Monster Codex* (page 82) and is a particularly unpleasant adversary, even for experienced adventurers.

The swarm (possibly swarms or murder cloud, if the Game Master wishes to increase the difficulty) was created by the blight mist and left behind as it drifted on. Its numerous individuals are sleeping in cracks and crannies and under the layer of debris that covers the floor, but will eagerly crawl out whenever potential victims come walking through the doorway. However, for the sake of the adventure, the player characters should get a chance to make some observations before the swarm wakes up:

- Without a success test, what remains of Valmer can be discovered roughly five meters into the hall. In addition to a curiosity (see Table 7, page 96), a coin purse with 3 thaler and 8 shillings and a dose each of moderate poison and antidote can be found on the corpse.
- There is a downward staircase, to the left, just inside the doorway, ending at a gate that seems remarkably well-preserved.
- Those who pass a *Vigilant* test can hear a gloomy murmur coming from the cracks in the stone floor (the undead, still excited by the blood that came dripping down as the swarmers feasted on Valmer).
- Player characters with the *Witchsight* ability are immediately struck by the suspicion that there is something in the basement: the air in this place is trembling with corrupt energies that (among other things) seem to be rising from cracks in the ground level's floor.

Lacking a Monster Codex

If you and your gaming group have not yet purchased the *Symbaroum Monster Codex*, the night swarmers can be replaced with some other swarming creature, such as the Etterherd or Violing from the *Core Rulebook*. If you have access to *Karvosti – The Witch Hammer*, it may well be a swarm of blight-born hornets (page 67). Either way, the creature should be given the *Corrupting Attack* trait (level II or III).

Stats for the undead

Their long stay in the basement has likely robbed the undead of their knowledge and skills – if so, use the stats of a Dragoul (page 230 in the *Core Rulebook*) but without abilities and some or all of their weapons. That way they will not be much of a threat in combat, but rather a sad remnant of a once proud and able people. Game Masters who would prefer a more challenging fight are of course free to come up with their own stats for Abaela, Ereld, Irma and their followers.

Defeating the night swarmers in combat should not be an easy feat; there is nothing wrong with the player characters having to give up and run – the world of *Symbaroum* is a dangerous one, and violence is rarely the only or the smartest way to tackle its challenges. They can come back when they know what stands in their way, or seek out the secret passage from the West Tower.

THE UNDEAD

The basement is crammed with undead – twenty or so humans who were reanimated after their death almost six hundred years ago. Among them are the People of Kavaler's former Matriarch Abaela, the war hero Ereld, and the master symbolist Irma.

Their clothes have long since disintegrated and all the basement's furniture has been torn apart by the dragouls, frustrated from being trapped between two doors blessed with holy powers. But not everything is gone. The creature that was Abaela is still wearing the artifact known as the Banner of Kavaler in her dried-up shoulder bag; the head of Ereld's weapon, called Ramara's Fiend Axe, has been kicked into a corner; and Irma's parchment-like skin is covered with tattoos which have lost their power, but can still be studied and lead to the rediscovery of the powers *Mark of Torment* and *Battle Symbol*. All of these are described in the last chapter of this section.

As for the undead themselves, there are few alternatives to violence; they are starving and infinitely frustrated after their long captivity. Perhaps they can be lured into some kind of trap? One example could be to fill the tunnel to the West Tower with oil-soaked wood, then open the door, run to the tower, and set the wood on fire before closing the stone hatch.

An even more nerve-wracking option is to try to appease them – after all, they are not abominations, and though their dusty brains have lost most of their senses, there are still a few glimmers of humanity in there. People who let them out of the basement and welcome them with a substantial meal (a large prey item, tied-up or half-dead) can prevent the dragouls from attacking. They cannot communicate in any way, although the Matriarch might give the characters a slight nod before she and what remains of her people walk off into Davokar.

AFTERMATH

How the player characters' visit to the Death Crater turns out, and what happens next, must be decided based on what has happened around your particular gaming table. Killing the dragouls leaves a number of items for the taking; in addition to the ones mentioned above, the players get 1D4+2 rolls on Table 7 to determine what the undead carried with them into the basement. On the other hand, if the Matriarch and her followers were allowed to wander off into the woods, the only remaining item is Ramara's Fiend Axe.

Other important issues are how the player characters chose to handle Lin-Elil and what their relations are with Dindra Starak. The latter is particularly relevant if the player characters came to the ruin on someone else's orders – either someone who wanted Dindra brought back safely or a patron who expects his or her share of the Death Crater's treasures.

Dawn of the Black Sun

ONE THOUSAND YEARS ago, at the time of Symbaroum's demise, there were many who revered daemons and primal blight beasts as gods, and who themselves sought exaltation. One of the unworldly creatures that tricked many people into submission, hoping that the worshippers' rituals would grant him unrestricted access to their world, was the daemon prince Jeberaja. From his place in the Yonderworld he manipulated princes and whole congregations into exploring ceremonies that could potentially open a rift large enough for him to pass through.

One of Jeberaja's most devoted worshippers was Prince Regal-Ang Fark – a warrior despot who had won many wars of conquest for the Symbarian Empire and therefore earned the trust of the central authorities. Despite Emperor Symbar's prohibition against the use of mystical powers, the people in the Prince's province were able to continue their religious practices until the elves finally arrived. The development and performance of rituals was led by High Priestess Cidrial-Ero Alea, a fanatic who allowed herself to become undead, hoping it would free her from the shackles of corruption.

But she never got to refine the ritual through which the body of Prince Regal-Ang would become Jeberaja's gateway into the world; her last desperate attempt, with the elven warriors no more than a day's march from her temple, all but killed the Prince. Cidrial-Ero had the grotesque, unconscious body carried into a chamber deep beneath the temple, concealed with mystical veils and sealed with powerful incantations. She shut herself in with him and swore not to return until she had

completed the ceremony. But instead, she would resurface earlier than that, thanks to the mystical veils slowly losing their power, and the humans that tunneled down to her chamber about a millennium after she went into hiding.

Another effect of the dwindling powers was that the consciousness of Regal-Ang Fark was able to escape the hideout. The abomination's body remains down there, in perpetual slumber, but its spirit moves freely throughout the temple – without the High Priestess knowing anything about it. It cannot manifest physically, but may reveal itself in any reflective surface, as a mirror image of the beholder. Its primary objective is of course to be freed from its prison, but also from its captor. For centuries he has listened to her cursing him, calling him a freak and a failure, threatening to destroy his very being and leave the body as a portal for her daemonic god.

The Excavation

Three years ago, a group of Ambrian explorers came to the overgrown temple of Jeberaja. The leader of the holy expedition was a theurg named Malgar, whose self-assumed task was to seek out ruins that showed signs of Sun God worship, preferably older than the one dug up by the templars east of Karvosti.

On the first night in the temple, Malgar heard a whispering voice calling to him; he turned his head and saw his own reflection in the silver cup next to his bed – it beamed at him and spoke in some ancient Symbarian dialect, bidding him welcome and asking why he had come. The blight-born prince used the theurg's answers to manipulate him into believing that the ruin was a temple to the Sun God; a place blessed by the presence of the Lawgiver, where *"a piece from the living bones of the One lay buried."*

Malgar decided to stay, to establish a congregation and a place of pilgrimage in the depths of the forest, and – guided by his whispering reflection – unearth the holy relic. For the latter purpose he enlisted the people of Alimaar, an isolated barbarian village founded by individuals who had been cast out from their clans for violating taboos and engaging with the darkness of Davokar. Subsidence and landslides made the excavation grueling work, that was only finished roughly two weeks before the player characters' arrival.

The Return of the High Priestess

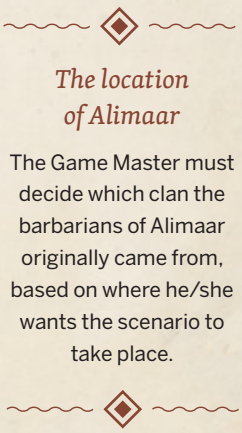
Cidrial-Ero Alea was of course aware that people were tunneling their way towards the chamber, and that the mystical protection was no longer strong enough to stop them. She spent several days preparing for her encounter with the intruders – she wove an illusion over the chamber, concealing the abomination and making the room itself appear as the hall of a great palace, full of gold and valuables. Through another illusion she regained the body, clothes and voice of her youth. So, when the barbarian diggers finally broke through, they were dazzled by her splendor and immediately enticed by her promises.

In that moment Malgar lost control of his discovery, and not long afterwards, when he appeared before the High Priestess in the throne room of the temple, he began to realize his grave mistake. The extent of that mistake became clear when his reflection suddenly took on a different expression and voice, swearing that the High Priestess was evil incarnate, that she must be maimed, crushed, slain. Though the mirror quickly resumed its smiling, amiable face, the theurg knew that he had not been approached by an avatar of the sun, but manipulated by something far worse.

Malgar and his followers were too few to challenge the cult which was established around Cidrial-Ero, but the realization that they had awoken an ancient evil compelled them to act. They played along with the cult's activities and pretended to be tempted by the promises of wealth, power and exaltation, but also requested another audience with the High Priestess – claiming they needed convincing. The day before the player characters' arrival at the scene, their wish was granted, and Malgar tried to atone for his mistake by killing the cult leader. He did not succeed. Instead it was Malgar who died, while his eight followers had to choose between pledging their lifelong fealty to Jeberaja or joining Malgar in the grave. Four of them chose death, the other four chose to bide their time in the hope of one day getting revenge.

The Current Situation

If the Game Master does not want to use the Temple of Jeberaja as a more or less random encounter on the player characters' travels through Davokar, there are several ways to make it an interesting destination in its own right. Perhaps a representative of the Sun Church is worried about Malgar's "unhealthy fascination" with the ruin he has found and wants someone to look into it? Another idea is to adjust the timeline a bit and let one of Malgar's followers flee back to civilization with the story of what happened. Last but not least, it could of course be an ordinary treasure hunt – the player characters or their client learn about an "untouched ruin" and where to find it, only discovering later that it is far from deserted like they were expecting.



The location of Alimaar

The Game Master must decide which clan the barbarians of Alimaar originally came from, based on where he/she wants the scenario to take place.

The Statue of Jeberaja

Player characters who have visited the palace of Farah Moroun in *Karvosti – The Witch Hammer* will recognize the statue that rises at the head of the prayer hall: a monstrous crouching figure, equipped with half-formed bat wings; a long, snake-like tongue slithering out of its gaping, fanged jaws; and four extended arms, two of them with massive pincers, the others with sharp claws the length of a man's forearm.

Whatever their reason for going there, the characters will actually be well received by the cultists, provided they approach them openly and without weapons drawn. The cult needs slaves and potential sacrifices, so its members are happy to welcome the "guests" and make them feel at ease. Once the newcomers are relaxed enough to drop their guard, the trap is sprung, for example in the way described under the Audience heading on page 83.

OVERVIEW

The temple of Jeberaja is perched on a squared stone fundament, almost two hundred meters on each side, surrounded by a weathered, cracked wall. The wall has eight towers: most of them are partially collapsed, but the old gate tower at the center of each wall segment are standing steady with newly built gates. On the upper plateau of the fundament are eight buildings (described below) along with the sanctum itself – a six-story structure rising more than sixty meters over the mossy floor of the forest.

Trees are growing just outside the wall, in some cases even over it, which has made it easy for predators and other threats to attack the temple's inhabitants. Now that the digging is over, the cult members have begun to repair the cracks and cavities, with plans to also clear the trees closest to the walls. But for now, as long as they watch out for the armed guard patrols, it should not be a problem for the player characters to sneak inside. The same goes for the group of Ironsworn who have monitored the ruin for the past five days...

1. Gate Towers

The towers in all four directions have been fitted with heavy doors of oak that can be bolted from the inside. Each gate is guarded at all times by four cultists – two in the doorway and two in the tower, the latter armed with bows and javelins. Bolted doors are almost impossible to open from the outside, but from the inside it is of course quite simple, as long as someone finds another way past the wall and removes the bolt.

2. The Thrall House

Malgar's former assistant, the liturg Genni, has rapidly emerged as something of a leader among the inhabitants who are not members of the cult. In addition to the four Ambrians, there are eight goblins and a handful of barbarians, all of them forbidden to bear arms and forced to perform most of the hard, dirty and otherwise unpleasant tasks the High Priestess demands from her devoted flock. They are not shackled or forbidden to leave, because they do not need to be – without weapons and equipment they would not survive long in this part of Davokar.

3. The Cultists' Residences

We suggest that the cult has thirty members when the player characters arrive, but that number can be adjusted depending on the competence and play style of the gaming group. The cultists are divided between three of the corner buildings on the upper plateau, while the north-western one is used for storage and cooking.

Regardless of how many people occupy each building, they are always divided evenly between the two open floors. The stairs that once connected the floors have collapsed and been replaced with sturdy ladders; if necessary, the residents can escape to the top floor, pull up the ladder, and place a wooden trapdoor over the opening.

4. The Sanctum

The ground floor of the temple consists of a single vast hall, almost forty meters on each side and with a two-story ceiling height, as the second floor consists solely of a two-meter-deep balcony that runs along the walls to the south, east and west. The balcony can be reached from a steep sets of stairs immediately to the right and left inside the main gate, but also via the stairwell past the door at the center of the north wall, just behind the great statue of Jeberaja. The stairwell continues up to the prayer alcoves and the ritual chambers on the third floor, and finally to the High Priestess' quarters on floors four to six.

5. Cidrial-Ero's Quarters

The lowest level of the High Priestess' quarters is largely made up of open space, with a floor, a ceiling, and interior walls made of weathered, but well-polished, black basalt. A man-high triptych, its center tile adorned with the silhouette of Jeberaja, is placed along the wall opposite the entrance. Also the triptych is made from black basalt, as is the throne-like seat where Cidrial-Ero sits when receiving guests or summoning servants.

The stairwell leads to the High Priestess' bed chamber that, for (un)natural reasons, contains no bed or other furnishings. There are two doorways leading into smaller rooms – the meditation alcove where she spends most of her time, dreaming of bringing Jeberaja to life, and a closet for clothes and storage (now empty). When she is not meditating, preaching or holding meetings, Cidrial-Ero can be found in her private ceremony chamber at the top of the sanctum.



6. Guest House
Should the player characters come in peace and be invited to stay the night (see Peaceful Contact below), they will be given a place to sleep in the south-east corner building on the second plateau. Its two floors are connected by a newly built ladder and are completely empty, except for the debris that has blown in from outside. Where the player characters roll out their sleeping pelts is up to them, although their hosts expressly state that the bottom floor is at their disposal.

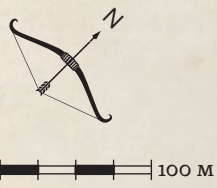
7. The Excavation
In the dilapidated north-east corner tower, there is the way down to the chamber where the grotesque creature that was Prince Regal-Ang Fark is resting, waiting to become Jeberaja's vessel in this world. His hideout was placed there in the belief that any intruders would search for secret chambers beneath the Sanctum; this choice may actually play into the player characters' hands, should they decide to seek out the sleeping abomination.

8. The Iron Pact
The group of Ironsworn that has arrived in the area is composed of both humans and elves, all of them disillusioned with mankind's ability to redeem itself. Their leader is the autumn elf Aran-Elaral, to whom humanity (with few exceptions) is the equivalent of a disease rotting the flesh of Creation, whose individual existence is only justified if the person helps combat the affliction and its spread. The humans under his command share this view; they are ashamed of their race and fanatically devoted to doing everything they can to atone for the sins of their forefathers.

The group should be quite small, comprised of the leader and a handful of companions. The Game Master decides whether, and if so how, to involve them in the scenario. They may be willing to cooperate with like-minded individuals, especially in bringing an end to the grave violations against nature. Perhaps they decide to contact the player characters? Perhaps one of the temple's inhabitants has made observations which the characters can

THE TEMPLE OF JEBERAJA

1. Gate Towers
2. The Thrall House
3. The Cultists' Residences
4. The Sanctum
5. Guest House
6. The Excavation



look into, and thus make contact with Aran-Elaral? Or maybe they will serve as a complicating factor by launching an attack just as the player characters are getting ready to act?

ARRIVAL

Whatever their reason for approaching the temple of Jeberaja, the player characters are bound to hear noise coming from it before they can see it. The High Priestess calls mass by sounding a huge, ancient gong just before sunrise and after sunset. Screams of agony can also be heard through the forest, as disobedient thralls are whipped for their transgressions.

Reaching the walls undetected is quite easy and requires no success test. The characters can get a view of the courtyard by searching the wall for large cracks – again, without success tests – while those trying to peer over the wall must pass a *[Discreet -3]* test to avoid detection.

The people inside show no obvious signs of belonging to a daemonic cult. They are clearly barbarians, dressed in functional clothes, and apart from the lack of smiles they seem to be acting as one would expect. That they are keeping thralls is nothing out of the ordinary, though the player characters may notice *[Vigilant]* that some of them are distinctly Ambrian in feature and manner.

The High Priestess never leaves the Sanctum, but if the characters should somehow catch sight of her, the *Witchsight* ability will reveal that she is thoroughly corrupted. Furthermore, if they listen to the sound coming from the temple during mass, a successful *Vigilant* test identifies the repeated use of the word "Jeberaja." A character with the *Sorcery* ability, or *Loremaster* at master level, recognizes the word and its association with the Yonderworld; a successful *Cunning* test reveals that it is the name of a Daemon Prince worshipped in the days of Symbaroum.

PEACEFUL CONTACT

It is possible to approach the temple area and be well-received by the cultists; the player characters can go straight to one of the gate towers, make their presence known, and soon be welcomed inside by spear-wielding guards in reinforced leather armor. One of the tower guards will then take care of them, giving them a brief tour of the area and introducing them to the locals, before showing them to the building where they are welcome to spend the night. There they are also informed that meals are served on the top plateau, at dawn, noon and dusk. Otherwise the rules are simple: do not disturb mass, and do not enter the Sanctum or any other building inside the wall!

STEALTHY MANEUVERS

Depending on why the player characters have come to the ruin, they may want to enter unnoticed. Mystical powers can be helpful in that regard, but otherwise the usual rules for moving undetected apply – that is, *Discreet* tests modified by *Vigilant*, possibly with additional modifications based on boons, equipment or strategic choices. If the player characters are smart and lucky, they can actually go through a fissure in one of the wall sections, sneak up to unoccupied buildings, and continue all the way to (and maybe even to the top of) the Sanctum.

If the attempt is made during one of the daily masses, all cultists will be gathered inside the temple, except the sixteen guards posted at the gate towers. Failure would then result in combat with four cultists, who after 1D4+1 turns are reinforced by four of their brethren. If there is no ongoing mass, reinforcements will arrive after two turns, and before long the enemies will be numerous enough to surround the player characters.

If the player characters are knocked down or captured, the cultists will try to keep them alive, albeit bound and confined in a dungeon beneath the Thrall House. Their lives and vital fluids will be a welcome ingredient in future rituals.

PRINCE REGAL-ANG REACHES OUT

With the death of Malgar, the abomination that was once Prince Regal-Ang Fark lost his one and only ally. He has tried to communicate with a few cultists, but could not make himself understood. When one of them later told the High Priestess about his "vision," she warned her followers of the *"unholy spirit trying to prevent the rebirth of its mortal foe, Jeberaja."*

He sees in the player characters a last chance to avoid certain death. Thanks to Malgar, he speaks Ambrian well enough to make his warning and proposition clear. He reveals himself as soon as the characters are alone inside the temple area (regardless of whether they have been welcomed or snuck in), in the form of a whispering voice coming from a reflecting surface, such as a polished copper vessel, a metal shield or, ideally, a mirror. He has the following to say, and note that everyone watching the shiny surface sees their own reflection:

- You are in danger. Under threat. The folks are blood cult, you are sacrifice.
- I, too, shall be sacrificed. Murdered.
- The cult is preparing, will awake the evil, Jeberaja, the prince.



- Must be stopped, by you and I. Maybe the slaves.
- Find me! Wake me! Beneath the tower of wall, north, east.
- Some blood, pure blood, on my lips. Then back and hide – I am furious. Run. I stop the evil.
- You understand? Sure?

The spirit knows that he will not be able to control the hatred and hunger burning in his physical body; that he will attack any living creature he sets his eyes on. For that reason, he wants to be perfectly sure that the player characters understand his instructions: after applying a bit of pure blood (untainted by corruption) to his lips, they are to retreat and stay out of his way.

Once the player characters have confirmed that they understand, the mirror image blinks and the reflection returns to normal.

AUDIENCE

If the player characters have been welcomed as guests, this is of course because the cultists are in need of new blood, literally and figuratively. Cidrial-Ero Alea is far from impressed with her current subjects and would love to have a group of capable mystics and warriors join her ranks. And if they refuse, their flesh and blood can always be used to boost the power of her mystical ceremonies.

On the characters' first night at the temple, almost the entire cult (except those on watch) will gather around the guest house with torches and weapons at the ready. Unless one of them is keeping watch, the characters will get a rude awakening as they are jumped by cultists and have their hands tied behind their backs. Should they be more careful, a dark figure will appear in the doorway, telling them to wake up and come out without weapons or



Prince Regal-Ang is in desperate need of help.

other equipment. One in four cultists have the stats of a Guard Warrior, while the rest are equivalent to Village Warrior (page 216 in the *Core Rulebook*) but with one-handed spears instead of axes. Game Masters wishing to crank up the difficulty may draw inspiration from the barbarian warrior Fundiber from *Karvosti – The Witch Hammer* (page 112).

Assuming that they do not choose combat, the characters are soon taken – hands tied – in a torchlit procession to the Sanctum. The cultists follow them through the hall, past the statue of Jeberaja, and up the stairs where they spread out along the walls after pushing the player characters to their knees before the black throne. After a considerable wait they hear footsteps coming from the stairwell behind them, and into the hall strides a middle-aged woman with flowing blonde hair, dressed in a beautifully embroidered off-white dress, with the posture of someone utterly convinced that she owns the world.

Sitting on the throne, she takes a good look at them before she finally speaks. A *Loremaster* (master) understands her ancient barbarian dialect; if there is no such player character, the liturg Genni will translate for them. Her message is simple: they must swear a blood oath to be her and Jeberaja's obedient servants, or be considered enemies and treated as such.

If they refuse, their hands remain tied and they are taken to a dungeon beneath the Thrall House, where they are held until the High Priestess requires a blood sacrifice. How they get out of such a predicament is for the Game Master to decide, but perhaps the thralls eventually muster enough courage to help them?

The player characters can buy some time by swearing the oath imposed on them. They will then be freed, though forbidden to carry weapons for a month, and assigned to different residences and work teams. But perhaps they can still find a way to coordinate themselves, for example to wake the slumbering abomination. Another option is to involve the Ironsworn in some way or another.

CIDRIAL-ERO ALEA	
Race	Undead (human)
Resistance	Strong
Traits	*Gravely Cold* (II), *Undead* (III)
Accurate 7 (+3), **Cunning** 11 (–1), **Discreet** 10 (0), **Persuasive** 17 (–7), **Quick** 10 (0), **Resolute** 13 (–3), **Strong** 5 (+5), **Vigilant** 9 (+1)	
Abilities	*Dominate* (master), *Exceptionally Persuasive* (adept), *Exorcize* (master), *Leader* (adept), *Ritualist* (master: *False Shape, False Terrain, Fortune-telling, Servant Daemon, Summon Daemon*), *Teleport* (adept)
Weapon, –	None
Armor	Half damage according to *Undead* III
Defense	0
Toughness	10 **Pain Threshold** –
Equipment	Ceremony Tome (see text box)
Shadow	Glossy black like velvet (thoroughly corrupt)

Tactics: In combat, Cidrial-Ero first teleports away from immediate danger, after which she starts banishing enemies to the Yonderworld. She is protected by her servant daemon Bug, and should anyone get past him she can rely on her dominating stare.

WAKING THE PRINCE

Regardless of when or under what circumstances the player characters decide to follow up on the strange reflection's offer, they will not face much opposition along the way. A massive slab of stone has been placed over the opening in the floor of the north-east tower, but there are no guards around.

The steep, spiral tunnel below runs ten or so meters downwards, toward the south-west. Eventually it levels out and continues straight ahead; with its gritty walls and supporting structures the tunnel would resemble a mine shaft, were it not for the smooth marble floor half-hidden under a layer of dust and pebbles. Perhaps it was originally a massive cavern, later collapsed and now partially excavated?

The tunnel leads through an open archway into a roughly ten by ten meter chamber. At first it seems furnished like a royal bed chamber, with a great canopy bed, three divans around a low table, carpets on the floor and patterned tapestries on the walls. But something feels wrong...

Those who pass a *Resolute* test can see through the fading illusion and discern a cold, empty, inhospitable hall of stone, with no furniture of any kind. Further in, resting against the far wall, is a sleeping body that would otherwise be concealed by the illusion: a huge, immensely muscular, naked human body (see the description below).



Bug

Cidrial-Ero has recently summoned a servant daemon, after having accidentally killed her former companion during the time in the chamber. She calls the new one Bug, and it is firmly ordered to keep to the shadows, often hiding behind the triptych in the Crown Room. Should the mistress be threatened, it reluctantly rushes to her defense, with stats as described in the *Advanced Player's Guide* (page 93).



The player characters must dribble a few drops of untainted blood onto the creature's toad-like lips, then quickly get out of its way, back to the surface. From the moment the blood touches its lips, it takes two turns before the abomination is ready to act – to rush to the surface, into the Sanctum, and do battle with the High Priestess. But if the player characters ignore or fail to understand the warning given to them, the abomination will target them instead. They would then have a tough fight ahead, and would also have lost a golden opportunity to get help in the fight against the cultists.

The Blight-Born Prince

Hisses menacingly, flicking its serpent's tongue
As a result of the failed ceremony that would grant the daemon prince Jeberaja entry to the world, Prince Regal-Ang Fark was deformed beyond recognition. His body grew to nearly three meters tall and his muscle mass increased many times over, as the skin thickened into jointed, grayish-beige flaps. His cranium was reshaped as well. The eyes are still human, but the jaw is reminiscent of a fanged reptile, with a long, cleft tongue.

The prince did not become a god, but a monster, with all the hunger and blind lust for destruction that such a creature possesses.

Race	Abomination (human)		
Resistance	Strong		
Traits	*Armored* (III), *Natural Weapon* (I), *Poison Spit* (II), *Poisonous* (II), *Regeneration* (II), *Robust* (III), *Sturdy* (II)		
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 10 (0), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 7 (+3), **Quick** 11 (–1), **Resolute** 13 (–3), **Strong** 15 (–5), **Vigilant** 9 (+1)			
Abilities	*Berserker* (master), *Iron Fist* (master)		
Weapons, Strong/ Accurate	Bite 14, and poison 3 for 3 turns; *Poison Spit* 3 for 3 turns		
Armor	Scutes 4, +6 for *Berserker* and *Robust*, and regenerates 3 *Toughness* per turn		
Defense	+3		
Toughness	30	**Pain Threshold**	8
Equipment	None		
Shadow	Yellowish black, like blackened gold (thoroughly corrupt)		
Tactics: Tries to poison as many targets as possible, starting with the melee opponents before spitting poison at the ranged ones.			

The Ceremony Tome

The mystically preserved ceremony tome of the High Priestess, with yellowing pages bound in black leather, covers a handful of ceremonies. The Game Master decides which, but Insect Swarm and Mass Resurrection from *Yndaros – the Darkest Star* (page 72) may be two of them. Additionally, it describes the latest version of her Ceremony of Exaltation, along with numerous margin notes, scratched out sentences and cryptic symbols. The Game Master is trusted to construct this ceremony in accordance with what suits the gaming group, but at full effect the creature at the focus of it should turn into something similar to the blight-born form of Prince Regal-Ang Fark (se page 85).

The tome is written in Symbarian and challenging to interpret. It takes *Loremaster* at the master level to try to follow the instructions on how to perform the ceremony, and even then the Officiant must pass three *Cunning* tests during the procedure. Should one test fail, the ceremony will come to nothing.

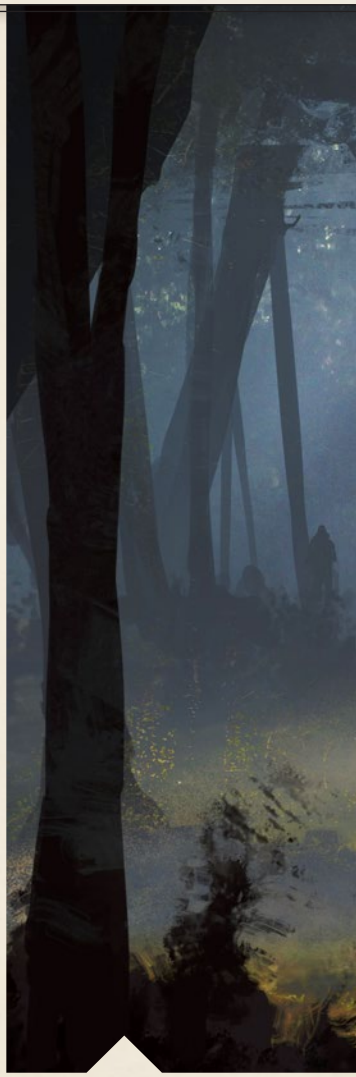
FINAL BATTLE

As usual when it comes to adventure landscapes, it is difficult to predict how it is going to end; it depends entirely on what the player characters decide to do, or not do.

In this case, many gaming groups may choose to ignore the reflection's offer and try to handle the cultists themselves, possibly with the help of thralls and Ironsworn. It may then be appropriate to have the player characters fight the High Priestess and her two (or more) bodyguards (stats like a Guard Warrior, page 216 in the *Core Rulebook*), while their allies take on the rest of the cultists. Perhaps the Iron Pact will attack just as the player characters are about to execute their plan; perhaps they initially mistake them for members of the cult? That could make the first two or three turns of combat really confusing, and interesting!

On the other hand, if the player characters decide to wake the abomination, it will most likely have a hard time reaching its true target; on the top plateau he gets caught up in the fight against the cultists, who after 1D4+2 turns are joined by the High Priestess herself (standing on the platform outside the audience chamber). The player characters can help the abomination push through its enemies and hurl itself up the exterior wall of the Sanctum, but they will hardly be repaid for their troubles – abominations are what they are; they keep fighting until there are no more lives left to extinguish!

Expeditions in Davokar



Numerous are the expeditions that have ventured into Davokar. Much fewer have returned...

IT HAS BEEN said before, but bears repeating time and time again: Davokar is a forest like no other. Traveling through an ordinary forest can be dangerous, arduous, and fraught with unpleasant surprises, but in Davokar the threats are greater, the challenges tougher, and the surprises far more deadly. And the further into the forest you go, the more dangerous it becomes – while travelers near the edge of Davokar may encounter a flock of mare cats, those venturing deeper into the woods will more likely face a horde of skullbiters or a famished arch troll.

THIS CHAPTER COVERS aspects of any journey into the legendary Davokar, to various depths and for different purposes. The aim is to answer three key questions: Why travelers expose themselves to the dangers of the forest, what sort of trouble they might get into, and what treasures they can hope to find.

The material can be used to spice up the player characters' journey in the adventure *Mother of Darkness*, but also to make other scenarios and campaigns more interesting. Should your gaming group want to use these guidelines when exploring other regions than Davokar, you will have to make some changes and probably adjust certain details.

It should be noted that the rules below can be seen as an extension of the mechanics described in the product Treasure Hunts in Davokar, which is included in *Adventure Pack 1*. They are aimed at really far-reaching expeditions, with the intent of making them more varied, interesting and (if so desired) random.



Missions

TO THOSE WHO have already made plenty of money and who live in a world where everything seems to have been explored and mapped, it may seem like madness to willingly expose oneself to the dangers of Davokar. But the people of Ambria see the forest in a very different light. For some the expeditions into the forest are a last desperate alternative to starvation and misery, for others a deliberate gamble with potential gains matching the extreme risk. Still others are driven by ambition, curiosity or the pursuit of power and glory – urges that can partly be satisfied in other ways, but not as quickly and effectively.

Davokar is arguably one of the *Symbaroum* game's main characters, meant to be the setting for many of the adventures taking place around the gaming table. Hence, it must offer a certain degree of variation, aside from the character progression that comes from accumulating experience and pressing deeper and deeper into the darkness. Looking for ancient Symbarian ruins is certainly exciting, but after a dozen treasure hunts even the most adventurous player would probably be yearning for something else.

TREASURE HUNT

The first and most obvious reason to head out into the murky woods is to look for ruins from the time of Symbaroum, in the hope that they will be brimming with riches. Information about promising treasure grounds can be obtained in many ways – in settlements near the edge of the forest, goblin villages, barbarian camp sites, or by studying legends and other remnants of ancient times.

Treasure hunts usually begin in civilized areas, where the player characters come across information about a ruin or are offered the chance to join someone else's expedition. The journey can be more or less challenging depending on how

far into the forest the characters are going, and whether any intrigues/conflicts arise between the expedition members – treacherous companions are a problem that should never be underestimated! As for the ruin and its treasures, they can either be generated randomly or designed beforehand; either way, in the long run, it will probably be more interesting to vary the amount of treasure, so that the player character will sometimes hit the jackpot and sometimes return with nothing after wasting a great deal of resources.

The challenges facing the player characters should reflect that they are not alone in the game world. Sure, confrontations with monsters and dragouls can make for thrilling encounters, but do not forget to include other types of encounters as well: another treasure hunting expedition may already be on the scene; the ruin may be home to a peaceful goblin tribe or be watched by the Iron Pact; or perhaps it turns out to be inhabited by a handful of stray ogres trying to build a decent life for themselves.

EXPLORATION

Every so often, organizations like the Royal Sekretorium and Ordo Magica will arrange expeditions into Davokar. The purpose for this can be to learn more about some historical event, identify or gather medicinal herbs, find manuscripts describing forgotten rituals, or seek out "proof" that House Kohinoor or some other noble house has a historical claim to a certain territory.

Player characters who are members of a faction or organization can of course go exploring on their own initiative, perhaps after finding clues in an archive or talking to some of Davokar's inhabitants. But since nobles and scholars tend to abhor physical labor, the player characters are just as likely to be hired to do someone else's grunt work. Again, the player characters should sometimes return empty-handed (to an aggravated employer) or sometimes with whatever they were supposed to retrieve. Maybe they will find some other even more important piece of information, which raises the question of how much they should withhold from the person financing the expedition (which could lead to complications if he or she has a mole among the player characters' companions)?

A group of explorers will probably face the same kind of challenging encounters as treasure hunters. But in this case a ruin's inhabitants can also be used as sources of information. A cryptwalker might provide deeper knowledge about the significance of a painting, while a goblin tribe can tell the characters about a previous expedition who recently discovered a cache of rune-marked copper tablets.

MISSIONARY WORK

Followers of both the Lawgiver and the Lifegiver see it as their duty to spread the knowledge of, and the love for, Prios among pagans and heretics. The target could be a goblin tribe, a barbarian campsite, or why not a free settlement that has come up with their own version of Prios worship.

A player character may feel compelled to serve the Sun God due to personal convictions or pressure from his/her superiors, but it is probably more likely that a certain congregation or an individual priest is in need of an armed escort who knows the forest. Whatever the case, the group in question could be receptive to the message, or outright hostile to "outsiders." Perhaps they feign interest in order to disarm and enslave the missionaries, or worse. Or they may demand that the player characters prove "Prios' greatness" by passing some brutal test or defeating some fearsome creature that has long plagued the group.

Most challenges during missionary tours will probably be social in nature – conflicts between missionaries and locals, between various groups on site, and between the locals and their wider community (such as a clan or tribe).

MANHUNT

Another common type of mission in Davokar is to find and bring back missing individuals or groups. The previous headings can be used as a starting point to determine who has gone missing, and why. These could also be humans wishing to join the Iron Pact or some who willingly have moved away from Ambria, attracted to the idea of becoming a free settler, hermit, or member of some barbarian clan.

In this case, suitable quest givers include family members, employers and friends. But one must be careful; the missing person does not always want to be found, possibly avoiding or hiding from the player character's contact. In more complicated cases, the person/people in question might no longer be where they should be; they might have been abducted or willingly followed new information to somewhere completely different. This is another type of mission where the player characters should sometimes return empty-handed, due to the person being dead or simply impossible to find.

In addition to the challenges that characterize treasure hunting, exploring and missionary missions, manhunts can require a high degree of problem solving. The characters could have to track the individual across great distances, sneak into hostile settlements, and use their powers and rituals in clever ways.

Movement in Davokar

WHEN MOVING THROUGH Davokar, use the table Way of Travel & Time on page 184 in the *Core Rulebook*, with Wild Davokar being equivalent to Bright Davokar. We also suggest that traveling up or down a river counts as one tier lower, so that a trip along the river Eanor in Bright or Wild Davokar is equivalent to a journey across the plains of Ambria.

Other things affecting the characters' travels are their access to a competent guide and the acquisition and storage of supplies. Below we present a set of guidelines for just that, including a list of Misfortunes that travelers might face if they or their guide botch things. Some gaming groups may find these rules unnecessarily detailed, in which case the solution is the same as always: use whatever seems interesting and ignore the rest.

SUPPLIES

These guidelines assume that the player characters can find fresh/untainted water every day. Food, however, must be brought along, preferably enough so that they will not have to spend time and energy hunting or picking berries and mushrooms. This raises the question of how much in the way of gear and supplies the characters can carry, on their own or with the help of carriers and pack animals.

Provisions

Regarding provisions, the gaming group has an important choice to make: do you want the food situation to be a challenge, or ignore all that and settle for the dangers that await in the forest and at your destination? In the latter case, the player characters can simply purchase enough food to get them there and back again, in the form of waybread and/or edibles that have been smoked, dried, salted or conserved in some other way – then they just have to keep track of how many days go by and adjust their food supply accordingly.

But for the players and their characters to get a feel for what traveling in Davokar is really like, we recommend the Game Master employ starvation as a very real threat, in which case purchasing, storing and transporting provisions becomes much more important. The characters should also find themselves a capable guide that can help them prevent Misfortunes, such as bolting pack animals, reluctant carriers and moldy/contaminated provisions.

If the characters are running out of food, the guide can help replenish their stock, and if that is not enough there are of course other options as well. The player characters could seek out and negotiate with local barbarian villages, goblin tribes, or free settlements, and maybe even venture a nerve-racking meeting with elves or trolls. Yet another option is to raid the stores of another expedition, if they are fortunate enough to find one.

But even so, they can find themselves on the brink of starvation. In that case there are rules for Starvation and hardships in the rule's section on page 102 of this book.

Encumbrance

Another factor that can make traveling through the forest a more vivid experience is the guidelines for Encumbrance on page 100 in the *Advanced Player's Guide*. To avoid making this more complicated than it needs to be, we suggest the following rules for woodland travelers:

- One waybread is enough to feed one person for seven days, and counts as one (1) item against the encumbrance limit.
- Other provisions are enough for one day per ration, and count as half an item against the encumbrance limit.
- Capable carriers (goblin or human) cost 1 shilling per day and can carry up to 40 units, unless they are expected to contribute in other ways (*Strong* 13 and the *Pack-mule* boon). Note that these will need their share of the food supply.
- Four-legged pack animals (horse, donkey, mule) can carry twice as much, i.e. 80 units each. The cost of such animals is specified in the *Core Rulebook* (page 154–155), and they have the advantage of being able to survive exclusively by grazing.

The expedition's encumbrance limit will of course also be important on the journey home, when the player characters will want to bring their finds back to civilization.

WILDERNESS GUIDE

Venturing into uncharted wilderness is always risky business. Book learning and a high *Vigilant* value is not enough to secure provisions and avoid danger; no, it takes special knowledge about the specific environment. This is why many treasure hunting parties and expeditions always have a skilled guide or two with them. Also, this explains why the rules of the trait/boon *Bushcraft* have been changed and expanded (see page 102).

The guide has two main functions: replenishing the food/water supply according to the rules for

Player character as a Guide

It is of course possible for a player character to act as the group's wilderness guide, as long as that person has *Bushcraft* (ideally at the required level) and is fairly *Vigilant*. The term guide simply refers to the person leading the party on their journey, whether he or she is an independent contractor or a full member of the party.

Unreliable guides

Not all guides can be trusted. If the Game Master so desires, one of the player characters must pass a *Persuasive* test after each random enemy encounter on the journey, in order for the guide to stay with the expedition. Furthermore, if the outcome is 20, it turns out that the guide belongs to a group of robbers who come to take the player characters' money and treasure. They outnumber the player characters by 1 and have the stats of a Robber/Robber Chief (see page 211 in the *Core Rulebook*).

Bushcraft, and helping the expedition avoid the worst hazards of the journey. In order to be truly useful, the guide must know *Bushcraft* at whatever level the local environment requires; in Davokar's case: level I for Bright, level II for Wild, and level III for Dark territories.

The cost of the guide is determined by its *Vigilant* value and its level of *Bushcraft*. The base cost is one thaler per week, but for every point of *Vigilant* past 11 and every level of *Bushcraft* past I, the cost increases by one thaler. For example, hiring a guide with *Vigilant* 13 that can be useful in Wild Davokar (*Bushcraft* II) costs 4 thaler a week.

ORIENTATION

Each day of travel through a wilderness area, the guide must roll an Orientation test against *Vigilant* with the *Bushcraft* trait/boon. If successful, this confers an advantage when rolling on some of the tables described in the next section.

If the test fails, the party gains no advantages and suffers a more or less terrible Misfortune. Below is a list of incidents with the potential to cause trouble for the travelers, or at least treat them to unwanted surprises. The Game Master can ask one of the players to roll 1D20, modified by +5 if the expedition is in Wild Davokar or +10 if they have reached the Dark, and then look up the Misfortune with the number corresponding to the dice outcome. The incidents are described in short, but often with questions which the Game Master can build on, possibly together with the players.

Furthermore, when it comes to avoiding Misfortunes, the person guiding the group can make success tests even in regions that require a higher level of the trait/boon than he or she possesses. It takes at least *Bushcraft* (I) to be allowed an attempt, and the test is made with a –3 modification if the environment requires one level higher, or –5 if the guide has level I and the environment requires level III. If such a test succeeds, the group suffers no Misfortune, but also does not gain any of the normal advantages for making a successful Orientation test.

Effect of Boons

The boons *Cartographer* and *Pathfinder* would probably be useful in relation to the Orientation test. *Pathfinder* then grants the guide two chances to succeed, while *Cartographer* can add a bonus of up to +3 to the roll.

1. The Camp Site
The characters find an abandoned camp site. Is it truly abandoned? Is there any valuable equipment left behind, or something dangerous?

2. The Corpse
The characters come across the remains of a dead fortune-hunter who was not prepared for the challenges of Davokar. What killed her? Do the characters recognize the deceased?

3. A Distant Howl
An inhuman howl is heard way out in the woods; soon thereafter it is heard again, closer this time. How do the members of the expedition react?

4. A Bad Omen
The characters encounter signs indicating a clear and present danger. What kind of signs – footprints, cadavers, mucus, blood? And how fresh are they?

5. Sudden silence
Suddenly the forest holds its breath and a dense silence falls over the expedition. Why?

6. Stuck
One of the expedition's carts or part of their equipment gets stuck, in mud, in a crack or under a falling giant tree. It takes two people, each of them rolling a test against *Strong*, to remedy the situation. If one of the tests fails, the company will travel ten kilometers shorter this day; if both tests fail, it takes a whole day before they can continue forth.

7. Shadowed
The expedition is being followed, which can be noticed with a test against *Vigilant*. Who is spying on them, and with what intent?

8. Thorns
The expedition stops at the edge of a vast field of dense thorn bushes. They can go around, thereby cutting the day's traveling distance in half. If they try to force their way through, all members must roll two tests against *Discreet* – each failure deals 1D4 damage (ignoring *Armor*).

9. The Patrol
A unit from the Queen's Rangers orders the expedition to halt. They rummage through packs and other bags and demand to see the group's Explorer's License. Are they really rangers of the Queen? If yes, are they corrupt?

10. Mosquito swarm
During the day's walk, the characters are harassed by a swarm of mosquitos. What they don't know is that the insects are exposing them to a disease. See rules on Disease in Symbaroum (page 169 in the *Monster Codex*) and roll 1D6 – 1–3 Weak Disease; 4–5 Moderate Disease; 6 Strong Disease.

11. Downpour
A strange, icy rain hammers down on the forest and the expedition is soaked. The characters can choose to test *Strong* or *Resolute*; a failure means that the person catches a chill and suffers –3 to all success tests until he or she gets warm by sitting close to a fire.

12. Lost
The characters have to admit that they have lost their bearings. As usual, the guide rolls one Orientation test per day, but with a –5 modification. If failed, the group wanders in circles and makes no progress at all; if successful, they progress at normal speed. It takes three successful tests with a –5 modification before they escape the bewildering area and hence are free from the negative modification. What makes the terrain so difficult to navigate?

13. Sick Animals
The animals of the expedition seem exhausted and throw up all they eat. A character with *Beast Lore* can help them by successfully rolling a *Cunning* test – one test per day and animal. If the company travels with one or more sick animals, they only move a quarter of the normal distance. Maybe they have to leave some animals behind?

14. Marshland
Suddenly, the characters reach a vast marshland which will take half a day to circumvent. If they choose to proceed, the guide must roll a *Vigilant* test; if failed, a random expedition member starts to sink and one of the others must pass two *Strong* tests to save him or her. If three tests fail before two successes are rolled, the unlucky one disappears into the muck.

15. Ambush
Hostiles in the area are planning to ambush the characters, which may be noted with a *[Vigilant –5]* test. Who is the enemy and what is its goal?

16. Spoiling Food
The characters discover that something has consumed some of their supplies while they were sleeping or traveling, or the provisions are attacked by aggressive microbes which cause part of the stock to rot. The expedition loses 1D20 rations.

17. Wildfire
Without warning, a wildfire spreads toward the expedition at an alarming rate. Each person must pass two *Quick* tests to reach a safe location. Anyone who fails one or more tests takes 1D4 damage for 1D4 turns (ignoring *Armor*) before getting to safety; note that they cannot stop and try to extinguish the flames before then. What happens to the pack animals and/or the contracted carriers?

18. From Bad to Worse
Roll two times on this table and use both outcomes.

19. Discord in the Ranks
The strenuous journey is starting to get on peoples' nerves. Two non-player characters in the expedition start fighting violently. What has happened? Is one of them infected by something?

20. Tabooed Grounds
The ground that the characters are traversing is considered taboo for strangers by the local population – the trespassers must die! Who lives in the area? Why the taboo?

21. Corrupted Soil
The environment suddenly feels twisted and sick; soon it can be seen, on the dark veins and black leaves of the vegetation. The area is blight-stricken; the characters can turn back and choose another way (loses one day), or they can proceed and roll a *Strong* test each – a failure means they suffer 1D6 points of temporary corruption that do not leave the body until they have left the corrupted area behind.

22. Hangman's Hill
Without warning you see them hanging there, in nooses from the lower branches, gutted and mutilated: the members of a large expedition. The characters' companions must be persuaded not to turn around and leave. Who has done this, and why?

23. Sabotage
During the night, a lone saboteur tries to access the expedition's members, provisions and/or animals. Who is the saboteur? What is the target? Can the characters thwart the attempt?

24. The Ironsworn's Ultimatum
They appear as if from out of the very air, along the path where the characters are walking – an Iron

The Importance of Preparation

Sound preparation should also have a positive impact on what events the player characters encounter on their travels. For example, choosing routes in consultation with experts can add positive modifications to relevant tests. Perhaps a certain artifact or piece of equipment can have the same effect?

The guidelines on page 119–123 in *Mother of Darkness* can serve as an example in this context, but the Game Master is urged to let the players and their characters be creative and give them an advantage if they can explain why a particular type of preparation or a certain purchase should benefit them.

Pact warband, arrows pointing at the travelers. The leader of the elves gives an ultimatum: turn around and take a long detour (two days) or face the Ironsworn's wrath. Why? Can an agreement be reached, such as being blindfolded and escorted through the area?

25. Lair of Evil
Something in this region attracts aggressive monsters and adversaries – roll an extra time on Table 4: Enemies in Davokar (page 94). What is attracting these creatures to the area?

26. Delirium
The characters start hearing and seeing what isn't there; horrifying figures connected to their own history. If a character openly questions what he or she sees and hears, they can roll a *[Resolute –3]* test; success means that the hallucinations subside. The Game Master decides how much time passes before the group can resume the journey. Is the delirium caused by something they have eaten, or by something in the air or water?

27. The Eternal Contagion
Everything in the area is dead or twisted beyond recognition. This place is horribly corrupt; even if the characters decide to turn back and go around (losing one day), they must pass a *Strong* test or suffer one point of permanent corruption. If proceeding and failing the *Strong* test, they suffer 1D4 points of permanent corruption; should the test succeed, they are instead plagued by 1D6 temporary corruption that lingers all day. In both cases, all provisions are automatically infected – each ration consumed deals one point of temporary corruption that does not go away until the afflicted has eaten pure food for a week.

28. Disappearance
An expedition member (character, companion or animal with supplies) suddenly disappears, as if evaporated into nothing. Was it transferred to another place, time or world? Who or what caused the disappearance, and why?

29. Heart of Darkness
A member of the expedition encounters something that makes him or her crazy (bug bite, spores, foul air or similar). Select a non-player or player character at random, who then must roll a *Resolute* test: the character suffers 1D4 permanent corruption if the test is successful, or 1D10 if it fails. Irrespective of which, the victim will attack the closest person with the intent of killing him or her – a state that remains for the duration of the scene.

30. The Eye of the Forest
All who travel the area feel as if they are being watched by the forest itself, as if it is assessing them, searching for weaknesses. Suddenly the feeling gowns many times stronger, threatening, like the whole world is out to get them. All who fail a *[Resolute –5]* test are struck by panic and start fleeing in different directions. The panic persists for 1D4 hours, and during that time the expedition members become scattered, alone in the depths of Davokar...

Events

TRAVELING THROUGH A wild and unexplored environment offers opportunities as well as risks. This section contains rules for randomly determining what the player characters encounter or experience on their expeditions. The Game Master may of course pick and choose among the lists and tables below, without rolling dice, if that corresponds to your preferred style of play, possibly after talking this through with your players.

Each day the player characters spend in Davokar, four things can happen: they can come across a ruin, an encounter, a group of enemies, and/or special terrain. Since the forest of Davokar is so vast and diverse in its environment, a separate roll is made for each of these four, with the following general modifications:

- In Wild Davokar, add +2 to rolls on tables 2 to 5
- In Dark Davokar, add +5 to rolls on tables 2 to 5

- When traveling along waterways, add +2 to any roll on Table 4

We suggest that these four rolls are made before the gaming session begins, so the Game Master will have time to consider what the outcomes entail and turn them into an interesting scene with suitable challenges.

If the outcome of the rolls means that the player characters encounter a medium-sized, badly damaged ruin and PC number of Weak enemies with an Ordinary leader, the ruin in question would likely be a den of robbers or the home of an aggressive goblin tribe.

Should it also turn out that there is a local settlement in the area (see Table 3), it may be inhabited by other goblins or human settlers who are either in conflict with the occupants of the ruin or working together with them in some way.

Table 1 can be used or consulted when the outcome indicates that the player characters face both an encounter and a group of enemies, to determine the relations between the two parties. Otherwise, feel free to let your imagination run wild!

Table 1: Relations

1D6	RELATIONS
1	The groups are bitter enemies
2	The groups are unaware of each other
3	The groups know of each other, but do not interact
4	One group is controlled/ruled by the other
5	The groups collaborate a little, but relations are strained
6	The groups collaborate a great deal, relations are good

RUIN

For each day of travel, the expedition leader makes a roll on Table 2: Ruins in Davokar. A successful Orientation test grants a bonus of +2, in addition to any other modifications.

The table determines whether the party finds a ruin and, if so, what type of ruin it is – in turn determining the maximum number of finds at that location.

It is up to the Game Master to decide on the physical characteristics of the ruin, possibly with help from the guidelines on page 54–57 in *Karvosti – The Witch Hammer*.

Table 2: Ruins in Davokar

1D20 +MOD.	RUIN	MAXIMUM NUMBER OF FINDS
1–7	None	–
8–10	Completely crumbled or already ransacked	–
11–12	Small, badly damaged	1D4+2
13–14	Small, dilapidated	1D6+2
15–16	Small, well-preserved	1D8+2
17–18	Medium, badly damaged	2D6+2
19	Medium, dilapidated	2D8+2
20	Medium, well-preserved	2D10+2
21	Grand, badly damaged	3D8+2
22	Grand, dilapidated	3D10+2
23+	Grand, well-preserved	3D12+2

Simply discovering a ruin rich with treasure is no guarantee of wealth and fame – the items in question must first be found or dug up! Everyone contributing to the excavation makes a *Vigilant* test every day. Successful diggers may roll on Table 6: Type of Item on page 95 to see what kind of treasure they have found, after which they are referred to another table to determine exactly what it is.

The excavation may continue until the ruin's maximum number of finds have been salvaged – a roll that can be made in secret by the Game Master

Active Search

As an optional rule, the Game Master can decide that the characters' chance of encountering a ruin is affected by whether or not they are actively searching for one – if so, active search requires that they do not move faster than normal speed. Groups that opt not to actively search gain no bonus from passed Orientation tests and also suffer a –5 modification when rolling on Table 2.

Finding ruins with Cunning

A person who is looking for a specific ruin and has the *Loremaster* ability can research the place in an archive before heading out. The process takes one week and costs 10+1D6 thaler in various fees and bribes.

Once the group has arrived in the area where the ruin should be, the player character makes a *Cunning* test to actually find it; if the test fails, a new attempt can be made the following day. Note that the excavation is carried out as usual.

Legendary Resistance

Table 4 uses the levels of resistance presented in the *Core Rulebook*, but also something called Legendary resistance. You can read more about this in the *Symbaroum Monster Codex*, but it basically refers to unique monstrosities that are particularly difficult to defeat. Legendary creatures are always named individuals; there are no known examples of entire races whose every member can offer such overwhelming opposition.

or left to the players. But staying in the same place for several days is not without risks, as shown under the Enemies heading below.

ENCOUNTERS

Although unusual, it is not impossible to come across groups of potentially peaceful travelers in Davokar. Obviously, the likelihood of that happening decreases the further into the forest you get, particularly when it comes to encounters with humans from Ambria or the barbarian clans.

Once a day a roll is made on Table 3, modified by what part of the forest the characters are in. If the outcome indicates that an encounter will take place, and the guide of the expedition passed the Orientation test, the player character (or guide) with the highest *Vigilant* value can make a test modified by the value specified in the Modification For Detection column. If successful, the player characters notice the other group before being detected themselves, and may choose whether to hide, lay an ambush, or do something else; if the test fails (or if the Orientation test failed) the Game Master gets to decide the strategy of the other group.

The details regarding the encounter are decided by the Game Master, on the basis that the player characters and the group they face are equally keen to avoid bloodshed. Perhaps they can exchange information, help each other with healing and/or supplies, or join forces to defeat a mutual enemy in the area?

Table 3: Encounters in Davokar

1D20 +MOD.	ENCOUNTER	NUMBER	MODIFICATION FOR DETECTION
1	Hunting party	1D6+2	±0
2	Missionaries	PC+1D6	+3
3	Treasure hunters	PC+1D6	+1
4	Local settlement	1D20+20	+5
5	Rangers	PC+2	±0
6	Large expedition	PC+1D6	+3
7	Nomadic goblins	1D20+20	–1
8	Diplomatic elves, Civilized trolls or Peaceful bestiaals	PC+1D10	–5
9 +	None	–	–

ENEMIES

In this case, the term "enemies" refers to creatures whose default position is aggression, whom the player characters cannot easily get past without combat. These may be predators, belligerent cultural beings, ravenous abominations or life-hating undead. Table 4 only specifies the enemy's resistance level, which leaves it to the Game Master to decide exactly what is attacking the player characters or standing in their way.

Each day a roll is made on Table 4, modified by what part of the forest they are in. A successful Orientation test adds a –1 modifier to the roll, or –2 if the test succeeds with a difference of 5 or more.

Table 4: Enemies in Davokar

1D20+ MOD.	ENCOUNTER	EXAMPLE
1–8	None	
9–10	PC number of Weak	Fortune Hunters, Jakaars, Frost Lights
11–12	PC number of Weak, with Ordinary leader	Robber chief + Robbers
13–14	PC number of Ordinary	Village Warriors, Kotkas, Blight-born Humans
15–16	PC number of Ordinary, with Challenging leader	Necromage + Dragouls
17–18	PC number of Challenging	Rage Trolls, Ferbers, Killer Shrubs
19–20	PC number of Challenging, with Strong leader	Lindworm + Aboars
21–22	PC number of Strong	Hunger Wolves, Colossi, Stone Boars
23	PC number of Strong, with Mighty leader	Skullbiter Queen + Skullbiter Crushers
24	PC number of Mighty enemies, or PC×2 Strong	Ravenous Willow old crushers, Primal Blight Beasts, Liege Trolls
25	PC number of Mighty enemies, with Legendary leader	The World Serpent + World Serpent wallowers

If the player characters choose to stay in the same place for more than one day, for example to gather supplies or excavate a ruin, they risk attracting unwanted attention. In that case the most *Discreet*

member of the party can try to make sure that everyone is as quiet as possible, by rolling a daily *Discreet* test from their second day forward. A failure means a roll is made on Table 4 to determine what type of unexpected guests show up, without help from a successful Orientation test – staying in the same place for too long can be very dangerous indeed...

TERRAIN

Davokar may seem fairly predictable on a map, with clear lines drawn between its bright, wild and dark regions. But the forest is legendary for its treacherous nature, which anyone traveling under its foliage will quickly become aware of.

Once a day, a roll is made on Table 5, modified by what part of the forest they are in. A successful Orientation test adds a –1 modifier to the roll, or –2 if the test succeeded with a difference of 5 or more.

Table 5: Terrain in Davokar

1D20 MOD.	TERRAIN	EFFECT
1–10	Nothing special	
11–12	Easily traversable	The party covers 10 km more
13–14	Swamp/marsh	The party covers 5 km less
15–16	Sinkhole	Everyone tests *Vigilant*. Failure causes 1D8 falling damage
17–18	Poisonous spores	Everyone tests Strong. Failure causes 3 damage for 3 turns
19–20	Vengeful terrain	PC number of creatures, suiting the location
21	Slightly corrupted nature	One roll on Table 2 in the *Symbaroum Monster Codex* (page 25)
22	Corrupted nature	Three rolls on Table 2 in the *Symbaroum Monster Codex* (page 25)
23+	Severely corrupted nature	Five rolls on Table 2 in the *Symbaroum Monster Codex* (page 25)

The Treasure of the Ruins

PEOPLE CLAIMING THAT valuable remnants from past inhabitants of Davokar are simply lying around under the foliage, waiting to be found by ardent fortune hunters, have probably never set foot in the forest. No, it takes a great deal of effort and no small amount of luck to become the next Iasogoi Brigo or Elmea Rabbit's Foot!

The finds listed in the three tables below – Curiosities, Mystical Treasures and Artifacts – are things that can be found in the forest's more or less well-preserved ruins. Guidelines on how to handle the search and how many treasures can be found in a specific location are found under the Ruin heading (page 93), while this is where you determine exactly what items the characters have uncovered.

Each person vigilant enough to find something starts by rolling on Table 6 to determine what type of item has been found. The outcome then points to one of three other tables, unless the find turns out to be debris. The Debris category covers items like cracked vases, damaged figurines and broken tools, which can be sold for 1D10 silver thaler on the markets of Ambria.

Table 6: Type of item

BRIGHT	WILD	DARK	CATEGORY
1–5	1–4	1–2	Debris
6–15	5–13	3–11	Curiosity, Table 7
16–19	14–18	12–18	Mystical treasure, Table 8
20	19–20	19–20	Artifact, Table 9

The Value of the Finds

The value of a find depends on several factors: what condition it is in, what the material is worth and how many potential buyers there are. A curiosity is worth 10+1D10 thaler. A Mystical treasure is worth 100+1D100 thaler. Artifacts are rarely traded in thaler, but if one finds a buyer the item can be sold for 1000+1D1000 thaler.

Rolling 1D100 simply means that you roll 1D10 twice. The first roll determines the tens digit, and the second determines the ones digit. For example, if you roll a 3 followed by a 4, the outcome is 34. In order to roll 1D1000 you just add 1D10 for the thousands digit. The outcomes 00 and 000 equals 100 and 1000 respectively.

Table 7: Curiosities

1D100	ITEM
1–2	Leather pouch containing stone marbles, fourteen shiny black ones and eight off-white, to play with or use as sling stones
3–4	Richly ornamented lyre of silver that can be fitted with new strings
5–6	Nail file with one rough side and one smooth, and a handle shaped like the silhouette of a wolf's head
7–8	Box containing twenty-four paper clips of patinated copper wire
9–10	Glass bottle containing a wooden model castle in a moorland landscape
11–12	Simple frying pan of rusted iron on which nothing ever sticks
13–14	Set of five bronze measuring cups, all in different sizes
15–16	Box containing thirty-six small, bone discs engraved with Symbarian cuneiform characters
17–18	Small basket woven out of miraculously living vines with healthy green leaves
19–20	Necklace made entirely from linked gold teeth
21–22	Silver brooch depicting a wraith owl, the rings around its eyes made from black, faceted stones
23–24	White-glazed and somewhat cracked porcelain plate, painted with the weathered motif of a straight-backed woman in a long dress, with a poleaxe resting against her shoulder
25–26	Comb made of lindworm bone with cuneiform characters on each tooth, which not only untangles one's hair but cleans away dirt and grease
27–28	Cracked ceramic serving platter, decorated with various types of fruit on a white background – two of the fruits are unfamiliar to present-day gardeners
29–30	Box in the shape of a rose with twenty-four golden petals in four rows, which must be unfolded in sequence to expose its empty interior
31–32	Silver fountain pen with golden details, which never seems to run out of ink
33–34	Bronze caliper, marked in cuneiform with an unknown unit of measurement
35–36	Flowerpot of dark blue ceramic, decorated with a white and red motif of daemonic couples in obscene positions
37–38	Copper box containing twelve ceramic figurines, each depicting the same goblin's head, but with different facial expressions
39–40	Patinated sheet of copper with cuneiform, listing the ingredients and procedure for brewing the alcoholic honey beverage Noid
41–42	Beautifully ornamented dagger with a dull steel blade that slides back into the hilt when pressed against something
43–44	White-glazed porcelain mask that covers the upper part of one's face, shaped with an owl's beak, small branched horns, and red-lined eye openings
45–46	Wax stamp with a handle of pure gold whose mark represents the royal rune Labrys
47–48	Thick, cracked tallow candle which, when lit, emits a dark yellow smoke
49–50	Green, ceramic oil lamp with a shade of patterned glass that rotates while the lamp is lit
51–52	Brown, leather eyepatch with different-colored gemstones arranged in the form of an open eye
53–54	Model of a twin-masted stone ship; the stern can be opened to reveal sixteen tin figures spread across two decks
55–56	Black leather leash that connects to a collar of the same material, large enough to fit around a bull's neck and decorated with studs of pure gold
57–58	Badly damaged wooden box with moldy fabric inside; contains five well-preserved seeds which, if handled correctly (successful *Cunning* with *Alchemy*), can grow into cherry trees with multicolored flowers and delicious fruit
59–60	Long, thin wooden box full of flat copper pieces of different shapes, all of them badly patinated; a puzzle with two missing pieces; washing off the patina reveals the motif of a daemonic abomination

61–62	Spoon of black bone, carved with runes filled with red paint that has partially worn off; nothing one eats with the spoon is absorbed by the body
63–64	12 x 9 game board with different-sized squares of various colors/materials (white bone, black wood, and patinated copper), in a frame of patterned hardwood.
65–66	The clappers and tubes of a wind chime made from melodious ettermite
67–68	Fist-sized, irregular, glistening black stone with magnetic properties
69–70	Silver case with sixteen dried-up, multicolored pieces of chalk; they are unused and can be restored for drawing after successful alchemical treatment (*Cunning* test with *Alchemy*)
71–72	Carved bone statue of an andrik with a cracked beak, armed with a crossbow and a broad-bladed hatchet
73–74	Silver tuning fork in the key of D
75–76	Stiletto with a wavy blade of mystical green metal; the hilt is shaped like a human child with clasped hands
77–78	Statuette of an ox chiseled in black stone; raising its tail tilts the horns
79–80	Blackened walking stick, patterned like the scales of a snake or fish, with a fist-sized pearl for a knob
81–82	Circular belt or cloak buckle made of silver, with gold details depicting three crossed arrows (the symbol of Iliel, see page 186)
83–84	Copper spyglass with rotating segments; aiming it at the sun reveals colorful patterns which change as one rotates the segments
85–86	Hourglass of misty white crystal contained within a blue-gray metal stand, whose sand runs exactly twice as fast in one direction as it does in the other
87–88	Silver watering can whose long, thin spout has been broken off; decorated with motifs of grotesque birds
89–90	Stuffed and mystically preserved ferret that has undergone a Symbarian rite of exaltation – equipped with predatory jaws, long claws, a crown of horns, and sickly yellow eyes
91–92	Bone flute, as long as one's palm and as thin as a little finger; attracts 1D20 small birds if played by someone with the *Musician* boon
93–94	Shimmering pink pearl with streaks of red, the size of an eyeball, with the sweet-sour taste of berry compote; never loses size or flavor
95–96	The components of a broken metal dreamcatcher that can be repaired (*Cunning* test with the *Blacksmith* ability). Brings peace to the sleeping; those burdened by Nightmares have two chances to pass their *Resolute* test
97–98	A clay cruse stoppered with a wax-sealed cork, bearing a life-sustaining seal that has kept its contents fresh for hundreds of years – red wine of excellent quality from a particularly superb vintage
99–100	Statue of glossy, dark gray stone, as tall as a forearm, in the form of a daemon (for description, see page 80). The base bears a cuneiform inscription that can be interpreted by someone with *Loremaster* (master): "Jeberaja"

Table 8: Mystical treasures

1D20	ITEM
1	Tall, thin vase of glazed porcelain, purple with a motif of bright red vines. Plants placed in the vase will not age, wither, bloom, or bear fruit
2	Facial mask made of seashells in pink, white and light blue. Its wearer can hold their breath under water at up to ten meters' depth, for a maximum of ten minutes
3	Handheld fan painted with stormy mountain scenery, which actively cools the air when waved. Roll 1D6 when used – a result of 6 inflicts 1D4 damage and causes facial hair to freeze.
4	Bronze bell whose inside and clapper is engraved with cuneiform characters. If carried so that it is hanging freely, it tinkles faintly whenever there is an abomination within a hundred meter radius, but at the risk of being detected *[10←the creatures Vigilant]*

5	Notebook with thin pages of parchment and pearl-covered binding. Text written in the book is only visible to the person who wrote it.
6	Metal canister whose white color has largely peeled off. It is half full of a powder which conceals signs of aging on human skin for twenty-four hours, at the cost of 1D4 temporary corruption; contains enough powder for 10+1D10 applications
7	Amulet set with a gray stone that emits a slimy secretion, which dries into an ineffective resin after a while. The secretion is enough for two individuals per scene. If applied on the skin, it has a repellent effect on insects; if the wearer succeeds with *[13←Resolute]* the insects select other targets.
8	Eight sticks of incense in a cylindrical leather case. Can be burned during negotiations, granting those with the *Manipulator* boon +2 to *Persuasive* tests.
9	Wedding ring of pure gold, adorned with six sapphires. A loving spirit is bound to the ring and can act in the wearer's defense; once per scene the wearer may reroll a failed *Defense* test. But the spirit is jealous and will haunt the wearer's romantic partner with horrifying nightmares.
10	Smooth wooden box containing two frameless spectacle lenses. Makes it easier to follow tracks in the wilderness (+1 to *Vigilant* tests), but weakens the other senses so that the wearer becomes less aware of her surroundings (–3 to *Vigilant* tests for detecting threats).
11	Three beautiful, iron-cast animal heads each the size of a clenched fist, completely free of rust – a wolf, a bear and a wild boar. Loops underneath allow them to be tied together into a bola, which adds +3 to the success test when thrown at creatures of the Beast category.
12	Long-stemmed briar pipe whose bowl is shaped like a woman's face with its eyes closed. Can be used when performing the *Oracle* ritual, with its smoke conveying the visions, granting a +3 bonus to *Resolute* tests.
13	Lantern with red glass in a metal frame, about the size of a tankard. When lit in an otherwise dim environment, it can expose people who are trying to hide intense feelings (such as outrage, love or grief). It takes one successful *Vigilant* test per target to notice their seemingly glowing outlines.
14	A simple right-handed chainmail gauntlet that needs relining. The person wearing it can never involuntarily lose her grip on the right-hand weapon.
15	A modest ring of low-karat gold, with cuneiform runes engraved on the inside ("The cleansing one"). Its owner can conceal any skin damage for one scene per day, including scars and tattoos. These can still be detected with *Witchsight* and a successful *Vigilant* test.
16	Key of blackened silver that can slide into most locks. Roll 1D6: on 1–4 the lock opens; on 5–6 the mechanism melts, making it impossible to unlock.
17	Staff of smoke-colored crystal, as long as one's palm, with one end shaped like a rounded point. When pointed at the North Star it gives a faint glow, granting +3 to Orientation tests, even underground.
18	Small copper pot, large enough to brew one dose of a single elixir. Adding an amount of silver equal to one (1) silver thaler makes the elixir one level stronger. If it is already Strong, the effect die is increased by one step.
19	Knife with a handle of scarlet wood and a ten centimeter curved blade, engraved with a running predator. Adds +2 to *Cunning* tests when harvesting a monster trophy.
20	Cracked, uncut ruby that emits enough heat to steam in cold and damp weather. If set in the hilt or grip of a one-handed weapon with the mystical quality Death Rune, the quality's effect die is increased to 1D10, at the cost of 1D4 temporary corruption per turn.

Table 9: Artifacts

1D6	ARTIFACT
1	The Censer of Olian
2	The Minstrel's Pipe
3	The Staff of the Plant Whisperer
4	The Gloves of Joliana
5	The long axe Blood Cleaver
6	The Lance of Porgo

THE CENSER OF OLIAN

Stories are told about the spiritualist Olian, who in the glory days of Symbaroum helped people deal with malevolent spirits in the western parts of the empire. Legend has it that much of his power lay in the censer he was carrying, the origin of which he would not divulge. Anyone who finds the artifact, made from fine gold threads and as large as a clenched fist, can fill it with oil to gain the following abilities (after binding to it):

Materialization: The master of the artifact can blow smoke from the lit censer at a spirit within two movement distances (about 20 meters). If the master succeeds with *[Resolute←Resolute]*, the spirit is forced to take shape for one turn, during which it counts as a physical creature in terms of movement and damage (but with no *Pain Threshold*).
Action: Active
Corruption: 1D4

Smokescreen: The master can veil herself and a few others in the smoke from the artifact, making them invisible to spirits as long as they do nothing but move. The effect is automatic for 1D4 turns, after which it can be maintained as long as the master passes one *[Discreet←Vigilant]* test per spirit each turn.
Action: Active
Corruption: 1D4+1 per person other than the master

The Dread of Spirits: If the master of the artifact knows the *Exorcism* ritual, the censer can be used to enhance its banishing effects, giving the master two chances to succeed with each of the three attempts to banish the spirit.
Action: Reaction
Corruption: +1D4

THE MINSTREL'S PIPE

This curved alto flute of dark-glazed wood may have belonged to the nameless musician in several heroic myths from eastern Symbaroum, who always appears after the heroes seem to prevail and then encounter a complicating factor. And it is certainly true that a person bound to the flute gains the ability to seriously frustrate the enemy.

Enervate: By playing a dissonant melody with discordant notes, the master of the artifact can distract a chain of cultural beings – roll *[Cunning←Resolute]* against the first target, then (if successful) against the next one, and so on until a test fails. The enervated person receives a –3 modifier to all success test until the music stops. The master may choose to cancel the effect, otherwise the music stops automatically if the master loses concentration *[Resolute –Damage]*.
Action: Active
Corruption: 1 temporary corruption per turn

Mesmerize: A master with the *Musician* boon can make a chain of cultural beings (see Enervate) stop whatever they are doing and just listen to the music. The effect lasts as long as the music is playing, or until the mesmerized are attacked or significantly affected by their surroundings – in that case they defend themselves as usual and the spell is broken. The master may choose to cancel the effect, otherwise the music stops automatically if the master loses concentration *[Resolute –Damage]*.
Action: Active
Corruption: 1 temporary corruption per turn

THE STAFF OF THE PLANT WHISPERER

She is called Ur, the first witch, and often described as carrying a half-meter-long, living tree staff – crooked and curved, dressed in bark, its appearance following the rhythm of nature, sprouting tiny shoots in the spring, bright green leaves in summer, yellow and brown ones in the fall and a naked shaft in the winter.

The Staff of the Plant Whisperer cannot be used as a weapon, but a person bound to the artifact gains +1 to all success tests for powers and rituals related to the green path of *Witchcraft* (Green Weaver). In addition, the following effects can be activated.

Trip: A master standing on earthy ground (not rock or similar) can once per turn make plants and roots trip a moving enemy to the ground. The action is performed on the target's initiative and requires a successful *[Resolute←Quick]* test; on success the movement is canceled and the target trips and falls over, losing any remaining actions that turn.
Action: Reaction
Corruption: 1

Lash: As long as there is larger vegetation like bushes or trees nearby, the master can once per turn cause branches or roots to physically distract an enemy within sight. The action is performed on the enemy's initiative while she or he is using a mystical power or making a ranged attack, giving the enemy two chances to fail with said action, or its target two chances to defend against the power/attack.
Action: Reaction
Corruption: 1

Plant Shroud: Once per turn (given the same circumstances as above) the master of the staff can

Burning Plant Shrouds

If someone tries to set fire to the plant shroud, new roots and/or branches will immediately emerge to smother the flames, whether they were caused by natural or mystical means.

call nature to her defense. The master thumps the ground with the staff, causing roots to rise up and vegetation to gather, forming a thick, self-repairing coat of armor. The master cannot perform any actions until she lets the shroud fall apart (one day max); however, until then she is shielded from physical attacks and mystical powers.

Action: Whole turn

Corruption: 1D4

THE GLOVES OF JOLIANA

The legends have little to say about Joliana, other than that she was a dominant wrestling champion, possibly originating from the Lindarians who ruled an area south of Karvosti in Symbarian times. Whether she received her famous gloves as a reward for her long-standing winning streak, or whether they are the reason she managed to defeat so many brave opponents, is a matter of dispute.

The gloves consist of fine, grayish brown roots, so tightly meshed that they seem to be made of leather. When bound to a master, they adapt to fit that person's hands perfectly. They also allow the master to activate the following powers.

Power Grip: The master can call on the living plant fibers to grip an enemy. Can be used with *Wrestling* (novice) or *Strangler* (novice), in which case it adds +5 to relevant attributes when rolling to establish or maintain a grip.

Action: Reaction

Corruption: 1

Thorn Bite: With the enemy in a Power Grip, the master can let the gloves grow tiny, razor-sharp thorns which deal 1D4 damage each turn the grip is maintained (ignores *Armor*).

Action: Free

Corruption: 1D4

Thorn Threads: The master can let the gloves send thin rootlets into a gripped enemy's flesh to feed on its life force. The effect lasts one turn, during which the victim takes 1D6 damage (ignores *Armor*) that is transferred to the master in the form of healed *Toughness*. If the victim is already suffering from an ongoing Thorn Bite, its effect is replaced by Thorn Threads for one turn, after which the bite resumes automatically.

Action: Free

Corruption: 1D4

THE LONG AXE BLOOD CLEAVER

Blood Cleaver is not mentioned in any popular stories, but perhaps it is a sibling of the long axe Blood Slasher mentioned in the legend of the Bell and the Dragon (see the adventure *The Bell Tolls for Kastor*). The latter, supposedly forged by the runesmith Xansha, was long mounted on the wall of Kastor's town hall, before it was stolen by the monster worshipper Kagliostro. A person who finds Blood Cleaver and has *Loremaster* (adept) will find that it, too, bears the rune of Xansha.

The artifact is a Bastard Weapon and may be wielded with one hand along with a shield, but then it loses its positive qualities. Wielded with two hands it has the qualities Long and Massive. Either way it always has the quality Unwieldy. The axe is even more powerful in the hands of someone bound to the weapon; then the following powers can be used:

Bloodwork: When swung by the master, the axe performs a mighty cleaving blow that fills the bearer with vitality. The effect lasts for a whole scene and heals the wearer for half the amount of any damage dealt to enemies.

Action: Free

Corruption: 1D4

Rending Swing: The axe can be swung in wide arcs, making it easier for the master to hit surrounding enemies. Each attack made on this turn works as a chain against enemies within melee range – if the attack hits, another attack is made at another enemy, and so on until a success test fails. The bearer can use any abilities as usual, and their effects apply to all attacks in the chain.

Action: Free

Corruption: 1D6

THE LANCE OF PORGO

Whether this fabled spear ever existed is a matter of some dispute among scholars, but according to legend, it was forged by elves as a gift to the human knight Porgo in the declining years of Symbaroum. Other stories claim that Porgo was later killed in battle against the last stone giants of the Titans, and that his weapon was subsequently lost to history.

The Lance of Porgo can be used as a spear in melee combat or thrown as a javelin, dealing 1D8 and 1D6 damage respectively, with the qualities Blood-letting, Long and Precise. In addition, the following abilities can be activated:

Return: If its master has the *Steel Throw* ability, the weapon can automatically return to the that person's hand after being thrown.

Action: Free

Corruption: 1

Return Attack: If the master has *Steel Throw*, the weapon can make a second attack on its way back to the hand. A new success test is made; if hit the target sustains the weapon's own damage, without additions from the master's abilities.

Action: Reaction

Corruption: +1D4

New Mechanics

IN THIS CHAPTER you will find a number of rules that are relevant to the player characters' arduous journey to Symbar. It describes the expanded version of the *Bushcraft* trait/boon and provides guidelines for how to handle starvation and other hardships that might befall the characters. The chapter also includes six new artifacts, some powers, an elixir, a couple of new monsters, and more.

Additional Rules

DESCRIBED BELOW ARE two new powers of the *Symbolism* tradition, a monstrous trait, and two alternative rules. They are all related to the contents of this book, but may of course be used in other contexts as well, when creating and developing player characters or making up new non-player characters.

MARK OF TORMENT, MYSTICAL POWER

Cryptic patterns cause severe stomach pain that reduces the victim's mobility and concentration, and can even inflict physical damage.

Novice	**Active.** The symbol triggers a chain of twinging pains; the victim closest to the symbol suffers first *[Resolute←Resolute]*; if the victim is affected, a new test is made for the next enemy, and so on until someone can resist the energies. The effect lasts one turn and prevents the victims from performing any active actions.
Adept	**Active.** Like Novice, but the pain is so sharp that the victims get two chances to fail at all reactive actions (such as *Defense*).
Master	**Active.** Like Adept, but now the pain is so severe that it has physical consequences, dealing 1D6 damage to *Toughness* (ignores *Armor*).

BATTLE SYMBOL, MYSTICAL POWER

Anyone who sees the rousing motif of the symbol feels a burning urge to fight which, unless they can resist the effect, drives them into a ruthless and possibly even suicidal berserker rage.

Novice	**Active.** The symbol fills a chain of creatures with an uncontrollable urge to fight; the victim closest to the symbol is affected first *[Resolute←Resolute]*; if the victim is affected, a new test is made for the next enemy, and so on until someone can resist the energies. The effect lasts one turn and causes the victim to immediately attack the nearest individual, friend or foe.
Adept	**Active.** Like Novice, but the effect lasts until the mystic fails a *Resolute* test or loses concentration *[Resolute –Damage]*.

Dehydration

A living creature cannot survive long without water. After three days the character must pass a *Strong* test; failure means death. If successful, the character must remain completely still in the shade in order to survive, for a maximum of five days (a new *Strong* test is made every day).

Master **Active.** Like Adept, but the affected are so consumed with bloodlust that they fail to defend themselves against incoming attacks; all attacks against the affected hit automatically.

BUSHCRAFT, BOON (EXPANDED)

The person can read the signs of the wilds, knows what areas to avoid and is used to finding food, water and shelter in harsh environments. While moving through ruins or wilderness, the person can pass a *Vigilant* test to gather 1D6 rations of food and water per day, or 1D10 rations if that is the person's sole focus (no movement).

Bushcraft can be acquired multiple times, in which case it can be used in increasingly hostile environments. For example, level I is useful in places such as Bright Davokar and the outskirts of the mountains; level II in Wild Davokar and the deep mountain valleys; level III in Dark Davokar and the Underworld (the Game Master decides). Note that one must have spent a significant period of time in the more demanding environments to benefit from the higher levels of the boon.

STARVATION, OPTIONAL RULE

For people traveling through Davokar, running out of food is as serious a threat as predators and corrupted nature. After five days without any food whatsoever, or ten days on rations, the following effects kick in:

The player character ...
... does not benefit from any natural healing
... has two chances to fail all success tests
... can only move at half speed
... must pass a *Strong* test every day; failure decreases *Strong* by –1. *Strong* 0 means death by starvation.

If this rule is combined with the guidelines for sleep deprivation (page 78 in *Yndaros – The Darkest Star*), the effects are added together, which among other thing means that the player character has three chances to fail all success tests.

LEAP, MONSTROUS TRAIT

The creature has strong, explosive leg muscles that allow it to jump several times the length of its own body, both vertically and horizontally.

I **Movement.** The creature can make a huge leap and land one movement action away from the starting point (about 10 meters). It suffers no free attacks from enemies it passes by or lands next to, but free attacks caused by the creature leaving melee combat are triggered as usual.

II **Movement.** Like Novice, but the jump is made with such precision that the creature can land on an enemy. The attack counts as a free attack with +5 damage, and the target is knocked prone unless it passes a *[Strong←Strong+5]* test.

III **Movement.** Like Adept, but the creature can jump up to two movement actions horizontally (about 20 meters), with such suddenness that it evades free attacks even when leaving melee combat.

Artifacts

THE ARTIFACTS IN this section all have a place in this book, either in *Mother of Darkness* or in the ruins described on pages 72–85. However, this does not mean that they cannot appear in other places or in other contexts if that is what the Game Master wants.

RAMARA'S FIEND AXE

The legend of the hunter Ramara has been largely forgotten, and the fragments that remain are usually attributed to the more widely recognized big-game hunter Umuma. But Ramara was held in high esteem by the People of Kavaler, due to her unfailing courage and many heroic feats in battle against the abominations awakened by the theourgical ceremonies of Symbaroum.

If the axe head is fitted with a suitable handle, it can be used as a one-handed axe or a halberd/pike axe, in both cases with the quality Blood-letting.

Wild blow: When fighting creatures from the Beast or Abomination categories, the person bound to the axe can forsake his/her reactive actions and instead deliver a massive blow to all enemies within melee combat range. The attack tests are rolled as usual, but each successful hit deals +1D8 damage.

Action: Active
Corruption: 1D4

Slaughtering strike: If the master of the axe has the *Beast Lore* ability at the novice level, he or she can activate this power to deal +1D4 damage to Beasts and Abominations. Upon attaining the level of adept, the damage bonus increases to +1D8.
Action: Free
Corruption: 1D4

THE BANNER OF KAVALER

Had it not been for this powerful artifact, which has been with the People of Kavaler since they first came to the plains west of the Ravens, they would hardly have survived the many Symbarian attempts to annex their territory. The flag is made of a glossy, silk-like fabric, imbued with mystical energies that prevent wear and tear as well as bleaching. The motif is an oak and two crossed swords, dark blue against a golden background.

Inspire Courage: All allies who see the banner are filled with unwavering courage in the face of danger. For the duration of one scene they will not flee under any circumstances (unless ordered to), and gain a +5 bonus when trying to resist frightening or banishing effects, whether natural or mystical (such as the *Terrify* trait or the power *Banishing Seal*).
Action: Active
Corruption: 1D4

Muster Strength: Once per combat scene, the master can let his/her power flow through all allies in sight. These may then choose to sacrifice their two ordinary actions in order to recover 1D6 *Toughness*. The power has no effect on poisons or ongoing mystical effects, other than the healing it provides.
Action: Active
Corruption: 1D4

Final Push: In a battle where the master's side outnumbers their enemies by at least 50%, the master can rally his/her allies for a final, forceful offensive. Everyone in sight is affected, ignoring 1D4 damage per hit while their own attacks each deal 1D6 extra damage. The effect lasts 1D4, 1D6, or 1D8 turns (the master decides).
Action: Active
Corruption: Same as the number of turns the effect lasts

THE SUN OF STEEL

The artifact which Brother Eumenos named the Sun of Steel was found on a severely blight-marked and deeply disturbed fortune hunter near the ruined city of Alkor. Its origin is unknown and hotly debated, especially as more and more people have started to believe that many of Davokar's "sun symbols" are in fact spider symbols. Whatever the case, the artifact is clearly related to the sun and a most powerful weapon against the enemies of Prios.

Its only power is described below, but it must also be mentioned that this power needs time to recover. Once the power has been unleashed, it takes 1D6+4 days of sunlight or twice as many under a cloudy sky to "recharge" the artifact.

Sun Storm: By striking the ground with the staff on which the artifact is mounted, the master can make its shiny metal surface generate a flash of dazzling light. Everyone in sight is blinded for 1D4 turns, unless warned to shut their eyes. The radiance also causes tremendous bodily pain to Abominations and Undead – 3D10 damage that ignores *Armor*, which is halved if the target passes a *Resolute* test (the player of the artifact's master makes the test/tests).
Action: Active
Corruption: 1D8

EINON'S COMPASS

Einon's Compass was created by the winter elf Einon roughly fifty years ago, as a gift to Elori, the Iron Pact's envoy in Yndaros. The purpose of the

Sun Storm in a Sea of Darkness

If the player characters come into possession of the Sun of Steel, or gain influence over how it is used, they may at some point want to unleash its powers on an entire horde of abominations or undead. This should be possible, but handled more smoothly than by making *Resolute* tests for every single enemy.

We suggest that tests are made for five enemies, and that the outcome is turned into a percentage to determine the fate of the entire horde. For example, if two of the five are killed, two injured, and one merely blinded, these are converted into the percentages 40%, 40%, and 20% respectively. That way, when the characters are facing an army of undead and activate the artifact in a place where it can be seen by three hundred enemies, 120 of them will die instantly.

gift was to give the envoy a chance to detect blight-born creatures in an environment which was otherwise difficult to read, amidst the humans' noise, congestion and inclination to fraternize with dark powers.

The item consists of a white and black needle floating in a viscous liquid inside a circular, finger-thick disc of crystal. The crystal is contained in a round, unadorned silver box.

Detect Blight Beast: The person bound to the compass can activate its ability to detect abominations. The black part of the needle will point to the most powerful abomination (the Game Master decides) within a one-kilometer radius, but with two limitations: there may be other powerful abominations in other parts of the same area, and the needle twitches more and more the closer one gets to the source, and finally starts spinning (within 100 meters of the creature). The effect lasts for one scene/hour, but can of course be activated over and over, with the result that the master always has 1D4 temporary corruption while the effect is active.

Action: Active
Corruption: 1D4

BASIGOR'S FOOD POUCH

Made from the stomach of a female gwann, this repulsive artifact can be very useful to people planning longer trips through hostile terrain. The shady merchant who sold the item to Agramai Kalfas (see page 156) claimed that it once belonged to the legendary adventurer Basigor, who explored the valleys of the Ravens back in the days of Lindaros. But the truthfulness of this claim is highly debatable.

Whatever its origin, the oily pouch can be fed with organic material, which it then starts to process – contracting and expanding, grinding the material with a crunching, fizzing sound before it starts to burble and hum. After an hour or so, it slowly inflates and can finally be opened, and the master may pull out a grayish-brown, foul-smelling piece of bread, as large as a Yndarian sweetloaf.

The loaf fulfills the daily nutritional requirement for six people, but those who eat it suffer one point of temporary corruption each day that they eat from it, which does not leave the body until the traveler has subsisted on normal food for seven days in a row. In other words, a person eating the bread for three days is also stuck with three points of temporary corruption for a week until it wears off – roughly the same time it takes for the stomach to recover from the incredibly fibrous diet.

THE STONE CLOAK OF ALIAL

It is said that this cloak, which is mentioned in the ballad *"The Demise of the Choking Coward,"* was made by order of the paranoid King Alial XIII of Arval, during the great expansion phase of Symbaroum. It was given to Agramai by Duke Sesario, through Esmerelda, for the journey to Symbar (see page 156).

Note that the person who activates any of the powers below is wrapped in a shroud that is completely airtight. The amount of oxygen inside it varies from time to time, as the shape of the shroud is never exactly the same; after 10+1D10 minutes the master passes out, after which his/her allies have a number of turns (same as the master's *Strong* value) to break through the shroud.

Shell of Stone: The person bound to the cloak can wrap it around himself/herself and make it turn into a thick shell of stone that covers the entire body. The effect lasts for one scene, unless the master cancels it or someone breaks it (*Toughness* 20, *Breakoint* 10, *Protection* 10).

Action: Active
Corruption: 1D4

Camouflage: The cloak envelops the master's body and takes on the texture and color of the immediate surroundings. Only those who know for sure that the master is in a certain area have a chance of finding him/her, with a successful *[Vigilant –5]* test. The effect lasts for one scene unless the master decides to cancel it.

Action: Active
Corruption: 1D4

Miscellaneous

THE RED PLAGUE

In Symbar there are many places where the Red Plague lurks in the ground, waiting to infect living creatures. Anyone entering an infected area will first see a glittery red dust rise from the soil, slowly drawn to those moving about in the area.

Those who pass an initial *Vigilant* test are quick to detect the danger and need only pass a single *Quick* test to escape before the pathogen enters their bodies through the skin or the airways.

Those who fail the *Vigilant* test must pass two consecutive *Quick* tests to avoid exposure. Once

a character is exposed, the Red Plague works like a Strong disease, according to the rules on page 169 in the *Symbaroum Monster Codex*, with the following additions:

- An infected person who fails the daily *Strong* test which is required after contracting the illness also suffers 1D4 temporary corruption that does not leave the body until the illness has passed (can be negated by cures such as Purple Sap).
- The illness does not pass until the infected person has gone three days in a row without the temporary *Strong* value deceasing by more than one point.

CRAB TICK

The crab tick is a creature that has emerged in the unique environment of Symbar; or rather, it has evolved from a type of insect as a reaction to the corruption and the punishing powers of the mystical tethers. They look like black crabs with red streaks, and can grow as large as the round shields of the clanfolk. They rest in the ground, often in groups of 1D4+2 individuals, waiting for the warm blood of living creatures.

Whenever there are victims nearby, the crab ticks extend their ocular antennae, which can be detected with a successful *[Vigilant -5]* test. If their prey draws near, they pop out of the ground and try to attach themselves to the victim, before eating their way into the warm flesh while being protected by their carapace. If they lose their grip and fall off, they immediately retreat into the ground.

CRAB TICK			
Race	Phenomenon		
Resistance	Strong		
Traits	*Armored* (III), *Carapace** (II), *Leap* (I), *Natural Weapon*** (II), *Prehensile Claws* (III), *Tunneler* (I)		
Accurate 5 (+5), **Cunning** 7 (+3), **Discreet** 15 (–5), **Persuasive** 9 (+1), **Quick** 11 (–1), **Resolute** 10 (0), **Strong** 13 (–3), **Vigilant** 10 (0)			
Abilities	*Backstab**** (adept), *Iron Fist* (adept)		
Weapons, Strong/ Discreet	Prehensile Claws 6, Bite 8 and 2 bleeding damage per turn/hit		
Armor	Hard shell 4, +4 with *Carapace*		
Defense	–1		
Toughness	13	**Pain Threshold**	7
Shadow	Glossy black (thoroughly corrupt)		
Tactics: See the description.			

* The effect of the carapace remains active as long as the creature maintains its grip, no matter what actions it performs.
** Powerful mandibles
*** The creature has *Advantage* over the victim as long as it maintains its grip

SPECTRAL SWARM

One effect of the diminishing power of Symbar's mystical tethers, is that the wrathful spirits that used to be bound are now waking up. Many of them gather in vengeful clusters as they roam the ruined city in search of living victims.

The swarm consists of between fifty and seventy individuals and looks like a dense formation of milky white, vaguely translucent human figures. They move around like a gust of wind, mouths open as if to roar, hands reaching silently for the hearts of their victims.

SPECTRAL SWARM			
Manner	Like a sweeping gale		
Race	Spirit (undead)		
Resistance	Strong		
Traits	*Alternative Damage* (II), *Spirit Form* (II), *Swarm* (I), *Terrify** (III), *Wings* (III)		
Accurate 15 (–5), **Cunning** 5 (+5), **Discreet** 10 (0), **Persuasive** 9 (+1), **Quick** 11 (–1), **Resolute** 13 (–3), **Strong** 10 (0), **Vigilant** 7 (+3)			
Abilities	None		
Boons/ Burdens	*Fleet-footed*		
Weapons, Accurate	Sweeping attack 4, damages *Strong*, ignores *Armor*		
Armor	Quarter of damage according to the combination of *Spirit Form* II and *Swarm* I		
Defense	–1		
Toughness	20	**Pain Threshold**	5
Shadow	Like pieces of black cloth fluttering in the wind (thoroughly corrupt)		
Tactics: The throng has no tactics; all it cares about is venting its wrathful envy.			

* Within sight, instead of within earshot



EVER HAD THE noise in the Toad's Square been so deafening that early in the morning. The cheers of the well-wishing crowd blended with the thud of boots, the clang of steel against steel, and the neighs, whinnies and clattering hooves of frightened pack animals. In the middle of the square, on a towering podium built specifically for this fateful moment, stood Mayor Nightpitch, flanked by Suria Argona and Colonel Marvello, the former captain of the Town Watch who would soon lead the Queen's expedition to Symbar. They all looked north, towards the palisade gate about to open and the great forest beyond.

"Marvello is an idiot," yelled Dorgai into his friend Alinard's ear. *"They will attract every monster, robber band and Sovereign warrior in the forest. They'll be dead before they even reach the Black Pitch Mire, all of them!"*

Alinard nodded and smiled as he heard his own words repeated back to him. He knew it more than anyone, for it was he who had spoken to every fortune hunter in Thistle Hold and devised the brilliant plan.

"When?" shouted Dorgai after shoving aside a drunken youngster who bumped into him in the crowd. *"Elma is packed, we're ready to go."*

He did not bother to respond, but of course he had the answer – they would follow roughly two hours behind the Colonel's party, like two silent mice in the shadow of a barking dog. And then, when the dog was devoured, the mice would slink forward and be the first to reach the priceless heart of Davokar.

As the sun rose over the eastern rooftops, its golden light spreading across the gathered masses in the Toad's Square, a fanfare of two dozen brass trumpets sounded. The north gate opened, and so it began – the great race to Symbar, the Mother of all Darkness...



SECTION 3:

MOTHER OF DARKNESS

Introduction

THE MOMENT VIRTUALLY all of Ambria has been waiting for, and that most of its people have dreamed of experiencing, is coming; the moment when bold Ambrian explorers set foot in what was once the heart of the Symbarian empire: Symbar. It is no longer a fairy tale, an unfounded rumor or speculation. Everyone knows it, everyone talks about it, and the few who are not wishing they were young, fit or resourceful enough to join the venture are easily counted. It is an occasion that makes people forget about the barbarian warriors of the Sovereign's Oath, the criticism of the Queen, and the turmoil within the Sun Church, at least for a moment, until they know whether Symbar will really be found, and if so, who will reach it first and what treasure the happy victors will bring home.



Soon the time has come, for the gates to open and the hunt for Symbar to commence.

AT THE START of the adventure *Mother of Darkness*, Queen Korinthia's large and well-equipped expedition is ready to begin their journey to Symbar. Their starting point is of course the almost as legendary, if much younger, Thistle Hold. Where the player characters start their journey is entirely up to them, possibly in consultation with a patron or quest giver. What matters is that summer has arrived, and that warmth and life are creeping north, hopefully all the way to Symbar – the place known as the Mother of all Darkness.

This is a standalone adventure in the sense that it can be played with other characters than the ones who experienced the previous episodes of the *Throne of Thorns*. But naturally all episodes are connected in a larger framework, and it will be more fun if the main characters of the drama remain the same throughout the entire (or much of the) story. Returning player characters will recognize both people and places from previous adventures, and will personally have experienced the events that explain why individuals and factions relate to each other the way they do – as allies, enemies or neutral parties. Furthermore, traveling to and maybe even reaching Symbar would probably be particularly rewarding for individuals who went looking for the treasure hunter Elmendra in *The Witch Hammer*, and found both her and a map to the heart of Davokar at the end of *The Darkest Star*. Even those who were there at the resolution of *Wrath of the Warden* can look forward to a (less happy) reunion...



This adventure section consists of five chapters which together form *Mother of Darkness*. The first chapter presents the adventure's background, the overarching course of events, and suggestions on how the player characters can be drawn into the story. The latter is especially important for newly created player characters, as are the chapter's guidelines regarding how much *Experience* they will need in order to stand a chance of surviving the challenges ahead.

The next chapters describe the three acts of the adventure, from game start and initial preparations, via the long journey, to the vast (and highly dangerous) adventure landscape that awaits the characters at the end of their voyage. The idea is that the players and their characters will have a decisive influence over the course of events, but if this does not suit the play style of your particular group, it is perfectly possible to let the player characters be guided by a quest giver.

The thunderous conclusion of the third act is followed by a chapter discussing what might happen once the dust has settled, when what remains of the various Symbar expeditions emerge from the shadows of the forest. Before the book ends with a set of handouts and player maps, we also offer some suggestions regarding the allocation of *Experience* and things the player characters can occupy themselves with while awaiting the fifth episode of the chronicle, which will take them south to lifeless Alberetor and the ravaged homeland of the Dark Lords – Lyastra.

Background

UP UNTIL THE year 14, when Lasifor Nightpitch went to face the threatening barbarian army and eventually negotiated the treaty that gave rise to the Explorer's License, contact between Ambrians and the clanfolk was very limited. But it did not take long for the witches' legends to spread among the Queen's people – including the story about the black heart of the forest, the Mother of Darkness, Symbar. And when the prophecy of Sarkomal was eventually found in the temple ruin east of Karvosti, and immediately linked to Symbar, the allure of the lost city grew even stronger.

It would be no exaggeration to say that the dream of Symbar has since captivated every person in Ambria, to some extent. For most people it has seemed as unattainable as the stars, which is why they instead placed their hope in the Queen or the factions closest to them. Others have devoted their entire lives to the hunt – even sacrificed their lives, along with all their time and possessions. Very few have actually managed to reach Symbar, and none of those have returned alive.

But now, this is about to change. Well, maybe. Hopefully...

THE KNOWLEDGE SPREADS

After the events that shook the capital of Ambria in the adventure *The Darkest Star*, the knowledge of Symbar's whereabouts started to spread among the realm's powerful factions. Exactly how it got out, and who was responsible, may depend on what has happened around individual gaming tables, but the description below can be viewed as a starting point, based on things discussed in the third episode of the *Throne of Thorns*.

The person who has been disseminating most of the information is probably the fortune hunter Elmendra's partner Herangoi, the former Wizard of the Order turned Spiritualist. He accompanied Elmendra to Emperor Symbar's funeral ship in the Yonderworld, where he got to study the map of the fallen empire. But he was sent home alone, to cover the tracks of Elmendra and himself. Having done what was asked, the greed immediately started gnawing at him. The knowledge he had acquired was worth a fortune, and he knew it – a fortune he could use to refine his research methods and, not least, ensure the comfort of his coming twilight years. Besides, he was certain that Elmendra would never be able to return, which made his promise to her seem pointless.

Herangoi contacted several potential, carefully selected buyers. To avoid causing more problems for the Ambrian kingdom, he avoided individual nobles, trading companies and clanfolk. Instead he turned to three factions: the Queen, the Black Cloaks and Iasogoi Brigo – the latter in his capacity as a successful fortune hunter, and on the condition that Herangoi would be allowed to accompany his expedition. After convincing the faction leaders that the coordinates were authentic, he then invited them to a meeting where they had to bid against each other, after which he used the highest bid (from House Kohinoor) as a price for them all to respond to – he insisted that all of them must get a chance to obtain directions to Symbar. After a short negotiation where the sum was practically cut in half, all three decided to pay.

The other hunting parties competing for a chance to explore and preferably take control of Symbar get their information from different sources. The Sovereign's Oath has already found their own way to Symbar and is first on the scene, while the Church of Dead Prios is informed by an agent inside the Twilight Monastery. The Reformists have the city's location pointed out to them by Elori, their ally within the Iron Pact who once helped watch over the ruins, and the Sacred of the Old Blood has Esmerelda's half-sister, Queen Korinthia herself, to thank for the information. Finally, there are the witches led by the Huldra, who learned of Symbar and its location from Keeper Kathman, who has been at Father Sarvola's side for some time.

Detailed descriptions of each faction's hunting party, resources and traveling route are found under the Factions heading on page 143.

WHERE SUMMER TURNS TO FALL

The history of Symbar is quite monotonous up until three weeks before the start of the adventure, when the troops of the Sovereign's Oath reached their destination. After the Battle of Symbar (see page 62) the victors decided that the city and its darkness had to be fettered and plunged into eternal sleep; the blight was permanent – it could not be killed nor cleansed, and if left unchecked it would soon infect the world around them, eventually transforming the entire region into a sea of darkness.

The power woven over the city was many times stronger than the one infused into the budding Davokar. A thousand oaks from the virgin woodlands of the west were planted in the blighted soil, during a days-long ceremony which shielded the saplings from corruption and filled them with power. They grew huge, roughly a hundred and fifty meters tall, and their roots intertwined into

a living blanket over the devastated city. Deep in the ground and on the surface, other roots fettered the thoroughly corrupted items and creatures left behind by the perished people of Symbar. To make sure that these shackles would never be broken, the elves established the Keepers of Symbar, a company tasked with keeping the area's flora and fauna in perpetual summer.

When the three thousand Sovereign warriors who survived the march through Davokar finally arrived, the twenty-nine members of the Keepers did not stand a chance. Their leader, Princess Geliael, was unable to counter the threat; being a winter elf, she perceives the fluctuations of time and the world in a way that is beyond human understanding, oscillating between the perspectives of the present and eternity. Her younger allies contacted the intruders to persuade them to turn back, but without success: the humans attacked and forced the Keepers to flee.

Confused and in tears, Geliael has since received continual reports from her scouts – reports about autumn slowly coming to Symbar; about intruders killing and being killed; about the fettered darkness coming back to life. Her own group never stays in the same place for more than a day, hunted as they are by human scouts. The Halls of a Thousand Tears have been notified; in their dreams, the Keepers of Symbar have reached out to allies who in turn have promised to inform Prince Eneáno. But so far they have had no response, let alone any reinforcements.

As summer spreads north through Davokar, autumn approaches the city of Symbar, and when the player characters arrive the leaves of the mighty oak trees are already turning yellow and crimson...

The Structure of the Adventure

THE ADVENTURE MOTHER *of Darkness* is designed to give the players significant influence over its progression and outcome – more so than previous episodes of the chronicle, with the possible exception of Act II of *Wrath of the Warden*. It may therefore be helpful to end each session with a conversation where the players reflect on what their characters will do when the next session begins. The Game Master will probably have to improvise anyway, but at least it will make the planning and preparation a bit easier.

It should also be noted that *Mother of Darkness* may turn out very differently around different gaming tables – what situations and scenes arise in the three acts depends largely on who the player characters are, what allies they have, how they have acted in the past, and what initiatives they take. The text below must try to take this potentially great variation into account, in terms of both the content and order of the scenes. We will try to rectify the resulting "disarray" with the use of clear references, but once again the Game Master has a great responsibility to consider how situations may develop given the make-up and play style of the gaming group. The timeline on page 112 can be helpful in this regard, as it offers a concrete example of how things might develop if the player characters are guided by an outside advisor or quest giver.

Next up is a summary of the adventure's three acts. Its purpose is to provide an overview of key events and turning points in the story, but it says nothing about the sequence in which they occur or how they will play out. Despite these limitations we hope that the following will convey an understanding that can be good to keep in mind while reading the adventure text.

ACT I: PRELUDE TO THE EXPEDITION

The adventure assumes that the player characters choose Thistle Hold as their starting point – that is where one finds the best guides, the best equipment, and the richest sources of information. The game opening deals with four main challenges: mapping the route, choosing a guide, acquiring equipment, and possibly recruiting other expedition members, such as warriors, mystics, carriers and so on. How the player characters handle the preparations can have a major impact on their journey through Davokar and, consequently, on what condition they are in if/when they arrive.

Another vital factor is how they deal with the murderous scheming going on at the Hold until the hunting parties set off. Even before leaving Thistle Hold, the player characters must watch out for sabotage, espionage, disinformation and armed attacks. Perhaps they themselves will resort to such methods to weaken any rival groups setting out from the Hold – eliminating the Black Cloaks' guide, planting a mole within House Kohinoor's hunting party, or infecting Iasogoi Brigo's supplies with mold spores.

The act ends with a handful of suggested scenes meant to portray the foul play that characterizes Mayor Nightpitch's town before their departure. These can be used as written or as inspiration when/if the characters decide to take an active part in the scheming.

Table 10: Timeline

For gaming groups who are used to having their characters guided by one or multiple quest givers, this section presents a suggested order in which the scenes of the adventure can take place. This outline is nothing more than an estimate, but hopefully the timeline can still be of some use to the Game Master.

As for quest givers, there are a great number of candidates to choose from. The leaders of all the other expeditions can invite the characters to come with them, as back-up or possibly as experts on relevant topics. It is also possible that leaders higher up in the factions' hierarchies will engage the player characters as a kind of supporting force to the faction's primary hunting party. The most interesting scenario would probably be for the Huldra Yeleta or Duchess Esmerelda to step in as quest givers.

If an external quest giver is used, it is of course important that this person is able to contact the player characters. The mystical artifact known as a Mind Stone (see page 111 in *Thistle Hold – Wrath of the Warden*) can be used as inspiration in this regard. Note that such a solution can lead to interesting situations if the quest giver does not answer when the player characters are in urgent need of advice, or if that person contacts them while they are in the middle of a chaotic action scene.

Also note that this timeline assumes that the characters do little other than seek the Throne of Thorns, and remember that you must read the entire adventure in order to fully understand the scenes – brows the timeline, read the adventure text, then go back and give the timeline a second read-through.

1
The player characters (PC) arrive in Thistle Hold and risk being discovered by competitors

2–3
The route is planned (via the Sinkhole), a guide recruited; the Black Cloaks arrive and are attacked

4–5
Supplies and carriers/pack animals are acquired; PCs negotiate with Agramai Kalfas and agree to make the journey together

6
Just before departure, PCs are attacked by destitute war veterans hired by House Kohinoor

7
A stop on Karvosti. An agent of the Sovereign's Oath, tasked with stopping rival expeditions, poisons their food

8
Encounter with a group of Sovereign warriors on their way to Jerak's Sinkhole; PCs must pay a "toll" to avoid combat

9
A couple of random events on the way to Eulia's Fire Mountain, or they are visited by Aluin

10
PCs come across a colony of skullbiters; either fight or make a detour

DAY 1

11–12
PCs arrive in Symbar and encounter the female crypt lord Siriad Ador-An and her minions – hide, fight or negotiate.

13–15
Investigating the surrounding area and choosing a campsite; PCs save two Kohinoor spies from Living Thorns

16–17
Miralba drops a Meeting Stone from Yeleta near PCs' campfire; PCs enter the Witches' camp, agree to attack the caravan, but not to "rescue the Flickering Flame"

18–20
PCs travel to attack the Sovereign's Oath caravan, along with the Witches and the Keepers; encounter scouts sent by Iasogoi Brigo; attack the caravan

21
On the way back they awaken abominations; two Knights of Dead Prios intervene

DAY 2

22
Agramai and company depart to establish their own camp before the PCs cross the root cover to the Imperial Palace; assessment of the situation

23–24
PCs manage to open the outer gate themselves and the abominations come pouring out, attacking the Sovereign's Oath

25–27
PCs investigate the palace, talk to the Emperor Spirit, and study the mosaics; they see House Kohinoor and Iasogoi Brigo approaching

28
Night spent in the besieged Imperial Palace. At dawn PCs get an ultimatum – open up or die!

DAY 3

29
Journey to the Crown Ship; Black Cloaks are there, investigating – negotiation or combat

30–31
PCs climb down through a tower; negotiations with Kantor

32–35
Investigation of the Crown Ship, particularly the Aftercastle

36
House Kohinoor with allies arrive and battle Kantor – PCs slip away after defeating a squad of Rangers.

37
PCs sleep under the root cover; they meet the survivor Asirial who flee after having been questioed,

DAY 4

38
Walk to the Mother Tree; sees the remaining troops of the Sovereign's Oath and a group consisting of Witches, the Iron Pact, and Reformists.

39
Miralba lands, says Sacred of the Old Blood is raising an army of undead. The ceremony must be stopped, or nothing else matters!

40–42
PCs + allies rush to the ceremonial site; they stop the ceremony at the Half Effect stage

43
Agramai Kalfas flees down the escarpment, hides in the Stone Cloak of Alial and is surrounded by loyal undead

44
From a distance the PCs see combat at the Mother Tree; Miralba investigates – House Kohinoor and allies have vanquished the Sovereign's Oath, but have many wounded.

DAY 5

45
PCs rise early and return to the Mother Tree; no sign of House Kohinoor

46–47
Rappel down the tree trunk; attacked by managaals and retreat into the tree, where Xanathâ joins the fray

48–49
Fight against or negotiation with Xanathâ, followed by a visit to the Weaver Valarai-Aia

50–52
Investigating the ziggurat and confronting the high priests; ends with The View of the Winged

53
Negotiation with allies: the throne must be protected; Valarai-Aia must be guarded. The Keepers of Symbar stays.

DAY 6

54
Walk to Castle Thorn after a long rest; must hide from Agramai's horde of undead,

55
Arrival and encounter with Sidril

56
Finds the Hall of Thorns. A group of Black Cloaks are defending the throne from House Kohinoor and allies.

57
House Kohinoor attacks, the PCs join forces with the Black Cloaks, as do Miralba/Yeleta. PCs side is victorious.

58
The survivors discuss how to defend against the undead army; preparations are made

59
The army pours into the hall and forms a semi-circle around the dais. Agramai tries to get the defenders to surrender

60
Prince Eneáno enters the hall. Before anyone can react, he sits down on the throne and transforms. Chaos erupts!

61
PCs slay the abomination; many are dead, Agramai among them – his undead escapes

62
PCs and their allies can lick their wounds and explore the castle

63+
The journey home, possibly after further exploration of Symbar which ends with the PCs (or someone else) waking Fofar the Destroyer

Paths to the throne

The Black Cloaks picked up the survivor Asirial after she left the player characters, and made her show them the way to the castle. House Kohinoor reached the View of the Winged after the player characters and allowed themselves a short night's rest.

ACT II: TO SYMBAR

The second act is about the characters' journey through Davokar. The first chapter provides an overview of the other expeditions participating in the hunt, while the second one presents three different routes to the destination. Each route has its own pros and cons; simply put, it is a question of balancing distance against risk – the shortest route is also the most dangerous, and therefore not necessarily the quickest.

Finally, the second act includes a presentation of the area surrounding Symbar and describes what might happen once the player characters arrive. Perhaps other groups (aside from the Sovereign's Oath and the Iron Pact) are already there? Where should the characters set up a base, which will later be their place of refuge and starting point for excursions into the ruined city? What resources and dangers are there in the outskirts of Symbar?

ACT III: THE BLACK HEART OF DAVOKAR

The final act begins once the player characters have established their base and are about to begin their exploration of Symbar. An initial overview is followed by some thoughts on how the various hunting parties will act – their members, goals, relations and willingness to compromise. The latter becomes particularly important when the player characters realize that they are unlikely to make it without entering into alliances, or at least agreements, with members of other expeditions.

Whether the player characters have come to seek knowledge, treasure or glory, there are four locations of particular relevance to the adventure: the Imperial Palace perched on its rock, the Mother Tree and the nearby pyramid, the Crown Ship Saroklaw from The First Realm, and the Order of Dakothnic's fortress – Castle Thorn – where the Throne of Thorns is situated. All these places are described in detail, along with maps, non-player characters and challenges, and the first three can be visited in any order. In addition, there are a handful of other places the player characters can come across on their travels.

The Player Characters

MOTHER OF DARKNESS was designed on the premise that participating player characters will also have experienced the previous episodes of the *Throne of Thorns*, and thus achieved a considerable capacity for both problem solving and combat; they are Veterans, as defined in the guidelines for balanced combat resistance (see the *Symbaroum Monster Codex*, page 179). Furthermore, it is our hope that the adventure will be playable no matter what goals they have, what factions they belong to, or what powers and items they possess.

As this is left open, it is not possible for us to decide what the players' (and their characters') goal should be. It falls on the Game Master to discuss with the players what incentives and motivations could get the characters invested in the story. But we will not leave you entirely without support! After a few bullet points explaining what capabilities we had in mind for the player characters during the design process, we present a series of suggested incentives which the Game Master and the players may use to define the motivations of individual characters.

- The player characters have earned approximately 230 *Experience* (beyond the starting level) from previous adventures and spent roughly 200 of these on abilities/boons that make them more proficient in combat.
- Each player character has at least one ability at master level, owns at least one artifact, and has weapons/armor with qualities.
- At least one player character has the *Loremaster* ability at Master level.
- The player characters (individually or collectively) have ample resources in the form of silver thaler or items that can be sold or used as payment. Arranging an expedition to Symbar is very expensive.
- The player characters are known to most of the game world's factions, by name, appearance and ability – by now they have made friends as well as enemies.

If new player characters are created specifically for *Mother of Darkness*, we recommend that they be provided with 150 *Experience* beyond the starting level, and encourage the players to use these to become an effective combat unit. It would also be a good idea to give them backstories that make it easy to involve them in the adventure – something that will hardly be a problem, considering that almost everyone in the region has at some point dreamed of seeing and exploring Symbar.

THE RICHES OF SYMBAR

There is no doubt that Symbar is sitting on vast amounts of valuable resources. It could be precious

metals, gems, artwork or tools, or ancient scriptures or etchings which would fetch a handsome price from Ambrian scholars.

Whether it is a quest giver or the player characters themselves who are yearning for these treasures, and whatever their reasons may be, gaming groups driven by this motivation have many potential allies to choose from. Sure, the Iron Pact could become a problem for those wishing to reap the riches of the ruins, but the others would certainly be willing to give up lots of valuable items as long as they get to keep the ones that are relevant to their own particular objectives.

THE WISDOM OF SYMBAR

Some gaming groups or individual player characters may primarily seek the knowledge and insights hidden among the ruins of Symbar. Such information could shed light on the history of the city, the region or humanity, or concern matters relating to corruption, blight beasts or the nature of magic.

The two obvious antagonist factions would in this case be the Sovereign's Oath and the Church of Dead Prios. Both groups seek to eradicate the knowledge of ancient times – the former because these "false teachings" caused the downfall of humanity; the latter because the "blasphemy and heresy" of the Symbarians killed Prios and brought forth The Eternal Night.

THE DARKNESS OF SYMBAR

If the witches and elves are correct, if Symbar really is the Mother of all Darkness, then all champions of the light must do everything in their power to defend the world against its evil! Other factions must be stopped from awaking the horrors of the ruined city; furthermore, the ruins must be examined and studied, to learn the truth about what caused the darkness – so that it never happens again.

A group with such ambitions will likely find allies in the Witches, the Iron Pact and the Reformists. Collaborations can probably be formed with Iasogoi Brigo and House Kohinoor as well, although there is a risk that they will ignore the agreement as soon as the battle against darkness gets in the way of their own goals.

THE POWER AND GLORY

It is said that the mythical Throne of Thorns is situated in Symbar, and frankly, where else would it be? If the legends are true, whoever sits upon the throne is filled with superhuman powers and exalted as the indisputable ruler of the region. And even if this should turn out to be pure fiction, the legendary seat still holds tremendous symbolic power among the region's inhabitants, so those who desire power would do well to stop others from reaching it. Ideally, they should of course claim the throne for themselves...

Should the player characters, or just one of them, openly admit that they intend to fight for their right to the throne, they will make enemies of everyone else. The expedition sent by the Sacred of the Old Blood might initially accept an agreement giving the player characters the right to the throne, but only to exploit their abilities until they themselves have the high seat within reach.

SERVING THE FACTION

Player characters who are well-connected within a certain faction, or themselves hold high-ranking positions within some powerful group, may of course choose (or be ordered) to travel to Symbar on behalf of the faction. They can then be part of one of the hunting parties described in Act I, or operate as an independent unit – a kind of support team meant to reinforce the faction's main force or, if necessary, replace it.

In this case, potential allies and enemies are determined by the faction to which the characters belong, but perhaps they can be more flexible than the main force in their choice of partners.

FRIENDS AND FAMILY

As a supplement to the incentives above, or as yet another alternative if need be, one can always make the motivation more personal. One of the player characters' friends, loved ones or relatives has gone missing on a journey to Symbar, following directions that may very well have been accurate. Another variant is that someone dear to the player characters (or their quest giver) has fallen ill, and knowledge or an artifact from ancient Symbaroum is that person's last hope of finding a cure.

Should the player characters' incentive involve some form of rescue mission, the choice of allies is completely open – all factions can help the characters find the person/cure in return for assistance in achieving their own specific goal.

Game Master Material

At Free League Publishing's *Symbaroum* page [www.freeleaguepublishing.com] you can find a document titled *GM Resource – Mother of Darkness*. In addition to all the maps, handouts and portraits relevant to the adventure, it contains tables of the hunting parties' support teams.

ACT 1:

Prelude to the expedition

THE FIRST ACT of the adventure begins on a beautiful summer's morning in Thistle Hold and ends with the player characters heading out through the palisade gates, ready to leave for Symbar. The time in between will be spent planning, gathering resources and expedition members, defending against attacks and foiling sabotage attempts staged by their competitors. The player characters can also take an active part in the scheming, to delay, weaken or eliminate rival hunting parties.

THIS ACT DOES not describe a clear chain of events; instead it offers information which Game Masters can use to create their own scenes based on the players' actions. The first section presents some suggested opening scenes, while the next one addresses what preparations need to be made and what advantages the characters can gain from preparing well.

This is followed by two sections dealing with scheming and interactions between the characters and their rivals. The first contains guidelines relevant to all three acts, while the second describes a handful of scenes which the Game Master can use to emphasize the competition between the player characters and the other hunting parties.

Game Opening

WE PROPOSE THAT the game begins with trusted sources claiming that northern Davokar is expected to bloom and bear fruit within a month. Depending on the weather, it should then be about a week until it is even remotely possible to survive a journey to Symbar. The expedition being planned is nothing for comfort-craving cowards; anyone wishing to be the first to arrive must be prepared to take risks, with the weather, the elements, and the monsters of the forest!

Now it is up to the players and their characters to prepare for the journey, while the Game Master tries to keep up and present suitable challenges at each stage of preparation. As the festive spirit in Thistle Hold grows with every passing day, and virtually explodes when Colonel Marvello announces the date of departure for the Queen's hunting party, the player characters should feel a constant urge to look over their shoulders and really struggle to acquire everything they need for the journey.

The two possible opening scenes described below can be modified and developed at will – one of them assumes that the characters arrive in Thistle Hold during the game opening, the other that they have already been there for some time.

THE ARRIVAL

Given that the player characters are likely to be relatively well-known, no matter which gate they enter through, their passage into Thistle Hold will be noted by the factions that are already present. If they are deliberately trying to disguise themselves or conceal their arrival by other means, the person with the lowest *Discreet* value may roll two consecutive success tests modified by –3, one for each rival agent (see below). If both tests succeed, they enter Thistle Hold unnoticed.

Player characters who state that they are focusing on people moving around the gate may also roll two tests against *[Vigilant –1]*. If the first one succeeds, the player character notices a young woman in plain clothes throwing repeated, scrutinizing glances in their direction. If the second test succeeds, the character spots a graying gentleman whittling on what will probable become a wooden flute, constantly looking up from under the brim of his slouch hat.

Should the characters not bother to conceal their arrival (or if they fail to do so), the woman and/or the man will start following them around – the former being a member of the Queen's Rangers, the latter a scout in the service of Iasogoi Brigo. Player characters who failed to notice the agents at the gate will get a second chance during their walk through Thistle Hold, modified as above. Their purpose is to identify potential competitors and find out where in town they are staying, before noting their resources and expedition members.

The player characters may of course try to capture one or even both of them. If they succeed, the agents will feign complete ignorance, and if threatened or bullied they will not hesitate to call the Town Watch.

THE BLACK CLOAKS

This scene can be used instead of the one above, or introduced a couple of days later when the player characters have begun their preparations. The characters could be sitting outside one of the cafés at the Antique Plaza, perhaps negotiating with a potential traveling companion. Suddenly the noise rises in the streets and the source of the ruckus soon becomes clear: a large group of Black Cloaks just arrived through the South Gate and are on their way to the square; some whisper that the leader is a known member of the Whip of Prios.

Over the years, Thistle Hold has been increasingly inspired by Father Sarvola and other Reformists. This is true of both the populace and the local Sun Temple run by Father Elfeno. The only ones who initially tried to oppose this development were the inhabitants of the town's monastery, who as a result made more and more enemies, before finally deciding to leave the Hold and go back to the Titans. That the Black Cloaks have returned, led by the hateful Whip of Prios, is stirring up emotions among the people – to say the least.

A crowd is gathering in a semi-circle, facing the direction from which the procession is coming. With a successful *Vigilant* test, player characters who are watching the scene will notice two people who seem particularly active in organizing the welcome committee: both women, of different ages yet sporting near identical hairstyles and leather armor that can be seen under their tunics. Soon the younger woman walks up to the patios, including the one where the player characters are sitting. With hatred in her eyes, she shouts:

"Up, get up! Now we will show the Black Cloaks what we think of them and their Lawgiver; the Prios of War has no place in Thistle Hold, we don't want them here! Show them! With stones, with weapons: OUT with the heretics!"

The clamor dies out when they arrive: two knights on horseback (probably former Templars), followed by a covered carriage bearing the emblem of the Whip of Prios, and finally a dozen or so Black Cloaks leading their horses on foot. Suddenly the riders halt, gesturing for the others to do the same. Then the first object comes flying – a small clay jar, aimed at one of the knights. Within moments, chaos ensues.

More objects come raining down on the procession: stones, bottles, jars, logs, even newly purchased turnips. Without coordination, the mob roars such things as: *"You are the heretics!"* and *"Leave! Leave or die!"* These cries are followed quickly by threats: *"The Prios of War shall burn!"* and *"You will be cleansed, cleansed by fire!"*

A successful *Vigilant* test reveals that a drunk person near the player characters (stats as Fortune

The Hold in Detail

The description of Thistle Hold in the *Core Rulebook* is more than enough for the Game Master to successfully portray the player characters' adventures before their departure for Symbar. However, additional information about places, people and authorities can be found in the first episode of the *Throne of Thorns*: *Thistle Hold – Wrath of the Warden*. That book also contains an array of adventure seeds and local conflicts that can be used to make the player characters' preparations even more interesting.



Preparing for the departure can sometimes be just as dangerous as the journey itself.

Hunter, page 215 in the *Core Rulebook*) is taking out a throwing dagger. Characters who pass a *Quick* test or possess the *Acrobatics* ability have a chance to stop him from throwing it. On failure the violence will escalate; on success the relatively harmless harassment continues for another five turns, until the Town Watch has gathered in sufficient numbers to restore the peace.

If the situation does escalate, several Black Cloaks will be injured, one of them fatally; they defend themselves with their shields and try to keep their horses from panicking. This is an opportunity for the

Joining the Mob

Of course, the characters may opt to join the mob, hoping to harm what will become a competitor in the hunt for Symbar. The Game Master decides how such a development plays out, but if they take an active (or leading) role in the harassments there will likely be repercussions. Their relations with the Black Cloaks will surely suffer greatly. Also, the Town Watch may (try to) arrest them for disturbing the peace – an offense which will get them thrown out of town, after a few days in the Penitentiary.



player characters to intervene, to place themselves between the procession and the mob as a clear signal that the violence must stop – this will make most of the normally level-headed inhabitants cease their throwing and fix their dark, disappointed gazes on them instead. Someone is heard accusing them of *"defending the Prios of War."*

Exactly how this develops is for the Game Master to decide. In addition to the above, there is of course the possibility of seeking out the two women, both of whom had orders from Ralgai Melion to give the competitors an unpleasant welcome and make their time in the Hold more difficult. Depending on what they decide to do, the player characters' actions may affect their relations with both the Black Cloaks and House Kohinoor – for better or worse (see Scheming on page 123).

Planning the Expedition

WHAT SHOULD THE player characters do before they leave for Symbar, and more importantly: how can the Game Master turn these preparations into thrilling encounters? Our suggestion would be to link at least one of the challenges described under Suggested Scenes (page 126) to three or four of the tasks mentioned in this section.

Game Masters who want the characters' preparations to feel relevant and exciting must also make it clear that their lives will likely depend on how well they succeed. At the Ruin or the Salons of Symbaroum they can find several (more or less physically and mentally scarred) fortune hunters who have journeyed into the darkness and can stress the importance of mapping one's route, securing a skilled guide (preferably two, in case one of them should die), purchasing high-quality provisions, and so on.

Described under the headings below are not only the sources of information, individuals and equipment available, but also how the characters' choices will technically affect their journey through Davokar. A high-quality resource can add bonuses to certain tests, penalties to others, or grant re-rolls when so desired.

THE ROUTE

While the player characters are free to choose any route they like, it is not inconceivable that they may ask other people for advice. These will then recommend at least one of the three routes described in Act II – the one along the Ravens, the one due north by way of Jerak's Sinkhole, and the option to follow the river Malgomor as far as possible. The pros and cons of each route are described in detail in the chapter titled Routes, starting on page 133.

As for sources of information, they will normally offer better advice the more expensive they are, unless they have reason to lie. Below are a handful of alternatives for the Game Master to build on or use as they are, depending on how much the player characters are willing to spend:

Experienced Fortune Hunter

The Hold is home to several fortune hunters who have survived journeys to the deeper parts of Davokar, but for various reasons have decided not to mount their own Symbar expedition, at least for the time being. These include Mayor Nightpitch, Lysindra Goldengrasp, Erok the Dark – all of whom are described in *Wrath of the Warden* – and Elmea Rabbit's Foot.

None of these will help the characters for anything less than future shares (see the *Core Rulebook*, page 185). They will likely demand as much as 10%, which can be haggled down to 7% with a successful *[Persuasive –1]* test, or to 5% if the test succeeds with a margin of 5 or more.

If a deal is made, the experienced fortune hunter can describe all three routes specified in Act II, along with their various pros and cons. However, the person will not pick a favorite route or tell them which one he or she would take – that depends entirely on the companions and resources available.

Davokar Experts

Should the player characters seek out someone they think knows a great deal about Davokar, but who has no experience at organizing expeditions, the advice they receive will be more precise. There are many barbarians living in Nightpitch's town, including witches, monster hunters and others who

The Origin of the Hate

The stories about what the Black Cloaks, and particularly the Whip of Prios, have done in their hunt for Reformists and other heretics are truly horrifying. And many of them are true, although they sometimes get blamed for purges and attacks conducted by the Knights of Dead Prios. Many people in Thistle Hold know someone who has been subjected to the witch hunt – killed, tortured, or hunted – and most of the others are outraged at the Curia's treatment of Father Sarvola. Also important in this context is that the representatives of the Reformists are feeling increasingly confident that they are on the winning side in this conflict.

Expensive Licenses

Acquiring an Explorer's License for the journey to Symbar is simply a must, and an expensive one at that. First of all, the expedition will likely consist of more than ten members, which makes the base cost 500 thaler (recently raised due to the war and the discovery of Symbar's location). Then the licensor will probably charge as much as possible in add-on fees, which means that the player characters will have to pay at least 1000 thaler.

Characters who have difficulties raising that kind of money have a few painful options to choose from: selling properties, artifacts or other assets; borrowing the missing sum at high interest rates; or offering to sell future shares in their expedition. Given the level of risk, the interest rate should be 25% per month (20% with a successful *Persuasive* test), and persons who are offered future shares should demand 10% for every hundred thaler they invest, i.e. 50% for a loan of 500 thaler.

know the forest well – from personal experience as well as from legends and witness accounts.

These people will of course demand payment for their advice – they are perfectly aware of what is at stake and see an opportunity to make a decent profit. The player characters can expect a starting price of one hundred thaler, which can be negotiated down to seventy with a successful *Persuasive* test, or fifty if the test succeeds with a margin of 5 or more.

The experienced Davokar expert will recommend that they travel along the western foothills of the Ravens, and then avoid any rivers and lakes when possible. The waterways will always attract the creatures of the forest, both predators and prey; this time of year, they are all on the verge of starvation and therefore particularly aggressive.

Ordo Magica

It may seem wise to turn to the local Ordo Magica chapter for advice. It is not a bad idea per se, but the problem is that the true loyalty of the wizards tends to belong to someone other than their paying customers. They frequently serve the nobles who are funding their projects, but most of all Queen Korinthia – she is the chief protector of the order, and the Grand Master has clearly stated that the organization's main responsibility is to serve *"the Queen and the Ambrian people."*

Whether the characters have the contacts to secure a meeting with one of the Masters or must make do with an adept, the information will cost them: one hundred thaler which can be negotiated down to seventy with a successful *[Persuasive –5]* test, or fifty if the test succeeds with a margin of 5 or more.

The wizard recommends that they travel north from Karvosti, via Jerak's Sinkhole and Eulia's Fire Mountain, before turning east toward the place where Symbar is supposedly located. This is not based on well-intentioned concerns, however, but on the hope that the expedition will run into the troops of the Sovereign's Oath and be imprisoned, enslaved or killed as a result. A successful *Vigilant* test reveals that the wizard is withholding or lying about something, but she (or he) will stand her ground, maintaining that this route is the best possible compromise between risk and speed, and that the Blood-Daughter's army is gathered around the stone fortress of Yeseda and therefore easily avoided.

Treasure Hunters

Thistle Hold is full of people who have experience traveling through Davokar, or claim that they have. These individuals often gather in places such as the Salons of Symbaroum, the Ruin Inn, or the tavern Legends, and are of course happy to impart their wisdom, at a reasonable price. Unfortunately, they know little about the depths of the forest, even though they claim to know better than *"the Arch Troll, the Primal Blight Beast, and the World Serpent put together!"*

Whether the player characters seek out individual treasure hunters or sit down with a group already boasting over tankards of Blackbrew, each of them will demand ten thaler for their insight (seven with a successful *Persuasive* test, or five if the test succeeds with a margin of 5 or more).

The advice given is simple and unquestionable: follow the waterways, in this case the river Malgomor, as far as possible – that is the only way to survive a long journey through Davokar! And they do have a point, but only if one sticks to the outskirts of the forest. Farther in, the rivers are virtual monster magnets.

MAP

When the player characters have decided on a route, they can try to learn more about it – specific areas to avoid, dangers to look out for, and places that are relatively safe or can offer various forms of resources.

Such information can be obtained from people as well as from written sources. As far as the former is concerned, it is of course possible to seek help from the groups and individuals described in the previous section, but in this case it could be extremely dangerous to put one's trust in boastful treasure hunters. Archives can be found in several places in town, the most well-stocked being the Queen's Legation, Ordo Magica and the Town Seat.

Information from People
How much help they gain from conversations with individuals claiming to have information about their route simply depends on how much they are willing to pay. Trusting the misleading information offered by ordinary treasure hunters (cost: 1–9 thaler) will even have negative effects during their travels through Davokar. Technically, their leader/guide gets a –1 penalty to orientation tests and +1 to rolls on tables 4 and 5.

Should they instead make the effort to search for experienced forest travelers, they can actually get some help, in which case they get a +1 modifier to the orientation test and a –1 modifier to rolls on the tables. But the question is how deep into the forest the person has ventured. An experienced treasure hunter at the Salons of Symbaroum or the Ruin will demand 25 thaler (20 with a successful *Persuasive* test), but the information will only be useful while traveling through Bright Davokar (see the map on page 135). Sources like Ordo Magica can also provide information on Wild Davokar, at a price of 50 thaler (40 with a successful *[Persuasive –5]* test).

Finally, there are a few people whose information can give the characters a bonus to said test throughout their whole journey, including those mentioned above under Experienced Fortune Hunters. These will charge 100 thaler for such detailed information, or another 5% in future shares – can be haggled down to 80 thaler/4% with a successful *[Persuasive –1]* test.

Written Sources
Finding reliable information in the messy archives of Thistle Hold takes time, even with the paid assistance of the notaries. Normally it costs 1 thaler a day and grants access to the archives, and another ten thaler a day for personal assistance (which adds +1 to tests for Research In Archives, page 100 in the *Advanced Player's Guide*).

Each participating player character makes one success test for every full day of research, up to a maximum of three successes.

The first success adds –1 to rolls on tables 4 (Enemies) and 5 (Terrain), or –2 if the roll succeeds with a modification of 5 or more, but only in Bright Davokar.

An additional test must succeed in order to find relevant information about the route through Wild Davokar, and yet another one for the journey through the darkest of the dark. In the latter case, the modifier can never exceed –1.

GUIDE
Rules and guidelines for wilderness guides are found on page 89, but while preparing for the journey to Symbar, the player characters will soon find that access to skilled guides is severely limited. People they may have hired in the past could be impossible to contact – either dead, fully booked, or determined to mount their own expedition.

Thus, finding a capable guide will be a challenge for the player characters, and most likely a social one. They will have to persuade one of the guides in town to ditch any prior engagements and come with them instead, preferably without their current client realizing what is going on. Here are some suggested means of exerting pressure:

- Sabotaging the guide's current plans, for example by eliminating expedition members or destroying supplies.
- Negotiating better terms, promising the guide more money or even future shares.
- Digging up some secret that gives them leverage over the guide, for example that the person in question has stolen from or actively worked against former employers.
- Convincing the person that the player characters' expedition has a greater chance of success or even survival.
- Asking for written evidence that some dignitary will act as the expedition's protector, for example Mayor Nightpitch, Chapter Master Cornelio, Father Elfeno or Lysindra Goldengrasp.

Note that a group which has already contracted any guide stolen by the player characters will not exactly be overjoyed with this. If the gaming group is using the rules for scheming (see page 123), all characters should get a –2 modifier to their relations with that faction. Otherwise the Game Master can simply try to keep it in mind and let it come back to bite them when the groups meet during the exploration of Symbar.

Table 11 lists a handful of guides to choose from or use as inspiration when creating your own wilderness experts. Should additional stats and characteristics be needed, the Game Master can use those described on page 132 in the *Symbaroum Monster Codex*.

OTHER COMPANIONS
Maybe the player characters should consider the possibility of hiring additional experts for their expedition, to fill in their own knowledge gaps or strengthen the group in other ways. Described below are a handful of professionals whose skills might be useful on the journey; the Game Master is free to give them names, appearances and personalities based on what kind of people the player characters are looking for.

Companions and Death Tests

Even if the player characters are to use their companions as additional player characters, we recommend that they be fundamentally handled as non-player characters. This would mean that they cannot make Death Tests, but will die once their *Toughness* reaches 0.

Table 11: Wilderness Guides

NAME	BUSHCRAFT LEVEL	VIGILANT	DESCRIPTION
Fonsiul	III	15	Famous goblin with a temper; already contracted by House Kohinoor
Arval	III	13	Timid youngster from Clan Baiaga; already contracted as a reserve by Iasogoi Brigo
Crooky	III	11	Stoop-shouldered ogre with a sense of humor; is planning her own expedition to another destination
Vindel	II	15	Elderly Ambrian, retired from the Queen's Rangers; thinks the directions to Symbar are nonsense and that everyone is going to die
Hygla	II	13	Scarred, love-struck goblin; also pregnant and therefore reluctant to embark on longer journeys

We propose that the player characters be allowed to decide exactly what their companions are capable of and how experienced they are, by creating them as independent characters with their own character sheets. These non-player characters should then be distributed between the players and become additional player characters over the course of the journey, in situations where their expertise can be of use.

The number of creation points that can be used to acquire abilities, boons, equipment and such for each companion is determined by how many future shares the player characters are willing to give up: the non-player character gets 50 creation points for every other percentage the player characters have promised him/her, to a maximum of 5% (that is, 150 points).

Should this procedure be too burdensome for the gaming group's liking, there is a vast array of characters described on page 122–139 in the *Symbaroum Monster Codex*. Certain adjustments will likely have to be made, but at least there are stats to build on for most of the types below.

Monster Hunter

The Monster Hunter profession is described on page 15 in the *Advanced Player's Guide*, where appropriate traits, abilities and boons are also specified. Aside from participating in regular combat, the monster hunter's knowledge about beasts or abominations (the *Beast Lore* ability) can give the entire gaming group a much-needed damage bonus in times of of peril.

Priest/Theurg

Priests can have different areas of expertise, but for a journey through Davokar, their healing or holy powers may be of particular interest. Furthermore, a combat-oriented priest can be an effective abomination slayer, with powers such as *Holy Aura*, *Witch Hammer* and *Blessed Shield*.

Interpreter

There are highly educated individuals who specialize in interpreting between the peoples of the region, and who have cultivated the ability to express themselves in the otherwise extinct Symbarian language.

In the company of an experienced interpreter with *Loremaster* (novice), the player characters can communicate in foreign human languages (for example the barbarian tongue) without passing any *Cunning* tests; at adept level the same applies to the languages of elves and trolls, and a master has the same effect on conversations in Symbarian.

The strong linguistic ability also gives the player characters +5 to *Persuasive* when negotiating to avoid combat, if the Game Master deems it at all possible.

Finally, the gaming group can benefit from having someone with whom their own loremaster can discuss and analyze finds, artifacts, ancient texts, and the like. Technically, this means that the player characters have two chances to pass all success tests related to *Loremaster*, as long as the level required does not exceed that of the interpreter.

Sellsword

In Thistle Hold there are plenty of battle-hardened veterans and well-trained youngsters seeking work as freelance warriors. In this case, the players are free to create their companions any way they like in order to bolster their own weaknesses. Perhaps they need a warrior on the front line, capable of soaking up a great amount of damage? Or maybe they are in need of a ranger who is a skilled marksman as well as a competent tracker?

Ritualist
Rituals are among the most powerful means of problem solving this game has to offer, and unless the player characters are very broad in their mystical training, there will likely be a knowledge gap or two that needs filling. There are rituals for tracking and finding, protecting and concealing, but also for communicating with animals and spirits – all of them very useful for expeditions trying to reach the heart of Davokar.

Witch
Witches are partly covered by the category above, but deserve their own mention. The brutality of the Sovereign's Oath toward the mystics of Davokar has forced many witches to flee, and though most of them have sought refuge on Karvosti or with the southern clans, they are also found in Thistle Hold. Their ability to lull Davokar's darkness and abominations to sleep can help the player characters escape many life-threatening situations, and the power they wield over weather and wind may also be of great help. Furthermore, their ability to shapeshift or *Borrow Beast* can be useful for reconnaissance purposes, for example when scouting locations in Symbar and spying on competitors.

EQUIPMENT

Last but not least, the player characters will need the right equipment, preferably items of high quality. The artisans and merchants of Thistle Hold are fully aware that several deep-pocketed factions and individuals are in need of supplies and tools for lengthy forest expeditions, which is why they have raised their prices considerably.

In the run-up to departure, the player characters can expect double the prices listed in the *Symbaroum Core Rulebook* and the *Advanced Player's Guide*. A successful *Persuasive* test reduces the price premium to x1.5, and if it succeeds with a difference of 5 or more, the wares are sold at the normal price.

If the Game Master wants to make things a little more complex, there could be a risk that the supply of certain goods is so limited that the player characters can only find 70% or maybe just 50% of what they need. If so, the players must then roll 1D10 for each good they wish to purchase – for a single item, a result of 1 means that it is not available in town; for mass produced goods (such as Waybread or Herbal Cures) a result of 1 means that they can only buy half of what they need, while rolling 2–3 covers 70%. In that case, the player characters may have to make a time-consuming detour to Kastor, or plan a heist on some competitor's well-guarded stores.

Explorer's Tools
A list of special tools, many of which could prove useful on the journey, are described in the *Advanced Player's Guide* (page 127–128). The players can also come up with suggestions on additional tools that grant bonuses or re-rolls in specific situations – the Game Master decides what is reasonable.

Elixirs
Characters foolish enough to venture into Davokar without a large supply of herbal cures and purple sap have only themselves to blame! But there are also other types of elixirs that can be of use – antidotes, wraith dust, ghost candles and holy water, to name a few.

Scheming

THE STAKES LEADING up to the departure from Thistle Hold are higher than ever before, as great as the potential gains of the expedition. Everyone involved has plenty of resources at their disposal, a relentless determination to win, and a willingness to do whatever it takes to achieve their goals. Securing the best companions and equipment will hardly be enough to emerge victorious; one must also obstruct, or rather destroy, the competition. Sure, some of those involved hesitate to use any and all means to achieve their ends, but most of them have no such qualms and would consider pretty much anything to ensure their own success.

While things will not get really ugly until the expeditions are out of public view, the foul play starts in Thistle Hold. And it is not only the parties leaving from the Hold who have agents in place – the Iron Pact and the Sovereign's Oath are also there to make trouble. This section describes different activities the factions' agents (the player characters included) can pursue, while the next section presents a number of specific events that might befall the player characters, directly or indirectly.

If your gaming group has been using the rules for scheming introduced in *Karvosti – The Witch Hammer*, the following table lists this adventure's most important factions and their representatives. The table establishes a kind of social playing field for the journey, and for the players, these relations can be used to stage a tactical game where negotiations determine whether they succeed or fail.

That being said, this element of scheming is purely supplemental and can easily be ignored. Gaming groups who prefer a simpler game can

Table 12: Leading individuals in Mother of Darkness

NAME	FACTION	IMPRESSED BY	LIKES	DISLIKES
Ralgai Melion	House Kohinoor	Cunning	Ambrians	Barbarians
Colonel Marvello	House Kohinoor	Strong	Ambrians	Witches, blight-marked, Ironsworn
Sister Losadra	Black Cloaks	Persuasive	Worshippers of Prios	Reformists, Witches, Heretics, blight-marked, Ironsworn
Arelma	Black Cloaks	Resolute	Worshippers of Prios	Reformists, Witches, Heretics, blight-marked, Ironsworn
Iasogoi Brigo	Iasogoi Brigo	Vigilant	Explorers	–
Orlandor	Iasogoi Brigo	Strong	–	Nobles
Father Sarvola	Reformists	Resolute	Reformists	–
Eliana Nidel	Reformists	Strong	Ambrians	Barbarians, heretics
Alisabeta Vearra	Church of Dead Prios	Strong	–	Witches, heretics, Ironsworn, non-humans, blight-marked
Agramai Kalfas	Sacred of the Old Blood	Discreet	Nobles	Wizards, Worshippers of Prios
Junia Dardall	Sacred of the Old Blood	Cunning	Nobles	Wizards, Worshippers of Prios
Ardil	Iron Pact	Vigilant	Ironsworn	Explorers, blight-marked, nobles
Yeleta	Witches	Resolute	Witches	Sun knights, explorers, blight-marked
Rábaiamon	Sovereign's Oath	Strong	–	Witches, Ambrians, blight-marked
Odralintos	Sovereign's Oath	Resolute	–	Witches, Ambrians, blight-marked
Karathran	Spiders	Cunning	–	–

treat the factions as quest givers or opponents, without complex nuances or rules regarding their reactions to the player characters' deeds. In that case, the Game Master decides what is reasonable from the point of view of each faction/individual, or settles the matter with *Persuasive* tests if the need arises.

Those who want to make full use of the scheming can find detailed rules, as well as a glossary, on pages 58–60 in *Karvosti – The Witch Hammer*.

Balanced Scheming

The challenges at the planning stage are primarily meant to give the players and their characters a sense of how much is at stake and how dedicated their opponents are. If the challenges are too numerous or too difficult, the gaming group might lose hope, which is why it is important to find the right balance between highs and lows. Obviously, the Game Master knows his or her players best, but maybe the expression "three steps forward, one step back" can be a good rule of thumb.

SABOTAGE

The factions must be wary of attempted sabotage in Thistle Hold. The people of Ambria are eagerly looking forward to the contest that is about to begin, and they will not take kindly to an expedition caught using its power and resources to obstruct other participants. But this will not stop the factions from trying.

The bullet points below list some examples of things the hunting parties might get up to. In most cases, the agents are independent operatives hired through an intermediary, so even if the perpetrator is caught, it can be difficult to figure out who was behind the attack. Furthermore, it is unlikely that any blame would fall on the actual leaders of the major hunting parties – they can always have one of their subordinates take responsibility, claiming that the scapegoat acted on her own initiative to prove her diligence.

- Destroying the competitors' stores/supplies by setting them on fire, poisoning them, or infecting them.
- Bribing business establishments not to sell certain goods for a period of time, or to keep their stores closed.



- Outbidding another faction to appropriate its guide or companions, or simply to make that person break his/her agreement and stay at home.
- Poisoning or infecting the food at the establishment where the members of an expedition usually go to eat.

ESPIONAGE

An essential part of all scheming is espionage – stealing information that the competitors have access to and finding out as much as possible about their resources, capabilities and travel plans. The latter can be used in negotiations with the groups, or to orchestrate carefully considered attacks or ambushes once they have left Thistle Hold.

Listed below are a number of ways to engage in espionage in the *Symbaroum* game world – methods the player characters can use and be subjected to. Suggestions on how the information can be put into practical effect are found under the Suggested Scenes heading on page 126.

- Classic techniques like stealthy maneuvers, disguises, and secret compartments between walls are risky, but may work if the target of the operation feels secure.
- Bribing or planting "newly-recruited" personnel at inns, taverns, or similar establishments. The Shapeshifter trait and the ritual *False Shape* can be useful in this context.
- Pretending to have information to sell or to offer one's services as a companion can be a good way of tricking the target into saying too much.
- Mystical powers and rituals can allow for creative solutions to complex challenges – for example *Shapeshift*, *Nature's Embrace*, *Unnoticeable*, *Possess*, *Familiar*, *Enslave* and *Borrow Beast*.
- The *Clairvoyance* ritual can be used to see and hear what is happening in a certain location; *Tale of Ashes* has the same effect, but retroactively.

ATTACK

Most factions involved in the hunt for Symbar will not hesitate to use brutal methods. None are stupid enough to attack their rivals in public, of course, at least not with their own goons. But there are other options.

The purpose of a deadly attack may be to eliminate the leaders of a rival expedition (e.g. the player characters) or one or more of their guides/companions. Exactly how such an attack is staged must be decided by the Game Master, but the hired thugs may fit one of the following descriptions:

- Destitute war veterans tricked into thinking they are serving the Queen.
- A smaller band of sellswords (such as the Blue Company from *Adventure Pack 2*).
- An assassin or two (for inspiration, see the Night Cape/Violing on page 80 in *Karvosti – The Witch Hammer*).
- A group of adventurers in need of funds for their own expedition to Symbar.
- A gang of robbers who have been informed about the target's considerable resources and valuable possessions.

INFILTRATORS

It could be really interesting to have some faction plant an infiltrator in a rival expedition. It would of course be particularly exciting if the player characters were the target of such an operation, but it could also be two or more other factions. In the latter case, a hunting party allied with the player characters could reveal that they have a mole working inside a hostile faction, who can then be used to delay, mislead or even attack the enemy from within.

Player characters wishing to plant secret agents in the other expeditions can try to persuade or manipulate any of their companions, and must of course watch out for signs that some of their own companions are in the enemy's service. Some examples on how individuals can be induced to act as infiltrators are:

- A large sum of thaler, at least twice as large as the promised reward, partially paid in advance.
- Credible threats against the person's spouse, friends or relatives, preferably with proof that the coercer can easily get to the victim.
- Extortion based on the threat of revealing a damning secret.
- A promise of returning the favor in a big way (might work on freelancers, but hardly on faction members).

Suggested Scenes

AS PREVIOUSLY MENTIONED, the players must decide to what extent they will actively participate in the scheming; as Game Master you must listen carefully and turn the player characters' plans into scenes with suitable challenges. As always, any well-considered strategies should be rewarded and more reckless endeavors punished with tougher opposition or serious complications – maybe the identities of the player characters are revealed, which gets them into trouble with the Town Watch and/or the affected faction; perhaps they themselves are followed after completing the mission, with the result that some competitor finds out where they keep their equipment...

The scenes below, however, are about the player characters being subjected to the foul play of rival hunting parties. These can be used as they are or serve as inspiration; either way, it is up to the Game Master to decide if and when they occur. Most of them require that one or several factions are aware of the player characters' presence and know that they are planning an expedition; if they manage to enter Thistle Hold unseen, a suitable reward could be that it takes a day or two before the inevitable rumors start to spread – which in turn means that they are spared one or two of the challenges below.

NEGOTIATIONS

Before getting into more action-packed scenes, we should say a few words about the possibility of other hunting parties inviting the player characters to take part in negotiations. If the characters are already familiar with one or a few members of House Kohinoor's expedition (for example Colonel Marvello or Ralgai Melion), they could be invited to a meeting. Both Iasogoi Brigo and Agramai Kalfas might be interested in exploring the possibility of a future alliance, or proposing a partnership that includes the upcoming journey. It could also be the Reformists' agent in town who requests a meeting, especially if the player characters have worked with one of their leaders in the past.

No matter who attends, the meeting will most likely take place in secret, perhaps on a farm outside the palisade. The invitation could be a trick to draw the player characters away in order to sabotage their equipment/supplies, or maybe to lure them into an ambush. Otherwise it will probably be a tense

meeting primarily dealing with the five issues below, where the opponent tries to obtain as much information as possible without revealing its own strengths, weaknesses, intentions, and so on. See the Factions section (page 143) for details and inspiration for the negotiation.

- The purpose of the journey
- The planned route with clear milestones
- The expedition's resources/manpower
- Opinions on other hunting parties
- The possibility of collaborating or even merging

SCAPEGOATS

The agents of the Sovereign's Oath are planning to kill two birds with one stone by setting fire to the Black Cloak expedition's stores and incriminating the player characters. For this they will need an item that points to one of the characters, which means that the plan can be nipped in the bud...

The item (the Game Master decides which one) can be obtained in various ways, largely depending on what precautions the player characters have taken. If it is left unattended in a place known to the Sovereign's Oath, this is of course where they will steal it; another option is pickpocketing in the streets. In the latter case the Game Master should instruct the targeted character to make a success test without explaining why; in reality, the test is made against *[Vigilant –5]*. On failure the game continues without the character noticing the theft.

Shortly thereafter the small monastery in town is set on fire, and before long a captain of the Town Watch (possibly one of those featured in *Wrath of the Warden*) shows up with PC×2 guards to take the player characters to the Penitentiary pending investigation. How this ends is up to the Game Master to decide, based on what contacts the player characters have and how they handle the interrogations.

Catching the thief in the act, out in the open or indoors, prompts a pursuit through town. Use the rules for Flight & Hunt (page 102 in the *Advanced Player's Guide*) to determine the outcome. The burglar/pickpocket has *Quick* 15 (–5), and if she is caught the player characters will likely be disappointed: she does not know who hired her, only that he spoke bad Ambrian with a barbarian accent. If they frisk her, a successful *[Vigilant –1]* reveals a hidden leather purse containing a few coins and, more importantly, an uncut ruby with cracked surfaces (worth: 50 thaler). The player characters may already be aware that this is the preferred means of payment of the Sovereign's Oath – otherwise it takes a *Cunning* test with the *Loremaster* ability to reach that conclusion.

UNDER ATTACK

Why not subject the player characters to a good old-fashioned ambush? Who is behind it and who ultimately gets hired to do the job (see page 126) is up to the Game Master, but the objective should be clear: to eliminate a competitor from the playing field.

It should be a challenging fight, in a place where the player characters are more or less trapped with no one to help them. Perhaps they are lured to a meeting in some murky basement, or to the shadows near the palisade to the northwest? As for the opposition, the Game Master can consult the chapter titled Balanced Combat Resistance in the *Symbaroum Monster Codex* (page 178), and make adjustments based on the situation and environment – for example, if the player characters count as veterans, the hired assailants could be PC×2 Ordinary enemies with a Strong leader.

UNWANTED SEASONING

If the player characters are staying at an inn or similar, and are not extremely careful about how their food is cooked and served, they may be in for an unpleasant surprise. Perhaps the Black Cloaks are trying to delay them (and other competitors) by making them seriously ill? Whatever the case, one of the factions hire an agent to discreetly lace their supper with an elixir containing poison or contagions.

The *Symbaroum Monster Codex* (page 169) offers guidelines for handling diseases in Symbaroum, and if the gaming group does not have access to it, the Game Master can draw inspiration from the Pale Death which is described in *Karvosti – The Witch Hammer* (page 65). It will probably be some kind of serious (Strong) disease. Once in the food, the contagion cannot be detected with success tests.

How poisons work is described in the *Symbaroum Core Rulebook*. In this case it is most likely a Strong poison, which a taster can detect with a successful *Vigilant* test and either the *Alchemy* or the *Poisoner* ability. The person tasting the food is affected by the poison, but in such a small dose that it counts as a Weak poison.

EXTORTION

At some point when one of the player characters is alone, he or she is approached by a young goblin who hands over a leather cylinder bearing no mark or sigil. The goblin hisses mysteriously: *"Psst, secret, just for you"* before running off. Inside the cylinder is a threatening letter and a lock of hair that may have come from the target mentioned in the letter. The Game Master decides who sent it and who the target is, but the following might serve as inspiration:

Action-oriented Players

Joining forces with another faction whilst still in Thistle Hold can be perfect for gaming groups who do not enjoy planning and preparation. Everything from recruiting companions to purchasing supplies could then be handled by said faction, but it would be very costly for the player characters. If they are part of Iasogoi or Agramai's group, they can expect a collective reward of 8% and 12% respectively in future shares, which can be negotiated up to 10% and 15% with a successful *[Persuasive –3]* test. If the faction is House Kohinoor, the characters are promised 1% each – no more, no less.

My friend,
Relax. Nothing bad will happen, as long as you do as I say. Swallow your frustration, ignore your pride – in situations like this, such feelings will only lead to misery and woe.

You will persuade your friends to postpone the journey to Symbar by at least one month. The reason is yours to decide; a crafty type like yourself will have no trouble coming up with a convincing story, especially now that your motivation is so strong. Speaking of which...

If you fail, you will have caused the death of your sister. When her corpse is found, it will seem as though she fell victim to a brutal accident, or maybe some horrific illness. But you and I will know the truth: that you are responsible, because of your stupidity or stubbornness.

Best of luck,
V

Ideally, the designated target will be somewhere near Thistle Hold; then the player character could tell his or her friends and possibly head out on a short rescue mission together, in the hope of getting the "sister" to safety. Perhaps they will find that she has already been kidnapped, which leads to another short investigation, followed by a less challenging confrontation with a group of thugs tasked with guarding "her"?

Whether or not the person who wrote the letter will follow through on the threat is for the Game Master to decide, depending on how dark the gaming group's version of the game world is.

THE MOLE

Something that could definitely make the journey through Davokar more exciting is if one or a couple of rival factions have managed to plant an infiltrator in the player characters' expedition. The likelihood of this happening increases with every companion the characters recruit, as this makes it more difficult for the leaders to expose a suspected defector. The contract could be drawn up before the agent is recruited or after a deal has been made between the player characters and the mole, and the arrangement between the rival faction and its infiltrator may vary as well – it could be based on threats against a relative, financial reward, a promise of promotion, or future favors. The mole's objective can either be to provide the employer with information or try to sabotage the characters' expedition. It would be particularly interesting if there were two of them; one of each type...

Described below are a number of activities which the mole can undertake, along with suggestions on how they can be detected and what kind of clues the player characters might find. Note that both types of infiltrator may begin their operation even before the expedition leaves Thistle Hold.

Table 13: The Mole's Activities

ACTIVITY	EFFECT	CLUE	PROOF
Mixing laxatives into the pack animals' feed bags	The animals get cramps and diarrhea, become exhausted and need to recover – motionless for one day, half speed for two	Active search and *[Vigilant –5]* with *Alchemy/Medicus* reveals traces of the substance	With *[Vigilant –5]* while examining everyone's packing, a vial of elixir is found; the owner claims that it was planted (Game Master decides)
Leaving marks for allies to follow	The player characters suffer a surprise attack	Active search around the campsite and *[Vigilant –5]* with *Bushcraft* reveals fresh marks on a tree trunk	With constant, discreet supervision and *[Discreet –5]* the mole is caught making a mark; blames fruitless search for chewing resin
Piercing holes in the packaging of the Waybread	The bread becomes moldy and eventually inedible	A successful *Vigilant* while eating suggests that the bread is drier than it should be; a subsequent *[Vigilant –5]* reveals tiny holes along the seams of the packaging	*[Vigilant –5]* while frisking the entire group leads to the discovery of an awl-like object that matches the holes; the owner claims that it is a toothpick
Stealing/destroying elixirs	Mainly focused on healing drugs (herbal cures, antidotes, purple sap, etc.)	A successful *Vigilant* with *Medicus* while inspecting the supplies reveals that doses have gone missing (noticed automatically if daily records are kept)	*[Vigilant –5]* while frisking the entire group leads to the discovery of two doses of different elixirs that the mole has not yet disposed of; the owner claims that they are his/her own
Poisoning a specific individual or the entire expedition	Delay the group or kill one of its key members (e.g. leader, guide, or tracker)	*[Vigilant –5]* from the person eating/drinking reveals a suspicious flavor; *[Vigilant –5]* with *Alchemy/Poisoner* reveals that the poison comes from a local berry plant	*[Vigilant –5]* with *Alchemy/Poisoner* while examining the hands of the entire group reveals stained fingertips; the person claims to have picked regular edible berries

ACT 2:

To Symbar

THE STAGE IS set, the equipment procured, and the objective clearly defined – it is time to head out! The second act focuses entirely on the journey to the great ruined city of Symbar in the dark heartlands of Davokar. First up is a general overview of the various hunting parties leaving for Symbar at roughly the same time as the player characters, from Thistle Hold or elsewhere. The chapter that follows describes three routes with different characteristics and a number of events that may occur on the journey, before the act concludes by addressing the arrival in the Symbar area.

IF YOU AND your group choose to play the adventure as it was designed, there is a significant risk that the characters will never reach their destination. Such is the world of *Symbaroum* – as dark and dangerous as it is potentially rewarding and (in rare cases) peaceful. Besides, the journey to Symbar is one of the most dangerous undertakings a person can attempt in this world, so if the characters think they will be following a graveled, birch-lined avenue all the way to the Mother of All Darkness... Well, then they are in for a surprise.

On the other hand, this is just a design premise, not a law. Should your gaming group prefer an exciting, but not very dangerous trip from point A to point B, then that is of course what you should give them. Some groups may even want to handle the journey summarily, in the form of a narrative or in a single gaming session, which is entirely possible and completely up to them. *Symbaroum* is your game, and its world is yours to shape exactly the way you like it!

The Hunting Parties

DUE TO THE unrest in Ambria and the ongoing war between the Queen's people and the Sovereign's Oath, no faction is prepared to sacrifice an unlimited amount of resources and manpower in their search for Symbar, at least not before the authenticity of the directions has been verified. Consequently, the hunting parties setting out from the Queen's realm are not entire armies or regiments, but smaller groups made up of extremely competent (or otherwise prominent) individuals.

Below is a broad description of the hunting parties, as they exist when the expeditions leave Thistle Hold or other points of departure. The purpose of this general overview is to help the Game Master portray the journey through the forest. A more detailed presentation of all groups is provided in the third act, with information on, and stats for, important non-player characters, the specific goals of each group, their willingness to compromise, etc. There we will also introduce the groups already in place – the Sovereign's Oath, the Iron Pact and the Witches. The reason for this division is that the composition of the expeditions will change on the way to Symbar, and so it is not necessary to go into detail twice.

Dead or Alive

Some of the expedition leaders will be people the player characters may already have encountered, in past episodes of the *Throne of Thorns* or in other published adventures. If one or several of these were killed during previous sessions, or affected in a way that makes their participation unlikely, we suggest that the Game Master keep the stats specified in this adventure and simply give the individual a new name, background and (if need be) personality.

HOUSE KOHINOOR

Had the domestic situation been different, Korinthia Kohinoor would probably have sent her entire army plowing through Davokar. While her seventy-five-member expedition is much larger and better equipped than all the others, it is a strategic force rather than a military unit.

Aside from verifying the authenticity of the directions, the group's objective is to gather information about the ruined city and secure as much of its treasure (riches and knowledge) as possible. They are authorized to form tactical alliances, but also instructed to make sure that no one else leaves Symbar alive.

The expedition is led by the noble Ralgai Melion, a seasoned member of the Royal Sekretorium. At his side he has Colonel Marvello, a veteran Davokar traveler known for his energy and resolve. They command a relatively powerful force, mainly comprised of rangers and wizards – how many of them will actually reach Symbar is stated on page 146.

These are accompanied by three experienced guides (*Vigilant/Bushcraft*: 15/III, 15/II, 13/II), two alchemists (master, *Cunning* 15), one royalist liturg (*Symbaroum Monster Codex*, page 123), and two scholars trained as interpreters. Finally, they are also bringing along three boat builders, a handful of servants/squires, twenty or so carriers, and a dozen hardy mules.

Barring some terrible mishap, the members of Ralgai Melion's expedition will probably be alright. They have abundant supplies and start off with at least ten doses of every elixir and three sets of all relevant Tools of the Trade (*Advanced Player's Guide*, page 127).

Determined to be first on the scene, House Kohinoor's expedition will of course choose the route described under Along the Malgomor on page 136.

THE BLACK CLOAKS

Until they are ready to head out, the Black Cloaks will keep a low profile. If the opportunity arises, they may try to take out or damage groups they consider potential allies of House Kohinoor. Otherwise they will save their resources for what is to come, in Symbar. They think they have the competence and strength to achieve their goal, and even if they do not, they are convinced that the Lawgiver is on their side.

Their overriding priority is to sabotage the Queen's hunting party. Secondly, they are to combat the corruption growing in Symbar to prevent it from taking hold and spreading under Prios' sky.

The expedition is directed by the Whip of Prios, the Sun Church's inquisition, with Sister Losadra at the helm (or Sister Engala if Losadra was killed in a previous adventure). Always at her side is the theurg Arelma, filled with the holy wrath of Prios. Their force is mostly made up of well-trained Black Cloaks, but there is also room for a number of former Templars who would not pledge allegiance to Dead Prios, as well as a handful of fanatics who demanded a chance to die fighting the darkness at the black heart of Davokar. The hunting party is guided by two experienced agents who know the forest well (*Vigilant/Bushcraft* 15/III and 13/III), and each member has a battle-trained horse (*Symbaroum Monster Codex*, page 133).

Aside from supplies, the expedition is carrying twelve doses each of a handful of common elixirs (antidotes, herbal cures, and purple sap), five doses of elixir of life, and a vial containing six drops of Water of the Dusk. Furthermore, Brother Eumenos has given Losadra a mighty artifact known as the Sun of Steel, due to the vital nature of the mission.

The Lawgiver's followers have faith in their god, but also know that Prios holds limited power over the armies of Darkness. The expedition will choose the western route, via Jerak's Sinkhole and Eulia's Fire Mountain, before heading east to Symbar.

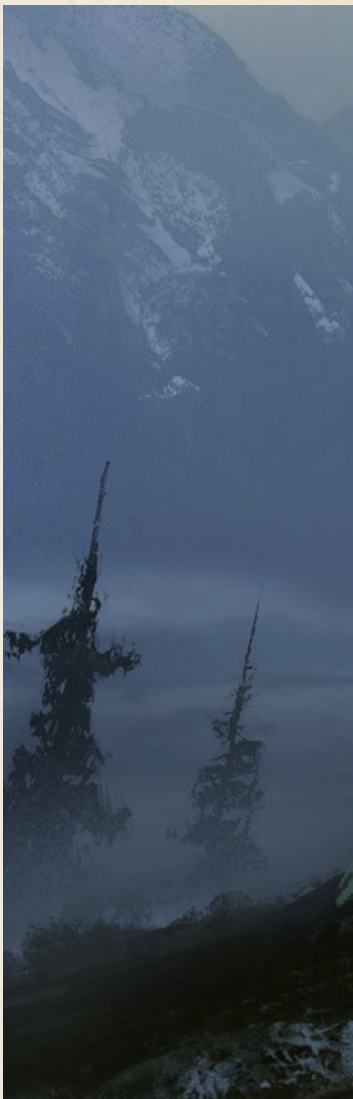
IASOGOI BRIGO

Six years have passed since Iasogoi returned from his triumphant expedition to the Catacombs of Akkona, located under the ruined city of Odaban. Until now he has been resting on his laurels and made tentative attempts to enter the political arena, but since his father Edogai was caught conspiring against the Queen (see *Yndaros – The Darkest Star*), the family name has been sullied.

Iasogoi is a fortune hunter with a fortune hunter's goals, but this time not everything is about bringing back as much treasure as possible – the most important thing is to return, and to do so with an item or two worthy of his status as Ambria's foremost treasure hunter!

Iasogoi is leading the group together with his long-time friend and guide, the changeling Orlandor. Despite their tarnished reputation, the two of them have no problem attracting competent companions; many are proud to take part in Iasogoi's expedition to Symbar. One idea is to draw inspiration from the list of Mother Mehira's Warriors, Pathfinders, and Mystics on page 44 in the *Core Rulebook* when describing individual expedition members.

The group has another guide besides Orlandor (*Vigilant/Bushcraft* 15/II). Wise from experience, they are also bringing along two alchemy-trained



medici, but otherwise they expect to manage on their own in terms of language skills and learning. They have plenty of carriers: two dozen experienced goblins, each leading a mule – not as many as he brought with him to Odaban, but enough to bring back a considerable number of items and treasures. Lastly, Iasogoi is joined by young Rosela Kohinoor, the Queen's cousin once removed – partly as a precaution against attacks from Korinthia's hunting party.

Iasogoi comes prepared for every eventuality and has enough resources to keep large stores of supplies as well as elixirs and special tools. The Game Master can assume his expedition starts the journey with at least ten doses of every common elixir (antidotes, herbal cures, purple sap, etc.) and two sets of any Tools of the Trade they might need.

Why walk straight into the unknown when you can let someone else pave the way? Iasogoi Brigo and company will be following House Kohinoor, heading out one day later and trying to maintain that distance. He knows the political game well, and assumes that Ralgai Melion sooner or later will try to eliminate all competition.

Elmendra to Symbar

If the fortune hunter Elmendra is alive, she too will be heading for Symbar. The Game Master decides whether she puts together her own group or joins someone else – most likely Iasogoi Brigo or House Kohinoor. Alternatively, she may of course accompany the player characters, maybe even as leader of their expedition, in which case one of the players should control her as a second player character during various challenges.

THE REFORMISTS

Father Sarvola's hunting party is one of the smallest, but on the other hand, they have Aluin and the Lifegiver on their side. Furthermore, they expect to be in a good position to negotiation with almost all who reach Symbar.

Sarvola's main objective is to stop House Kohinoor's expedition from establishing dominion over the ruined city, which will be accomplished through cooperation with other groups. Secondly, he will try to disturb the ruins



Sarvola and his son, hiking along the roots of the Ravens.

as little as possible and contribute to the Iron Pact's efforts to keep the darkness fettered.

Father Sarvola is of course the obvious leader of the expedition, but in practice it is mainly Field Marshal Eliana Nidel who is running things. Aluin is also a central figure, though one can hardly call him a leader. They are accompanied by a mere handful of experienced soldiers from Duke Ynedar's escort, as well as the witch Kathman. The plan was for Elori to come with them as well, but he went into hibernation just days before departure. As long as Aluin is with them they should not need much in the way of equipment or supplies, but nevertheless, given the boy's capricious nature (he might suddenly decide to disappear or join another group), the expedition has ten carriers and three animals in tow. Kathman serves as both guide, interpreter and alchemist – stats as Witch, Keeper on page 124 in the *Symbaroum Monster Codex*, with *Bushcraft* III.

Unless the Game Master has other plans, Aluin will be traveling with his father, at least for the most part, long enough that they will have everything they need. They also have the Compass of Einon, given to them by Elori before he fell asleep – it will come in handy on the journey and during their stay in Symbar.

Father Sarvola's expedition will depart from Ravenia and travel across the western foothills of the Ravens, until they are in line with Eulia's Fire Mountain where they continue northwest through the forest.

Clearing the Board

Game Masters who would rather not keep track of all the hunting parties and strong-minded individuals could use the journey to get rid of unwanted factions. Some expeditions could certainly be wiped out on the way to Symbar, or get lost so that they are either delayed or forced to turn back. It is also possible to merge certain groups from the start, provided that such an alliance seems reasonable based on their goals and values.

Then again, the Game Master must think carefully before making such adjustments. For example, removing House Kohinoor or the Reformists would diminish much of the political game relevant to *The Chronicle of the Throne of Thorns*. It is also important to find the right balance between potential alliances – for instance, if Iasogoi's expedition was removed, House Kohinoor would suddenly be standing alone against a temporary pact between hunting parties wishing to sabotage the Queen; in that case the Black Cloaks and/or the Reformists may also have to be removed. The Game Master decides, with the goal of creating as great a gaming experience as possible.

THE KNIGHTS OF DEAD PRIOS

Iakobo Vearra has sent the largest of his remaining suns to verify the position of Symbar. Once he receives word that the ruins have been found, he will personally set off with the rest of his church – that is where the final battle against the armies of the Eternal Night will be fought!

Having verified the directions and sent a kit of pigeons south to report their conclusion, the knights have three main objectives. The battle against the evil of Symbar will have to wait until reinforcements arrive; in the meantime, the Witches, the Reformists and the Iron Pact's groups shall be hunted down and destroyed.

The sun traveling to Symbar is commanded by the First Revenger's daughter, Alisabeta Vearra, once known as the Sun Princess and described in more detail in *Karvosti – The Witch Hammer* (page 26). With a few exceptions, her expedition is comprised entirely of former Templars and their squires. Normally, Alisabeta knows the forest well enough that her sun has no need for a guide, but for the journey to Symbar she is bringing along two guides whom she picked up in Kastor, against their will (*Vigilant/Bushcraft* 13/III, 13/II). In addition, all knights and squires have their own mounts – the former battle-trained horses, the latter regular ones (*Symbaroum Monster Codex*, page 133) – which carry all the baggage and supplies needed for the expedition.

The knights have no particular assets except their burning desire for vengeance and their capacity for self-sacrifice, and in most cases that is enough.

Speed is of the essence for the impatient knights – they will travel north from Kastor to the Black Pitch Mire, and then follow the river Malgomor until they reach the tributary from Eulia's Fire Mountain. From there they will go straight to Symbar, through the forest.

THE SACRED OF THE OLD BLOOD

Disguised as a group of independent explorers, Agramai Kalfas and company will seek collaborations, both to reach Symbar in one piece and to get their hands on its treasures. Agramai is of course already a celebrity in Thistle Hold, as famous for his generosity and festive spirit as for once having been the local Sanitation Commissioner. His decision to launch a new career as an explorer has made many townsfolk root for him over the Queen and the others.

The mission Agramai has been given by his superiors is to find a cure for undeath, in the form of written recipes or rituals. Personally, he is more interested in artifacts, powers and other kinds of

rituals – things that could enhance his own power. Ideally a certain Throne of Thorns.

So, Agramai Kalfas, also known as the Prince, has been tasked with leading the expedition. But as it comprises half a dozen self-aggrandizing and power-hungry individuals – Sesario and Esmerelda are expecting trouble – if the Prince should fall, everyone is informed that Junia Dardall will pick up the mantle. Aside from its leaders, the expedition is composed of six members of the Sacred of the Old Blood – all of them nobles with a taste for the power that corruption can bring. In addition, they have hired a dozen sellswords bound with slave runes, who are used to traveling through Davokar and tasked with serving food to their superiors, building shelters, massaging sore feet, and leading the group's six pack horses. Lastly, Agramai has enlisted the services of two skilled guides (*Vigilant/Bushcraft* 15/III, 15/II) who are also expected to attend to the main members of the expedition.

Apart from the supplies and common elixirs carried by their six battle-trained horses, the little group has one considerable asset: its ability to raise the living dead to fight for them. All of them know the Raise Dead ritual, and both Agramai and Junia have access to the mystical ceremony Mass Resurrection (see *Yndaros – The Darkest Star*, page 72).

Agramai and his companions will try to secure an alliance before leaving Thistle Hold – first with the player characters, perhaps, otherwise with Iasogoi who then agrees to travel to Symbar together (concerned as he is by the threat from House Kohinoor).

Routes

THIS SECTION DESCRIBES three different routes from Thistle Hold to Symbar – some shorter than others, but also more dangerous. They are presented below in descending order, from the longest and safest to the shortest and most perilous, all of them broken down into a number of legs which offer different travel conditions.

Each route is first described in general terms, before the details of each leg are laid out in a table of four columns with the headings Mode of Transportation, Days, Terrain, and Challenges. The mode of transportation listed may differ from what normally applies in various parts of Davokar, due to local conditions or special circumstances, which in turn affects how long it takes to cover that distance at normal marching speed. The Terrain column mostly has to do with what kind of encounters might befall the travelers, which of course affects the challenges they face. And lastly, Challenges – a column with suggestions on how many times the travelers must roll on tables 2 to 5 during each leg of the journey.

Note that these guidelines differ somewhat from the general rule that an expedition must roll on the tables once a day. The reason is of course that the journey to Symbar could get tediously long if something has to happen every single day, but as always, this is ultimately decided by the Game Master. Some alternatives could be to...

... make the number of rolls indicated in the tables, but demand a re-roll whenever the result shows that nothing happens.

... not make any rolls, and instead choose one or multiple events from tables 2–5, in accordance with the numbers indicated in the Challenges column.

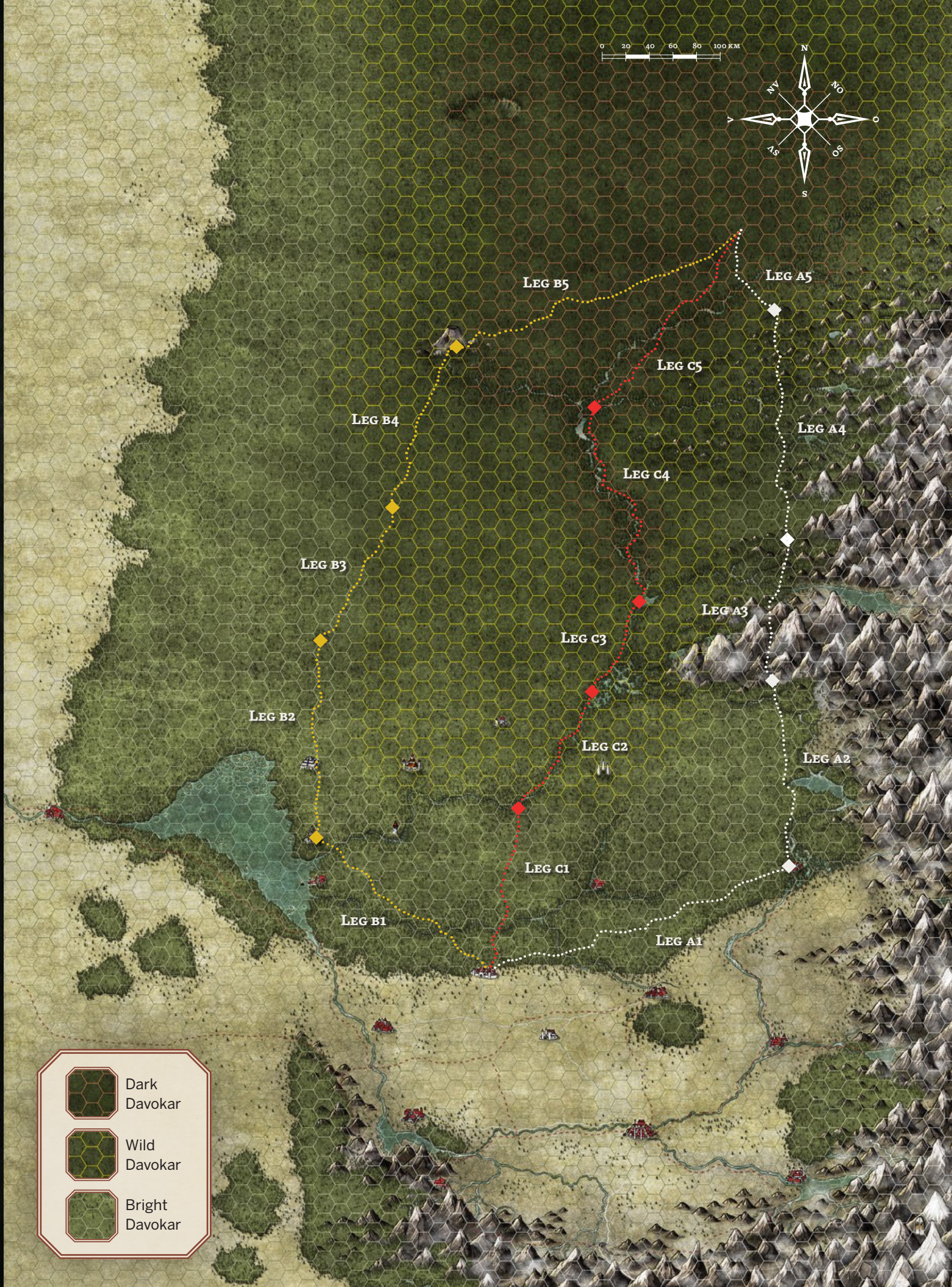
... ignore the "chicken rules" and instead make one roll per day (or hexagon), and let the journey take its time.

Finally, each route comes with two suggested scenes of a more detailed nature, designed to reflect the differences between them. These can either be used in addition to the challenges or replace them entirely, depending on how many scenes the Game Master wants the player characters to experience on their way to Symbar.

ALONG THE MOUNTAINS

Given that the journey starts in Thistle Hold, the route along the Ravens is longer than the other ones presented here, but also involves the least exposure to the darkness of Davokar. Although the path winds its way through hills and valleys, the vegetation is often much sparser and the trees both thinner and shorter.

The threats lurking in the shade of the mountain range differ, in both form and number, from those normally encountered under the foliage. Sure, there are flocks of jakaars and belligerent goblin tribes, but on the western slopes of the Ravens one is more likely to encounter mountain trolls, wraith owls and stone boars. And while unfortunate forest travelers might face king toads, abominations or Iron Pact warbands, their equivalent in the mountains will probably come across a hungering drakworm instead.


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Leg B4
Leg A4
Leg C4
Leg B3
Leg A3
Leg C3
Leg B2
Leg C2
Leg A2
Leg C1
Leg B1
Leg A1
Dark Davokar
Wild Davokar
Bright Davokar

THE BEAST CLAN

Since the escape from Thistle Hold, the so-called Beast Clan has established several settlements north of Clan Vajvod's territory. The main settlement, where Chieftain Helionor is based, is located just east of the Black Pitch Mire, but a handful of smaller outposts have also been established, both in the mountains and near the southern edge of the forest.

A hunting party from one of these settlements will discover the player characters, who in turn might not detect the threat until the ambush is upon them. The scout who spots them is bone-crafted, circling the sky on its wings, and it takes a successful *[Vigilant –8]* test to even notice the "oddly shaped bird." A subsequent *Cunning* test with *Beast Lore* reveals that it is actually a winged human. Player characters who follow the creature with their eyes can see it circling above them, before flying southwest where it eventually swoops down among the trees.

The trap will be set in some form of narrow passage, where the melee-oriented warriors of the beast clan will quickly be able to reach their prey. If the player characters noticed the scout and state that they are on their guard, they may all make a *Vigilant* test when the ambush begins. Those who fail will count as Surprised during the first turn.

Stats for various types of beast clan members are found in *Thistle Hold – Wrath of the Warden* between page 93–96. Make sure to adjust their numbers and stats so they become a suitably tough challenge for the player characters' expedition. For example, their bone crafts could be more advanced than before, and the time in Davokar could have made them more proficient in combat – meaning that they have leveled-up their abilities or acquired new ones.

Aluin

Father Sarvola's son, Aluin, is described in detail on page 153. It is possible that the player characters have met him before, in which case they might think that his sudden appearance in their camp is meant to renew the acquaintance. But this is not the case. He acknowledges that they have met before, but laughingly points out that *"everybody is meeting everybody all the time, constantly, so much so that it would get repetitive were it not for the fact that everyone is always so nice and friendly."*

Aluin has come simply because he felt like it. He can tell them that he and his father are on their way to *"a terribly, delightfully interesting place,"* but when pressed for details his answers tend to be more confusing than clarifying. For example, if asked whether Sarvola is north or south of the player characters, he might answer that it depends on what meaning one attaches to such words, which after some consideration leads to the conclusion that his father is probably both north and south of there. Or neither.

The Game Master decides whether Aluin wants to help the player characters in some way. He can heal wounds, cure permanent corruption, replenish supplies, and even turn weapons into artifacts that can be used without gaining corruption – the only thing he will not do is to destroy or preserve for the sake of preserving. Also note that this scene can be used to spice up trips along the other routes as well. Aluin has never cared much about things like distance and time.

Table 14: The Route Along the Ravens

LEG	MODE OF TRANSPORTATION	DAYS	TERRAIN	CHALLENGES
Leg A1	Riding	8	Ambria	0
Leg A2	Riding	5	Bright Davokar	1
Leg A3	Walking*	10	Bright Davokar	1
Leg A4	Walking*	12	Wild Davokar	2
Leg A5	Walking	8	Dark Davokar	1

* Winding path and/or terrain unsuitable for riding

NORTH VIA JERAK

The route from Thistle Hold via Karvosti and Jerak's Sinkhole has the advantage of mostly passing through well-known clan territories along the outskirts of the forest. This not only allows the travelers to cover long stretches on horseback, but also gives them a chance to avoid the most blighted parts of the forest, and maybe its most dangerous monsters as well.

The downside of this route is its length, which entails a long walk through the darkest parts of Davokar, from Eulia's Fire Mountain to the final destination. Information from archives and experienced fortune hunters (see the Map heading on page 120) suggests that the terrain east of the volcano is neither rugged nor particularly overgrown – although this route will no doubt pose some tough challenges, the expedition should be able to keep a faster pace than in other parts of Dark Davokar.

Table 15: The Route North via Jerak

LEG	MODE OF TRANSPORTATION	DAYS	TERRAIN	CHALLENGES
Leg B1	Riding	5	Plains*	0
Leg B2	Riding	5	Bright Davokar	1
Leg B3	Riding	4	Bright Davokar	1
Leg B4	Walking	7	Wild Davokar	1
Leg B5	Walking	17	Dark Davokar**	2

* The route between Thistle Hold and Karvosti is so frequently patrolled and well-traveled that it counts as Ambrian plains
** Counts as Dark Davokar during encounters, but the terrain varies

The Sovereign's Oath

Player characters who chose this route should of course have to face the Sovereign's Oath. The Blood-Daughter's troops have strict orders to attack any expedition traveling north from Karvosti, and large units have been stationed at regular intervals in an east-west line, from their leader's stone fortress all the way to the river Malgomor. The Sovereign warriors do not know what prompted this order, but its purpose is of course to stop any Ambrians from reaching Symbar.

This threat can be used in two ways. The Game Master could let the characters make a *[Vigilant –3]* test to detect two scouts moving between two larger postings; if successful they get a chance to hide in time or prepare an ambush *[Discreet –5]*. If they fail to notice the scouts, however, the player characters will soon come eye to eye with the scouts, in a clearing or on opposite sides of a small stream. The scouts will then try to escape, in order to fetch reinforcements in the form of a large group of Sovereign warriors.

The liege troll Gunagan

If the Game Master so desires, the liege troll mentioned in the first section of this book can be used as an additional challenge. Perhaps the player characters happen to walk straight toward the heart of his territory, and soon find themselves surrounded and captured by a throng of rage trolls who take them to their liege's camp. Getting out of there could require a negotiation where Gunagan demands that they steal something from a nearby Sovereign posting, as he himself wants to maintain peace with the barbarians. In that case, he will of course keep someone or something hostage to make sure that the player characters do their job!

Another option is to let the player characters walk into an already prepared ambush. Each character may then make a *Vigilant* test, as usual, to avoid *Surprise* during the first turn of combat.

We suggest that the Game Master use the stats presented under The Sovereign's Oath on page 168, and adjust their numbers to make the fight as interesting as possible. In addition, one can use two variants from *Karvosti – The Witch Hammer*: Sovereign Witch (page 85) and Gaoian Warrior (page 114). Finally, it should be noted that this scene can (maybe even should) occur if the player characters choose to travel along the Malgomor.

The Skullbiters

Between Eulia's Fire Mountain and Symbar there are several skullbiter colonies, of varying size, each centered around a queen. If the Game Master thinks the player characters have faced enough problems already, they could first run into an egg cluster (see page 96 in the *Symbaroum Monster Codex*) and then choose whether to sneak past the local queen's domain or take a detour through a blighted area (where the shield beasts will not follow).

The enemy could of course carry out a plain old attack, possibly in fewer numbers at first, and later with greater force if their prey continues along the same route. Another option is to let the player characters detect the skullbiters first, arriving at the edge of the forest near an open field where a young queen has settled down with a limited number of crushers guarding her egg clusters. Perhaps there is a swamp on one side of the field, and a pitch-black lake on the other, so that a circumventing maneuver would slow them down considerably? Crossing the field will likely lead to a tough fight; if they go through the swamp or the lake, it may be time to teach the players an important lesson: in Dark Davokar, attempts to elude the pyre can sometimes plunge you right into a blazing inferno!

ALONG THE RIVER MALGOMOR

Given Symbar's position, the route along the Malgomor may seem like the obvious choice (even if the early-summer flood makes it difficult to row upstream). But though it may be the shortest route, and in some respects the easiest, much of it goes straight through Davokar's darkest areas. In Thistle Hold alone one hears numerous stories about expeditions perishing along the riverbank, their members and pack animals sent floating downstream, badly mauled and sometimes disfigured beyond recognition.

The Arachs

The subjects of the legendary Spider King are on the rise once more, and their advance guards have been spotted outside Davokar's darkest areas. Player characters traveling through the wild and dark parts of the forest risk being attacked by their plunderers, ordered to search the woods for mystical artifacts and kidnap cultural beings whenever the opportunity arises.

They could strike at night, in an attempt to abduct two or three of the expedition's less combat-proficient members. In that case the enemy will sneak right into the camp and drag off their victims while their spider beasts delay the others in melee combat. Different types of spider beasts can be found in both the *Core Rulebook* and the *Monster Codex* – Fray Spider, Hunting Spider, and Tricklesting.

Should the Game Master want to put pressure on the player characters, some truly vital expedition member could be among the kidnapped, but the most interesting moral conflict might arise if the plunderers "only" abducted three carriers: will they try to rescue the kidnapped or continue without them?

A rescue mission should be kept simple. For example, the arachs could be tracked down with a couple of *Vigilant* tests and the right level of *Bushcraft*, which leads the player characters to a small, newly-built pyramid. The Game Master decides how difficult it should be to free the prisoners (the kidnapped expedition members are hardly the only ones), but perhaps it turns out that most of the pyramid's inhabitants, including its princess, have yet to arrive or are out on some mission. In that case, an alternative to combat could be to sneak into the pyramid and its underground levels, to the cells where the kidnapped are waiting to be transformed.

The Refugees

The advance of mankind is affecting all inhabitants of Davokar, and rarely for the better. The liege troll Ulgamour and what remains of her proud people have been forced to abandon their home in the Underworld. She made the mistake of welcoming an expedition sent by Ordo Magica, led by the inquisitive and ambitious Master Marlar and guided by a young troll named Bark, whom Ulgamour herself had sent out into the world for educational purposes. Master Marlar could not stay away from the tabooed pond near their settlement, and now it is he who rules down there, filled with corruption and primal hunger.

The player characters could run into a group of trolls dispatched from Ulgamour's temporary surface settlement, in the hope of finding a new home for their people. The Game Master decides who discovers whom first, or settles the matter with a die roll *[Vigilant←Discreet]*. In any case, the trolls' posture, clothing and equipment differ from what one would expect. These are no raging, naked or semi-naked savages. They move with purpose, tall and proud; their clothes and equipment are superbly crafted (for inspiration, see pages 19, 45, and 122 in the *Advanced Player's Guide*). Initially they are looking for information that could help them in their search, and might very well make peaceful contact with the player characters' expedition.

But trolls can be difficult to understand and easily angered. Moreover, they are annoyed by entirely different things than what humans are used to: many of them are extremely provoked by displays of insecurity, fear or weakness – that kind of behavior must be punished, severely. In a situation like the one these trolls are facing, that principle becomes particularly important.

The Game Master could let a player character be aware of this, if he or she passes a *Cunning* test with *Loremaster* (adept or master). But even if this succeeds, the player characters must behave with dignity. The Game Master decides – if they dither, turn their eyes away, apologize, back away, or show other signs of weakness, there is a significant risk that the leader of the trolls will grab her sledgehammer to show her followers that nothing good ever comes from such behavior.

Table 16: The Route Along the Malgomor

LEG	MODE OF TRANSPORTATION	DAYS	TERRAIN	CHALLENGES
Leg C1	Riding	5	Bright Davokar	1
Leg C2	Riding	4	Wild Davokar	1
Leg C3	Riding	4	Wild Davokar	1
Leg C4	Walking	9	Dark Davokar	2*
Leg C5	Walking	12	Dark Davokar	2

* Counts as Dark Davokar during encounters, but the terrain along the river counts as Wild.

GENERAL EVENTS

Although some of the events described above could also take place along other routes, there is reason to address two more scenes of a more general nature – as they seem reasonable given the theme of the adventure and can lead to interesting or exciting situations for the players characters.



The liege troll Ulgamour's subjects should be treated with caution and respect...

Encounter with Competitor
The forest of Davokar is huge, and the road to Symbar long, but it does not hurt to remind the player characters that there are other groups heading for the same destination. When and how they run into the other hunting parties must be decided by the Game Master, depending on which route they chose and when they decided to head out into the forest, but we would still like to offer a few suggestions.

It could of course involve an outright attack, where one hunting party thinks itself superior in strength and decides to stage an ambush for, or hunt down, the player characters' expedition. The groups most likely to perform such a maneuver would probably be House Kohinoor and the Black Cloaks.

But the encounter with the competitors may also be of a different nature. The player characters can meet a smaller group on its way south to gather essential provisions/equipment or escort someone who is ill or injured. They might also be deserters from another expedition, or badly wounded individuals who were left behind as their companions fled an assault (elves, beasts, or rage trolls). Finally, if the player characters started out before their competitors, perhaps a spy or advance party might catch up to them.

The Warband
The fragmented and virtually leaderless Iron Pact is of course aware that several human expeditions have left Ambria and are on their way to the heart of the forest. Most of the groups dwelling in the woods have lost all hope of reasoning with the humans; the only remaining option is to stop them by force.

The player characters may well get one of the larger, stronger warbands on their tail, but it might be even more interesting for them to face a smaller group of early-summer elves. These will then launch sneak attacks with ranged weapons, focusing on one target at a time, over a period of several days – until the player characters manage to shake their pursuers or lure them into some kind of trap.

Symbar's Surrounding Area

EVEN THE LONGEST and most arduous journey will sooner or later come to an end. For some gaming groups the end may come even before the expedition reaches Symbar, but hopefully the player characters will manage to overcome the challenges in front of them and eventually reach their destination.

This section provides a general description of the overgrown ruined city, but mainly focuses on its surrounding area. After addressing what has happened since the expeditions left Ambria, we present the first impression of Symbar.

The text goes on to describe the area's available resources, possible hideouts, and general hazards, as the events of the third act take place not only in the shadows of Symbar, but also in the surrounding woods.

ARRIVAL

What has happened on the journey depends in part on the player characters' actions prior to departure. All hunting parties have suffered casualties, particularly those who traveled along the river Malgomor, but any collaborations and acts of sabotage should affect the exact number.

In the Factions section, starting on page 143, you will find a subheading titled Members, which shows how many expedition members arrive in Symbar and are still fit for combat. However, in view of the reasoning above, the Game Master is expected to adjust the final number based on what the players and their characters have done that would have a significant impact – for example, if they infected the Black Cloaks' provisions, the number of Experienced Black Cloaks indicated in Table 20 should be cut in half; if they planted a skilled infiltrator in Iasogoi Brigo's expedition, that person could have taken out their guides, thereby delaying their arrival and considerably reducing the number of warriors, pathfinders and carriers. Use a pencil to fill in the Adjusted Number columns of the tables on page 146 and onwards, to keep track of the hunting parties' troops.

Another interesting question is of course when the player characters arrive at the scene. Table 17 (next page) shows in what order and at what intervals the other hunting parties arrive in the area, again with a column left blank where the Game Master can jot down adjustments depending on events that have taken place around respective gaming tables. The adventure's "calendar" starts with the arrival of the Knights of Dead Prios (Day 0); if the player characters beat them to it, they would arrive on Day –1, if not earlier.

Remember, this is merely a suggestion – the groups may choose to cover certain distances in Forced March and thereby arrive earlier than expected, or encounter some hindrance that delays them. As usual, the drama and the gaming experience is more important than individual details.

Table 17: The Hunting Parties' Arrival to Symbar

DAY	ADJUSTED ARRIVAL	HUNTING PARTY
Day –2		The Witches
Day 0		The Knights of Dead Prios
Day 1		House Kohinoor
Day 2		Iasogoi Brigo
Day 2		The Sacred of the Old Blood
Day 5		The Reformists
Day 6		The Black Cloaks

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

No matter what route they chose, the members of the player characters' expedition will want to gain an initial overview of Symbar and its surrounding area when they arrive. The small hillock southeast of the city offers a fairly good view, but the best vantage point is of course at the edge of the escarpment.

The text below describes the view from the upper plateau, due west of the massive sinkhole of the marsh. It can be read as it is or adjusted if the player characters should choose some other lookout; details can be deleted or added depending on when the characters arrive and what has happened on the way. What matters is that they quickly get a sense of the area – particularly the autumn-colored, overgrown Symbar and the army encamped to the east.

The dawn creeps slowly across the black ridges of the Ravens.

The sky turns pale, extinguishing the stars one by one. The morning breeze comes to life and brings the sound of rustling early-summer leaves. But the view gradually emerging before your eyes is not dominated by the colors of summer. For autumn has come to Symbar.

You all take an instinctive step back as the light reveals that the precipice right in front of your toes must be at least fifty meters high. But your eyes are not drawn to the cliff edge, nor to the depths below – they are fixed on the wondrous landscape that begins a couple of kilometers to the north.

A vast area, probably stretching ten kilometers from east to west and even more to the north where a lake begins, reflective and still, with water as black as tar. Massive roots wrestle each other like love-struck world serpents, but motionless, innumerable and impossibly thick. They cover the entire area, often bare, but occasionally dressed in delicate greenery or tangled shrubs. They are embracing their mothers, which look a lot like oak trees, only bigger than any oak you have ever seen, most of them over a hundred meters tall; they are wrapped around what you realize must be the tops of hundreds of razed buildings – ruins from what was once the capital of Symbar's empire. And though the surrounding forest is clad in summer green, the vegetation of Symbar burns in red and yellow.

For a few heartbeats, the big picture is all there is, but soon details start to emerge. The broken tower, seemingly competing with the giant trees to see who can rise the highest above the rootlands. The strange formation that mostly resembles the masts and after-castle of an overgrown ship. And in the far northeast, an entire cliff crowned by what may be a ruined castle or palace. And smoke. Beyond the cliff, on the border between summer and autumn, ten or so thin columns of smoke are dancing in the morning breeze.

Your gaze wanders south, toward the marsh and the huge sinkhole at its center, and the forest beyond, with hillocks like rocky islands in a sea of leaves. You see the spring river crashing down from the mountains, then the pond and the visibly corrupted vegetation stretching out to the south – twisted, dark and half-dead.

The spell is broken by a chilling screech, echoing with hunger and rage and loneliness. It comes from below, from the bottom of the precipice, not far from the soon to be sun-kissed rock face. You lean forward, peering over the edge. There, too, nature is dead, blackened, grotesque. Crooked trees are growing along the ground or bending like reeds over each other; what few leaves they have are rarely green, but reddish-brown or dark shades of purple. It is unclear if it is the source of the screech, but there is something moving down there, something big, something furious, something crushing the diseased vegetation in its path.

Symbar, the Mother of Darkness, has waited for centuries. And now you are here.

THE HUNTING PARTIES' CAMPS

On page 170–171 there is a map of Symbar and its surrounding area which, among other things, shows where the various factions will establish their camps – that is, the place they will use as a base of operations, where they keep their equipment and where they go to rest between tours. These places are described in more detail in the Factions section, as the player characters may have reason to visit their competitors, to talk or engage in more aggressive activities.

Once again, the player characters' actions may necessitate certain adjustments. If they arrive early, they might claim one of these places for themselves, which will likely cause conflicts or open up an opportunity for cooperation. The same applies if the characters arrive later than expected and take a liking to a spot that is already occupied by someone else.

RESOURCES

Access to water, prey animals, edible plants and medicinal herbs are of course vital for hunting parties hoping to survive in the area. Local water sources include the river and the lake; there are several smaller streams flowing over the escarpment, and both creeks and smaller ponds can be found in the woods. But one must always beware of corruption and other diseases. The [] symbols on the map indicate where one can always find fresh water; otherwise two *Vigilant* tests, with *Witchsight* and *Medicus* respectively, are rolled when the characters are drinking or filling their waterskins. On failure they must roll on Table 18.

The symbols for prey [] and edible plants [] are general in nature and must be specified by the Game Master. The former could be rich fishing grounds, a large herd of wild boar, or a place where there are bird nests to raid for meat and eggs; examples of the latter may include fields of berry bushes, wild crops, or a cave whose walls and ceiling are covered in mushrooms. In any case, these are places where the player characters may encounter members of other factions. Perhaps the Sovereign's Oath or one of the larger hunting parties dispatches a smaller team to lay claim to the resource in question?

Last but not least, the symbol [] shows where alchemists can find ingredients for various elixirs. As the game of *Symbaroum* has no explicit system for gathering ingredients, aside from the *Alchemy* ability, we suggest that the player characters can find exactly the medicinal herbs they need near these symbols. But the Game Master can also decide in advance which ingredients are available at which symbol, so that the characters must go to a certain place to concoct new herbal cures and the like.

HIDEOUTS

There is a good chance that the player characters or some of their competitors will end up in a situation where they are hunted by a superior foe and need to find a place to lay low. Locations marked with [] show where there are good places to hide. It could be a natural cave, a rock crevice, an abandoned lair, or an overgrown islet.

People moving through the landscape can identify these potential hideouts by passing a *Vigilant* test with *Bushcraft* (I). When used, they can be arranged to become even more difficult to spot – if the player characters are hiding in one of these places, the most discreet of them makes a test against *[Discreet←Vigilant]* to avoid detection. If the player characters are the ones looking for someone, the formula is *[Vigilant←Discreet]*, where the value of the most discreet prey is used as a modification.

DANGERS IN THE AREA

As if the other hunting parties were not enough, there are plenty of other threats to worry about in the Symbar area, in the form of creatures and treacherous nature. The creatures may be roaming monsters, horrors that because of the weakened protection have escaped the ruined city, or hibernating blight beasts the player characters (and others) happen to awaken.

Below are a number of suggestions for the Game Master to choose from, in order to keep the player characters on their toes or create interesting encounters between the characters and members of other hunting parties.

The Dragouls

The dead are rising in Symbaroum, and their numbers increase as the fettering power grows weaker and weaker. The player characters could get in the way of a group of PC×2 Dragouls (*Core Rulebook*, page 230) led by the female crypt lord Siriad Ador-An (*Monster Codex*, page 145) who are on their way south or east from the depths of the ruined city – most of them wearing rags of former uniforms. Perhaps long ago they belonged to the same platoon, fighting in Symbar's defense?

Since the column makes no attempt to hide its advance, the player characters should get a chance to notice the danger in time to hide *[Vigilant +1]*, but probably not get so far that Siriad and her followers will not have a chance of detecting them. The least discreet player character

Table 18: Contaminated Water

1D10	CONTAMINATION	EFFECT
1	Slightly poisoned	Poison damage 2 for 2 turns
2	Slightly infected	Risk of contracting a Weak disease
3	Slightly corrupted	Each sip inflicts 1D4 temporary corruption
4	Poisoned	Poison damage 3 for 3 turns
5	Infected	Risk of contracting a Moderate disease
6	Corrupted	Each sip inflicts 1D6 temporary corruption
7	Severely poisoned	Poison damage 4 for 4 turns
8	Severely infected	Risk of contracting a Strong disease
9	Severely corrupted	Each sip inflicts 1D8 temporary corruption
10	Roll twice on the table	–

makes a *[Discreet –1]* test, which on failure makes the undead cry out, halt and turn toward them. As the crypt lord's *Gravely Cold* afflicts the player characters, the Dragouls start surrounding them. If a player character becomes paralyzed, it will be difficult for them to escape.

Here the characters must choose whether to fight or negotiate. Siriad and company are undead, not some crazed abominations, so a person with *Loremaster* (master) can temporarily stop them from attacking without need for success tests. With a successful *Cunning* it is also possible to negotiate with the former commander of Symbar's guard regiment: she will spare the player characters' lives if they agree to tell her about the world and point her towards civilization.

Living Thorns

While in camp or walking through the woods, the player characters suddenly hear a muffled scream. It seems to be coming from a human; an expression of pain or terror. Maybe both.

Two scouts or provisioners from another faction (the Game Master decides which one) have walked straight into a group of Living Thorns (page 62 in the *Symbaroum Monster Codex*). Down south they are rarely seen in groups, but the living conditions of Dark Davokar leave them no choice but to work together and share their prey.

We suggest that there be PC+2 thorn beasts. The player characters must decide whether to watch as one of their competitors loses men, to be chivalrous and help them, or take the opportunity to force an agreement: they will help, but only if those in need swear to become infiltrators within their own expedition. In the latter case, the individuals in question can be persuaded to perform one (1) act of sabotage or espionage each before breaking down and confessing to their expedition leader.

Abominations

The fact that the fettering powers of the Iron Pact are losing strength is also affecting the surrounding area. At some point when the player characters are moving through the forest, the person leading the way suddenly feels the ground shake under his/her feet: a moment later it quakes, and then it heaves as if something is about to break free. The player characters manage to back away in time, and a successful *Vigilant* test reveals similar movements in the ground in other places around them

Out of the ground bursts an abomination in the shape of a grotesque wild boar (stats as Blight-Born Aboar, page 228 in the *Core Rulebook*). It rushes straight at the nearest living creature, and will soon be joined by the rest of its flock: they are then equal in number to the player characters.

Let the fight go on a few turns before help arrives, perhaps in the form of three Enforcers from the Knights of Dead Prios (see page 155). These will attack one abomination each, and if the player characters keep fighting the battle will soon be won. But the question is what happens next. Perhaps the groups are already hostile toward each other, which would make the Punishers target them once the blight-swine are dead. Alternatively, the knights could question the player characters about their goals, in which case they must choose their words carefully. Anything that might be interpreted as expressions of support for Dead Prios' murderers (the Iron Pact, the Witches and/or the Reformists) will lead to violence – immediately if the Punishers think they have the slightest chance of winning, or later with reinforcements.

The Nightmare

A nightmare (*Monster Codex*, page 78) has come to undead life in Symbar and gone out in search of a host to possess. It could target one of the player characters, but it might be more interesting if some other member of their expedition is afflicted – a guide, a sellsword, or maybe one of the carriers.

This particular nightmare has an almost insatiable appetite; one that becomes more twisted with every passing night. On the first night, someone notices that two whole loafs of waybread (or similar) are missing; questioning the expedition members reveals very little, except that one person (the possessed) has a terrible stomachache. The next night some smoked, dried or recently cooked meat disappears; then someone finds the fleshless bones of an animal that was slaughtered and strung up the night before. And finally, the nightmare starts luring expedition members out into the woods, to maim and devour them.

At whatever point in this downward spiral of gluttony the player characters manage to identify the culprit, they must first figure out what has happened, then try to solve the problem. It will be particularly exciting if the host is an indispensable member of the group, and the player characters lack the ability to banish the spirit possessing him/her. The Black Cloaks or the Reformists would certainly be able to help, but not for free...

ACT 3:

Symbar

THIS THIRD ACT is all about Symbar – the ruined city hidden under the rolling, withering rootlands. Just as the rumors foretell, this is the richest treasure ground in all of Davokar; just as the witches and elves have warned, it is also the single most dangerous part of the forest, particularly if the fetters bound over its darkness are allowed to fade away. What the player characters get up to, and what goals they set for themselves, are entirely up to their players; Symbar is a completely open adventure landscape, consisting of a number of specific places, factions and conflicts which will probably be handled very differently by different gaming groups.

THE ACT OPENS with the Factions section, which provides a detailed description of all the groups operating in the ruined city and its surroundings. You may want to mark this particular section with one of the book's ribbon markers, as it also contains stats for the factions' leaders and agents.

After the factions are described, there is an overview that includes guidelines for gaming groups who are primarily focused on finding treasure, followed by a presentation of four specific adventure locations: the Imperial Palace, the Crown Ship, the Mother Tree and Castle Thorn, home of the Order of Dakothnic and the current location of what was once the Throne of Thorns, now a bottomless well of corrupting energies. These are supplemented by a section detailing yet another handful of places and events, just as exciting as the others, full of promise and danger – some marked on the map, others that can be placed wherever the Game Master sees fit.

Once the adventure locations have been described you come to the final chapter titled Aftermath, which addresses what might happen before the next episode of the chronicle comes out, when it is time for the player characters to visit The Lost Land: Alberetor. Finally, the book concludes with a set of handouts and player maps.

Factions

MUCH HAS HAPPENED since the hunting parties described in the adventure's second act set off for Symbar. The text below presents information the Game Master should bear in mind when deciding what the hunting parties and other groups already present will try to do, their stance on forming alliances and what they are prepared to sacrifice in order to achieve such collaborations. Finally, there is information about the factions' encampments, as the player characters will likely be visiting them at some point – willingly or otherwise.

Note that the tables detailing the number of members of respective groups contain the abbreviation EM instead of PC, as in "EM number of

Negotiations and Compromises

Whether the player characters initiate a negotiation or are contacted by someone else, the discussions will usually result in favors being exchanged – "we will help you to achieve goal X if you help us to achieve goal Y." In these situations, the Game Master is referred to the Objectives subheading, where the three main objectives of each expedition are laid out.

However, other forms of compensation can also be acceptable. Depending on the situation, examples may include future shares in an expedition, a small favor of a more personal nature or direct payment in the form of supplies, elixirs or a valuable artifact. The rule of thumb should be that everyone in Symbar knows their worth and will not give anything away without something in return.

Experienced Templar." This abbreviation stands for Expedition Members and refers to the number of able fighters that are part of the player characters' expedition – that is, individuals who can contribute in combat situations. We suggest that possible allies from other factions should not count as EM, but only the player characters themselves and their hired companions.

HOUSE KOHINOOR

Ralgai Melion and company have taken a dangerous route to their destination, following the river Malgomor, often through the darkest parts of the forest. Moreover, many of the other factions want to see them fail, and consequently they have been subjected to sabotage as well as infiltration, orchestrated by the Black Cloaks, the Sovereign's Oath and the Sacred of the Old Blood. The Game Master decides exactly what blood-curdling events have befallen the members of the expedition (e.g. encounters with Iron Pact warbands, primal blight beasts, and poisoned supplies). The important thing to note is that their numbers have been heavily reduced; they still have an advantage over the other hunting parties, but are by no means dominant.

Members

Ralgai Melion has the honor of leading the Queen's expedition, and at his side is the experienced ranger Colonel Marvello, who distinguished himself during a previous mission in Davokar. They have lost half their men on the way, but are still a force to be reckoned with, not least because the two leaders were allowed to hand pick both soldiers and specialists for the mission.

Ralgai Melion

"Ambria is the sun of this world; as long as the realm stands, night shall not fall."

The almost forty-year-old Ralgai is a true patriot with absolute belief in the righteousness of Queen Korinthia's enterprise. While his older brother Count Arnon and little sister Aelia are busy filling the bulging coffers of their house, Ralgai has dedicated his life to assisting the Queen in building The Promised Land. He acknowledges that there is a long list of domestic political problems, even crises, at the moment, but he is certain that all will be dealt with once the goal of a stronger Ambria, free from the threat of external foes, has been achieved.

This project has already been very costly in terms of lives and suffering, and it will cost even more before the battle is won. As far as Ralgai is concerned, other expeditions and their members are merely pieces in a game of Prios' Sun – they can be deceived, killed or afflicted in other ways, if that is what it takes to secure the future supremacy of the Ambrian realm.



Manner	Kind but firm
Race	Human (Ambrian)
Resistance	Strong
Traits	Privileged
Accurate 9 (+1), **Cunning** 15 (–5), **Discreet** 10 (0), **Persuasive** 18 (–8), **Quick** 7 (+3), **Resolute** 10 (0), **Strong** 5 (+5), **Vigilant** 11 (–1)	
Abilities	*Exceptionally Cunning* (master), *Exceptionally Persuasive* (master), *Leader* (master), *Loremaster* (adept), Man-At-Arms (adept), *Quick Draw* (novice), *Steadfast* (master), *Tactician* (master), *Twin Attack* (master)

Boons/ Burdens	*Con Artist* (III), *Hideouts*, *Manipulator* (III), *Telltale* (III)
Weapons, Cunning	2 Fencing swords 6/5 (balanced, deep impact, precise)
Armor	Studded leather 4 (reinforced, flexible)
Defense	–7
Toughness	10 **Pain Threshold** 3
Equipment	Two mastercrafted fencing swords, 3 doses each of Drone Dew, Elixir of Life, and Moderate Purple Sap, Interrogation tools (+1 to *Persuasive* during interrogations)
Shadow	Dark gold, like a golden mirror in the shade (corruption: 0)
Tactics: Ralgai is a skilled fencer, but usually stays out of the battle; he is a person of vital importance, and his first responsibility is to stay alive. Should he still be drawn into combat, his main focus is to defend himself.	

Colonel Marvello

"I act in the name of the Queen."

The career of fifty-year-old Marvello has skyrocketed – from Captain of Thistle Hold's Town Watch, via a post as Captain in the Queen's Rangers, to the rank of Colonel he has now earned. His recipe for success has been unwavering loyalty combined with brutal efficiency and competence.

If the player characters have met him before, the Game Master must adjust their relationship based on what happened in the past (in *Wrath of the Warden* or *The Witch Hammer*). Should Marvello owe them a favor, he may be completely open with information (for example about his orders to not let anyone else leave Symbar alive), but under no circumstance will he actively work against the Queen's agenda.



Manner	Grumpy, hot-tempered
Race	Human (Ambrian)
Resistance	Strong
Traits	Contacts (the Ambrian army)
Accurate 17 (–7), **Cunning** 7 (+3), **Discreet** 9 (+1), **Persuasive** 11 (–1), **Quick** 13 (–3), **Resolute** 10 (0), **Strong** 10 (0), **Vigilant** 5 (+5)	
Abilities	*Exceptionally Accurate* (adept), *Iron Fist* (master), Man-At-Arms (master), *Marksman* (master), *Recovery* (master), *Steadfast* (adept), *Twin Attack* (master)
Boons/ Burdens	*Commanding Voice* (III)
Weapons, Accurate	2 fencing swords 8/7 (deep impact, precise), Long bow 5 (precise)
Armor	Laminated armor 5 (reinforced)
Defense	–4
Toughness	10 **Pain Threshold** 5
Equipment	Two mastercrafted fencing swords, 2 doses of Moderate antidote, 4 Herbal Cures, 1 dose Elixir of Life, 2 doses of Weak Purple Sap, 5 Flame Arrows, 5 Whistlers
Shadow	Matte gray, like an unpolished iron ingot (corruption: 0)
Tactics: Marvello stays back whenever possible, assisting his companions with well-aimed arrows. If he deems it necessary, he does not shy away from joining the melee himself, armed with his two fencing swords and all the experience he gained during The Great War.	

Objectives

Ralgai's objectives are clear, dictated by Queen Korinthia and her council. Any exploration and excavation will have to wait: the purpose of the expedition is simply to confirm Symbar's position and stop the enemy (everyone else) from doing the same.

Establish dominion over Symbar: Although Ralgai and his companions are not expected to cleanse the city of darkness and monsters, they have orders to eliminate any cultural beings arriving, or already present, in the area. When Korinthia arrives, there must be no humans, elves or others seeking to conquer the ruined city for themselves.

Magically Long Strides

As the adventure is written, not expedition member with the ritual Seven-league Stride survives the journey to Symbar. If someone had, this would radically alter the situation for all who are in or near the ruin city. Should the Game Master want it to be possible for the player characters and/or their competitors/ allies to travel back and forth between Symbar and civilization it is of course simple enough to add those rituals to the arsenal of one or more non-player characters.

Table 19: House Kohinoor's Troops

TYPE	NUMBERS	STATS	ADJUSTED NUMBERS	REFERENCE
Junior officers	2	Pansar		Monster Codex, p. 135
Experienced Rangers	EM×2	Ranger Captain		Core Rulebook, p. 212
Master Wizard	1	Master of the Order		Monster Codex, p. 126
Wizard	3	Adept of the Order (one of each school; the Mentalist has *Levitate* instead of *Mind Throw*)		Monster Codex, p. 125
Ritualist	1	Ritual Master		Monster Codex, p. 128
Master Spy	1	Queen's Spy, *Bushcraft* instead of *Privileged*		Monster Codex, p. 136
Sapper	EM	Sapper		Monster Codex, p. 136

Stop others from returning: None who have laid eyes on Symbar can be allowed to leave the area alive. That goes for their own companions as well, should there be any reason to suspect them of betraying "the Ambrian realm and its people" (meaning House Kohinoor).

Locate the Throne of Thorns: If possible, they are also to find and secure the supposed location of the Throne of Thorns. This is not an explicit demand, but for Ralgai it is a matter of honor – of course he should be the one to eventually escort Korinthia to the high seat, and the way there must obviously be safe and accessible when the time comes!

Relations
Ralgai is well aware that his expedition has few friends in Symbar. Iasogoi Brigo and the nobles who make up Agramai Kalfas' expedition (and possibly the player characters) are initially the only ones he considers neutral. The rest want to see him fail, or even die.

Willingness to Compromise
Ralgai has no reason to compromise, but every reason to pretend that he does. In fact, even if he plays hard to get, he will agree to almost anything if it helps him destroy the Sovereign's Oath, the Black Cloaks and the Knights of Dead Prios. In the end, he will turn his back on any "ally" and see to it that no one returns to Ambria alive.

Encampment
House Kohinoor will lay claim to the ruins of Ansyor Village, on the upper plateau. It is a vast area with eerily meager vegetation and fifty or so ruins in various degrees of collapse. Once the site has been cleared, the old village well can provide safe drinking water, while edible berries, roots, and lichens grow in the area. There are also rich hunting and fishing grounds both to the south and west.

THE BLACK CLOAKS

Sister Losadra (or Engala if a name change is required) has managed to avoid any catstrophic mishaps on the way to Symbar, partly by taking the longer route via Eulia's Fire Mountain, but also thanks to the peace offering Brother Eumenos sent her to deliver to the Sovereign's Oath – a portfolio of carefully selected secrets regarding Queen Korinthia and her palace. Nevertheless, she has lost many of her men, mostly to the corrupting or otherwise treacherous nature between the volcano and their destination. And even before then, they accidentally wandered into the territory of the liege troll Gunagan, which cost a handful of rangers their lives before an agreement of safe passage could be reached.

Members
Aside from Losadra and the theurg Arelma, the leaders mostly rely on strength of arms, in the form of Black Cloaks and Templars who left the order rather than pledge their allegiance to Dead Prios. They are accompanied by a group of fanatical warriors, flagellants with a burning love for their dying god who demanded to join the expedition and *"fight for the Sun where the world is at its darkest."* These fanatics have already suffered heavy casualties, with only a handful of survivors.

Sister Losadra

"Prios dictates my faith, and it condemns you."

Losadra has devoted her life to hunting the Lawgiver's enemies. In the final stages of The Great War, she assisted in the interrogation of suspected collaborators and learned all about The Eternal

Might Makes Right

If Ansyor has already been claimed by another faction, Ralgai will first send someone to notify these people that they have two hours to vacate the ruins. If it is a smaller group (such as the player characters) there may be an opportunity for an alliance: they can stay in the outskirts of Ansyor if they help defend the area, gather provisions and participate in House Kohinoor's excursions to Symbar. Should it be a large, hostile group, Ralgai will seek an ally who is given the same offer as above, provided that they help him conquer the ruins.



Night – how it can hide within anyone, even those who do not know their own darkness; how it can always be exposed, brought to light, and if not banished then at least burned from the flesh.

Now, at forty years of age, despite her modest background, she has emerged as the undisputed leader of the Whip of Prios. No one has exposed more heretics or darkness-worshipping cults than she has. Her recipe for success is simple: to never let oneself be fooled by the deceptions of The Eternal Night; to trust in one's faith, regardless of desperate appeals, tears and pleas of innocence! And should one's faith be in error, it is a price worth paying – better an innocent sent to Prios than a deceitful heretic living under His gaze.

Manner	Contemptuous, self-righteous		
Race	Human (Ambrian)		
Resistance	Strong		
Traits	Contacts (Sun Church)		
Discreet 7 (+3), **Quick** 13 (–3), **Cunning** 11 (–1), **Strong** 9 (+1), **Accurate** 10 (0), **Vigilant** 10 (0), **Resolute** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 16 (–6)			
Abilities	*Acrobatics* (master), *Dominate* (master), *Exceptionally Persuasive* (novice), *Flailer* (master), *Loremaster* (master), *Ritualist* (adept: *Holy Smoke, Judging Bonds, Oracle*), *Theurgy* (novice), *Whip Fighter** (master)		
Weapons, Persuasive	Flail 4 (jointed, ensnaring), Long whip 3 (jointed, ensnaring, blunt)		
Armor	Studded leather 3 (reinforced)		
Defense	–3		
Toughness	10	**Pain Threshold**	5
Equipment	Sun symbol, the Sun of Steel (see page 103), copy of The Lightbringer, Interrogation Tools (+1 to *Persuasive* during interrogations), vial containing 6 drops of Water of the Dusk, pipe and tobacco, 13 thaler and 10 shillings		
Shadow	Glaring white like annealed steel (corruption: 0)		

Tactics: Losadra fights expertly with a whip in one hand and a flail in the other. She uses the whip to pull the target toward her for an automatic hit which deals +3 damage. When fighting multiple enemies in melee combat, she swings the flail at everyone within range. She will only use her subduing ability in situations where she is outnumbered and feels a need to level the playing field.

*See the *Symbaroum Monster Codex*, page 123

Arelma

"The law is deadly serious, and so are your crimes against Prios!"

Arelma has been loyal to the Black Cloaks ever since her parents died on the journey across the Titans and she was taken in by the monks who had started occupying the Twilight Monastery. Twenty years have passed since then, and the talent for *Theurgy* she displayed early on has now been fully developed, as has her fanatical love for Prios. Both of these factors explain why she was asked to join the Whip of Prios, charged with tracking down and punishing heretics.

Manner	Proud, judgmental
Race	Human (Ambrian)
Resistance	Strong



Traits	Contacts (Sun Church)
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 9 (+1), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 11 (–1), **Quick** 7 (+3), **Resolute** 15 (–5), **Strong** 13 (–3), **Vigilant** 10 (0)	
Abilities	*Anathema* (master), *Blessed Shield* (master), *Holy Aura* (adept), *Loremaster* (adept), *Medicus* (master), *Prios' Burning Glass* (master), *Ritualist* (master: *Command Confession, Heretic's Trail, Holy Smoke/Piercing Gaze, Judging Bonds, Sanctifying Rite, Purging Fire*), *Steadfast* (adept), *Theurgy* (master), *Witchsight* (adept)
Weapon, Accurate	Quarterstaff 3 (long, blunt)
Armor	Blessed robe 2 (flexible)
Defense	+3
Toughness	13 **Pain Threshold** 7
Equipment	Sun mask (+1 to effect die for holy and banishing powers), copy of The Lightbringer, 3 Herbal Cures
Shadow	Fiery, like red gold under a blazing sun (corruption: 0)

Tactics: After surrounding herself and two allies with a *Blessed Shield*, Arelma unleashes the energy of Prios upon the enemy. If she ever lets the burning light go out, it is to break the enemy's ongoing powers (*Anathema*).

Objectives
Sister Losadra is instructed to focus on undermining the Queen's expedition, preferably wiping it out completely. But once in place, she will of course take her own initiatives, as she views Prios as her true commander and the struggle against heretics and the armies of darkness as her principal task.

Destroying House Kohinoor's expedition: One of Losadra's main priorities is to put together an alliance to attack Ralgai Melion and his men. She limits herself to targeted sabotage operations until her side outnumbers the enemy by at least 50%.

Annihilating the Arch Heretic Sarvola: Once it is clear that the Reformists are present and that Sarvola himself is part of the expedition, he will definitely become a high priority target, even more so than the Queen's expedition.

Combating evil: The darkness of Symbar is on the rise – that much is clear. If Losadra can be convinced that this is due to the diminishing power of the Iron Pact's mystical fetters, she might be willing to do something about it.

Relations
Apart from secret sympathizers and infiltrators in other branches of the Sun Church, the Black Cloaks stand alone in their struggle to save the supposedly dying Lawgiver. There is of course common ground between them and many others – not least regarding the battle against The Eternal Night, which is also being fought by the Iron Pact, the Witches, the Reformists, the Knights of Dead Prios and House Kohinoor. But at the same time, they have branded all these groups as heretics responsible for their god's weakened existence.

Willingness to Compromise
Sister Losadra/Engala is not known to compromise, and under no circumstances will she enter into agreements with enemies of the Lawgiver or blight-stricken individuals. But once in Symbar, she realizes that temporary agreements are necessary for the mission to succeed. In the struggle against House Kohinoor, the Reformists and the hordes of darkness, she is willing to consider such an alliance with almost anyone.

For example, in exchange for help to destroy Ralgai's expedition or slaying Sarvola, she is prepared to make her own troops available for an excursion into Symbar, as long as she does not deem its purpose heretical or contributing to the weakening of Prios. Once these goals have been met, she may also agree to help without receiving anything in return, if the objective is in line with Prios' laws.

Encampment
The Black Cloaks will set up camp on the lonely cliff to the southeast, which has everything one

Table 20: The Black Cloaks' Troops

TYPE	NUMBERS	STATS	ADJUSTED NUMBERS	REFERENCE
Black Cloaks	EM+5	Experienced Black Cloak		Monster Codex, p. 122
Templars	EM	Experienced Templar		Monster Codex, p. 122
Fanatics	5	Flagellant		Monster Codex, p. 123

could ask for in these parts. There are crevices leading into natural caves and tunnels, where freshwater gathers in small ponds and edible mushrooms and algae can be harvested – it is not enough to feed them all, but still a substantial addition to the provisions they brought with them and the food gained by hunting and fishing in the local area.

IASOGOI BRIGO

Whether Iasogoi's strategy to follow in House Kohinoor's wake was wise or foolish is impossible to say. They have suffered several predator attacks on their journey, possibly because the larger force was attracting beasts to the river – monstrous creatures that stayed near the water and saw their chance when the smaller expedition came wandering by. For whatever reason, the legendary fortune hunter arrives in Symbar with fewer people than he had anticipated. Iasogoi and his longtime partner Orlandor are both alive, as is the witch Eryala, but he will need alliances to get anything done in Symbar, and to survive the journey home.

Members

As stated, Iasogoi and his dear friend Orlandor loses many of their hired companions (Warriors, Rangers and Mystics) on the journey through the forest, along with the extra guide they hired as backup. Most of the carriers and pack animals survive, and the same is true for young Rosela of House Kohinoor.

Iasogoi Brigo

"Courage and competence will take you far, but without luck you are lost."

The recent turmoil has left House Brigo in freefall. Iasogoi's father, Count Edogai, is dead, his uncle imprisoned, his brother missing, and with his grandmother Alevia back in Alberetor, there is no one left to save the family. None but Iasogoi. But he does not want to, not until the Queen has passed judgment on the House and he himself has restored at least a fraction of his family's honor.

Unusually humble and open-minded for a noble, the almost 40-year-old treasure hunter/legend is determined to return from Symbar with a new fortune. He would like to contribute to House Kohinoor's success as well, but will approach them with great caution – well-aware that the Queen would not want another rival on the domestic stage...



Manner	Speaks slowly
Race	Human (Ambrian)
Resistance	Challenging
Traits	Privileged
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 13 (–3), **Discreet** 10 (0), **Persuasive** 7 (+3), **Quick** 5 (+5), **Resolute** 11 (–1), **Strong** 9 (+1), **Vigilant** 15 (–5)	
Abilities	*Beast Lore* (adept: Beasts), *Hunter's Instinct* (adept), *Loremaster* (master), *Marksman* (master), *Rapid Fire* (adept), *Ritualist* (adept: *Clairvoyance*, *Sanctum*, *Tale of Ashes*), *Sixth Sense* (adept)
Boons/ Burdens	*Cartographer* (III), *Enduring March*, *Musician* (I)
Weapons, Vigilant	Longbow 5 (precise), +2 with *Hunter's Instinct*, +2 against Beasts, ignores *Armor* or two arrows per turn
Armor	Lacquered Silk Cuirass 4 (reinforced, flexible)
Defense	–4

The Spiritualist Herangoi

If the Game Master wants to include Elmendra's former colleague Herangoi in the adventure, he could have stats as a Master of the Order (page 126 in the *Symbaroum Monster Codex*), but with *Ritualist* (master) and the additions *Dimension Walk* and *Necromancy*, as well as corruption: 3. If the greedy spiritualist is not wanted, he will simply have died on the way to Symbar.

Rosela Kohinoor

Whether to ignore or make use of the Queen's young sibling is totally up to the Game Master. Should you feel that her precense only complicates things, you can let her die or go missing before reaching Symbar. If you, on the other hand, want to add a bit of drama to your game you can have her be kidnapped by some other faction, or possibly have her vanish and later turn up alongside Ralgai Melion or Agramai Kalfas – when her service as a spy is no longer needed.

Toughness	10	**Pain Threshold**	5
Equipment	2 doses each of Strong Antidote, Strong Purple Sap, and Herbal Cure; 1 dose each of Spirit Friend, Smoke Bomb, Protective Oil and Holy Water; 5 each of the specialized arrows Hammerhead, Rope Cutter, Whistler and Grappling Hook.		
Shadow	Bright yellow with tinges of lilac, like purple rain in brilliant sunshine (corruption: 3)		

Tactics: Iasogoi stays back, preferably behind Orlandor. He focuses on enemies who seem to be coming toward him and tries to kill them or at least hamper their movement.

Orlandor

"Ask Iasogoi, he's in charge."

Like many other changelings, Orlandor became an explorer to learn more about the world he considers his heritage. That he joined Iasogoi's expedition to Odaban was an accident that turned out to be a happy one – one of the intended guides fell ill and recommended him as the replacement. They have worked together ever since, even though Orlandor has had to stay in the background while his partner frequents the corridors of power.

The Origin of Changelings

The ritual used to create changelings was developed by the Theourgs of ancient Symbaroum, also called Morphantics. It is a process teeming with corruption, and entails grave violations against the laws of Wyrtha. Nonetheless, the elves of the Iron Pact have reluctantly embraced it, thinking that the end justifies the means.

Deep within the Halls of a Thousand Tears sit seventeen winter elves who would have been thoroughly corrupted long ago, had it not been for the protective runes covering their bodies, and the hymns being chanted around them. These elves are the ones who deformed fairies into Siraphs, known to humans as Changelings, and they have the power to control and influence their children – see what they see, hear what they hear, even speak through their throats. In this way, the elves have kept an eye on the humans since long before the clans were formed. (Read more about Changelings on page 60 in *Karvosti – The Witch Hammer*, under the *Create Siraph* heading.)

In the adventure *Mother of Darkness*, Prince Eneáno will order one of the aforementioned winter elves to use the Siraphs present in Symbar to discover what is going on and who is there. It could be a player character or a non-player character. For more suggestions, see the text box titled The Prince and the Siraphs on page 223.

The two of them would do anything for one another, but there is an element of reluctance in Orlandor's actions. The thought of his noble friend assuming his father's mantle as Count of Brigo is not entirely pleasant. Perhaps he would even go behind Iasogoi's back to preserve the free life they have together.



Manner	Quietly confident		
Race	Changeling		
Resistance	Strong		
Traits	*Long-lived, Shapeshifter* (III)		
Accurate 15 (–5), **Cunning** 7 (+3), **Discreet** 10 (0), **Persuasive** 5 (+5), **Quick** 11 (–1), **Resolute** 9 (+1), **Strong** 10 (0), **Vigilant** 16 (–6)			
Abilities	*Acrobatics* (master), *Bodyguard* (adept), *Exceptionally Discreet* (adept), *Exceptionally Vigilant* (master), Lightning Reflexes (master), *Medicus* (novice), *Polearm Mastery* (master)		
Boons/ Burdens	None		
Weapons, Accurate	Pike 5 (long, precise)		
Armor	Lacquered Silk Cuirass 4 (reinforced, flexible)		
Defense	0		
Toughness	10	**Pain Threshold**	5
Equipment	10 Herbal Cures, 2 doses of Moderate Antidote		
Shadow	Lustrous green, like jade (corruption: 0)		

Tactics: Orlandor mainly concentrates on keeping the enemy at bay and protecting Iasogoi, relying on the latter's arrows for damage output. Against multiple enemies he uses his acrobatic ability to trick them into attacking each other, as well as to retreat and make use of his long weapon.

Table 21: Iasogoi Brigo's Troops

TYPE	NUMBERS	STATS	ADJUSTED NUMBERS	REFERENCE
Warriors	EM	Guard Warrior		Core Rulebook, p. 216
Rangers	EM	Late-summer Elf		Core Rulebook, p. 205
Mystics	3	Adept of the Order		Monster Codex, p. 125
Witches	1	Village Witch (*Nature's Lullaby* instead of *Quick Growth*)		Monster Codex, p. 131

Objectives
Iasogoi is a fortune hunter with a fortune hunter's goals, but this time not everything is about bringing back as much treasure as possible – the most important thing is to return, and to do so with an item or two worthy of his status as Ambria's foremost treasure hunter!

Finding the Throne of Thorns: Iasogoi's top priority is to find the Throne of Thorns and haul it back to Ambria. Whether he will then try to mount it himself or offer it to someone else is a question for another time.

Gathering artifacts: Curiosities and knowledge are all very good, but nothing resonates louder after a successful return than powerful artifacts. Once in Symbar, Iasogoi will want to visit places where he thinks such items may be found.

Surviving: While no exact time limit has been set, Iasogoi will not remain in Symbar longer than he deems necessary, and he will constantly be weighing risk against potential reward. After getting his hands on a bunch of powerful artifacts, he may decide to leave Symbar, especially if the path to the Throne of Thorns seems fraught with danger.

Relations
Iasogoi has no qualms about forming temporary alliances. The most obvious candidate would of course be Ralgai Melion, but at the same time Iasogoi fears that he would be powerless in such a partnership. No, he would rather join forces with expeditions which he considers independent of Ambria's factions – the "fortune hunters" of the Sacred of the Old Blood and (possibly) the player characters.

Willingness to Compromise
In the case of alliances, Iasogoi will call first dibs on any treasures and artifacts found, but he is prepared to compromise in terms of value – as long as he gets the first pick, his partner may keep items worth half (or even two thirds) of the total value. And he is always weighing risk against reward.

Encampment
Iasogoi's team encamps on the upper plateau, right next to the precipice. They clear the trees to build a one-meter-high wall of horizontal logs, resting between thinner stakes beaten into the ground – not the sturdiest of constructions, but enough for predators to hesitate. They also drop five ropes over the edge of the precipice, long enough to reach all the way down and thereby enable a swift retreat.

A small brook runs through the campsite, berries and fruits can be gathered in the woods, and their fishing equipment can be used in the river below. In addition, there are lots of bird nests on the rock face, often with eggs to steal at this time of year.

THE REFORMISTS

The Reformists have been traveling along the western slopes of the Ravens, without any major incidents. Aluin left the group on a few occasions, forcing Eliana and her five companions to fight off unexpected predators as well as an ambush staged by a Beast Clan hunting party. But all members of the expedition survived the journey and arrive in Symbar without serious injuries.

Members
When arriving in Symbar, Father Sarvola assumes direct command of the expedition. Field Marshal Eliana Nidel continues to be an important advisor, along with the Keeper Kathman.

Father Sarvola

"Always doubt, with love, in benevolence."

Sarvola of House Bargomol is the lone survivor of a noble family whose members suffered a particularly cruel fate in the final stages of The Great War. He completed his studies in Yndaros under Peonio, where he became known as Sarvola the Disbeliever, as he was constantly questioning the laws of the Sun God. And he still has doubts, but not about

Defectors

Note that the members of Iasogoi's expedition lack the conviction and unity that characterize other expeditions. It might be possible for other factions to simply recruit some of the fortune hunter's companions, in exchange for more pay and/or the opportunity to be part of a safer group. Ralgai Melion would certainly consider such an attempt.

everything: he is convinced that the Ambrian people are suffering under needlessly harsh and unjust decrees – possibly warranted during the war against the Dark Lords, but certainly not today.

According to him, protection from external threats means nothing if it comes at the expense of domestic conflicts and oppression. The bleak lack of freedom imposed by the Prios of War gives rise to fear, which in turn explains much of what is wrong with the world – greed, distrust, isolationism and baseless hate. Sarvola does not seek power for its own sake; to him it is a divine calling, and he will do anything to prevent the world, its creatures and nature, from being torn asunder.



Manner	Austerely hopeful
Race	Human (Ambrian)
Resistance	Strong
Traits	*Contacts* (Sun Church)
Accurate 9 (+1), **Cunning** 13 (–3), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 18 (–8), **Quick** 10 (0), **Resolute** 11 (–1), **Strong** 7 (+3), **Vigilant** 10 (0)	
Abilities	*Dominate* (master), *Exceptionally Persuasive* (master), *Leader* (master), *Loremaster* (master), *Medicus* (master), *Recovery* (master), *Steadfast* (adept)
Weapons, Persuasive	Quarterstaff 3 (long, blunt)
Armor	Blessed robe 2 (flexible)
Defense	0
Toughness	10 **Pain Threshold** 4
Equipment	Holy symbol, copy of The Lightbringer
Shadow	Reddish yellow like the setting sun (corruption: 0)

Tactics: Sarvola does not use violence, but will of course defend himself if attacked. In most cases a glare is all it takes for the enemy to stop and back away.

Eliana Nidel

"On our lord's honor."

Having passed the age of fifty, Eliana is still in good health and vigor. That the Duke ordered her to protect a heretic during a mission aimed at sabotaging her Commander-in-Chief, Queen Korinthia, would just a few years ago have upset her entire worldview. But not anymore. She sees that The Promised Land is on the brink of destruction; she sees the suffering the Queen is causing or ignoring for the benefit of her allies. If there must be a seizure of power to bring order to the realm, she would like to see Duke Ynedar on the Ambrian throne, and, like Sarvola, she hopes the transition will happen without bloodshed.



Manner	Juts out her chin
Race	Human (Ambrian)
Resistance	Strong
Traits	*Contacts* (nobles)
Accurate 7 (+3), **Cunning** 10 (0), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 13 (–3), **Quick** 11 (–1), **Resolute** 10 (0), **Strong** 15 (–5), **Vigilant** 9 (+1)	
Abilities	*Bodyguard* (adept), *Equestrian* (master), *Feat of Strength* (novice), *Iron Fist* (master), Man-at-Arms (master), *Polearm Mastery* (novice), *Recovery* (master), *Two-handed Force* (master)

Boons/ Burdens	*Enterprise, Code of Honor*		
Weapons, Strong	Lance 9 (long), +5 on horse Bastard sword 10, ignores *Armor*		
Armor	Field Armor 6		
Defense	–1		
Toughness	20	**Pain Threshold**	8
Shadow	Glistening yellow, like well-polished gold (corruption: 0)		

Tactics: Eliana's primary responsibility is to keep Sarvola alive. Her battle-trained horse will be of little use in the forest, so she has her squire Kastro lead it while she herself walks (and fights) by the priest's side.

Aluin

Aluin is the product of Sarvola's carnal encounter with a creature of the forest named Ala. They met as the priest was walking the woods of Davokar seeking insights into "the dark and wild," before he settled down in Thistle Hold to spread his gospel. Aluin showed up at Sarvola's home almost a year ago, declaring that he would be staying there. Oddly enough, he already looked like a young boy; odder still is the fact that he has since grown to resemble a human teenager – tall and lanky, with zits covering his forehead under an unkempt fringe of hair, but in an uncharacteristic state of constant bliss.

Apart from Aluin's lack of a spiritual shadow, there is no point in providing stats for someone like him. He is Wyrtha incarnate, a being of pure creative power, but as such he is also characterized by what humans would call capriciousness or even madness. There is nothing he cannot create; his only limitations concern his attitude toward reality and all existence.

Aluin does not tolerate destructiveness and conservatism – the thought of destroying for the sake of destruction, or preserving just to maintain the status quo, is completely foreign to him. And he does not act on the basis of moral or worldly considerations, so even though he could probably cleanse the entire forest of Davokar of corruption, abominations and disease, he would never do it. But not, as one might think, because he believes these phenomena to be as much a part of creation as humans. He simply does not see the point of doing so.

The following bullet points illustrate how Aluin might react to different situations and what he is capable of. The general principle is that he can do anything, without risk of failure.

- If the expedition or people they encounter are hungry and thirsty, the puzzled Aluin wonders why that is. It does not take much explaining for him to fill their waterskins to the brim and make the packs of the needy overflow with their favorite food.
- If the expedition is subjected to a violent attack, the young man looks troubled for a moment, before taking the opportunity to have some fun: projectiles turn into flowers falling gracefully to the ground; physically manifested powers disintegrate in small cracks of fireworks; melee weapons are suspended in the air, mid-swing, and so on.
- Aluin can be shot or stabbed in his sleep, but that would only harm his body, which is easily mended for someone like him. If the sleeping Aluin is decapitated, his spirit will rise and materialize with a smile on his face, pick up the head, put it in place, and restore the body before re-entering it. Unless there is a more interesting body to inhabit for a while, that is...
- If someone asks him to clear the way to a certain place or individual, his response will likely be something like: *"Naaah. Boring. But look, this gravel is as heavy as a mountain, and yet it can fly!"*



Objectives

Sarvola's main objective is to stop House Kohinoor's expedition from establishing lordship over the ruined city, which he will achieve by cooperating with other groups on site. Furthermore, he believes it is important to avoid disturbing the ruins if possible, and aims to contribute to the Iron Pact's efforts to keep the darkness fettered.

Table 22: The Reformist's Troops

TYPE	NUMBERS	STATS	ADJUSTED NUMBERS	REFERENCE
Bodyguards	5	Pansar		Monster Codex, p. 135
Kathman of Vajvod	1	Witch, Keeper with the addition *Bushcraft* III		Monster Codex, p. 132

Forming alliances: Sarvola's initial goal is to contact other groups and try to secure an alliance to eliminate House Kohinoor.

Sabotaging the Queen's efforts: It is important to the Reformists that no ally of the Queen is allowed to leave Symbar alive. Sure, the expedition represents a merciful god, but this is a matter of taking a few lives to save an entire people.

Thwarting evil: Once the initial aims have been fulfilled, Sarvola intends to help the Iron Pact re-establish their dominance over Symbar. With this done, the alliance he has created may be able to drive the Sovereign's Oath from the area.

Relations
The Reformists' goal of sabotaging the Queen's efforts is shared by several other groups, not least their former colleagues within the Sun Church, the Black Cloaks and the Templars. Unfortunately, they are all at odds with Sarvola on other issues, and it will take a lot to reconcile the differences between them. Otherwise the expedition's most obvious allies in the area are the Witches and the Iron Pact, who may not care as much about stopping Korinthia, but share Sarvola's views on the relationship between cultural beings and Creation at large.

Willingness to Compromise
Sarvola is happy to cooperate; his motto is to *"always doubt, with love, in benevolence."* He is therefore open to alliances with most groups, including the Black Cloaks, but of course he will have nothing to do with the Sacred of the Old Blood if, or when, they reveal their dark intentions. What he needs most is a fairly neutral ally who would be able to mediate between him and the faction leaders who have reasons to want him dead, particularly Sister Losadra and Alisabeta Vearra.

Encampment
Sarvola and company set up camp by the lake, on a little islet surrounded by a swampy wetland which almost serves as a moat. They quickly construct two footbridges, one to dry land and the other leading out towards the lake, built in sections that can be pulled in with ropes in the event of an attack. A person trying to reach the islet without the footbridges will have to wade through almost sixty meters of sludge, while making a *Strong* or *Vigilant* test once per turn – on success the individual progresses ten meter, and on failure only five.

They get their water from the lake, which can also provide fish and (in the marsh) amphibians. Otherwise Aluin makes sure that his friends do not go hungry or thirsty.

THE KNIGHTS OF DEAD PRIOS

Alisabeta Vearra and her (now black) sun do not shy away from the darkness of Davokar – they welcome it! By now, they are used to moving through the woods and keep a good pace, especially along the Malgomor, where they travel roughly one day ahead of House Kohinoor's expedition. They made it far without any serious mishaps, thus increasing the distance between them and the followers, but on the final leg through Dark Davokar they ran into a patrol of arachs in an ancient pyramid – an encounter that cost them a handful of knights and almost a full day of travel, as the furious Alisabeta decided that the entire arach colony needed to be destroyed.

Members
Alisabeta Vearra reaches Symbar without any serious injuries and continues to command her decimated Sun with absolute resolve. Should she fall, the Enforcers know their orders – to put their lives on the line in order to reach the already established goals.

Alisabeta Vearra

"Prios is dead, and I'm his avenger!"

There is not much personality left in the once beloved and revered Sun Princess, the woman who slew the Blood Dancer in Mergile and spent her entire life fighting heretics and creatures of darkness. Now there is only hate – hate for Prios' murderers, especially the Ambrians who knowingly contributed to the Lawgiver's death and the spread of The Eternal Night. At the top of her kill-list is Father Sarvola, the Arch Heretic.



Manner	Calmly furious
Race	Human (Ambrian)
Resistance	Mighty
Traits	Contacts (Church of Dead Prios)
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 7 (+3), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 10 (0), **Quick** 13 (–3), **Resolute** 13 (–3), **Strong** 18 (–8), **Vigilant** 9 (+1)	
Abilities	*Beast Lore* (master: Abominations), *Berserker* (master), *Blessed Shield* (adept), *Equestrian* (master), *Exceptionally Quick* (adept), *Exceptionally Strong* (master), *Feat of Strength* (master), *Holy Aura* (novice), *Iron Fist* (master), *Two-handed Force* (master), *Witch Hammer* (master)
Weapons, Strong	Executioner's Sword 15 (precise, unwieldy, massive), or 13 and ignores *Armor*, +2 once *Toughness* has been halved, +5 during cavalry shock
Armor	Blackened Templar full plate 7 (holy), +5 with *Blessed Shield* and Holy
Defense	–3
Toughness	23 **Pain Threshold** 9
Equipment	The Knights of Dead Prios own nothing but the instruments of their revenge
Shadow	Streaks of faint yellow against a darkening background, like the last rays of sunlight across the evening sky (corruption: 3)

Tactics: Alisabeta enters battle surrounded by the lingering light of Prios, her great sword burning with wrath, on horseback if the terrain allows. She does not care about injuries, fully aware that she grows stronger with every wound.

Enforcer

"Die, murderer!"

All Enforcers in Alisabeta's sun are lowborn nobles. They know how to conduct themselves properly, but no longer care about manners or etiquette. Their eyes burn with a fire that is never seen in other nobles, possibly as a result of the corruption they have willingly contracted to be more effective in their quest for vengeance.

Manner	Calmly fanatical
Race	Human (Ambrian)
Resistance	Strong
Traits	Contacts (Sun Knights)
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 9 (+1), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 10 (0), **Quick** 13 (–3), **Resolute** 11 (–1), **Strong** 15 (–5), **Vigilant** 7 (+3)	
Abilities	*Beast Lore* (novice), *Berserker* (novice), *Equestrian* (adept), *Iron Fist* (master), *Man-at-arms* (master), *Mystical Power* (adept: either *Curse*, *Levitate*, or *Unnoticeable*), *Steadfast* (master), *Two-handed Force* (adept), *Witch Hammer* (master)
Weapons, Strong	Bastard Sword 9 (precise), +3 if *Berserker*
Armor	Studded leather 3 (reinforced)
Defense	–3 (+5 if *Berserker*)
Toughness	15 **Pain Threshold** 8
Equipment	1D10 thaler, flagellant whip, symbol of Dead Prios
Shadow	Golden yellow with streaks and blemishes of dark red (corruption: 3)

Tactics: The Knights of Dead Prios fight with controlled fury and move in groups to avoid being flanked; only when they seem to be losing will they unleash their berserker rage and attack in full force.

Objectives

The fallen Templars have come to Symbar for their final battle. Not that they want to die, but they more or less assume that such an outcome is certain – the only questions is how much evil they can eradicate before they go. However, their merciless attack against the darkness of Symbar is postponed on arrival as they notice the Sovereign's Oath, and soon learn about the others who have come to the ruined city...

Destroying the Sovereign's Oath: The Templars have no love for barbarians in general, but the

Table 23: The Templar's Troops

TYPE	NUMBERS	STATS	ADJUSTED NUMBERS	REFERENCE
Enforcer	EM×2	Enforcer		Mother of Darkness, p. 155
Squire	EM×2	Squire		Monster Codex, p. 129

The Fate of the Templars

If appropriate, the players and their characters should get to watch as the remaining Knights of Dead Prios draw their flaming greatswords and charge into the shadows beneath the root system, for a final battle against Prios' killers. What the player characters do not know is what happens next, when the corruption from the battle kills their bodies only to bring them back as raging undead. Nor are they aware that the First Revenger and his remaining Enforcers are on their way to Symbar, where they will suffer the same fate. Next time the Knights of Dead Prios show up, they will fight to avenge the principle of Wyrtha, against anything that lives and breathes...

Sovereign's Oath has a very special place in their blackened hearts – like Ambrian cultists and sorcerers, they personify the evil within mankind, and must therefore be regarded as traitors and accomplices to the murder of Prios.

Killing Sarvola: Father Sarvola has long been one of the First Revenger's primary targets. The Arch Heretic must die for his crimes against the Lawgiver and involvement in his death; meting out that punishment would mean more to him than slaughtering every abomination in Symbar!

Crushing the darkness of Symbar: In the end, all members of Alisabeta's expedition – herself included – will die a martyr's death in a fierce assault on the city's darkness.

Relations
Normally, the Knights of Dead Prios believe there are only two kinds of creatures in the world – those involved in the murder of the Lawgiver, and everyone else. The latter is usually of little interest to Alisabeta and her troops, but groups and individuals who recognize Prios as the Lawgiver have nothing to fear from them (including Black Cloaks and individual members of Ralgai or Iasogoi's expeditions).

Willingness to Compromise
Alisabeta does not compromise; she may engage in short-term collaborations with others who share her specific objectives, but there will be no bargaining. However, neither she nor her companions have any interest in treasure, knowledge or whatever else might be found – such things are left to others, as long as the items are not corrupted.

That said, there is one piece of information that could make the former Sun Princess soften her attitude: if someone (such as a player character) told her where to find the Halls of a Thousand Tears (see *Thistle Hold – Wrath of the Warden*, page 146), she would agree to more or less anything – for example making herself and her knights available for an attack on another expedition. But one must be very careful. She can just as well decide to put the information source in irons and extract the directions by other means...

Encampment
Southeast of the campsite of the Sovereign's Oath is a vast stretch of barren land; a rolling desert of dust with occasional bare trees, which on closer inspection seem to have turned to stone – or possibly they are actual sculptures chiseled out of large rocks. The upside is that this provides a clear view in all directions, and the terrain is well-suited for mounted combat; the downside is that the horses must be led away from the camp every day to graze and drink, and that water must be fetched from a spring just east of the lifeless area.

THE SACRED OF THE OLD BLOOD

What happens to Agramai and his expedition depends on who they teamed up with in Thistle Hold. No matter what, the eight nobles will keep a low profile in dangerous situations. They will certainly fight to defend themselves, but are very careful not to reveal their darker abilities when there are witnesses around (with the possible exception of mental powers such as *Bend Will*, which will be used to make enemies flee). Upon arrival they will initially want to remain with their fellow travelers; the suggested encampment below is based on the allies turning them down.

Members
Agramai Kalfas is the appointed leader of the group, and the other nobles (Junia Dardall included) will appear to be wholeheartedly loyal as long as he does not exhibit weakness or they find themselves in a situation where their individual greed comes into play. The rest of the expedition members, both sellswords and guides, are bound to Agramai with slave runes and remain reliable until their master dies.

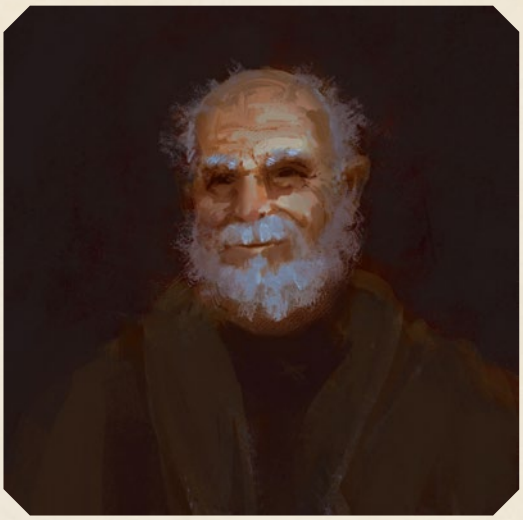
Agramai Kalfas

"Bravo! What skill, what style – you're absolutely marvelous!"

As the son of Count Marok Kalfas' fourth and unlikable brother Enek, Agramai's prospects were never very bright. But he soon learned to cherish his noble blood and view his privileges

as inherent, god-given rights. A Kalfas rules over nature, not the other way around, and the notion that there are natural forces which he and his kin cannot master strikes him as downright ridiculous. The fact that his own body and spirit are changing as a result of his studies and activities has not altered this view – as he sees it, it is a step toward the exaltation mentioned in the ancient Symbarian legends.

Agramai is a true master of manipulation. He is immensely popular in Thistle Hold, for his generosity and good humor, but over time that charade has become increasingly difficult to maintain. That the cult's leaders are finally taking action, and that he himself has gained influence and responsibility, makes him relieved as well as proud. He is fully prepared to act docile and loyal before the leaders, and contribute to the increased power and influence of the cult – at least until the time comes for a change of leadership...



Manner	Cheerfully amiable
Race	Human (Ambrian)
Resistance	Strong
Traits	Privileged, Contacts (cultists, as the Prince)
Accurate 7 (+3), **Cunning** 11 (–1), **Discreet** 13 (–3), **Persuasive** 17 (–7), **Quick** 5 (+5), **Resolute** 10 (0), **Strong** 10 (0), **Vigilant** 9 (+1)	
Abilities	*Bend Will* (master), *Exceptionally Persuasive* (adept), *Leader* (master), *Loremaster* (master), *Ritualist* (master: *Enslave, Exchange Shadow, Possess, Raise Undead*), *Sorcery* (master), *Strong Gift* (adept: *Bend Will*), *Unholy Aura* (master)

The Suffering of the Slaves

The enslaved companions understand that they must not reveal their plight to others, verbally or otherwise. However, player characters who actively watch the Prince's underlings and pass a *[Vigilant –1]* test will notice that they look dejected, sometimes even sad. If asked about it, Agramai explains that the group has been together a long time, but recently lost three comrades during a similar expedition – hence the sadness.

Boons/ Burdens	*Con Artist* (III), *Dexterous* (III), *Manipulator* (III), *Poison Resilient*, *Shadow Spawn* (II)		
Weapons, Accurate	Sword 4		
Armor	Concealed armor 3 (concealed, flexible, reinforced)		
Defense	+5		
Toughness	10	**Pain Threshold**	5
Equipment	Basigor's Food Pouch (see page 104), the Stone Cloak of Alial (see page 104), 3 doses of Spirit Friend, Drone Dew, Moderate Poison Candle and Shadow Tint, 1 dose of Transforming Draught, mastercrafted Concealed Armor		
Shadow	Striped silvery-black, like a metal plate with blackened scratches (corruption: 6)		

Tactics: Agramai is no fighter and will not demonstrate his mystical abilities unless absolutely necessary. If his side appears to be winning, he will activate the Stone Cloak of Alial until the battle is won; when things are looking bad and there is little risk of discovery he uses *Bend Will* on an enemy or two to send them running.

Junia Dardall

"That is none of your business, is it!?"

The youngest child of Baron Arto Dardall, his daughter Junia, was deeply influenced by her childhood in the shade of Davokar. She constantly ignored the prohibition on going into the forest and never accepted that its dark power might be harmful or dangerous. At the tender age of thirteen she left the barony for Yndaros to become a lady-in-waiting – a position that has given her the freedom to better herself and socialize with like-minded friends, especially as she is rarely required at court and her parents seem relieved about not having to deal with their troublesome lastborn.

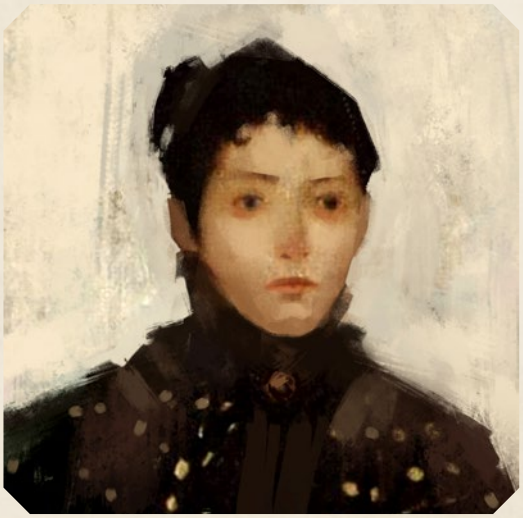
Witchsight and Agramai

In Thistle Hold, Agramai preforms the *Exchange Shadow* ritual, which makes him seem completely untainted to anyone watching him with the *Witchsight* ability, and the same goes for Junia. Should the player characters be traveling with their expedition, the effect of the ritual will expire after one day. If their blightmarks are then exposed, they will claim them to be the result of *"a shamefully unsuccessful expedition to a ruin just east of Odaban,"* where they fell straight into a pool of simmering black corruption.

Already Acquainted?

Note that the player characters may have met Junia in the adventure *The Darkest Star* (see page 144). She was wearing a mask at the time, but if the Game Master so wishes, a successful *Vigilant* test aimed at Junia could still make her seem familiar to a player character, though not enough to place her...

Junia longs for Symbar. That she is traveling with other cult members does not mean she is loyal – she will always put her own interests ahead of the group's. She is seeking manuscripts, recipes and other things that might increase her power over the creatures of the Yonderworld and Spirit World, and to that end she is willing to betray anyone in any way.



Manner	Haughty and aloof
Race	Human (Ambrian)
Resistance	Strong
Traits	Privileged
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 11 (–1), **Discreet** 7 (+3), **Persuasive** 13 (–3), **Quick** 10 (0), **Resolute** 16 (–6), **Strong** 5 (+5), **Vigilant** 9 (+1)	
Abilities	*Channeling* (master), *Dominate* (adept), *Exceptionally Resolute* (novice), *Loremaster* (adept), *Ritualist* (master: *Desecrating Rite, Dimension Walk*, Exchange Shadow, Necromancy, Summon Daemon*), *Sorcery* (master), *Teleport* (master), *Witchsight* (master)
Boons/ Burdens	*Archivist* (II), *Medium* (III)
Weapons, Persuasive	Quarterstaff 3 (long, blunt)
Armor	Concealed armor 3 (concealed, reinforced, flexible)
Defense	0
Toughness	10 **Pain Threshold** 5
Equipment	Ceremonial book for Mass Resurrection (see *Yndaros – The Darkest Star*, page 72), master-crafted Concealed Armor, iron crown (packed away), blackened fox skull (ritual focus), burial shroud, 4 doses Elixir of Life
Shadow	Dark gold, like a gilded mirror covered by a thin, black veil (corruption: 4**)
Tactics: Junia is reluctant to demonstrate her mystical powers. She stays back, protected by the sellswords, and tries not to attract the enemy's attention. In a really difficult situation she will use her teleportation ability to escape.	

* See *Yndaros – The Darkest Star*, page 75
** Lowered with Water of the Dusk, given to her by Duchess Esmerelda

Sacred of the Old Blood agent

"Blood is the key to unlimited power!"

The six nobles participating in the expedition are as power-hungry and narcissistic as their leaders. Their ages range between eighteen and forty; half are men and the other half women; and they are all members of less prominent houses, most of them with at least three older siblings who will inherit the bulk of the family influence and wealth.

Unlike Agramai and Junia, they look up to Esmerelda and her father with great respect, and they would react very strongly to evidence that any of their expedition leaders was putting self-interest over the common goal – something that could potentially be exploited to sow discord within the dark group.

Manner	Smiles proudly
Race	Human (Ambrian)
Resistance	Challenging
Traits	Privileged
Accurate 5 (+5), **Cunning** 13 (–3), **Discreet** 7 (+3), **Persuasive** 11 (–1), **Quick** 10 (0), **Resolute** 15 (–5), **Strong** 10 (0), **Vigilant** 9 (+1)	
Abilities	*Black Bolt* or *Black Breath* (adept), *Channeling* (adept), *Loremaster* (novice), *Ritualist* (novice: *Raise Undead*), *Sorcery* (adept), *Spirit Walk* (adept), *Tactician* (master)
Weapons, Cunning	Fencing sword 4 (precise)
Armor	Concealed armor 2 (concealed, flexible)
Defense	–3
Toughness	10 **Pain Threshold** 5
Equipment	1D4 doses each of Moderate poison, Shadow Tint, and Herbal Cure.

Shadow	Dark gold, like a golden tray in the shade (corruption: 3)

Tactics: The six cultists were chosen partly because of their skill with the fencing sword, but that does not mean they are eager to fight. They stay behind their sellswords as long as possible, using their swords if the need arises and unleashing their powers as an absolute last resort.

Objectives
The mission given to Agramai by his superiors is to find a cure for undeath, in the form of written recipes or rituals. Personally, however, he is mainly looking for artifacts, powers and other kinds of rituals – anything that might increase his own power – and he is prepared to go very far to seize control of Symbar.

Obtaining an overview: Initially, Agramai will keep his cool and let others take the risks; he is happy to discuss interesting places to explore, but then offers to stay behind and "guard the camp." He also tries to find out what other expeditions know (see the text box Bloody Deeds).

Mass resurrection: After a few days (see suggestions on page 113), Agramai sets his real plan in motion: he initiates the mystical ceremony Mass Resurrection on the upper plateau, with a view of the place where the Battle of Symbar raged the fiercest. For more information, see The Army of the Damned on page 218.

Mounting the Throne of Thorns: Agramai's ultimate goal is to sit on the Throne of Thorns, which will certainly be possible if the Mass Resurrection is successful. What he does not know is that Junia and his other companions have the same plan – something the Game Master can use if the situation presents itself...

Relations
The Sacred of the Old Blood regard themselves as superior and would never seriously enter into alliances with others. But that does not stop them from pretending to do so; nor from pitting different groups against one another. The Game Master can expect them to do anything to achieve their goals – they will not hesitate to lie, betray or kill.

Willingness to Compromise
The Sacred of the Old Blood would never compromise, but lies and deceit are their lifeblood. They will happily lie about alliances and agreements, preferably in a way that makes others take risks while they themselves sit back and enjoy the fruits of their labor.

Encampment
If Agramai and company find themselves without allies, they will not care about prudence or caution. They set up camp in a small, overgrown, roofless ruin by the riverbank southeast of Symbar and immediately start to expand their forces using the *Raise Undead* ritual – first reanimating any fallen companions and then, under cover of darkness, taking what they need from the half-open mass graves of the Sovereign's Oath. Within a few days their camp will be guarded by two dozen undead (stats as Dragoul, page 230 in the *Core Rulebook*).

THE IRON PACT

The Dark Watch is in tatters, not only in the sense that many have been killed, but also because their surviving members are disoriented and struggling to cope with the current situation. They have not given up, and reinforcements will arrive, but there is much to suggest that they have lost their grip on Symbar forever.

Members
Princess Geliael is formally in command, but since their flight from the Sovereign's Oath, the more vigorous autumn elf Ardil has emerged as the effective leader of the group.

What remains of the Dark Watch is still a force to be reckoned with, though not strong

Bloody Deeds

The members of the Sacred of the Old Blood view themselves as chosen elites, superior to everyone else, and as such they do not have any moral reservations about treating their "fellow human beings" any way they like. Once in Symbar they will soon start kidnapping people from other expeditions, with help from their barbarian warriors, sometimes beginning with Junia Dardall using *Teleport* to move the targets away from their allies. These are then brought to a secret hideout near the campsite they are probably sharing with someone else, where Agramai marks them with slave runes (the *Enslave* ritual) and forces them to talk.

Table 24: The Sacred of the Old Blood's Troops

TYPE	NUMBERS	STATS	ADJUSTED NUMBERS	REFERENCE
SotOB agent	6	SotOB agent		Mother of Darkness, p. 158
Warrior	6	Guard Warrior		Core Rulebook, p. 216
Ranger	6	Late-summer Elf		Core Rulebook, p. 205
Undead	0	Dragoul		Core Rulebook, p. 230

enough to take on the Sovereign's Oath alone. The individuals listed below are accompanied by five autumn elves with no fighting ability, who previous helped Geliael watch for intruders in Symbar and its surrounding area. If stats for them are needed, use Ardil as a basis, but with *Wisdom of the Ages* (I) and without the power *Entangling Vines*.

Princess Geliael

"It is not too late, it must not be too late..."

As an autumn elf Geliael was a fearsome warrior, but now she remembers only bits and pieces of that time. When she woke from her third hibernation, maintaining the mystical fetters over Symbar seemed like her only purpose in life. She meditated long and hard, probing deep into the collective memories of the Iron Pact, and learned to perform the rituals and ceremonies that could help her preserve said powers. But that is all she knows, and all she cares about.

The Princess will not fight, and is therefore presented without stats. If she ever feels threatened, she will shapeshift into an immobile, but also indestructible, statue of adamantine, greenish-black stone, which is also immune to mystical powers. She will remain in that form as long as there is a perceived threat.

Should the player characters lack access to a certain ritual or power, perhaps Ardil can persuade Geliael to perform it on their behalf. But in that case it will cost them a valuable favor – for example the player characters must hand over an item they have found which the Iron Pact believes to be dangerous, or carry out some kind of mission for the elves.



Ardil

"This cannot be allowed; the darkness of Symbar must never awaken again."

Unlike his leader and fellow members of the Dark Watch, Ardil is both talkative and capable of decisive action – not because he wants to be, but because someone in Symbar must play that role when conversing with others on site.

Ardil will approach any group arriving in the area, apart from the Knights of Dead Prios, whom he immediately dismisses as obvious enemies. He comes alone in the hope of forming an alliance powerful enough to bring down the Sovereign's Oath. If the player characters are hesitant, he will try to convince them with horror stories about the monsters that might awaken and the corruption they would spread. If they still do not listen, he sadly shakes his head: *"Then you must leave, right now, or we will have no choice but to consider you enemies, just like the drakworm and its army."*



Manner	Neutral face, expressive eyes
Race	Elf (autumn elf)
Resistance	Strong
Traits	Long-lived, Pariah, Wisdom of the Ages (III)
Accurate 5 (+5), **Cunning** 13 (–3), **Discreet** 10 (0), **Persuasive** 10 (0), **Quick** 7 (+3), **Resolute** 18 (–8), **Strong** 9 (+1), **Vigilant** 11 (–1)	
Abilities	*Borrow Beast*, *Entangling Vines* (master), *Exceptionally Resolute* (master), *Inherit Wound* (master), *Ritualist* (master: *Break Link, Death Divination, Nature's Lullaby, Tale of Ashes, Witch Circle*), *Staff Fighting* (adept), *Witchcraft* (master), *Witchsight* (master)

Weapons, Accurate	Quarterstaff 3 (long)		
Armor	Skald's Cuirass 3 (reinforced, flexible)		
Defense	+1		
Toughness	10	**Pain Threshold**	5
Equipment	2 doses of Spirit Friend, 3 doses Elixir of Life, Flask of Lingonberry Juice.		
Shadow	Greenish yellow with brown spots, like autumn leaves struck by the oncoming winter (corruption: 3)		

Tactics: Ardil is no warrior. In combat he will first try to ensnare as many enemies as possible before attempting to make them see the error in using violence against Creation. If the opposition seems tough, he starts by inhaling a dose of Spirit Friend.

Dark Watchman

"Nevermore!"

The remaining armed wing of the Dark Watch – two women and two men – are tall and proud, ready to do whatever it takes to defend their mystically trained friends. If attacked, they will not hesitate to slay anyone who endangers their mission, nor have they any qualms about killing people who violate the area's taboos.

Manner	Terse, uncompromising		
Race	Elf (autumn elf)		
Resistance	Strong		
Traits	Long-lived, Pariah		
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 10 (0), **Discreet** 7 (+3), **Persuasive** 5 (+5), **Quick** 13 (–3), **Resolute** 11 (–1), **Strong** 9 (+1), **Vigilant** 15 (–5)			
Abilities	*Acrobatics* (adept), *Arrow Jab* (master), Man-at-Arms (adept), *Marksman* (master), *Rapid Fire* (master), *Sixth Sense* (master)		
Weapons, Vigilant	Mastercrafted longbow 6 (precise, deep impact), fires three arrows per combat action, or one that ignores *Armor*		
Armor	Lacquered silk cuirass 4 (flexible)		
Defense	–5		
Toughness	10	**Pain Threshold**	5
Equipment	20 arrows, 3 Herbal Cures, 2 doses Elixir of Life		

Malahai or Teara-Téana

Gaming groups who have experienced the adventure *Thistle Hold – Wrath of the Warden* and *Karvosti – The Witch Hammer* may replace Ardil with Teara-Téana (see page 155) or Malahai (see page 118). In that case the replacement has recently requested to be transferred to the Dark Watch, convinced that defending Symbar is the most important task an Ironsworn could undertake. Use the stats presented below or the ones from the previous descriptions.

Shadow	Green, shifting between bright and dark, like a swaying leaf on the lower branches of a tree (corruption: 0)

Tactics: The autumn elves prefer to keep their distance, but can also use their bows in melee combat if need be, fighting back to back to avoid being flanked.

Objectives

Ardil's aim is to drive out all intruders and restore the mystical fetters that keep the darkness of Symbar dormant – something the remaining shreds of the Dark Watch cannot manage by themselves. He and several others know exactly where to find the Throne of Thorns, but will never reveal its location unless absolutely necessary – that is, if their enemies are on the verge of finding it and the Iron Pact must seek allies to prevent them from doing so.

Forming an alliance: The Sovereign's Oath is too strong for the Dark Watch to handle on their own – an alliance must be forged between groups who share their other objectives.

Aiding the Weaver inside the Mother Tree: A rescue party must be sent to the Mother Tree once the Sovereign's Oath has been driven off; something has happened to the eternity elf known as the Weaver, but what that is remains unclear. See The Mother Tree on page 190 for more information.

Driving out the intruders: When the darkness has been fettered once again, all intruders must be expelled from Symbar. This is non-negotiable; even diplomatically inclined elves like Ardil are prepared to see this accomplished, by force if necessary.

Relations

The Dark Watch is a special branch of the Iron Pact in that many of its members have never met any Ambrians or clanfolk before. Consequently, they

Table 25: The Iron Pact's Troops

TYPE	NUMBERS	STATS	ADJUSTED NUMBERS	REFERENCE
Dark Watchman	4	Dark Watchman		Mother of Darkness, p. 161
Warrior	5	Late-summer elf		Core Rulebook, p. 205
Mystic	4	Autumn elf, but with *Entangling Vines* instead of *Ritualist*		Core Rulebook, p. 205

do not have many preconceived notions about the members of the expeditions, but judge them solely by their words and actions in Symbar. Their fundamental values are rooted in the sanctity of Creation and the necessity to once again plunge the darkness into fettered slumber – they loathe violence in all its forms, but can accept a great deal of self-loathing if the purpose is to suppress the raging power of corruption, though not before they have tried to negotiate with the ignorant wrongdoers (i.e. the Sovereign's Oath or House Kohinoor).

Willingness to Compromise
When other expeditions start to arrive, Ardil will contact them to ascertain their intentions. The goal is of course to drive out the Sovereign's Oath and restore the mystical protection against the darkness, which is more important than individual treasures – as long as they are not corrupted. Allies may be allowed to keep what they find in Symbar, if they promise to let the Dark Watch examine the items and confiscate anything that might cause direct or indirect harm to Creation (the Game Master decides).

Encampment
The elves are constantly moving around in the woods located west, south and east of Symbar. They never stay in the same place for more than four to five hours, and avoid areas with few escape routes – they stay on the forest floor, not in caves or up in the trees.

THE WITCHES

Darkness descends on Davokar, ever deeper, blacker and more impenetrable. Yeleta has not come to Symbar to negotiate or persuade the intruders to turn back; she is there to observe and, if possible, prevent a total disaster.

Members
Yeleta represents the three witches in negotiations and discussions, but in reality, all decisions are made jointly, not least because she herself has barely left Karvosti since her appointment as Huldra.

The two keepers who accompanied Yeleta to Symbar did so for partly different reasons – Amanmaar because he knows the area relatively well, and Miralba because of her extraordinary shapeshifting ability. Both of them are experienced, highly skilled and fanatically devoted to the struggle of keeping the night at bay.

Huldra Yeleta

"Protect the light, flee the dark – that is all."

Yeleta is no more familiar with Symbar than any other living person, but in her dreams she has seen its ancient black soul, its hunger and lust for power. She has finally accepted that neither she nor the Iron Pact can stop Symbar from awakening – the forces driving this development, blinded by senseless greed, are far too strong. Her one faint hope lies with a figure who has repeatedly appeared in her dreams: a flickering flame, shrouded in blackness yet shining relentlessly, trapped (or simply just living) among the ruins. She knows roughly where to look, but needs allies to attempt it.

As for her personality, the spine-chilling stories Ambrians tell about the Huldra are far from untrue – Yeleta can strike fear into the heart of just about anyone, and her iron gaze is sharp enough to subdue even the pluckiest of heroes. You can read more about the Huldra Yeleta in the *Core Rulebook* (pages 26 and 63–66), as well as in *Karvosti – The Witch Hammer* (pages 14–15, 42 and 145).



Manner	Serious behind her mask
Race	Human (barbarian)
Resistance	Mighty
Traits	Contacts (Witches), *Bushcraft* (II, Davokar)
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 15 (–5), **Discreet** 7 (+3), **Persuasive** 18 (–8), **Quick** 9 (+1), **Resolute** 11 (–1), **Strong** 5 (+5), **Vigilant** 10 (0)	
Abilities	*Artifact Crafting* (master), *Dominate* (master), *Exceptionally Cunning* (adept), *Exceptionally Persuasive* (master), *Inherit Wound* (master), *Leader* (master), *Loremaster* (master), *Ritualist* (master: *Borrow Beast, Death Divination, Fortune-telling, Nature's Lullaby, Witch Circle*), *Steadfast* (master), *Storm Arrow* (master), *Strong Gift* (master: *Witchsight*), *Tormenting Spirits* (master), *Witchcraft* (master), *Witchsight* (master)
Boons/ Burdens	*Augur, Horrifying* (III), *Medium, Nightmares*
Weapons	None
Armor	Witch gown 3 (reinforced, flexible)
Defense	+1
Toughness	10 **Pain Threshold** 3
Equipment	Four masks (see the text box titled The Masks of the Huldra), 3 doses each of Spirit Friend, Wraith Dust, Strong Antidote, Purple Sap and Herbal Cure
Shadow	Fiercely green, like a stormy sea of leaves (corruption: 0)
Tactics: Thanks to the mask called Ygba's Ward, it has been a long time since Yeleta was attacked in combat. She expects it to save her in future confrontations as well, and focuses on leading her allies before summoning the creatures of the spirit world to attack the enemy while she herself fires storm arrows at threatening mystics.	

Amanmaar

"Nature neither listens nor obeys. It simply is."

The wild-bearded Amanmaar of Clan Godinja is as slight as a gnarled tree branch and has seen his people fall to the advance of the Sovereign's Oath. He is obviously haunted by the knowledge that all the witches he once commanded have likely been murdered, but nature is what it is – it gives and takes away, heals and destroys, with or without humanity's help.

While in Symbar, the creases of worry never leave Amanmaar's face; he feels the suffering of Creation as if it was his own. He has no illusions about being able to ease nature's pain, but hopes that Yeleta will know what to do, and therefore follows her directions to the letter.



Manner	Frowns glumly
Race	Human (barbarian)
Resistance	Mighty
Traits	*Bushcraft* (III, Davokar), Contacts (Witches)
Accurate 9 (+1), **Cunning** 10 (0), **Discreet** 10 (0), **Persuasive** 7 (+3), **Quick** 15 (–5), **Resolute** 15 (–5), **Strong** 5 (+5), **Vigilant** 11 (–1)	
Abilities	*Alchemy* (master), Cloak of Thorns (master), *Entangling Vines* (master), *Exceptionally Quick* (adept), *Lay on Hands* (master), *Loremaster* (master), *Medicus* (master), *Nature's Embrace* (master), *Ritualist* (master: *Living Fortress, Nature's Lullaby, Quick Growth, Traceless, Turn Weather, Witch Circle*), *Witchcraft* (master)
Boons/ Burdens	*Green Thumb* (III), *Pathfinder* (III)
Weapons	None
Armor	Witch gown 2 (flexible)
Defense	–5
Toughness	10 **Pain Threshold** 3
Equipment	5 doses each of Strong Poison, Elixir of Life, Concentrated Magic, Strong Antidote, Strong Purple Sap, Herbal Cure, 2 doses of Thorn Beasties, Mask covered with blackened bark (works as Bark Mask and Mystical Focus).

The Huldra's Invitation

If the player characters have already met the Huldra and/or Miralba and were not outwardly hostile, Yeleta will invite them to a meeting at the witches' thorn fort (see page 165). She does this by creating a lesser artifact called a Meeting Stone (see the *Advanced Player's Guide*, page 124) which Miralba then grasps with her talon and drops near the player characters' campfire. A person who possesses mystical powers and touches the stone will know who sent the invitation and where to find her.

The Masks of the Huldra

On the journey to Symbar, Yeleta is bringing along four of the legendary masks passed down to her by her predecessors. The masks work as Mystical Focus (*Witchcraft*) and have the following powers, whose activation counts as an Active action and inflicts 1D4 temporary corruption:

Ygba's Ward: Mask depicted on the cover of *Karvosti – The Witch Hammer*, which for one scene makes living enemies (not undead or abominations) afraid to attack the wearer. Anyone wishing to perform some kind of hostile action requires a successful *[Resolute←Resolute]* to summon the courage to attack, where each level of the *Horrifying* boon adds +1 to the wearer's *Resolute*. Even if the test succeeds, the enemy has two chances to fail the subsequent success test.

Soalem's Truthsayer: Mask with a curtain of glass pearls covering the face which allows the wearer to see through any illusions or transformations with a successful *Vigilant* test. Furthermore, the wearer's use of *Witchsight* is not affected by rituals such as *Exchange Shadow*.

Bagdal's Bone Spikes: Helmet-shaped skull seen in the portrait of Yeleta, with fang-like bone spikes over the eyes and cheeks. For one scene the wearer cannot be possessed by spirits, and has +3 to success tests for controlling (e.g. *Tormenting Spirits*) and communicating with (e.g. *Death Divination*) spirits.

Ktelba's Blight Veil: Black, transparent veil embroidered with black pearls that hang down over the wearer's shoulders, making her completely invisible to thoroughly corrupted creatures for one scene, as long as she does nothing but move. If the wearer interacts with the environment in any other way, abominations within sight can detect her with a successful *[Vigilant←Resolute]*; if she performs an Active action, a test against *[Vigilant]* is enough. Once detected, the wearer cannot become invisible again to the creature who has seen through the veil.

Shadow	Rugged grayish brown, like the dry bark of an alder tree (corruption: 0)
Tactics: If combat breaks out Amanmaar escapes into *Nature's Embrace*, then uses his powers to help his allies or attack the enemy.	

Miralba

"Wrath should not be underestimated as a weapon, if properly channeled."

It is hard to believe that the small, wiry old woman following at the Huldra's side is one of the most powerful witches in Davokar, ever. But the eyes hidden behind her scraggly mane of long gray hair, which often falls over her face, are at least as hard as Yeleta's, and on closer inspection the short, thick, talon-like fingernails reveal that Miralba has a secret.

She has never seen herself as a leader, but rather as a warrior fighting for her people and Creation. In Symbar her main task is twofold: to conduct reconnaissance in her eagle form and, in the form of a massive hunger wolf, defend the Huldra with the help of her familiar, a large female jakaar named Fulba.



Manner	Sways her upper body
Race	Human (barbarian)
Resistance	Mighty
Traits	*Armored** (II), *Bushcraft* (III, Davokar), *Contacts* (Witches), *Natural Weapon** (II), *Regeneration** (II), *Robust** (II)
Accurate 5 (+5), **Cunning** 10 (0), **Discreet** 13 (–3), **Persuasive** 10 (0), **Quick** 11 (–1), **Resolute** 15 (–5), **Strong** 9 (+1), **Vigilant** 7 (+3)	
Abilities	*Berserker* (master), *Curse* (master), *Entangling Vines* (adept), *Iron Fist* (adept), *Maltransformation* (master), *Natural Warrior* (master), *Nature's Embrace* (master), *Ritualist* (master: *Beast Companion, Black Sympathy, Borrow Beast, Torment, Witch Circle*), *Shapeshift* (grand master), *Wild Hunt* (master), *Witchcraft* (master)
Boons/ Burdens	*Beast Tongue, Bloodthirst*
Weapons, Strong	Wolf claws* 16, two attacks at the same target
Armor	Wolf skin* 3, +5 for *Robust* and *Berserker*, regenerates 3 *Toughness* per turn

Defense	–1/+2*		
Toughness	10	**Pain Threshold**	5
Equipment	Alto flute in minor key		
Shadow	Dark reddish purple, like soil mixed with fresh blood (corruption: 0)		
Tactics: Miralba has many tools to use in combat. Usually she starts with a chain of maltransformations, before shifting into her wolf form and hunting down enemies alongside Fulba.			

* In beast form

FULBA			
Race	Beast (jakaar)		
Resistance	Challenging		
Traits	*Armored* (I), *Bushcraft* (I), *Natural Weapon* (II)		
Accurate 5 (+5), **Cunning** 10 (0), **Discreet** 10 (0), **Persuasive** 7 (+3), **Quick** 13 (–3), **Resolute** 9 (+1), **Strong** 15 (–5), **Vigilant** 11 (–1)			
Abilities	*Iron Fist* (adept), *Natural Warrior* (master)		
Weapons, Strong	Wolf claws 7, two attacks at the same target		
Armor	Wolf skin 2		
Defense	–3		
Toughness	15	**Pain Threshold**	8
Shadow	Dark reddish purple, like soil mixed with fresh blood (corruption: 0)		
Tactics: Fulba follows Miralba's commands to the letter.			

Objectives
Yeleta has not formulated any specific goals, but has come to observe the situation and intervene when needed – assisting people in distress whom she wants to see survive (which may or may not include the player characters) and/or combating awakened primal blight beasts from the time of Symbaroum.

Rescuing the afflicted one: The "flickering flame" from the Huldra's dreams must be found and, if the dreams are true, saved from destruction. You can read more about this under The Mother Tree on page 190.

Keeping Sarvola alive: Thanks to Keeper Kathman, Yeleta knows that Father Sarvola – one of the best hopes for peace between Ambrians and clanfolk – is on his way to Symbar. His survival is extremely important to the Huldra, and perhaps some of the player characters seem equally deserving of her protection.

Thwarting evil: Although the Huldra has little hope of reversing the grim development, she will of course do everything in her power to prevent the darkness of Symbar from waking, preferably with the help of other groups such as the Iron Pact.

Relations
Necessity knows few laws, and in the current situation even the gravest offense can be forgiven, or at least overlooked for the time being. Even though the Black Cloaks and the Church of Dead Prios have killed countless witches (both real and imagined), their determination to fight the darkness can make them potential allies. The opposite is true for the representatives of House Kohinoor – they are officially allied with the High Chieftain and the Huldra, but as far as Symbar is concerned, Yeleta does not trust their intentions. There is a strong likelihood that uncomfortable alliances will have to be made for the purpose of betraying a formal ally...

Willingness to Compromise
The Witches want others to help them find the "flickering flame" from the Huldra's dreams; apart from that, they no longer care about details such as individual corrupted artifacts and people or corruption-generating deeds. Darkness will fall; all that matters is that as many glimmers of light as possible survive the coming night.

Encampment
Our suggestion is that the three witches arrive a couple of days before the first expedition (see Table 17 on page 140), aware that many others are on their way. Realizing that several hunting parties are hostile to barbarians in general and witches in particular, they decide to set up camp in the heavily corrupted area south of the lake – they walk in to the tunes of a melody that lulls the darkness to sleep, and keep singing while Amanmaar builds a *Living Fortress* around which Miralba weaves a *Witch Circle*.

THE SOVEREIGN'S OATH

The Sovereign's Oath will take Symbar once and for all! But after losing many men on the journey through Davokar, and even more since their arrival at the ruins, Clan Chieftain Rábaiamon is starting to have doubts. And with the other factions showing up, one by one, even Odralintos is feeling a pang of uncertainty.

Members

Rábaiamon is the leader of the invasion force, though he can hardly do anything without Odralintos' consent. He is assisted by the five commanders who make up the unit's strategic council. If he is still alive, the warrior Fundiber may well be one of them (see *Karvosti – The Witch Hammer*, page 112).

The army doggedly working its way toward their goal of uncovering the dilapidated Imperial Palace consists of warriors from several clans. The Game Master can use the stats referred to in the table below as a basis to add some variety. If you have access to *Karvosti – The Witch Hammer*, they could also be accompanied by twenty or so Sovereign Witches (page 85).

Rábaiamon's shrinking force still has plenty of servants taking care of equipment and animals and replenishing their supplies of water and meat. If the situation becomes truly desperate, they may of course be used in combat as well, in which case they have stats as Fortune Hunter (page 215 in the *Core Rulebook*).

Finally, it should be noted that in the run-up to the adventure, the Sovereign force is on the brink of starvation. Sure, the members of the strategic council have Blackbrew and food in abundance, but the others have long subsisted on half rations. A supply convoy is on its way from Clan Enoai's territory, but if it fails to arrive, Rábaiamon will soon be losing men to malnutrition and disease. For more information, see The Caravan on page 216.

Rábaiamon

"Past sins are forgiven; we are the fathers of the future!"

Rábaiamon comes from a long line of warrior chieftains, and although he is getting older, he still lives up to his reputation. He will never submit to anyone; rather, he views Razameaman and his daughter as tools – necessary allies in his quest to become the new emperor of the once glorious Symbaroum. That the plan was conceived by Odralintos is to him a matter of course – the serpent has provided generations of Gaoian chieftains with good advice and active assistance.

The fact that he has lost most of his army is of course troubling, especially now that the Ambrian expeditions are starting to arrive. But once again, he trusts in Grandfather Lint and accepts whatever measures are proposed, usually without hesitation – something that may cost him dearly...



Manner	Superior		
Race	Human (barbarian)		
Resistance	Strong		
Traits	*Bushcraft* (II)		
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 7 (+3), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 11 (–1), **Quick** 13 (–3), **Resolute** 10 (0), **Strong** 16 (–6), **Vigilant** 9 (+1)			
Abilities	*Beast Lore* (adept: Beasts), *Feat of Strength* (adept), *Hammer Rhythm* (master), *Iron Fist* (adept), *Leader* (adept), Man-at-Arms (master), *Recovery* (adept), *Two-handed Force* (master)		
Weapons, Strong	Long-hammer 9 (bastard weapon, deep impact, unwieldy, massive, precise), two attacks at the same target, or one ignoring *Armor*		
Armor	Field Armor 6 (reinforced)		
Defense	–3		
Toughness	21	**Pain Threshold**	8
Equipment	Mastercrafted Long-hammer, Ambrian Field Armor		
Shadow	Dark green with tinges of grayish black, like wet moss with dead patches (corruption: 2)		

Tactics: Rábaiamon loves to fight, but has never been one to rush straight into melee. Instead he stands back and directs his subordinates toward suitable targets, before personally taking on one of the enemy's strongest fighters.

Odralintos

"The time of the beassst hasss come. The reign of Odralintosss beginsss!"

Odralintos is ancient, so much so that he remembers the last human golden age with dread. Even then he

was wise enough to stay away from hunting-crazed princes and the abominations birthed by Symbar, so until very recently he did not know where to find the legendary city. But he has never forgotten the legends about the emperor and his high seat – the Throne of Thorns, which is said to imbue its master with unlimited, godlike power.

It is the throne he wants. Ever since humans first came to the region he has steered them toward the depths of the forest, where he believed Symbar to be located. Now it is close, so close it makes his fanged snake's mouth water. Naturally he will not risk his own life as long as there are humans to do the fighting, but once the path to the imperial throne room is clear... Then Davokar will have a new, monstrous emperor of matchless power!

Note that Odralintos is a master manipulator who does not hesitate to lie or break promises. Perhaps the serpent seeks contact with the player characters in the hope of reaching an agreement that would put the throne within his reach – an agreement he will ignore as soon as the dream is about to be realized?

Manner	Overbearingly condescending
Race	Reptile (beast)
Resistance	Strong
Traits	*Armored* (III), *Colossal* (I), *Enthrall* (III), *Long-lived, Robust* (III), *Sturdy* (I), *Wings* (I), *Wisdom of the Ages* (I)
Accurate 7 (+3), **Cunning** 9 (+1), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 11 (–1), **Quick** 10 (0), **Resolute** 15 (–5), **Strong** 17 (–7), **Vigilant** 10 (0)	
Abilities	*Exceptionally Resolute* (adept), *Exceptionally Strong* (adept), *Iron Fist* (master), *Loremaster* (master), *Natural Warrior* (master)
Weapons, Strong	Bite 14, or two attacks at the same target 12/8
Armor	Scales 8
Defense	+4
Toughness	26 **Pain Threshold** 9
Equipment	None
Shadow	A dark, matte green, like the rustling leaves of a stinging nettle (corruption: 0)

Tactics: Odralintos has woken up much more hot-headed than he was as a lintworm. Sure, he is wise enough to appraise the opposition and use his enthralling ability if necessary, but if readily provoked, he has to pass a *Resolute* test to restrain himself and not attack immediately.

Commander

"For the Blood-Daughter; for Symbaroum!"

Manner	Arms folded across their chest
Race	Human (barbarian)
Resistance	Strong
Traits	*Bushcraft* (II)
Accurate 11 (–1), **Cunning** 9 (+1), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 10 (0), **Quick** 13 (–3), **Resolute** 10 (0), **Strong** 17 (–7), **Vigilant** 7 (+3)	
Abilities	*Berserker* (master), *Exceptionally Strong* (adept), *Feat of Strength* (adept), *Iron Fist* (master), *Leader* (adept), Man-at-Arms (adept), *Recovery* (master), *Two-handed Force* (master)
Weapons, Strong	Double-axe 14 (deep impact), ignores *Armor*
Armor	Double chainmail 5 (reinforced), +2 for *Berserker*
Defense	–3
Toughness	22 **Pain Threshold** 9
Shadow	Brown with stains of white and yellow, like granite gravel (corruption: 0)

Tactics: The finest warriors of the Sovereign's Oath run at the forefront of their troops, utterly convinced of their superiority. They attack the biggest, most fearsome enemy around – anything else would be unthinkable.

Objectives

The end goal is easily identified: to gain domination over the ruined city and ultimately root out the weeds of the Iron Pact – it shall be rebuilt and made the capital of the new Symbarian empire.

The Monster Cult

Almost a hundred of Rábaiamon's clan warriors are members of a secret monster cult centered around the drakworm Odralintos, including one Commander, ten squad leaders, and roughly eighty regular warriors. The Game Master decides whether this internal conflict can be used in the scheming or whether the schism makes the situation unnecessarily complex.

In the latter case, the cult may be ignored completely until the drakworm tries to reach the throne and the cultists come to his defense; as for the former, perhaps Odralintos' plans can be revealed to Rábaiamon, leaving the Sovereign army heavily reduced by internal fighting.

Table 26: The Sovereign's Oath's Troops

TYPE	NUMBERS	STATS	ADJUSTED NUMBERS	REFERENCE
Commander	5	Commander		Mother of Darkness, p. 167
Squad Leader	40	Guard Warrior		Core Rulebook, p. 216
Warrior	300	Village Warrior		Core Rulebook, p. 216
Scout	20	Wilderness Guide		Monster Codex, p. 132

Reaching the Imperial Palace: Like most people, Rábaiamon believes the Throne of Thorns is somewhere in the palace – his primary objective is to clear the way to the ruin and turn it into the headquarters for the Sovereign's Oath in Symbar. For more information, see The Imperial Palace on page 172.

Finding the Throne of Thorns: If the Sovereign's Oath is allowed to reach the ruin, but initially fails to find the Throne of Thorns, they will set their sights on other landmarks such as the Crown Ship and the pyramid by the Mother Tree – all for the purpose of finding the throne.

Eradicating all competition: While searching for the high seat, the Sovereign's Oath starts attacking other hunting parties on site, with the Iron Pact and House Kohinoor as their priority targets.

Relations
The Sovereign's Oath can hardly expect to find allies among the newly arrived expeditions. A slight exception is the Reformists, who focus mainly on domestic political intrigues and would rather see Rábaiamon dominate Symbar than Ralgai Melion. Not that Sarvola would propose an alliance, but if the Sovereign's Oath make their way to the palace and establish themselves there, he may well provide them with information which helps them destroy the Queen's expedition.

Willingness to Compromise
Rábaiamon initially has no real interest in cooperating with any of the other groups, but if he and his force manage to reach the palace and establish a fairly safe base of operations, the situation will change – relatively independent groups such as the player characters, Iasogoi Brigo and Agramai Kalfas will receive an invitation to negotiations regarding potential collaborations.

The compensation promised to temporary allies is the right to keep as many curiosities and treasures as they can carry, artifacts and collections of rituals/formulas excluded.

Encampment
At the start of the adventure, the Sovereign's Oath is encamped in a deforested area east of the Imperial Palace. As their numbers have decreased, the open space between the forest and the tents has grown to nearly two hundred meters in all directions. Water is fetched from the lake to the north, where they also fish to supplement their shrinking supplies.

Unless the player characters and other hunting parties act to prevent it, they will reach the Imperial Palace in a few days. Two dozen of their warriors are killed in battle against the abominations, but in the end they have secured a great base for further conquest. See page 174 for a map and details about the palace.

The Treasures of the Sovereign's Oath

During their time in Symbar, Sovereign warriors have amassed a considerable amount of treasure, not least on their way to the Imperial Palace. Most of it is probably junk, but player characters who find the stash in one of the central pavilions will (as a suggestion) get their hands on 1D10+10 Curiosities, 1D4+4 Mystical Treasures and 1D4–2 Artifacts. If one of the characters' competitors gets their hands on the treasure, the Game master decides what they find.

Overview

THE MAP ON page 170–171 provides a good overview of Symbar and its surrounding area. The cover of roots concealing the city stretches from east to west for about ten kilometers, and almost fifteen from north to south. The cover is between one and two meters thick, growing like a winding ceiling roughly ten to fifteen meters above ground; being below is like moving through a huge, dark hall full of ruins in various stages of decay, with a ceiling that lets in thin beams of sunlight/moonlight or wider columns where larger openings have emerged.

Beneath the cover is a second blanket of roots, consisting of mycelium-like threads meshed into a fine net. The threads once glowed in a healthy greenish-brown tone as they coated the ground and climbed over and through every structure in the city. Now they are all turning black, shriveling and dying, which explains why so many of Symbar's unholy inhabitants have come back to life.

The thousand mighty oak trees are scattered at irregular distances from each other, denser and denser the closer one gets to the center of the area, and in many places the ruins have broken through the root cover, dressed in vines and blackening moss – a few stories of a collapsed tower, parts of a wall section; rarely anything like an unscathed

structure. The most eye-catching elements are undoubtedly the rock of the Imperial Palace, the Library Spire, and the deck and masts of the Crown Ship.

Depending on the time and location, the player characters will probably see indications of where some of the other hunting parties are encamped, at least if the weather is calm and clear so that columns of smoke are rising steadily from their fires. They can also detect movement up on the root cover – a few members of some other expedition, a patrol of Sovereign warriors, or possibly an abomination or some other monstrosity that has crawled up from the shadows below. They might even hear distant screams, blood-curdling shrieks, or the clang of steel against steel coming from somewhere ahead. Whatever the case, it should be clear that the area is not nearly as desolate as other parts of Dark Davokar.

In short: a huge and dangerous adventure landscape is waiting to be explored and subdued, or at least survived. Before describing a number of specific adventure locations and events, we would like to say a few words about Symbar as a site for good old-fashioned treasure hunting, and what it is like to travel the area.

TREASURE HUNTING

Player characters who have come to Symbar to harvest its riches should of course get to do just that. The Game Master can use the members of other hunting parties to try and lure them into the plots about the awakening darkness and the hunt for the Throne of Thorns, but some gaming groups may well choose to ignore all that, at least initially. Even an expedition focused entirely on treasure hunting will soon be affected by the other groups' conflicts and the growing strength of the city's raging powers.

Whether the treasure hunting is the characters' main occupation or something they do in conjunction with other tasks and missions, the Game Master is referred to the section titled Expeditions in Davokar (page 86–100). The tables below replace the ones concerning Encounters (Table 3) and Enemies (Table 4) and apply specifically to Symbar. A roll is made for each hexagon the characters explore, or for every day that passes, without modification – no training or past experiences will help you in Symbar!

As for treasures, each hexagon on the map of Symbar counts as 1D4 ruins, the rest are completely collapsed. The result of the roll shows how many times the player characters may roll on Table 2 on page 93, after which the usual rules for excavation apply.

The Expanse of the North Lake

The exact nature of the waters north of Symbar is irrelevant to this adventure – it could be a long and narrow lake, not much wider from north to south than what is seen on the map, or even a wider river; it could also be an enormous lake, or a wetland with more islets and marshes than open water. What matters is that the Game Master has thought this through before the players ask about it, and has some idea of what type of challenges await the player characters in that area.

MOVEMENT

Regardless of where the player characters set up camp, they will most likely have to travel fairly long distances every day. Reaching the northern parts of Symbar may even require a two-day journey, with an overnight stay at or near their destination.

The woods around Symbar are dense and inaccessible and count as Dark Davokar during travel. However, we recommend that you limit the number of clashes with wild animals and other aggressive creatures; use the suggestions presented under Dangers in the Area (page 141) and let the

Table 27: Encounters in Symbar

D20	ENCOUNTER	DESCRIPTION
1–5	None	–
6	Scout, House Kohinoor	1 Queen's Spy, 2 Ranger Captains
7	Patrol, House Kohinoor	PC number of Ranger Captains, led by 1 Pansar
8	Excavation, House Kohinoor	PC number of Ranger Captains, led by 2 Adepts of the Order
9	Scout, Black Cloaks	1D4+2 Experienced Black Cloaks
10	Patrol, Black Cloaks	PC number of Experienced Black Cloaks, led by 1 Templar
11	Excavation, Iasogoi Brigo	2 Guard Warriors, 2 Rangers, 2 Adepts of the Order
12	Aluin	–
13	Patrol, Knights of Dead Prios	PC number of Enforcers
14	Excavation, Sacred of the Old Blood	2 Guard Warriors, 2 Rangers, 2 Sacred of the Old Blood Agents
15	Scout, Iron Pact	2 Late-summer Elves, led by 1 Dark Watchman
16	Miralba	Initially in beast form
17	Scout, Sovereign's Oath	1D4+2 Wilderness Guides
18	Patrol, Sovereign's Oath	PC number of Village Warriors, led by 1 Guard Warrior
19–20	Roll twice on the table	+1 Encounter per result


House Kohinoor
Iasogoi Brigo
8
8
Reformists
Witches
Sacred of the Old Blood
Black Cloaks


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Sovereign's Oath
Church of Dead Prios
1 Imperial Palace
2 The Crown Ship
3 The Mother Tree
4 Castle Thorn
5 The Caravan
6 Ceremony Circle
7 The Library Spire
8 Steps in the rock
Camp Sites
Hideouts
Fresh Water
Prey
Edible Plants
Alchemical ingredients

Tabell 28: Enemies in Symbar

D20	ENEMY	DESCRIPTION
1–5	None	–
6	Blight	Red Plague in the area (see page 104)
7	Awakened undead	PC×2 undead with stats as Dragoul
8	The College of Mystics	2 Necromages, with PC number of Dragouls
9	The noble	1 Cryptwalker, with PC×2 Dragouls
10	The blight born	PC×2 Blight Born Humans
11	The blight beasts	PC number of bestial abominations (Blight Born Elk)
12	The swineherder	PC/2 Blight Born Aboars, with 1 Glimmer
13	Invisible killers	2 Scorners
14	The wrath of the earth	PC number of Gobble Gnomes (Vengeful Terrain)
15	The enraged	Spectral Swarm (see page 105)
16	The blight mist	Corrupted Nature, 1D4+1 dangers
17	Clattering jaws	Night Swarmers, Murder Cloud
18	The sisters	2 Primal Blight Beasts
19–20	Roll twice on the table	+1 Enemy per result

characters run into enough of them to make them understand how dangerous the region really is, but not so frequently that it becomes tiresome – better to have a few truly dangerous confrontations than many easier ones.

Traveling on top of the root cover is easier, equivalent to movements in Bright Davokar. Here it might be time to let the players make a roll on Table 27: Encounters in Symbar for each stretch of travel (or each mile, if that seems preferable). Other, more threatening creatures seldom move under the open sky, so the risk of encountering them is negligible. However, since the visibility is usually quite good, the Game Master can let the player characters witness one or several monstrous figures moving among the rolling roots at a distance, before they quickly head down into the shadows again.

Longer trips on the ground, through the ruins of Symbar and its dying mycelium roots, are not recommended. Not only are they time consuming (like in Dark Davokar), but the darkness is omnipresent – a roll on Table 28: Enemies in Symbar is made for every square passed on the map, and another on Table 29: Corruption in Symbar. If the latter reveals that the area is corrupting, the players make *Strong* tests for their characters and companions; those who fail are afflicted by the blight. The only upside is that other hunting parties can be avoided: a roll is made on Table 27 for every stretch/mile as stated above, with the difference that the player characters have a chance to detect the others first, by succeeding with *[Vigilant←Discreet]*.

Finally, there is one last alternative. From the huge sinkhole south of Symbar it is possible for the characters to make their way through the Underworld, via natural cracks and caves, up through Symbarian sewers and catacombs, into basements which (if one is lucky) have openings on the ground level. This path has the advantage of containing fewer threats; the drawback is that encounters that do occur are much more dangerous, and that one can easily get lost down there, possibly having to go through the ruins. As a suggestion, the players roll a d6 twice per stretch. A result of 1 on the first means that they encounter a Mighty adversary (such as a World Serpent, wallower or a Primal Blight Beast); the second roll is modified by –3 and the outcome shows how many squares away from their destination the characters are when they reach the surface.

Table 29: Corruption in Symbar

1D20	CORRUPTION*
1–5	None
6–8	1 temporary corruption per hour
9–12	2 temporary corruption per hour
13–15	1D4 temporary corruption per hour
16–17	1D6 temporary corruption per hour
18–19	1 permanent corruption per hour
20	1 permanent corruption per half hour

* Note that the temporary corruption does not wear off until the person reaches an area free of corruption.

Lulling Symbar to Sleep

The ritual *Nature's Lullaby* is very effective for people moving through the ruined city. If one member of the party maintains the ritual while traveling, he or she may make a *Resolute* test for every hex passed. On success, the abominations in the area will ignore or even avoid them. However, this only works on abominations, not on other thoroughly corrupted creatures such as undead and those referred to as Phenomena in the *Symbaroum Monster Codex*.

The Imperial Palace

The contrast with the dusty, dead and trampled ground of the outer courtyard could not be greater. You step onto a raked walkway of smooth pebbles in black, white and gray, which runs between patches of fresh, short-cut grass; between tender broadleaves with red, white and pink flowers. The bird song is more audible now, and you can see the singers, in the trees and perched on the hero's statue in the fountain that marks the center of the inner courtyard. Towering before you is the polished, golden brown facade of the palace, with ornaments and

figures and wide-open double gates, over five meters tall. And therein rests a bright red carpet on a shiny stone floor, leading to a dark gray marble podium crowned by a throne, whose high back is shaped in the form of sprawling foliage.

ONE OF THE first places the player characters spot upon their arrival in Symbar will likely be the palace ruin looming over the root blanket, not least because of the smoke plumes often rising to the east of the building. Unless they hurry over there themselves, the characters may be informed of the Sovereign's Oath's presence by another group, such as the Iron Pact or the Witches. It is quite likely that the palace of the last Symbarian emperor will be an early focus for the player characters, and if they manage to get inside, a surprising encounter awaits in its halls: Emperor Symbar is once again the master of his palace!

INCENTIVES

There are several reasons for the player characters to visit the Imperial Palace. Sheer curiosity is of course one of them; the assumption that the Throne of Thorns will be there is another. And they do not necessarily have to go there alone. The Iron Pact, the Witches and almost all of the newly arrived hunting parties have an interest in destroying the Sovereign force, or at least driving them out of Symbar – to stop their pillaging or to gain access to the palace themselves.

DESCRIPTION

The mighty Imperial Palace stood for more than three hundred years, until the Battle of Symbar, towering over the surrounding city. Large parts of the building were crushed in the decisive hour of the battle, when Prince Eneáno's weather weavers ripped the blight born dragon Fofar from the sky, plunging him onto the rock on which it was situated. Only a fifth of the palace remains, including the throne room and the emperor's beloved garden, as well as the southern courtyard where many of the city's prominent individuals sought refuge.

The rock rises roughly twenty meters above the root blanket, and its slopes are covered by what seems from a distance to be rust-brown thorn bushes. These will soon prove difficult to overcome, especially on the north side where the bushes are both wide and deep. Getting onto the plateau will therefore be a challenge, which is described in greater detail under the heading Ways Inside on page 177.

The part of the palace that still stands is roughly twenty meters high in the far south, while the upper stories are increasingly collapsed the further north one goes. It also gives a strange impression: the facade appears to have been partially restored, especially the surface facing south toward the garden – the golden brown stone is free of cracks and imperfections, so meticulously polished that it shines in the sun; its decorative statues, chiseled windows, and ornaments seem newly built; and those who enter the inner courtyard will be amazed that even the five-meter-high, open double gate of silvery metal looks brand new.

As for the corruption in the area, it is practically non-existent on the rock. But the blight still plagues the ground that surrounds it; anyone down there must pass a *Strong* test every hour or suffer 1D4 temporary corruption.

The different parts of the Imperial Palace are detailed below, followed by a number of scenes that may take place in or around the ruin. The section concludes with a brief run-through of the other hunting parties' approaches to the Imperial Palace, and what roles they may play during the player characters' arrival and investigations.

The Corridor

The Sovereign's Oath has chopped and sawed down parts of the root blanket to form an almost two kilometer long, fifty-meter-wide, open road towards the ramp leading up to the gatehouse. The severed roots dangle along the sides of the corridor like a sparse curtain over and between dilapidated buildings of different heights, and the sun shines down upon the exposed ruins covering the ground in-between, most of them badly damaged by the ravages of time. The mycelium roots on the ground are still there, climbing over blackened soil and graying lichens, and

General Meeting

If the Game Master so desires, the player characters can, shortly after arriving in Symbar, be called to a general meeting in some neutral location, by the Huldra or Ardil. Other attendees will likely include Ralgai Melion, Sister Losadra and Alisabeta Vearra, and the topics to be discussed are twofold: What to do about the Sovereign's Oath, and how to stop the awakening of Symbar?

Something that could make the meeting particularly interesting is if one player is chosen to represent the player characters, while each of the other players is tasked with portraying one of the other participants, based on the information presented in the Factions section (all subheadings). A possible drawback of this is that the factions become less mysterious to the players; they would know things about the opponents that their characters do not. But that problem can be tackled, at least in part, by the Game Master allowing the factions' objectives and reasoning to change over the course of the game, so that the players' information eventually becomes dated.



IMPERIAL PALACE

1. Corridor
2. Moat of Thorns
3. Ramp
4. Gatehouse
5. Outer Courtyard
6. Inner Courtyard
7. Small Throne Room
8. Mosaic
9. To Escape Tunnel
10. Fofar the Destroyer

the abominations and undead who once roamed the area have been slain by the barbarian warriors – at the cost of numerous lives and a great deal of suffering.

By Day 1 of the adventure, Rábaiamon's forces have gotten so far that it will only take them another three days to reach the foot of the ramp, if they are not disturbed. Which, of course, they will be; as soon as the Knights of Dead Prios arrive in the area, they will carry out raids which delay the deforestation in various ways. But ideally the player characters and the other hunting parties should still have a sense of urgency to deal with the Sovereign's Oath – if Rábaiamon's troops reach the palace, they will gain a significant advantage over all competitors!

The Moat of Thorns

The slopes of the palace rock are covered with thorn bushes which to this day are drawing their corrupted sustenance from the body of the blight born dragon slumbering in the vast field of thorns stretching out north of the ruin. A successful *Vigilant* test aimed at this field reveals that it is heaving up and down at regular intervals, barely noticeable, but clearly enough to indicate that a gigantic creature is resting beneath its roots. The *Clairvoyance* ritual can be used to actually see the monster down there, curled up, the tail resting over its head.

The thorn bushes themselves are dangerous. In the narrowest part it takes six movement actions to get to the other side, or four with a successful *Strong* test. For each movement action performed among the bushes, the characters must succeed with *[Vigilant –5]* – on failure they are hit by a Penetrating thorn with damage 6; if it pierces the victim's protection, that person is afflicted by a Moderate poison and 1D6 temporary corruption.

Added to this are the blight born Thorn Beasties (the *Advanced Player's Guide*, page 123) and Living Thorns (the *Monster Codex*, page 65) who live among the bushes, both with the addition of *Corrupting Attack* (I). Every person wading through the thorns rolls 1D10 per turn to decide whether any creatures detach themselves from the branches – 1–4: none, 5–7:_one Thorn Beasty, 8–9: one Living Thorn, 10: one of each. These creatures will not leave the safety of their home; characters who manage to escape the thorn bushes will not be pursued.

Player characters trying to set fire to the vegetation will find that it takes more than a jar of oil and a flame arrow (or equivalent); such fires will quickly go out due to the life-giving juices of the thorns, and because the creatures inhabiting the field isolate the part that is burning. To really set the bushes ablaze, the player characters must defend the flames and feed them oiled firewood. The process takes five turns to complete, and each turn the characters are attacked by another 1D6 Thorn Beasties and 1D6 Living Thorns.

The Ramp

The ramp leading up to the gatehouse of the outer wall is almost two hundred meters long, with an altitude difference of roughly thirty-five meters. The moat of thorns is particularly wide where it climbs over the approach to the palace, and takes eight movement actions to push through (or six with a successful *Strong* test).

Gatehouse

The outer wall of the palace is four meters high and made from dark mottled granite with a rough surface, clearly worn by wind and weather. The gatehouse rises another two meters and is roughly ten paces deep, with a sturdy portcullis at the entrance, immediately followed by a double gate of dark gray metal. The grille is shut, and the gate bolted.

The grille can be raised with a winch on the upper floor of the gatehouse. In other words, one must first reach the top of the wall, then squeeze oneself through one of the crenels or pick the lock on the iron gate of the balustrade, before finally operating the winch. The Game Master decides whether any success tests are required on the way in, but it takes a successful *Strong* test to rotate the jammed winch wheel.

The gate has to be unbolted before it can be opened (otherwise it has *Toughness* 50, *Breakpoint* 20, and *Protection* 20). The abominations described below become a problem at this point. A diversion further away along the wall can give someone 1D4+1 turns to operate freely inside the gate; without such an effort the time limit is just one (1) turn. It takes a

Rabáiamon's Strategy

You may wonder why the Sovereign's Oath does not just go to the palace via the upper root cover, like the player characters might. The answer is simply that they are preparing for the Blood-Daughter's arrival – they want to secure a safe path to the top of the fortified rock, free of abominations and dangerous vegetation.

Fofar Awakens

If the player characters attempt to reach the part of the palace that lies buried north of the rock, there is a significant risk that they will awaken Fofar the Destroyer. For example, this might happen if they manage to set fire (or if the fire spreads) to the north part of the thorn field, or if they chop their way to the ground. In that case, use the stats of a Dragon (the *Symbaroum Monster Codex*, page 37), but with all traits at level III, and with the addition of *Corrupting Attack* (III), *Harmful Aura* (III, corrupting), and *Regeneration* (III). A somewhat sluggish Fofar will massacre every living being around, before flying off into the sky and disappearing toward the Ravens.

successful *Strong* test to remove the equally jammed bolt – one attempt is allowed per turn.

Outer Courtyard

In its glory days, the outer courtyard was a blossoming park, full of statues, sculptures, caged songbirds and bubbling fountains. But that was a long time ago. Now it is all trampled and dusty, covered with the bones of blight born humans who fell victim to the crazed rage of their fellow prisoners.

During the Battle of Symbar, many of the city's nobles were offered refuge atop the palace rock. The lowborn were assigned the area between the outer and inner walls of the plateau, and were consequently directly exposed to the wave of corruption that emanated from the crashing dragon. More than half of them were blight born within moments, while the rest, who escaped the wave with only severe blight marks, did not survive for long.

The abominations have been trapped there ever since, between two sturdy ramparts and the walls of the palace wings. Some of the clawed monstrosities have managed to climb the wall and disappeared into the city; the others have scratched and scraped to no avail. Over the centuries a handful of them have attacked the others in outbursts of rabid savagery, slightly reducing their numbers. But there are still more than two hundred abominations in the courtyard; howling with frustration; clawing at the walls and the ground and even their own bodies, longing for living flesh to sink their teeth into. If stats are needed, use Blight Born Human (the *Core Rulebook*, page 226) as a starting point.

The player characters have little hope of killing the entire horde; they must find a way to get past it, or let the creatures out. Suggestions on how to do this are found under the heading Ways Inside (page 177).

Inner Courtyard

The contrast between the inner and outer courtyards could not be greater. The inner wall is almost seven meters high, so while birdsong can be heard amid the surrounding desolation, there is nothing to prepare those who reach the top of the wall for the sights on the other side – the lush early summer greenery; the apple trees with flowers of white, pink and red; the gorgeous flowerbeds; and the fountain bubbling at its center.

Emperor Symbar comes here every so often, in spirit form, unable to manifest but still capable of interacting with the vegetation. More about the Emperor Spirit and the player characters' encounter with him can be read under the heading Conversation with the Emperor on page 178.

The Palace

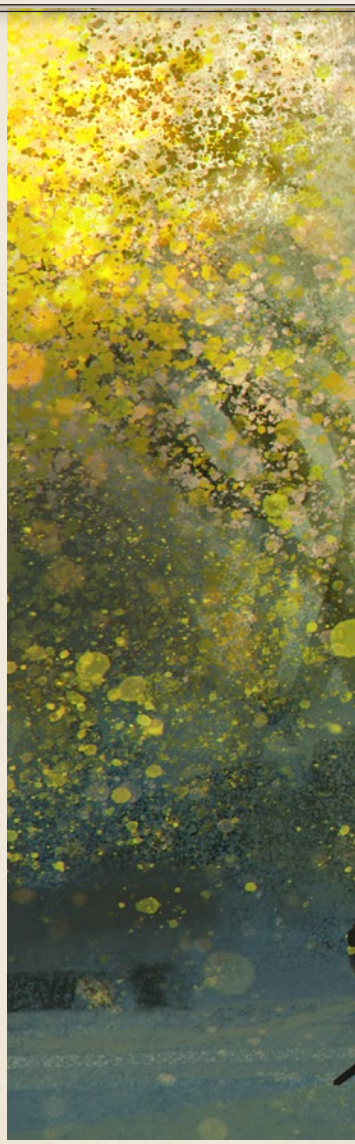
The Emperor Spirit has not only invested lots of time and effort into cultivating the garden, but has also begun a loving restoration of the palace itself. The map only shows the bottom floor of the remaining part of the structure, which is all that is needed for the sake of the adventure. But while the throne room behind the palace's massive double gate rises almost twenty meters, all the way to the roof, the east and west wings have three stories above ground as well as basement levels. Should the player characters want to explore these, the Game Master is free to improvise on the basis that they once served as workrooms and offices for Symbar's and Symbaroum's government officials, including military officers. The restoration of the basements and the upper levels has been sporadic; a few rooms are clean and cleared of rubble, but most of them look pretty much like any other ruin in Davokar.

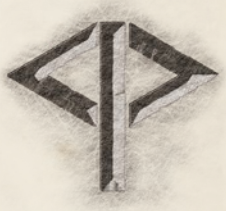
The throne room is the part of the building that the Emperor Spirit and his helpers have shown the most love. The red carpet with golden yellow borders has been recreated and leads to a polished marble podium crowned by a restored throne of stone, whose high back is shaped like sprawling foliage. Large braziers are burning at regular intervals along the walls, with dancing flames that give off no heat, seemingly without needing oil or coal. The same can be said of the hundreds of flames burning in the five chandeliers of dark burnished copper hung from the ceiling by heavy chains, seven or eight meters above the floor. The colors of the huge mosaic on the inner wall are bright and clear (see more below), and the floor's light gray, brilliantly polished marble tiles do not have even the slightest scratch.

Beyond the north wall of the throne room only the bottom floor remains, increasingly dilapidated the closer one gets to the collapse. The rooms on the west side were used by the Palace Marshal, the Lord Chamberlain, and their respective staff members, while the east rooms served as conference halls for official matters. As far as the adventure is concerned, the most important element is the stairway leading down into the center of the rock, from one of the rooms directly behind the throne's podium (see more under The Escape Tunnel, page 179).

EVENTS

The sections below addresses a handful of situations or challenges the player characters are likely to come up against at the Imperial Palace. The players may of course take their own, more extensive initiatives, in search of knowledge and treasure, but the ones below should cover all that is relevant for the story to progress.





The royal rune **Labrys** can be seen in many places in the palace ruin, for instance on the gate and the red carpet.



Emperor Symbar dwells in an oasis of color and light, right in the middle of his dark, dying city.

Ways Inside

It is possible to reach the palace rock by crossing the moat of thorns, but as mentioned earlier, that particular route is anything but safe. Those with the ability to fly, levitate or teleport will of course have no problem getting to (and past) the gatehouse or the outer wall. Otherwise the player characters will have to be clever and the Game Master flexible, rewarding good ideas and punishing foolish ones with carefully balanced challenges. One option is to build a makeshift ramp by dragging an at least thirty-meter-long tree trunk up to the root blanket; it can then be leaned against the western or southern slope, thus enabling the characters to cross the vicious thorns.

After reaching the gatehouse the characters must neutralize the threat of the abominations in the outer courtyard. Once again, a tree trunk can be used as a bridge by placing it between the tops of the inner and outer walls, for instance just north of the gatehouse. The simplest solution is of course to open the gate and release the abominations. As long as the person unbolting the gate has a plan for getting out of the area alive, this could actually be a great way of eliminating the remaining Sovereign forces: as soon as the gate opens, the monstrous nobles will rush east and soon pick up the scent of the barbarian encampment. How many survive that battle, and whether they are abominations or clanfolk, is for the Game Master to decide based on the relative strengths of those involved and what other parties decide to join in.

Note that Odralintos should not be killed during this sequence. If the abominations clash with the Sovereign's Oath as described above, we suggest that the lindworm retreats along with part of his monster cult. That way, sly Grandfather Lint can appear later in the adventure (see The Power Awakens on page 212)...

Conversation with the Emperor

In the adventure *The Darkest Star*, the spirit of Emperor Symbar was freed from his funeral ship in the Yonderworld by the mystic Kullinan Furia, in the belief that the old emperor would pass on to the Spirit World. But the spirit had other plans; he returned to his home world and his native city of Symbar, to atone for his sins and cleanse the city of the darkness he once caused.

Having remodeled the old throne room, the Emperor Spirit is currently occupied with cleansing and reviving his beloved garden. Two of his helpers (see the text box The Powers of the Emperor Spirit) have started restoring the front of the building, and can be seen as almost completely translucent tremors in the air on each side of the facade – one focusing on a crumbled, bull-like gargoyle; the other smoothing a section where the stone is still cracked, rough and lackluster.

The player characters may approach the Emperor Spirit, but he won't react or even stop what he is doing – working on a lavish bed of roses whose petals have not yet regained their crimson tone – unless addressed in Symbarian by someone with *Loremaster* (master). The spirit is happy to talk, but has trouble focusing and suffers from severe memory gaps, especially regarding time and details. For example, he remembers that the Battle of Symbar was fought between humans, elves, spiders, trolls and monsters, but cannot recall who won or which side anyone was on, nor whether he died before, during or after the battle.

The Emperor Spirit looks like the half-translucent shadow of an elderly man, dressed in a simple robe, with a bushy beard and bald head, completely white except for his beady black eyes. The following bullet points list the information he has to offer, as answers to direct questions or dropped into sentences as he rambles to himself in confusion. Remember that his speech is incoherent – the spirit may interrupt himself in the middle of a word and reach for a bumblebee or focus on a detail of a player character's clothes.

- Symbar was beautiful, breathtakingly beautiful. But Symbar is no more.
- Symbar was not one, but many – it was the place, the body and the power. Now the place is destroyed (the spirit gestures toward the city in all directions), the body lost (points at himself), and the power corrupted.
- What pains him the most is that he cannot find his throne. Not the one in the throne room, but his real throne, the throne of Symbar.
- It was cared for by the priests, somewhere nearby. He does not remember where, but he should know, should sense it, should be in tune.
- The throne was the vessel, not the source; the source was and is of another time, another world, before and beyond Asbarast. Far, far beyond. Supremely powerful! That is why we needed the priests, to tend, nourish and harness.
- And guard, with staves, words and growing contempt!
- The theft! He recalls a theft. Treason. The priests, they stole something, or someone. His throne, perhaps...
- No, Symbar is no more, but what is left of the body and the power, inside him, will hopefully be enough to restore the city, to wash it clean from sin and shame and pain. That is all that matters. That is all...

Grief-stricken, the spirit turns his back on the player characters and returns to the rose bed. It seems the ethereal figure is struggling to hold back his silent tears.

The conversation can continue at a later time, but will not produce any more information – talking

The Powers of the Emperor Spirit

The Throne of Thorns is not what it once was, but back when Emperor Symbar was alive it really could endow its master with godlike powers. Using that power gave rise to corruption, which limited what the Symbarian emperors could actually do – but that restriction does not apply to the dead...

The Emperor Spirit who has come back to restore his old capital cannot create anything new, but is able to shape creation as he sees fit – a lengthy process that requires absolute focus on the task at hand. As a guideline, should it be required, the spirit can process one creature or one cubic meter of matter per hour. In that way, it is able to cleanse a lilac of corruption, making it healthy and strong, but doing the same to a blight born human is a bit trickier, as it is likely to run away, after trying to harm the source of its discomfort.

Furthermore, the Emperor Spirit has a certain power over other wraiths. He can communicate with them without linguistic obstacles, and break the bonds that bind them to bodies, places or memories, allowing them to pass on to the eternal rest of the Spirit World. At the start of the adventure, Emperor Symbar has already taken some long walks under the root cover and encountered both wraiths and undead, who were offered this help. Everyone accepted, and a handful have also agreed to help their liberator cleanse and restore the city before they go. Two of these are at the palace, while three more can be found in different places under the root cover; they have been granted some of the Emperor Spirit's powers, but are much weaker and need ten times as long to make changes to Creation.

about Symbar, the throne, and the priests' betrayal only makes him sad or upset. However, the Game Master can use these conversations to provide the player characters with further insights into the history presented on pages 59 to 64, albeit in the same incoherent and fragmentary style as above.

Investigations

There is only one key discovery to be made in what remains of the palace, and it is hard to miss. The twenty-meter-high and almost seventy-meter-wide wall in the back of the throne room is one big mosaic painting, which can give the player characters and their competitors a clear indication of where they can learn more about the Throne of Thorns.

The background depicts a starry night sky, or rather a space vista. On the right is a sphere covered in swirling darkness, blacker than the space around it; on the left is another sphere, deep blue with patterns of green, white and yellowish-brown (symbolic representations of the world from whence the humans came as well as their destination).

Between the spheres, at the center of the mosaic and just behind the podium, there is a ship in cross section – the bow to the left, the stern to the right, with two floors below the upper deck. The interior is completely devoid of furnishings and creatures, with one noticeable exception: at the heart of the ship, in the middle of the second floor, is a large hall of pillars centered around a podium. On the podium a human figure is standing at attention, wearing a purple cloak and a golden headband. And behind the regal sculpture, a simple throne whose back is roughly one and a half times taller than the king, seemingly made of black stone, overgrown with winding vines.

In addition, the player characters can explore the two wings of the throne room and what is left of the ruin's northern parts (including the basement described under the next header). If they get there before anyone else, there is a maximum of 3D8+2 finds to collect; if other groups have already been there, the Game Master must adjust the number of finds depending on who they were and how many were in their group.

The Escape Tunnel

Before the collapse there used to be several escape routes from the palace, but only one of them is still intact. In the round room behind the throne there is a spiral staircase leading down into the rock, to corridors and chambers once used for storage by the staff of both the Palace Marshal and the Lord Chamberlain – accounting records, journals, linens, consumables, and other mundane items.

The chamber immediately to the right in the first corridor contains an open trapdoor, propped up by two massive iron poles. It has been that way ever since the Battle of Symbar, when a section of the palace guard went to reinforce the city's defenses, mere heartbeats before the dragon crashed onto the rock.

A ladder embedded in the wall leads down into a small chamber, and jutting off that chamber is a tunnel that angles west, first steeply through the rock, then onward to the basement beneath the City Watch headquarters. Black roots have burst through the tunnel walls and ceiling; dense drops of foul-smelling, discolored water are trickling down here and there; the surrounding soil squeaks and groans, occasionally trembling restlessly. The lack of supports contributes to the feeling that the tunnel may collapse at any moment.

And sure enough, there are about a dozen places where parts of the walls and ceiling have fallen in. In some places one must crawl about twenty meters in order to continue, but only two sections require shovels or pickaxes (alternately, shields and hand weapons) – one located roughly one kilometer from the palace and the other at the end of the tunnel, as the City Watch building has been completely demolished. If the player characters are under a time limit, it takes one hour to pass the first collapse, or half an hour if each of the two diggers pass a *Strong* test. In the City Watch basement there is more digging to be done, but also more room for others to help out: they can reach the surface in three hours, minus fifteen minutes for every contributing player character who passes a *Strong* test.

THE COMPETITORS

Regardless of what awaits inside the walls, the Imperial Palace is highly coveted by every hunting party in Symbar – for its walls, its strategic position and the corruption-free plateau. Claiming it is crucial, but stopping others from doing so is at least as important. Moreover, the groups who have come to take control of Symbar and/or find the Throne of Thorns have even more reason to occupy the palace.

Eliminating the Sovereign's Oath is in the interest of all groups, but for different reasons. If everyone comes together in an alliance, including witches and elves, the obvious question is what happens next. It is therefore likely that House Kohinoor's expedition would prefer a small but strong alliance made up of groups they believe to be trustworthy, such as Iasogoi Brigo, the Sacred of the Old Blood, and possibly the player characters. The Witches will probably do the same and settle for the Iron Pact, the Reformists and maybe the player characters.

Deus Ex Machina

During their time in Symbar, the player characters will have plenty of opportunities to get into trouble. If it looks like the entire group might be killed, the Game Master may decide to send in unexpected reinforcements – it could be Aluin, Yeleta or a raging abomination suddenly attacking the characters' enemies. This is called Deus Ex Machina and should mean that the player characters do not gain any *Experience* from the scene in question. For more information, see page 195 in the *Core Rulebook*.

If the Black Cloaks have arrived in time, they and the Knights of Dead Prios become wild cards in the negotiations – they have reason to hate the members of both alliances, but may be persuaded to contribute if they get something in return.

Note that the player characters can defeat the Sovereign's Oath on their own, or at least do some serious damage, by releasing the abominations from the courtyard. If this succeeds, and they manage to take control of the Imperial Palace, the characters will be in a very interesting negotiating position. House Kohinoor will offer them just about anything in exchange for a close alliance, as will the Sacred of the Old Blood – both of them intent on later stabbing the player characters in the back. The others are more moderate in their proposals, especially the Witches and the Reformists who propose an alliance without offering anything but a joint effort to defend the palace.

Finally, it should be mentioned that groups whom the player characters refuse to let into the palace might well band together and try to take the location by force, probably by surrounding the rock and giving the characters a tight deadline. In that case the previously mentioned escape tunnel may come in handy...

The Crown Ship

The cracked marble of the plateau is covered by mycelium-like, red-brown roots, but none of that can be seen on the stone gangway, nor on the rune-carved hull of the stern. Guards are posted in tight rows alongside the gangway, all the way to the half-open double door of the stern; undead warriors with listless eyes and parchment-colored skin, dressed in tattered uniforms. Silently they let you enter the ship, into a dark, echoing hall. As your lanterns flare up, you notice the remarkably high ceiling, seven or eight meters above. The hall is empty, save for some leaves, branches and clods of dirt blown in from outside, as well as dull-colored mosaics of warriors in full armor with broad-bladed greatswords on the long side walls, almost all the way to the ceiling. You take a few hesitant steps forward, and soon the welcoming committee appears in the glow of the lanterns: another dozen undead guards armed with rusty spears, facing your way, in a semicircle around what you initially mistake for the sooty statue of a warrior – a mistake which is dispelled as you notice the glowing eyes watching you through the slits of the horned great helm.

LOOKING OUT OVER Symbar's cover of roots, one's eyes are inevitably drawn to the ship deck rising over the rootlands, though from a distance it can be hard to tell what the strange formation really is. The Crown Ship, Saroklaw, came to the lands east of the Ravens with the first humans, before being dragged across the mountains to the imperial capital, and has now become the high seat of a slowly growing domain whose ruler does not take kindly to intruders.

INCENTIVES

A huge ship of stone, located in central Symbar, will probably be of particular interest to treasure hunters, especially if the fortune hunters in question have already visited Emperor Symbar's much smaller funeral ship in the Yonderworld (see *Yndaros – The Darkest Star*, page 154). The mosaic in the Imperial Palace's throne room, which depicts a stone ship containing what looks like an overgrown throne, is another reason to visit this adventure location, in search of clues about the Throne of Thorns and its fate.

BACKGROUND

Mankind arrived on this world by means of an armada of ceremonial stone ships, carried by tremendous mystical powers. One of these vessels was the Crown Ship Saroklaw, named after the travelers' ruling dynasty. In addition to the imperial family, Saroklaw was occupied by three types of passengers: highborn nobles, skilled artisans and servants. It was equipped to carry everything the travelers might need in the new world, completely self-sufficient in case the other ships should sink or get lost in the darkness between worlds.

But that did not happen. Instead, Saroklaw became the hub of a great wave of colonization, when the humans slowly but surely conquered the land between the East Sea and the Ravens, and the city of Asbarast was raised around it. The Throne of Thorns, linked to an inexhaustible power source in the old world, remained on the ship, only available to the descendants of Saroklaw. Later, when the people fled the desolated land, the ship was sealed and left behind, as the high seat was found to be the source of the destruction. There it stood for almost seven hundred years, until the defeat of Ambal Seba allowed Symbar's subjects and slaves to haul it across the Titans, to the capital of the growing empire. The Throne of Thorns was soon moved to what became known as Castle Thorn, seat of the Priesthood of Dakothnic, while the ship was placed on a platform for all to see.

Six months ago, the death knight Kantor An-Orel awoke and found himself free from the shackles of his late master. Dazed and weak from the still potent powers of the Keepers, he found his way to the Crown Ship, whose interior is completely free of

both corruption and corruption-suppressing energies. It was already inhabited by twenty undead, they too recently awakened and searching for meaning in the miserable world to which they had returned. Kantor proclaimed himself Lord of the Blackland and took possession of the Crown Ship, and his subjects have since grown in number to about a hundred.

Their main duties include raising and recruiting more undead, mapping the ruins and gathering information. Kantor's memory is dark and muddled, but he remembers that elves and spiders were responsible for his master's death and the destruction of Symbar – once he has assembled an army large enough and gained a better understanding of what actually happened, he will do everything in his power to satisfy the desire that drives him: the desire for revenge.

DESCRIPTION

The only part of the ship that is visible above the root blanket is the railing and upper deck, but at nearly two hundred paces long from bow to stern, it is quite hard to miss. The roots are tightly wound around the hull and the three towers poking up around it – one larger and better preserved, and two smaller ones. Player characters trying to enter via the deck will quickly find that it cannot be done. Most likely they will go down one of the towers, or simply chop an opening in the root blanket and hoist themselves down.

The ground below is clearly corrupted, which is also the case up on the platform: everyone must pass a *Strong* test every hour or suffer 2 points of temporary corruption. But thanks to the mystical symbols carved into the hull, the ship's interior is completely free of corrupting energies.

The Deck

The Crown Ship is nearly two hundred paces long, and about half as wide. The upper deck is full of blown-in leaves, twigs and other debris, and some corners are covered with a thin layer of soil where little trees and bushes have taken root. The mainmast is cracked but still standing, though without the ceremonial sails that long ago adorned the booms. All entrances into the ship are sealed and have been for over two thousand years, as if the stone doors have merged with the stone of the hull. The characters may of course hack their way into the fore- or aftercastle or the stairwell leading to the middle floor, but it takes time and will inevitably provoke a reaction from Kantor An-Orel – he sends a force of twenty soldiers to the surface through the large tower, with orders to defend his domain against the intruders.

It is possible that some other faction will be on (or somewhere near) the deck when the player characters arrive, most likely House Kohinoor or Iasogoi Brigo. It could be an advance team of scouts and scholars, or a larger force ready to defend the site from other hunting parties. For more details, see the heading Arrival (page 187).

The Main Tower

The northwest tower has survived the centuries surprisingly well, with even its roof intact. Only the top floor protrudes from the root cover. Its windows are large enough even for an ogre to fit through, and long ago offered a magnificent view of the emperor's city.

The tower has four stories connected by a spiral stairway in the middle. The top floor held a salon where visitors could admire the view over a glass of wine and some snacks, while the two middle floors contained remarkable exhibits displayed inside the ship – tableware, ornaments, and paintings, as well as items involved in the ceremony that brought the ship to this world. The furnishings are completely destroyed, but a few items may still be around – the Game Master can choose from Table 6 (page 95) or let each character who is actively looking roll on the table once per hour (up to six items).

Those hoping to sneak down through the tower will be disappointed: Kantor has posted a two-man patrol on each of the middle floors, and a guard force of ten soldiers in the empty hall at the bottom of the stairs. It may be possible to take out the patrols on the upper floors without alerting the guard force, either with ranged weapons from the top of the stairway or by sneaking down the flight of iron bar stairs – it takes a successful *[Discreet –5]* test to keep the metal from creaking and squeaking.

Characters who would rather try to communicate with the tower guards, perhaps to request an audience, require *Loremaster* (master) and a successful *Cunning* test. They have orders to attack any intruders, which makes combat inevitable unless the player characters quickly make themselves understood.

Kantor's Soldiers

These undead warriors were once seasoned Symbarian soldiers, and while they remember little in terms of military strategy, they still know how to use their weapons and shields. They all look dried-up, with wrinkled, tawny skin and hollow features; the uniforms are tattered and their eyes blank, almost as if drugged.

Manner	Mechanically eager
Race	Undead (undead)
Resistance	Challenging
Traits	*Undead* (II)



THE CROWN SHIP

1. Upper Deck
2. Main Tower
3. Smaller Towers
4. Podium
5. Stairs to overgrown square

Note that the upper root cover has been made transparent in order to display the podium. In reality, the cover grows all the way to, and encloses, the railing.

Accurate 9 (+1), **Cunning** 10 (0), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 7 (+3), **Quick** 11 (–1), **Resolute** 15 (–5), **Strong** 13 (–3), **Vigilant** 10 (0)			
Abilities	*Iron Fist* (master), Man-at-Arms (adept), *Shield Fighter* (master)		
Weapons, Strong	Sword 9, plus Shield Bash 6 and *[Strong←Strong]* to knock the target prone		
Armor	Assorted light armor 2, half damage according to *Undead* II		
Defense	–3		
Toughness	13	**Pain Threshold**	–
Equipment	None		
Shadow	Grainy matte black, like sooty fabric (thoroughly corrupt)		

Tactics: The warriors have retained none of their tactical acumen – they charge without coordination or any regard for their own lives.

Smaller Towers

The two smaller towers can be climbed and are virtually unguarded, save for a single two-man patrol each, posted outside the opening to the plateau. However, there are other types of challenges to look out for.

The northeast tower is falling apart, and too much weight placed in the wrong places might cause it to collapse. Its interior is like a chimney, without intermediate floors, but the walls are so rough that the characters can easily climb up or down, especially with the help of a rope. But they have to be careful, which a person with the *Loremaster* ability can realize by passing a *Cunning* test (or *[Cunning –5]* without *Loremaster*). If the tower is subjected to a load equivalent to a total *Strong* value of 25 or more, there is a 50% risk of collapse; for each point of *Strong* over 25, and each level of the trait *Robust*, the risk increases by five percentage points.

If the tower does collapse, everyone inside takes damage from the fall (the Game Master decides how much) and adds another 1D10 points of crushing damage from falling stones. Furthermore, the collapse is of course heard by the ship's inhabitants; a patrol of ten warriors will arrive after 1D4+2 turns.

The southwest tower stands firm, but has an unpleasant surprise in store for anyone who visits it, unless they have the *Witchsight* ability and pass a *Vigilant* test, which provides a premonition of what is to come. The two lower floors are overtaken by thoroughly corrupted fungal mycelium that covers the floor and walls like a rusty red carpet. The mycelium itself is harmless, but the puffballs it produces are not – equally rust-colored and no larger than grapes; some growing on the surface, others partially concealed by mycelium.

If none of the characters have *Witchsight*, they will probably not recognize the danger until someone steps on a mushroom: on the next turn, everyone within one movement action suffers 1D4 temporary corruption. If they still decide to press on, they must all make two *[Vigilant –5]* tests, one for each floor – each failure has the same effect as above.

Platform with surroundings

The platform carrying the Crown Ship is roughly five meters high, made of granite with a layer of cracked marble slabs on top. Like the surrounding ruins, it is completely covered by thin, black roots.

The stairs face a large open space – once one of the most beautiful squares in the city, with a nearly fifteen-meter-tall majestic statue of the Symbar who first assumed the title of Emperor and founded the Symbarian Empire. Here the battle raged long and hard, and beneath the thin layer of fettered roots lie the remains of countless warriors from both sides. Player characters who take the time to look for treasures can find suitable curiosities and mystical treasures from tables 7 and 8, though no artifacts. But this is not without risk: for every item found 1D8 is rolled to determine whether its original owner rises from dead, and if so, in what form.

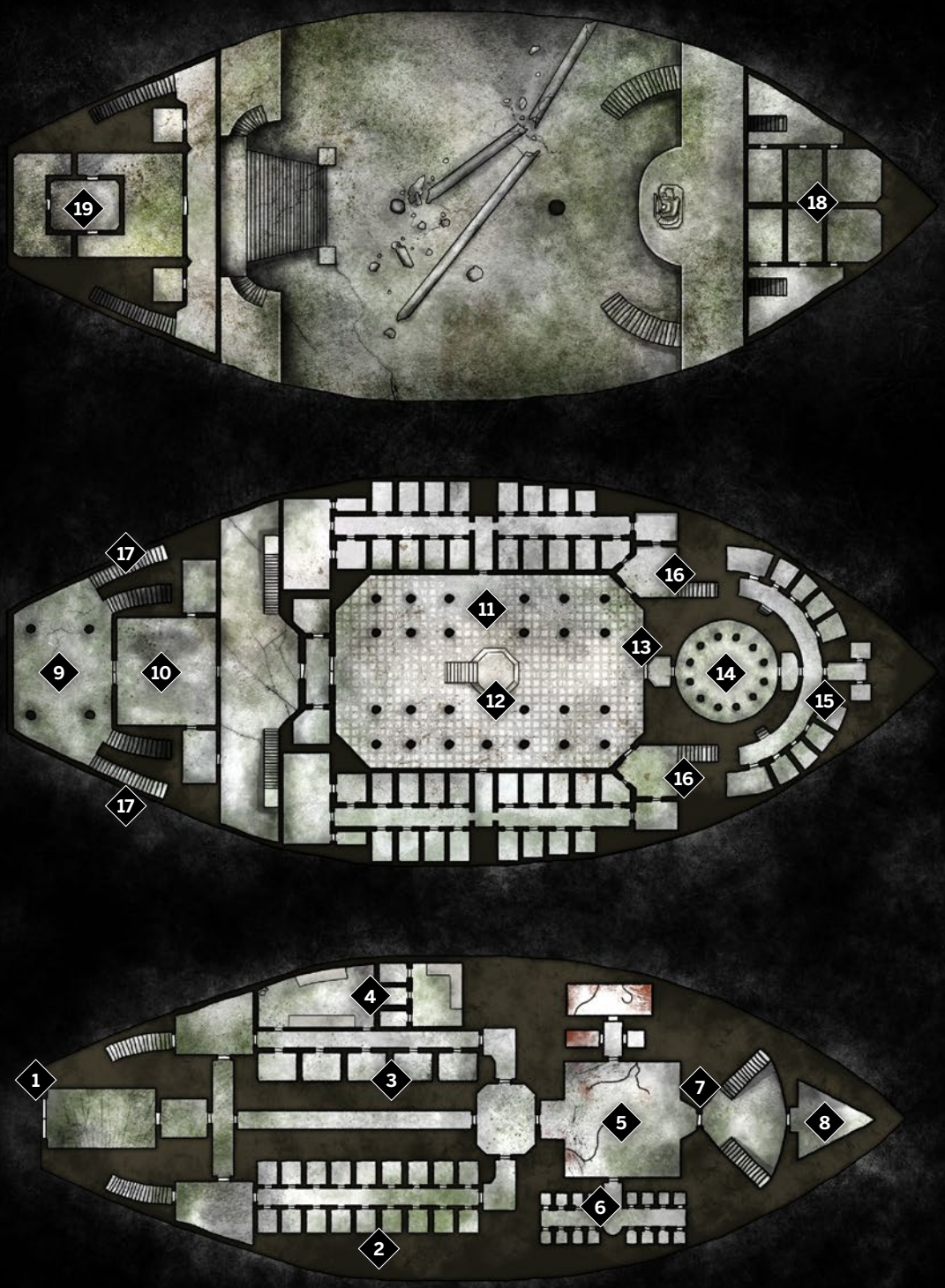
Table 30: Restless Dead

1D8	RISES AS...	REFERENCE
1–3	–	
4–5	Dragoul	Core Rulebook, p. 230
6	Nightmare	Monster Codex, p. 81
7	Crypt Lord	Monster Codex, p. 145
8	Crypt Walker	Core Rulebook, p. 233

The Treasures of the Museum

Before the Crown Ship embarked on its journey through the darkness, life-sustaining seals were placed on all containers in the Museum, some of which remain unbroken. But searching all the shelves and cabinets in the sixteen alcoves takes time, and the unopened containers are not easy to find. A character can make one *Vigilant* test for every hour of searching – on success she finds one of the containers listed in Table 31 (next page), and the search may continue until all containers have been found.

Finding the seeds is not enough. In order to cultivate an actual plant from the ancient, otherworldly ovules, someone with the *Alchemy* ability must pass a *[Cunning –3]* test – only one attempt per container is allowed; failure means that the seeds are destroyed.



INSIDE THE SHIP

1. Stern Gate
2. Servant Quarters
3. Artisan Quarters
4. Workshops
5. Cages
6. Plant Seeds
7. Sealed Gate
8. Sacrificial Chamber
9. Salon
10. Restaurant
11. Throne Room
12. Podium
13. Sealed Gate
14. Ceremony Circle
15. Priest Quarters
16. Stair to Forecastle
17. Stair to Aftercastle
18. Forecastle
19. Aftercastle

0 40 M

Table 31: Treasures of the Museum

1D6	CONTAINER	CULTIVATED PLANT
1	Flask of smoky crystal with a wax seal	Bone-white rosebush from which a substance can be extracted and added as an accelerator when creating the elixir Spirit Friend, doubling its duration (1D4 x 2 turns).
2	Bark box painted with a red rune	Bush whose red berries can be dried, ground and mixed into poisons that are applied to weapons: increases damage by +1 per turn of duration.
3	Elongated copper cylinder, threaded in the middle	Vine plant whose leaves can be milked for a slimy green secretion, which if added to the elixir Shadow Tint makes the user appear totally uncorrupted. The downside is a vicious hangover that sets in once the substance wears off, adding a –2 modifier to all success tests for the next twelve hours.
4	Matte black orb with a flat bottom; three holes provide a grip for unscrewing the lid	Legume with black peas that can be squeezed to extract drops of a viscous, yellow-gray fluid. When mixed into war paint the paint adds +3 to the chosen trait, at the cost of one point of temporary corruption each time the trait is used.
5	Bottle of deep red glass with no visible opening; must be shattered or melted	New crop, tasty and energy-dense, resistant to drought and poor soil. Also slightly corrupting: after half a year's consumption it inflicts one point of temporary corruption per month until the afflicted has gone seven days without consuming the crop – then the corruption starts to wear off at a rate of one point per week.
6	Tall, narrow bottle with a stopper of white gold, secured by a metal clasp	Poppy-like flower whose milk juice has miraculous properties. When mixed into Twilight Tincture the chance is 1–5 on 1D20 that the undead is actually cured and restored to life. However, each attempt requires milk from an entire hectare of flowers, and failure renders the individual immune (no further attempts are allowed).

Bottom Floor

The only way into the ship is through the usually closed, but never locked, double door at the stern. Prominent passengers would immediately turn left or right, toward the stairs to the middle floor, while the bottom floor was for the servants and artisans.

Roughly one hundred and twenty servants were crammed into the eighteen cabins on the starboard side, now inhabited by Kantor's undead subjects and completely cleared of furnishings. The port side cabins were occupied by some of the refugees' most famous artisans and scholars, with an adjoining workshop and laboratory farther out toward the hull.

The section closer to the bow was called the Museum and contained seeds, plants and animals rescued from the otherwise devastated home world of humanity. The plant matter was stored in the small chambers on the starboard side, while most

The Church of Haman

The refugees who traveled on Saroklaw worshipped the Divine Human and its eight named aspects. In practice it worked similar to the pantheon of the Young Gods: humans worshipped the totality and prayed to whatever principle they needed at the moment. Many had also chosen a main principle that guided their daily and professional lives; they tattooed themselves or wore religious jewelry to show their allegiance and affiliation to others who shared their values and lifestyle.

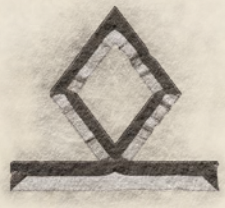
The church's organizational structure and power over society varied over time and between locations. The passengers of Saroklaw mostly regarded the principles as equally important, while earlier cultures made them the basis of a caste system – often with Sorokh and Vaesar at the top of the hierarchy, and Drobekh and/or Lethol at the bottom.

Table 32: The Principles of Haman

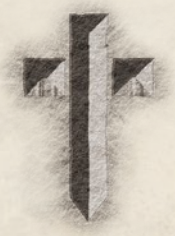
NAME	PRINCIPLE	SIGNIFICANCE	COLOR
Arian	Integrity	The ability to mask intentions and avoid attention	Blue
Dakothnic	Concentration	The ability to focus on the circumstances, the action and its consequences	Black
Drobekh	Strength	The ability to influence the environment through brute force	Red
Iliel	Precision	The ability to meticulously define and fulfill objectives	Orange
Lethol	Agility	The ability to control the movements of the body	Green
Sahan	Determination	The ability to exert one's will in spite of personal and external limitations	Purple
Sorokh	Charisma	The ability to inspire loyalty, obedience and self-sacrifice	Yellow
Vaesar	Wisdom	The ability to see things as they are, unbiased by morality and self-interest	Brown



Arian:
Integrity



Dakothnic:
Concentration



Dorobekh:
Strength



Iliel:
Precision

of the animals were caged in the large hall in the middle. Beyond the storage rooms, at the portside end of the Museum, there was a stable with room for a dozen of the most eminent traveler's mounts. Now there is not much left except storage containers of ceramic or glass, and fifty different-sized steel cages, a handful of which are now used as prison cells for undead subjects who have broken their ruler's (highly arbitrary) laws.

The gate to the two rooms at the bow has not been opened in over two thousand years and is made of metal, engraved with reinforcing and sealing runes. At the center of the door, at shoulder level, is what looks like a handprint with spread fingers, too big to have been made for a specific hand. And in the middle of the imprint is a stamped symbol: a stylized swirl. The gate leads to a sacrificial chamber at the very end of the bow, past a preparation room with stairs to the priests' quarters on the middle floor.

The Middle Floor

The middle floor of the ship was occupied by the twenty-four members of the imperial council and their families, as well as the high priests of the Church of Haman – one for each of the eight principles of the Divine Human – and Haman Dakh, head of the priesthood, who represented (and was responsible for cultivating) the principle of the Harmonious Whole.

The salon and restaurant at the stern were mainly frequented by the nobles, but they all assembled in the throne room, both before departure and during the months following their arrival in the new world. They gathered around the Throne of Thorns, often accompanied by the residents of the fore- and aftercastles (see below). And though the high seat itself was relocated long ago, the room serves roughly the same purpose to this day – this is where Kantor An-Orel receives and addresses his subjects and decides the fate of undead newcomers.

The priesthood resided in the bow section, where the nine members had their own suites and a number of common areas for eating and socializing. The ceremony that carried the ship and its passengers to their new home world, like most ceremonies after the arrival, was performed in the circular ritual chamber. The entrance from the throne room is of the same type as the one on the bottom floor – made of metal, with the handprint and the symbol, engraved with reinforcing and sealing runes. Everything behind the door is just as it was when the priests of Haman abandoned ship for the newly built temple in Asbarast, over two thousand years ago. They left with most of their personal belongings, but the player characters can find up to six items from the tables on page 96–98 (one artifact max) if they search the rooms – each failed *Vigilant* test reduces the number of finds by one.

The room ahead from the ceremonial chamber is where the priests kept their ceremonial codexes, and five of them are still there since the owner passed away before the move. These texts are very fragile and written in a language that is impossible to decipher without years of arduous study, but they obviously have great value to collectors (1000 thaler a piece for members of Ordo Magica, and 500 for other collectors).

Forecastle

The bow suites were occupied by the closest relatives of the Emperor and Empress – their respective parents as well as their siblings and their families. All furnishings have been removed, but the mosaics on the walls of the two rooms nearest the bow may be of interest. Also, the servants forgot to empty one of the hidden caches in a relative's suite...

Mosaic, port: A palace on a hilltop in a landscape of rolling farmlands, built around a keep in the form of a six-pointed star. Judging by the proportions, with tiny windows and doors, the dark gray-blue building must be huge – several hundred meters long and fifty meters tall, with towers rising twice as high. But most remarkable of all are the three celestial bodies that stand out as lighter shadows on the deep blue sky: three moons of different sizes, close together in a V-shaped formation.

Mosaic, starboard: An underground temple which, judging by the furnishings, is almost as enormous as the palace depicted in the other mosaic. The roof is still natural – a landscape of elongated stalactites – while its walls, floors and columns have been cut directly out of the mountain and chiseled with winding patterns. Row upon row of simple stone benches line a center aisle leading to a podium, and on the podium lies what seems to be an unprocessed gemstone the size of an Ambrian two-story building. The precious boulder gives off a dim light shifting between ice blue and violet, illuminating the hall with its mystical shimmer.

All suites have hidden compartments in the walls, but only one of these (the Game Master decides which one) still has items to find. The erosion has made it relatively easy to spot the joints in the patterned sections of the walls. The doors will open if someone with the imperial blood of Saroklaw in their veins presses a palm against them, but that is hardly an option for the player characters (or is it?). The alternative is to simply break each door with a sledgehammer or similar.

One of the caches contains a jewelry box that was accidentally left behind; the documents that once accompanied the box have turned to dust. Apart from the engraved and jeweled rings, pendants and earrings placed in the compartments along the edges, the contents are dominated by a thick neck chain with a simple medallion. The metal is yellowish green, heavy and hard as diamond; it looks like nothing the player characters have ever seen before. Perhaps it is an alloy? In any case, the main item is worth 800 thaler to the right buyer, the pearled box is worth 200 thaler, and the rest of its contents roughly 400 thaler. All these prices are tripled if the seller can convince the buyer of the items' legendary origin.

Aftercastle

The stern suite occupied by the childless imperial couple consisted of a salon, a bed chamber, and a study – all completely devoid of furnishings until the death prince took possession of them. Even the mosaics that once adorned the walls were moved to the palace in Asbarast, which makes the rooms look anything but grand.

The salon contains two details worth noting. Piled against a bedroom wall is what looks like a heap of different-sized boulders, but with a flat sitting surface in the middle – the undeads' attempt to build a high seat for Kantor, and the place where he goes whenever he needs to be alone. The second noteworthy detail is the pile of "gifts" the ruler has received from his subjects, now tossed in the right-hand corner just inside the sealed door to the deck. Most of it is debris, but player characters who take the time to look will also find two curiosities and one mystical treasure, without rolling for it. However, they must pass a successful *Vigilant* test not to prick themselves on the sharp needle hidden in the pile; failure means that the looter must pass a *[Strong –3]* test or be afflicted by a Moderate poison and suffer 1D4 points of temporary corruption.

The bedroom is completely empty, but in the emperor's old study, closest to the stern, Kantor An-Orel is building a map of his growing realm, using the ship as a starting point. The massive oak trees nearby are marked with blackened tree stumps; the palace perched on its rock is unmistakable, as is a building represented by flat stones stacked like a step pyramid. You can read more about this under Investigations (page 189).

EVENTS

The clues available at the adventure location can be obtained in different ways; above all, the challenge posed by the current inhabitants of the ship can be tackled with different methods and strategies. The player characters' relations with the other factions will also be an important factor, as it decides who initially stands in their way.

Arrival

The Game Master may of course decide otherwise, but our suggestion is that another faction is already present when the player characters arrive at the Crown Ship, with or without allies. If they come alone, a delegation from Iasogoi Brigo could have gotten there first; if they have company perhaps Iasogoi does too, in the form of a group loyal to House Kohinoor.

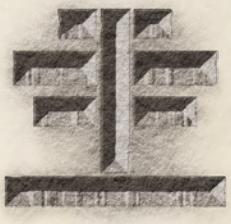
Should the player characters already be allied with said factions, it may turn out that the Knights of Dead Prios have discovered the *"outbreak of corruption and the horde of dark beasts"* that have taken possession of the ship. These may then be persuaded to enter into a temporary alliance for the purpose of cleansing the darkness of the Eternal Night, but there is a considerable risk that they will later break the agreement, or rather cut it to shreds with their greatswords. Witches, Iron Sworn, and Reformists are in particular danger, but those serving the Night Queen (i.e. Korinthia) might also suffer the holy wrath of Dead Prios.

Perhaps the rival group is up on the root blanket when the player characters arrive, or on the ship's deck, trying to find a way down. Tests against *[Vigilant←Discreet]* or vice versa may be required, depending on the circumstances, to determine which group is first to notice the other. The Game Master decides how the situation plays out based on the player characters' actions, but an initial peaceful negotiation should always be possible.

Audience with the Death Prince

Kantor An-Orel and his subjects may be thoroughly corrupt, but they are no abominations. Moreover, the ruler wants to learn more about the world and what has happened since the fall of Symbaroum, so it is certainly possible for the player characters to be granted an audience. But it is far from risk-free...

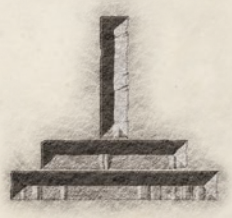
Characters with *Loremaster* (master) who pass a *Cunning* test can speak with Kantor's soldiers as well as the ruler himself. If the player characters opt for this strategy, they are told to wait where they first encountered the soldiers while one of the undead goes to inform Kantor, before returning a little later with an invitation. While they are waiting, the player characters notice that the soldiers are watching any elves and/or changelings among them with burning hatred in their otherwise dead eyes; a successful *Vigilant* test reveals that some of them are twitching as if about to attack, only to stop themselves at the last moment.



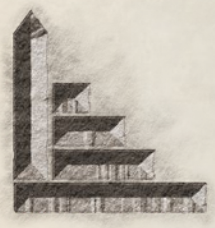
Lethol:
Agility



Sahan:
Determination



Sorokh:
Charisma



Vaesar:
Wisdom

If the player characters nevertheless decide to stick to this strategy, they are soon escorted to the Throne Room where they are received by Kantor An-Orel, standing on the podium with fifty armed subjects lined up behind him. Here it is important to show reverence; a person with *Loremaster* (master) can pass a *Cunning* test to remember how to perform a formal Symbarian bow and teach it to the others. What they can gain from the conversation, in terms of information and agreements, is described below.

If the player characters have an elf or a changeling in their midst, the situation becomes more complicated. No matter how the conversation progresses, it ends with Kantor demanding that *"the enemy's descendant"* is handed over for imprisonment and ritual execution. There are only two non-violent ways of avoiding this: the characters use a powerful artifact to buy the war criminal's freedom (the Game Master decides), or someone else with *Loremaster* (master) can take the offender's place and assume the role as Kantor's advisor. Note that, regardless of the outcome, it is of course possible for the player characters to return with allies at a later time to retrieve the item or person in question.

The following bullet points describe what the player characters can learn from a conversation with Kantor An-Orel. He speaks tersely in a rustling, metallic voice that almost seems to be echoing from within the raging glow of the black great helm.

- The characters may be permitted to investigate the Crown Ship, under the supervision of an armed escort. In exchange, Kantor demands that they first answer his questions about the world and the time after The Battle of Symbar – a thorough questioning that takes 1D4+2 hours.
- Questions about the Throne of Thorns are initially met with silence; he remembers it, but not what it was or where it stood, only that it was of great importance to the realm and that it had something to do with the city's priests and mages.
- A successful *Persuasive* test can make him dig deeper into his memories: the Throne of Thorns was guarded and nurtured by the Priesthood of Dakothnic, and studied by the Theourgs – mystics trained in morphology, the refinement of the Harmonious Whole.
- He cannot recall where the priesthood was based, but the Theourgs were held in high esteem and their sacred ziggurat was located in the middle of Symbar. His subjects know the way and can take them there in exchange for payment in the form of an appropriate item (at least a mystical treasure or a mastercrafted weapon).



Haman Dakh: Principle of the Harmonious Whole

KANTOR AN-OREL			
Race	Undead (undead)		
Resistance	Strong		
Traits	*Gravely Cold* (II), *Undead* (II)		
Accurate 7 (+3), **Cunning** 10 (0), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 10 (0), **Quick** 11 (–1), **Resolute** 13 (–3), **Strong** 17 (–7), **Vigilant** 9 (+1)			
Abilities	*Exceptionally Strong* (adept), *Iron Fist* (master), Man-at-Arms (master), *Revenant Strike* (adept), *Ritualist* (adept: *Desecrating Rite*, *False Life*, *Raise Undead*), *Two-handed Force* (master)		
Weapons, Strong	Bastard sword 10, or 8 and ignores *Armor*		
Armor	Full plate 5		
Defense	–1		
Toughness	17	**Pain Threshold**	–
Equipment	None		
Shadow	Matte black, like sooty steel (thoroughly corrupt)		

Tactics: Kantor marches into melee and uses *Gravely Cold* to paralyze his enemies before crushing them with mighty blows. Only against heavily armored adversaries does he use his ability to strike through a target's armor.

Cleaning Out the Enemy

Whether it happens right away or after a meeting with the death prince, it is entirely possible that the players characters will want to wipe out the growing undead realm. But it would probably be wise to secure one or more allies before the assault.

Here the Game Master must be flexible and adjust the challenge based on the plans and actions of the player characters. If they take on Kantor and his soldiers on their own, they will soon be surrounded and forced to fight a never-ending stream of undead, led by their ruler.

If they have an ally who can keep most of the enemy forces busy, the player characters might only have to face the death prince and [PC×2] soldiers, or PC number of soldiers if a second ally is involved. With three or more allied groups on their side, the players may choose whether to take on Kantor or help keep the undead at bay; in that case they will have to kill [PC×2] soldiers before the battle is won.

There is of course a risk that the gaming group's heroes will lose. In that case they could be dragged into the ship and locked up in separate cages. Eventually some other faction might come

to the Crown Ship; maybe, just maybe, the player characters can persuade these people to free them from captivity...

Investigations
Apart from the conversation with the ruler of the Crown Ship, there are three important insights to be gained, which help move the story forward. Two of them are described below, and the third is addressed in the upcoming paragraph about the priests' quarters.

First of all, it is important that the player characters get to see the murals in the Throne Room. The matte colors form four different motifs, each of which covers one side of the room.

East end wall: A single throne of matte gray stone that would seem utterly inconspicuous were it not covered with winding vegetation. It stands in the middle of a starry night sky, on legs that are thick and straight at the top, but split into a tangle of branches where the ground should have been, much like the plants that cover it. The branches wind their way across the dark sky before wrapping themselves around what looks like a multi-colored stone, possibly a boulder. A successful *Cunning* test allows the characters to draw a parallel between the boulder and the enormous gemstone from the mosaic in the forecastle (see page 186).

North side wall: Shows one person undergoing a transformation in four stages. On the far left is a naked, sexless human without any hair growth whatsoever. Next, the same person is holding a clear decanter full of matte black liquid in one hand, and a crystal glass filled with the same liquid in the other, raised to the lips. In the third section the human is standing tensely, arms outstretched, legs wide, with its head tilted back and a chilling light flowing from the eye sockets and the open mouth. On the far right the transformation is complete: there stands an abomination, similar to Jeberaja (see page 80), but with proud, human-like posture and what must be some kind of holy, if not divine, light shining around it.

A successful *Vigilant* test reveals a symbol on the glass decanter, in the shape of a stylized swirl – the same symbol that is stamped in the middle of the handprints on the mystically sealed doors.

South side wall: Matte yellow text on black stone, line after line, column after column. A person with *Loremaster* (master) recognizes certain Symbarian characters, but the text as a whole is impossible to understand – it tells the legend of Arlantor, the woman who founded the Church of Haman and was the first to explore and awaken the inner divinity of mankind. After an hour's examination and a successful *Cunning* test, the loremaster concludes that the writing could be deciphered, but that it would take at least six months of thorough study to break the code.

West end wall: Same throne as the one on the opposite wall, this time against a gray-patterned background and viewed from the side, along with three figures. Sitting on the throne is a man of imperial bearing, completely naked. In front of him, a woman wearing a white (now grayed) cowl with golden edges and glistening gold gloves; she is holding a simple crown in both hands while leaning forward, as if to crown the emperor. Finally, kneeling behind the throne, an androgynous, bald-headed individual in a black cowl is holding what looks like a pair of scissors or pliers in one hand and a small copper watering can in the other.

A successful *Vigilant* test reveals indistinct symbols on the front of the cowls worn by the latter individuals; these can be identified, with a subsequent *Cunning* test, as the symbols of Haman Dakh (page 188) and Dakothnic respectively (page 186).

A second important clue is of course the map of Symbar being built in the aftercastle, where the Morphantics' ziggurat stands out among the other landmarks (along with the ship and the imperial palace), not least because of the symbol carved into the top stone – the symbol representing the principle of the Harmonious Whole, Haman Dakh (see page 188). Should someone draw a sketch based on the physical map, the result might look something like the illustration on the following page.

There is nothing to describe what the landmarks are, so if the player characters have already sent Kantor An-Orel to his final rest, they will simply have to take the chance that the pyramid is somehow significant. On the other hand, if they have reached an agreement with the death prince, he can tell them what the stacked stones symbolize and offer (possibly for the second time) to have someone show them the way.

The Priests' Quarters
The nine representatives of the Priesthood of Haman became known as the founders of the new church, which is why their quarters on Saroklaw were regarded as sacrosanct – the spiritual cradle of the Divine Human. No one has set foot in the

The Church of Haman and Corruption

The priests of Haman viewed corruption as divine energy – a pure and holy power they called Koaral. That this power source was clearly harmful to humans and nature was seen as a symptom of them being unworthy, too primitive to channel the power in question. In other words, it was the humans, animals and plants that were at fault, not corruption itself, which is why the church's teachings largely focused on awakening the divine – developing each aspect as much as possible and balancing them against each other in perfect harmony. And in the absence of a moralizing God, when humanity itself was elevated to divine status any means were permissible. The pursuit of exaltation was the same as the pursuit of awakening God, and could not possibly be evil or shameful.



Koaral:
Power of the Divine
(corruption)



The map can also be found as a handout on page 229, and can be downloaded from www.freeleaguepublishing.com

rooms behind the sealed gates in two thousand years, even though they are relatively easy to open, for the right person...

The symbol in the handprints on the doors is a clue, which can be recognized as the same exact symbol found on the crystal decanter in the mural on the north wall of the Throne Room. What it means is that someone with at least one point of Total Corruption must press a hand against the metal – then a click is heard from the locking mechanism and the door can be pushed open.

In addition to what is mentioned in the description of the priests' quarters, there is really just one important conclusion to be drawn from these desolate rooms. The ceremonial circle of white gold is lined with nine symbols, which are also found above the doors to the priests' cells – the symbols for the eight principles of the Divine Human and the principle of the Harmonious Whole (see page 186–188). Additionally, the latter can be seen above the entrance of the center suite. It is also carved into the model of the ziggurat on Kantor's map, and depicted in the mural on the west end wall of the Throne Room, at the front of the white cowl.

THE COMPETITORS

Initially, it is mainly Iasogoi Brigo and the Sacred of the Old Blood who are interested in Saroklaw – the former because of its presumed treasures, the latter in the belief that the ship is of historic significance. But this will change as more and more groups reach the Imperial Palace and notice the mosaic behind the throne.

The Game Master is free to involve the other hunting parties in whatever way works best. As mentioned earlier, one of them may already be present, but if the player characters gain Kantor's permission to investigate the ship it is also possible that another faction will show up while they are doing so. This new faction could then request an audience themselves, or lack the patience for such things and launch an attack.

In the latter case, the group in question would most likely be the Knights of Dead Prios or House Kohinoor, who may also have an interest in eliminating the player characters. This could create a very interesting situation around the gaming table, where the players must consider whether or not it is advisable for their characters to enter the battle on the side of the death prince...

It should finally be noted that, if the player characters are very late to the Crown Ship, other factions may already have been there. It might even be the case that the battered bodies of Kantor and most of his subjects already lie scattered over the plateau, possibly along with some of the attackers. Perhaps someone else has already gotten their hands on most of the items that are otherwise found inside the ship? The Game Master is welcome to improvise, based on how the story progresses around the gaming table.

The Mother Tree

You rappel down the massive tree trunk, little by little, with ropes attached to the root blanket above. The desolate landscape below is intersected by a serpentine stream, and sporadically lit by beams of light filled with shimmering dust which dances in the air. There are no buildings below, only piles of stones and a few wall sections, all of it overgrown by fine-meshed mycelium roots. Your eyes are drawn to the exceptions – to the crumbled step pyramid a couple of hundred meters to the west, beyond the black water of the stream; to the public square in the west, it too on the other side of the water, where the dilapidated, sunlit statue of a warrior appears to be standing on a newly built, well-polished pedestal of stone. But as soon as you touch ground by the foot of the giant tree, the stillness is shattered by first one, then another, then a full choir of disharmonious battle roars. You look at the tree and the cracks that seem to lead to the core of the trunk – a potential refuge

from the clearly inhuman and famished monstrosities that have made you their prey...

FROM A DISTANCE, the so-called Mother Tree looks just like any other giant oak tree in the area, and the nearby ziggurat – once home to the greatest priest mystics in Symbaroum – is also hard to distinguish from the rootlands. But the player characters are still likely to seek out this area, on their own initiative or accompanied by the Iron Pact and/or the Witches, possibly after investigating the Crown Ship Saroklaw.

INCENTIVES

The main reason to explore this adventure location has to do with the weakened protection over Symbar, the slowly dying fetters. Only the Iron Pact knows about this, though even before the expeditions arrive, the Huldra has also realized that her "flickering flame" is probably located inside the Mother Tree.

Other factors that might draw the player characters to the area are the Sovereign's Oath's outpost and clues from the Crown Ship, especially the map being developed in the aftercastle or a conversation with its creator, the death prince Kantor An-Orel.

BACKGROUND

In a chamber under the first tree the elves ever planted in Symbar sits Valarai-Aia, the eternity elf who accepted the task of weaving and maintaining the fettering root cover over the city's darkness, and who is unknowingly contributing to the growth and vitality of Davokar. She has not left her ethereal fabric since the fall of Symbar, as the corruption buried around her would otherwise spread far and wide; it would grow and grow and, unless stopped, eventually cover the entire world in the darkness of The Eternal Night.

Roughly a year ago (see the text box titled The Parasite), something happened that could be the end of the Weaver and her work – the white spider Xanathâ came to the Mother Tree, attracted by the power of Valarai-Aia, a power whose sole purpose is to subdue the other aspects of nature, the unbridled creation and the raging destruction (for more details, see The Spider King Reborn, page 204). Since then the spider has not left the Weaver's side, curled up among the roots in a dark little burrow, absorbing part of her power, a parasite feeding on mystical energy instead of blood. This has weakened the power being infused into the fettering layers of roots, along with Valarai-Aia herself; her power continues to wane as she is unable to interrupt her work long enough to defend herself or even send out a plea for help. Xanathâ is gluttonous; there is a strong possibility that she will not stop until the power source has been completely depleted.

So, Valarai-Aia's weakened condition is the reason for the withering of the fetters, which in turn is causing the resurgence of corruption that brings bound and dormant creatures back to life. A couple of weeks before the hunting parties' arrival in Symbar, the latter occurred not far from the tree – the last Haman Dakh of Symbar and his right-hand man were roused from their age-long slumber, in the form they assumed before the Battle of Symbar – a form named after the daemon prince whose power enabled their exaltation: Managaal.

The two managaals have since managed to suffocate more and more of the ziggurat's fetters, bringing increasing numbers of equally exalted brothers and sisters back to life. They have even located the source of the fetters, in the nearby Mother Tree, and realized that it is a representative of the enemy who wiped out their people, destroyed their empire and took their lives. The elf must die, to pay for her crimes and to undo the shackles preventing the people of Symbar from rising again!

DESCRIPTION

The Mother Tree was placed in the middle of the ruins shortly after the battle was won. Even then, Valarai-Aia was there to lead the ceremony that made it take root and grow, after which she redirected the power to other saplings and eventually started weaving the covering layers of roots.

The trunk of the Mother Tree is more than fifty meters in diameter and now covers the square in which it was planted. The surrounding area is full of dilapidated ruins, which once served as residences for the city's (mainly religious) elite. The paved streets are covered with dying mycelium roots, and the stream cutting through the desolation is black with corruption, which may prove particularly problematic as both of the bridges nearby have collapsed.

On the other side of the stream rises the step pyramid where the Church of Haman's mystic priests, the Theourgs led by Haman Dakh, explored the innate potential of the Divine Human – roughly seventy meters wide at its base, with four stories rising to a total height of twenty meters. Several of the building's Theourgs, also known as Morphantics, have emerged from their slumber, determined to slay the enemy hiding at the roots of the tree.

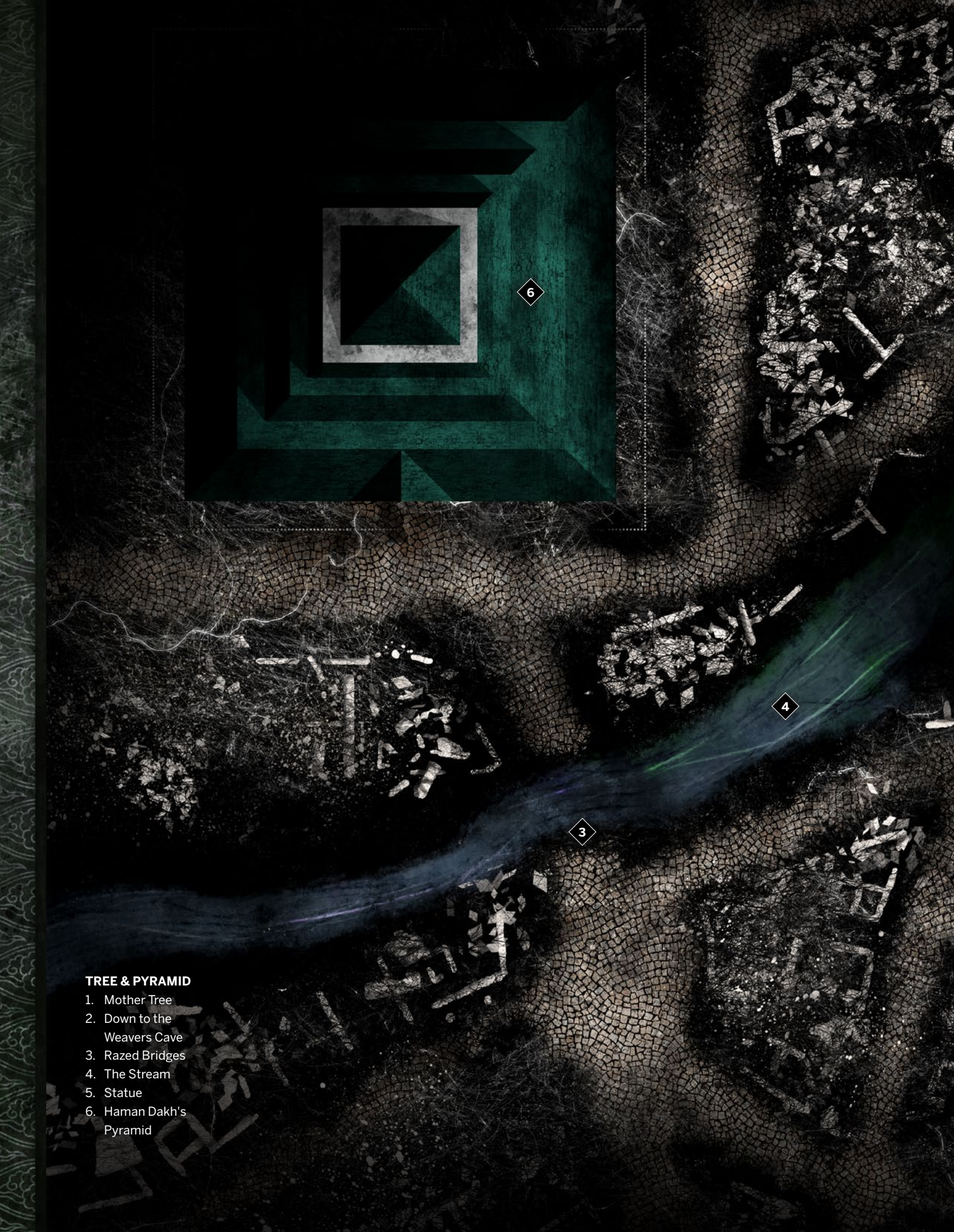
The corruption in and around the pyramid is considerable – anyone who does not pass a *Strong* test every half hour suffers 1D4 points of temporary corruption. But inside the Mother Tree the

The Powers of the Weaver

Exactly how Valarai-Aia's powers work is not relevant to the adventure, especially as neither the player characters nor anyone else will ever be able to replicate what she is doing. Like other eternity elves, such as Aloéna on Karvosti, she has transcended the capacity and understanding of other cultural beings, with the limitation that she lives to serve a specific purpose – in her case, keeping the darkness of Symbar fettered.

The Parasite

The parasite that is slowly killing the Weaver does not necessarily have to be the spider Xanathâ, especially if it does not correspond to the experiences and adventures of your particular gaming group. The Game Master can replace the parasite with someone/something completely different, as long as the new parasite fulfills the same role as Xanathâ – the role of both protecting and sucking the life out of Valarai-Aia. It could be a powerful spirit, a parasitical abomination, or perhaps some other ravenous spider queen.



TREE & PYRAMID

1. Mother Tree
2. Down to the Weavers Cave
3. Razed Bridges
4. The Stream
5. Statue
6. Haman Dakh's Pyramid


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corruption is limited to 1 point per hour, and the Weaver's chamber is completely untainted.

Outpost of the Sovereign's Oath

Before heading down beneath the root cover, we make a short stop on its surface. A person standing by the trunk of the Mother Tree, where it rises through the roots, can see two distinct landmarks nearby. A couple of hundred meters to the west, half the top floor of the ziggurat is poking up, with two smaller extensions at the top, scarcely bigger than an Ambrian outhouse. The structure is partially overgrown with roots and vines, which makes it difficult to spot from a distance.

In the opposite direction, no more than a hundred paces from the tree, the Sovereign's Oath has established an outpost consisting of two large pavilions and ten smaller tents, inhabited by thirty Warriors, three Squad Leaders and one Commander. Their mission is to keep an eye on the root cover, which they are doing from the top of two broken spires protruding from the roots, to the east and west of the tents. They are also dispatching patrols twice a day, which move in wide circles – one of them marches west, before turning south and returning from the east; the other does the opposite with a northward turn.

Commander Arna and her warriors have no idea what is going on along the ground at the roots of the tree. They have heard screams and sounds indicative of combat, but assumed that they came from prowling abominations and/or undead. Besides, they have their orders, which do not include excursions under the root cover. But this will of course change if a clash of weapons is heard from the deep, or orders roared in a human voice...

More information regarding the outpost and how to handle its inhabitants is found under The Sovereign Warriors (page 198), but we can already point out that Arna is known to take her own initiatives. If she learns that the tree is inhabited by some being that is keeping the hateful roots alive, she will definitely try to stop that creature, preferably by planting an axe in its skull. If the player characters do not take out the warriors and later act in a way that alerts Arna of the Weaver's existence, there is a strong possibility that the Blood-Daughter's troops will look into the matter at the first opportunity, and then strike with full force.



The Ruins
There are various places where one can get down to the ground, but regardless of whether the player characters decide to rappel down the tree trunk, crawl down the walls of the pyramid, or lower themselves down somewhere in-between, they must first cut a hole in the dense root cover.

The ground around the Mother Tree is utterly devastated, with black mycelium-looking roots climbing over soil and ruins alike. Except for the inhabitants of the tree and the pyramid, the place is completely devoid of creatures. And as for treasure, the Game Master can use the guidelines on page 93 and assume there to be three relatively well-preserved ruins to search for finds.

Two elements warrant a closer description:

The Stream: The dark stream snaking its way between the pyramid and the tree trunk is tainted; anyone who falls into the water must make a *Strong* test every turn; failure inflicts one (1) point of temporary corruption. Worse still, it is inhabited by aquatic abominations with stats as Vapaya (page 151 in the *Symbaroum Monster Codex*) plus *Corrupting Attack* (II).

The stream is twenty meters wide, and whoever wishes to cross it will have to be careful (or fly, like the managaals). The nearest passable bridge is located in the southwest, but requires a long detour through two other hexagons (see Treasure Hunting, page 169). Let the players be creative and turn their plans into a suitable challenge. A person who falls into the water is immediately afflicted by the corruption, but the vapayas will not reach their prey until 1D4+1 turns later.

The Statue: Long ago, in the small square on the far side of the northern bridge, there used to be a statue of the Emperor Spirit's mother – seven meters tall, in full armor but lacking a helmet, with flowing hair and a dove perched on the point of her raised greatsword. Time and the clingy roots have crumbled the stone and caused the sculpture to fall apart, but that is about to change. One of the Emperor Spirit's helpers has been ordered to restore the statue to its original state.

The translucent, vaguely human-like wraith is operating methodically, floating around its work. So far, he has cleared the structure of roots and started repairing the four-meter-tall marble base – two of the sides are polished to a shine, gleaming in the light that penetrates the root cover, darkly golden brown, without any cracks and imperfections. Player who stay to marvel at the wondrous artwork can see dust, gravel and larger chippings dancing up from the ground and merging with the stone on the south side of the base. Nothing they say or do will cause the wraith to react or interrupt its work.

The Weaver Valarai-Aia lives for her work, and should she perish, the work dies too.



The Mother Tree
The fifty-meter-wide base of the great oak tree is cracked, or rather forked, as if it has been growing that way from the start, its trunk divided into sections separated by tall and narrow passages that lead to the place where the core should be. There is an open space at its center, almost round, with a diameter between fifteen and twenty meters.

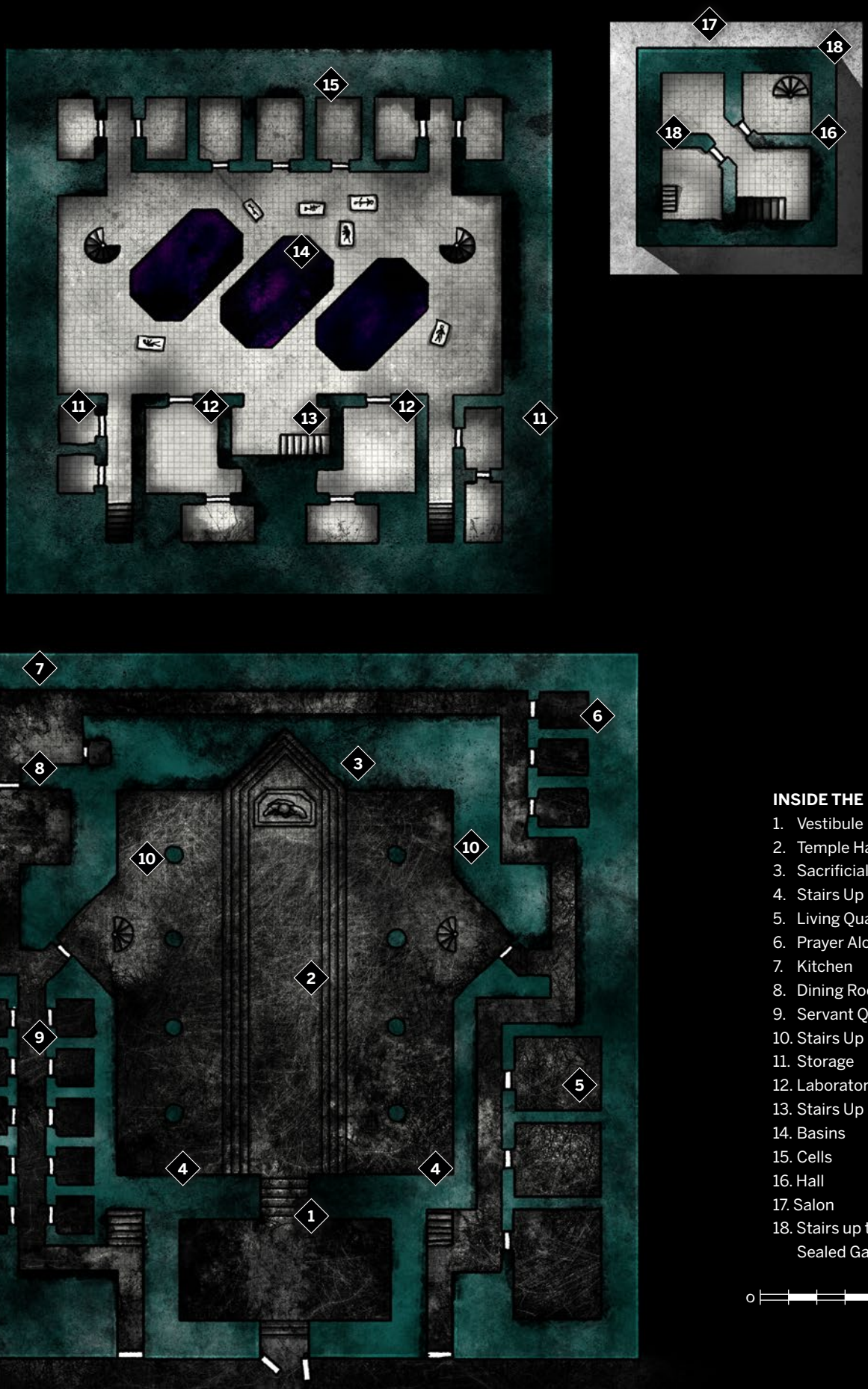
In there, the carcasses of three managaals (Adult, page 67 in the *Symbaroum Monster Codex*) lie scattered around a hole in the ground, completely round and about one and a half meters wide. The bodies are covered with thick spider webs, which on closer inspection seem to be twitching and moving, still clinging to the monstrous corpses. A *Vigilant* test with the *Medicus* or *Poisoner* ability reveals the cause of death to be poison – and a strong one at that!

The hole in the ground leads straight down into darkness. A torch (or similar) dropped down the deep will land after ten meters, on a trampled dirt floor in a tangle of winding roots. With a successful *Vigilant* test, those who listen carefully will notice what sounds like groaning, not from a human, but rather an ogre or something even bigger...

Before the player characters try to reach the chamber below, Xanathâ comes climbing up the shaft, either to drive them away or to fend off attacking managaals. More information is found under the Events heading (page 198).

The Weaver's Cave
Although it was created deliberately, as part of the ritual that gave the tree its shape and rapid growth, the Weaver's chamber now looks like a natural cave. Roots of different shapes and sizes have burst through the walls and floor, but few so thick that they cannot easily be moved out of the way.

A huge female figure is sitting in an armchair formed by roots. She must be over three meters tall standing up, and is probably naked under the tight web of rootlets wrapped around her body. The arms are naked and free, which allows her long fingers to manipulate the green-shimmering orb hovering in front of her face, showing an intricate tangle of brown, green and black strands (*Vigilant*: roots). Her face is also free of roots, with the big narrow eyes of an elf, thin high eyebrows, sharp cheekbones, and black-brown hair falling like a veil over her shoulders and back.



INSIDE THE PYRAMID

1. Vestibule
2. Temple Hall
3. Sacrificial Table
4. Stairs Up
5. Living Quarters
6. Prayer Alcoves
7. Kitchen
8. Dining Room
9. Servant Quarters
10. Stairs Up
11. Storage
12. Laboratories
13. Stairs Up
14. Basins
15. Cells
16. Hall
17. Salon
18. Stairs up to Sealed Gate

0 15 M

What makes the sight of her particularly strange is that her facial expression and posture suggest absolute exhaustion – her eyes are glassy, the skin around them is dark, and the mouth half open – as if it takes all her effort just to stay upright. If she is freed from the parasite, it will still take several months for the Weaver and her fabric to recover.

No matter what the player characters do or say, she will not react, either with words, gestures or facial expressions. The same is true if she is approached by Princess Geliael or anyone else, with two exceptions. The sight of Aluin brings a tired smile to her face, if only for a moment. And if Yeleta comes near, Valarai-Aia pauses, makes eye contact with the witch, and gives her a solemn nod of gratitude.

Pyramid – Bottom Floor

The bottom section of the ziggurat is 70x70 meters on the outside, and roughly seven meters tall. It has three entrances – the double door in the middle lead to the ceremonial chamber, while the single doors give access to the residences of the priests and servants respectively. All rooms are covered by the Weaver's mycelium roots, mostly withered or dying, particularly in the great temple hall and in the hallway just inside the entrance, where the vegetation has clearly been trampled and kicked around by creatures.

The outer rooms have no furnishings whatsoever, and the mosaics that once covered the walls of the prayer alcoves, the servants' dining room, and the priests' residences have been broken by the mycelium. Two managaals are still trapped in hibernation, buried under sinuous roots and fettered by their power – one in the northeast prayer alcove and one in the kitchen, left by Haman Dakh to wake by themselves. Player characters who touch the covering vegetation to see what hides underneath better be careful. Reckless ripping and tearing will immediately cause the respective creature to wake up and charge toward them in a berserk frenzy; if the players expressly state that their characters are exercising caution, a *Discreet* test is made. Failure means that the managaal wakes up as described above.

Entering the temple hall is like walking into a spider's nest, with the floor, walls, columns and ceiling all covered by blackened, web-like mycelium. The only exception is the floor around the sturdy, root-covered sacrificial table with its statue, as well as a corridor leading to the double door. This is where the two monsters gather their newly woken warriors until they are numerous enough to launch another assault on the Mother Tree. Unless the player characters have recently helped fend off such an attack, there are 1D10+10 creatures (stats as Managaal, Adult, page 67 in the *Symbaroum Monster Codex*), frustrated with having to restrain their aggression.

To the right and left of the sacrificial table, concealed by dying roots, are two trap doors, each roughly 1 x 1 meter in size. Those who go near these hatches and pass a *Vigilant* test can feel an intense, stinging wave of unease washing over them; characters with the *Witchsight* ability can literally see the corruption rise from the gaps and get a vision of an immense wave of blackness surging and bubbling below, waiting to be unleashed. You can read more about the hatches in the text box titled The Waste of Haman below.

Player characters who spend time looking for items underneath the roots can, with successful *Vigilant* tests, find two curiosities from Table 7 (page 96), perhaps in the priests' residences. Otherwise there is just one important discovery to be made: a secret passage beneath the sacrificial table that leads to an underground chamber, which in turn contains a great deal of valuables. For more details about the passage and the chamber, see The Treasure Trove on page 201.

Pyramid – Middle Floor

The roots covering the ground level are largely absent on the second floor. This is where the Theourgs performed their sacred practices, with the aim of "perfecting mankind" – a kind of laboratory where the power of the gods (corruption)

The Personification of the Harmonious Whole

The human-sized statue on the sacrificial table, one and a half meters tall and made of stone, is a representation of the Principle of the Harmonious Whole. It depicts a sexless, muscular human with its eyes closed and its head tilted slightly backward, legs wide and arms stretched forward, with the palms facing up. A person who examines the statue carefully and passes a *Vigilant* test will notice shallow molds in the palms and in the table between its feet, as if the statue once held something in its hands and was standing over something. You can read more about this in the section titled The Treasure Trove.

The Waste of Haman

The hatches in the floor of the temple hall open to the gruesome waste generated by the Theourgs' ceremonies – discarded bodies, broken and deformed, often teeming with corruption. In the natural tunnels beneath the ziggurat, these corpses have ripened and fermented over the centuries, and finally merged into three horrifying abominations just waiting to be freed.

The hatches are easily opened thanks to iron rings set into the marble, but hopefully the player characters will leave them shut. If they ignore the stinging sensation of unease and open one of the hatches, everyone within two movement actions immediately suffers 1D8 temporary corruption. Those foolish enough to lower themselves into the caves, despite the wave of corruption and the shuffling, growling, purring sounds rising from the darkness, will have a tough battle ahead of them. The three shapeless abominations each have stats as a Primal Blight Beast (page 228 in the *Core Rulebook*), with the addition of *Harmful Aura* (III, corruption), *Colossal* (II), and *Devour* (II).

was infused into more or less willing individuals, in the hope of unlocking their innate divinity. The ceremonies were usually completed in the temple hall, but all preparations and theourgical explorations into the nature of existence and humanity took place on the middle floor, in Haman Dakh's laboratories.

The row of small chambers along the wall to the north worked as incubators and prison cells for more reluctant research subjects – murderers, traitors and insurgents, and prisoners of war from the enemy's upper classes. One of these is still alive, locked in the larger cell to the north. She is undead, her body curled into a ball, impossible to straighten; her dark, golden brown skin is dry as bone; the stringy gray-white hair flows around her, several meters long. She can no longer speak, only groan, but her eyes burn with an unmistakable longing for the sweet release of death.

Outside the cells are three combined pools filled with oily black liquid. Characters with *Witchsight* can tell, without tests, that the sludge is highly corruptive – not as potent as Vile Water (see page 68 in the *Symbaroum Monster Codex*), but close. Player characters with training in a mystical tradition can draw the same conclusion with a successful *Cunning* test. Anyone who falls into a pool suffers two points of temporary corruption per turn, with no chance of avoiding the blight.

The furnishings in the two laboratories are all worn down by the passage of time, but there are actually some interesting items to be found. For people rummaging through the layer of filth and dirt that covers the floor, a successful *Vigilant* test reveals a handful of bronze tools – a bone saw, a scalpel and three pairs of pliers, completely unpatinated and fully functional. They all count as mystical treasures and together add +3 to success tests for performing the *Flesh Craft* ritual (worth 200 thaler each, or 400 to a sorcerer). If two or more of the items are missing, the bonus is just +1.

Finally, it should be mentioned that this is the floor where Haman Dakh spends most of his time, often lapping up corrupt sludge from the pools to fill himself with corruption, which is later used to spew out new managaal spawn. For more details, see The Managaals on page 200.

Pyramid – Upper Floor

The third floor is divided into four sections, consisting of two residences, a salon and a hall that served as a reception and meeting room. There used to be a stairway from the residences to the roof of the ziggurat, but the stone doors to the roof were sealed before the Battle of Symbar, with the same kind of rituals that caused the doors to and from the upper deck of the Crown Ship to merge with the stone around them.

There is not much to find on this floor; everything is moldered, peeled or cracked. There are two exceptions, one being the 2x3 meter reflecting surface on the north wall of the salon, described in greater detail in the Investigations section (page 202); the other is a loose floor tile in the middle of the hall, which can be noticed with a successful *[Vigilant –5]* test – only one attempt is allowed per hour of searching. Hidden under the tile is a patinated copper box containing a fist-sized orb of golden crystal. With a successful *Vigilant* test, a person with the *Witchsight* ability or training in a mystical tradition can sense that the object is charged with mystical power, though its purpose is unclear.

This is in fact one of the three orbs required to open the secret passage under the sacrificial table in the temple hall. Haman Dakh and his right-hand man each carry one of the others, one red and one black. More information on how they work is found under The Treasure Trove on page 201.

EVENTS

As already mentioned, the player characters may seek out the Mother Tree for several different reasons, most likely to rescue the Weaver together with the Witches and the Iron Pact, or after investigating the Crown Ship and finding clues pointing to the Theourgs' pyramid. Either way, the order in which they do things will have a major impact on the future of Symbar.

Both the Sovereign warriors and the mangaals want the Weaver dead, or at least stopped from continuing her work. Should the player characters kill or drive away Xanathâ, her parasitic companion, and leave the tree unguarded, one of these will take action – the managaals if the player characters leave the adventure location entirely, and the Sovereign warriors if they go to the pyramid. In that case, Valarai-Aia will probably be killed, with consequences which are described in the text box titled The Fetters are Broken on page 200.

Below we present a number of scenes which are likely to occur during the player characters' stay at the location. At this point the most important thing is that they find the View of the Winged, an artifact that can guide them in their continued search for the Throne of Thorns.

The Sovereign Warriors

It is quite possible, albeit difficult, to get down to the roots of the Mother Tree without being detected by

Arna's warriors. Sneaking up to the trunk at night only requires a *Discreet* test; in broad daylight the test is *[Discreet –3]*. If the player characters (or any of their companions) are detected, they can either flee or stay and fight; the outpost's thirty Warriors, three Squad Leaders, and the commander Arna have orders to kill any intruders they encounter.

Attempts to sneak all the way to the camp through the slightly undulating terrain are doomed to fail during the day. However, a resourceful person might be able to do it at night – perhaps some kind of diversion can distract the warriors' attention, or maybe a lone shadow can sneak up on one or several of the sentries? Let the players improvise, and make sure to reward all good ideas as generously as you punish the bad.

How difficult it is to defeat Arna and her warriors in combat should of course depend on the number of allies participating in fight. With three hunting parties on their side, the player characters will only have to face the Commander and her two bodyguards (stats as Squad Leader); having two allies adds PC number of Warriors; and with only one ally they are forced to take on half the enemy's total force. On their own, the characters are... Well, on their own, against the entire outpost, with the possible exception of those currently out on patrol.

Finally, it should be noted that the outpost can be bypassed altogether if the player characters get down on the ground a good distance from the Mother Tree. You can then use the guidelines for Treasure Hunting (page 169) to determine what awaits the characters in that particular area.

Crossfire

Regardless of how (or by which route) the player characters approach the Mother Tree, the managaals will probably detect them and view the intruders as a threat to their chances of getting to the Weaver, or just a threat in general. Haman Dakh will then send every available managaal to attack the tree. The Game Master decides whether or not this should happen, in which case the number of adult managaals should be balanced against the capacity of the player characters. However, we suggest that there are enough beasts to spur the characters to look for a more defensible position inside the tree.

Once in the chamber at the core of the giant oak, the managaals can only reach them through the four cracks that are wide enough to let them through – in other words, from four different directions, but only one at a time from each direction. Feel free to let chance decide how long the fight lasts before Xanathâ emerges from underground; 1D4+2 turns could be appropriate (rolled by the players). Any allies accompanying the player characters will not make it into the tree in time, but retreat in a different direction, with their own group of managaals to deal with.

Whatever happens, Xanathâ will join the bloody fray, initially on the side of the player characters. But after that...

Xanathâ

Xanathâ is described in greater detail under The Spider King Reborn (page 204). The pure corruption she carries in her body, meant for the ritual that will bring the return of the Spider King, has taken a toll on her spirit and made her aggressive and domineering. But this is mitigated to a certain extent by the pure magic her daughter Karathran stole for her from the Huldra's power node inside Karvosti. And now she has also consumed the suppressing energies from Valarai-Aia's fettering work.

These primal forces and the interaction between them make the giant spider unpredictable. She has already stolen enough of the Weaver's energy to complete her ceremony, but the corruption has made her gluttonous for more, and their long time together has also made her protective of the helpless eternity elf. Regardless of the circumstances, Xanathâ's first reaction when encountering the player characters will be to attack – an attack that can only be stopped through persuasion. One attempt per turn is allowed, with a *Persuasive* test if the player characters have met her before (in *Tomb of Dying Dreams*), otherwise *[Persuasive –1]*.

Once she has calmed down a conversation can be initiated, which in that case takes place telepathically between the spider and one of the player characters. Depending on what the characters say or ask, she can offer the following information:

- She is here to feed on the she-elf's power; she needs it to bring back her son, Angathal Taar.
- The son must return and wage war once more, to restore the balance, to stop humans from destroying the world. That was always his purpose, nothing else.
- The elven Weaver must be protected. She is beautiful, the most beautiful soul Xanathâ has ever known. But weak, weaker than when they first met, about to cross over to the world where only spirits dwell.

Unless the prospect of a reborn Spider King compels the player characters to attack, they may be able to persuade her to leave the Weaver in their care. But she must first be convinced of their earnest



Why Alive?

One might wonder why the Keepers of Symbar hasn't already discovered and killed the parasitical spider? The answer is simply that Geliael and the others have orders never to disturb Valarai-Aia, and that they for a long time interpreted the weakening fetters as linked to the general darkening of the Davokar region. Once they realized that the Weaver was in danger it took (from a human perspective) long before they felt ready to act, and then came the Sovereign's Oath. In lack of initiative from the apathetic Princess, Ardil has been waiting for orders from the Halls of a Thousand Tears. He knows that he ought to act but is afraid to lure the Sovereign's Oath or the reawakened darkness to Valarai-Aia's hideout.



desire to protect Valarai-Aia and tend to her spiritual wounds. If the player characters do not seem trustworthy in this regard, perhaps a reference to the Iron Pact and the Keepers of Symbar will make the spider feel reassured enough to leave.

The White Spider Xanathâ

"The threads of fate tremble as I weave the future"

When Symbaroum was young, Xanathâ was already old, and the venerable spider beast found herself hunted for sport by Symbar's powerful princes. She fled down into the Underworld, but not even there would they leave her alone, which is why she used mystical powers to cross over into the Spirit World where she bided her time.

She is a bone-pale spider with a body as large as an ogre, covered in even paler scars from countless battles. Normally, her compound eyes are positioned about a meter above ground, but her long legs make it possible to lift the body so high that she can look down on even the tallest adventurer. She speaks telepathically, in images, meaning that she disregards any language barriers. She can also express herself verbally, but only in the form of piercing hisses and at best in a long forgotten barbarian dialect.

Race	Beast (spider)
Resistance	Strong
Traits	*Armored* (III), *Fleet-footed, Natural Weapon* (II), *Poison Spit* (III), *Poisonous* (III), *Web* (III)
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 17 (–7), **Discreet** 11 (–1), **Persuasive** 5 (+5), **Quick** 13 (–3), **Resolute** 7 (+3), **Strong** 9 (+1), **Vigilant** 10 (0)	
Abilities	*Acrobatics* (novice), *Exceptionally Cunning* (adept)
Weapons, Accurate	Bite 4, plus poison 4 for 4 turns
Armor	Chitin shields 4
Defense	–3
Toughness	10 **Pain Threshold** 5
Equipment	None
Shadow	Drifting flakes of soot in a blaze of blinding light (corruption: 2)

Tactics: Xanathâ is sly and plans many steps ahead. If she has to fight, she uses her almost living webs to catch her enemies and then she attacks them with poisonous spit. If that is not enough, she will fall back and alter her strategy. She only uses her bite as a last resort, if she gets backed into a corner.

The Fetters are Broken

If Valarai-Aia should die or somehow be prevented from continuing her weaving work, it is only a matter of time before Symbar turns into an inferno of raging abominations and famished undead. About a dozen fearsome monsters will also haunt the ruins in search of living flesh – including the dragon Fofar and the three creatures beneath the ziggurat.

The rate of the darkening process, and those awakened by it, are for the Game Master to decide with the aim of creating an exciting finale. But ideally the player characters should get to visit Castle Thorn before the darkening is complete. Perhaps Fofar the Destroyer awakens just as the player characters are leaving the ruined city; they could hear his rumbling roar as they are breaking up camp, maybe spotting him from a distance, circling in the sky, before they hurry off to the south

The Managaals

His name was Amaron, the last Haman Dakh of Symbar, and his right-hand man and assumed successor was named Selofarg. It was they who led the exploration of human limitations, the barriers which according to Haman's teachings were preventing humanity from reaching its divine potential. When the Battle of Symbar seemed inevitable, they personally underwent the ceremony that had showed the greatest potential, accelerated by substances and harmonies with more uncertain effects. Their goal was to contribute to Haman's and Symbar's defense, and in that respect they succeeded. They were exalted; they turned into managaals and fathered all the dark beasts of the same name which now roam the Davokar region.

The two high priests have retained much of their mental acuity, although it is muddled by a burning desire for blood and corruption. Their primary objective is to free Symbar from the Weaver's fetters, and for that they need warriors – after the first attack they know the enemy is strong, and they see no reason to put their own precious lives in danger. Instead they spend most of their time immersed in the pools of corruptive sludge, filling themselves with darkness and spewing out spawn after spawn. These are then locked in the cells until they are broken into submission, after which they are allowed to drink from the tainted water and grow into big, strong managaals.

The number of managaals inside the ziggurat, beside the former Theourgs, depends partly on the

player characters' actions. If they have not gone near the Mother Tree and thus provoked the beasts to attack, the full force is still there, resting and waiting in the temple hall – 1D10+10 creatures with stats as Managaal, Adult on page 67 in the *Symbaroum Monster Codex*. Amaron and Selofarg are likely located on the second floor, either floating in the pools or ready for battle with 1D4+4 spawn positioned between themselves and the enemy. In the former case, four of the spawn are locked in the cell farthest to the northeast.

The managaals cannot be reasoned with, but it is possible to escape – the creatures defend their home and their corruption source, but have no interest in pursuing fleeing intruders. However, they will make an exception if any of the characters have a total Corruption of 5 or more: in that case neither adults nor spawn will be able to control their hunger, regardless of Haman Dakh's orders.

Primal Managaal

Amaron and Selofarg exposed themselves to the not yet fully explored exaltation ceremony, in a desperate attempt to defend the city, but also because they realized that they would never get another chance to sample the powers of divinity. And that is how they see themselves now – exalted, gods, destined to conquer the world and modify it according to their needs.

In appearance they resemble their creations, the managaals, but more upright and with more human-like features, and their eyes are more focused, less muddled by the thirst for corruption. They are not wearing clothes, only a thick neck chain around their necks, each linked to a separate crystal orb the size of a fist, one red and the other black.

Race	Phenomenon
Resistance	Strong
Traits	*Bloodlust* (III), *Corruption Hoarder* (III)*, *Enthrall* (III), *Natural Weapon* (III), *Robust* (II), *Wings* (I)
Accurate 5 (+5), **Cunning** 10 (0), **Discreet** 7 (+3), **Persuasive** 15 (–5), **Quick** 13 (–3), **Resolute** 10 (0), **Strong** 11 (–1), **Vigilant** 9 (+1)	
Abilities	*Bend Will* (master), *Black Breath* (master), *Dominate* (master), *Leader* (adept), *Ritualist* (master: *Black Sympathy, Dimension Walk***, *Enslave, Flesh Craft, Necromancy, Summon Daemon*)
Weapons, Persuasive	Bite 9
Armor	Tough skin 3
Defense	0
Toughness	11 **Pain Threshold** 16
Equipment	None
Shadow	Purple, shifting towards deep black as it accumulates more corruption (thoroughly corrupt)

Tactics: The primal managaals prefer not to put themselves at risk; they are gods and should not sully themselves by engaging with lesser beings. They start by using their mystical powers and enthralling abilities to support their minions, but will of course fight for their lives when there is no other choice, after attempting to dominate the enemy into submission.

* The primal managaals start the scene with 1D6 accumulated corruption.
** See *Yndaros – The Darkest Star*, page 75

The Treasure Trove

The Theourgs' ziggurat is sitting on one of the greatest treasure troves in the city, but it is not easy to access. In order to open the stairway (roughly 2×1.5 meter) the sturdy sacrificial table must first be pushed aside, which requires three crystal orbs the size of a clenched fist – one golden yellow, one deep red, and one black – which must be put in the right places. Where to locate the orbs is described earlier, and the shallow molds in the palms of the statue's hands and between its feet can also be noticed by the vigilant. The question is, which orb belongs in which place?

The player characters will have to figure this out through trial and error, unless one of them has read the expedition leader Vidina's journal, describing her journey to the Temple of Exaltation – the golden yellow orb goes in the left hand, the deep red in the right, and the black one on the table between the statue's feet. This may seem simple; after all, there are only six possible combinations. The problem is that misplacing the orbs triggers a wave of corruption like the one generated by the *Raven's Doom* ritual: everyone within one movement action suffers 1D10 temporary corruption. Moreover, the locking mechanism remains locked and each failed attempt yields the same result.

Those who manage to push the table aside (requires a combined *Strong* value of 25) will find a stairway down into the darkness. After only a couple of meters they reach a whitewashed tunnel that runs for ten paces before leading into a small chamber, where the priests brought some of the pyramid's treasures when the enemy drew near the city walls. In other words, there are plenty of interesting finds to be made:

The Journals: Amaron and Selofarg had their most important research journals brought to the chamber in a wooden chest that has since decayed. Twenty-four leather tomes with parchment pages made from calf skin are arranged in an untidy stack directly on the floor. They are damaged and shriveled, but can be made legible again by a master Alchemist who passes a *Cunning* test for each book. Written in Symbarian, the texts present the results of horrific experiments involving flesh crafts, corruption enhancement, and daemonic symbioses – all for the noble purpose of attaining the ideals of the Harmonious Whole and awakening mankind's inherent divinity. Exactly what the journals can be used for is up to the Game Master, but they are of great value (at least 200 thaler per restored volume).

The Sarcophagi: Salvaged from the Crown Ship, the stone caskets of Arlantor and the warlord Xakarak – the founder of the Church of Haman and her husband – were stored in the ziggurat. They are leaned up against one of the chamber's walls, completely unadorned, slightly larger than an adult human. A successful *Vigilant* test aimed at the caskets reveals faint, scratching sounds coming from the one to the right; the Weaver's fetters have not reached the chamber, and the corruption in the area has raised both corpses from the dead: Arlantor as a Cryptwalker (page 233 in the *Core Rulebook*), and Xakarak as a Crypt Lord (page 145 in the *Symbaroum Monster Codex*). A *Vigilant* test with the *Witchsight* ability reveals corruption emanating from the caskets.

It takes strong prying tools and a successful *Strong* test to open the tightly sealed and carefully spackled lids of the sarcophagi. They contain no treasures to speak of – Arlantor's teachings state that humans must face the afterlife naked, without any possessions.

The Temple's Gold: Two large urns standing directly on the floor contain the ample gold supply of the priesthood – five hundred and one statuettes the size of a thumb, perfectly molded to resemble the statue on the sacrificial table in the temple hall – the representation of the Harmonious Whole. The gold alone is worth almost 10,000 thaler, but if one goes to the trouble of selling the statuettes as single units, for example to a collector of historic curiosities, a successful negotiation can yield as much as 40 thaler a piece.

Investigations

Although there are plenty of interesting finds to be made inside the ziggurat, only one of them will bring the player characters closer to the Throne of Thorns – the mirror which the priests called the View of the Winged.

In the middle of the otherwise cracked northern wall in the salon on the third floor, there is a reflecting surface, two meters tall and three meters wide. A successful *Vigilant* test reveals slight ripples on its surface, barely noticeable, in response to any movement in the room; leaning closer and blowing hard on the surface enhances the effect, almost like when blowing on liquid mercury. The mirror is frameless, but scrubbing the dirt off the wall reveals Symbarian cuneiform characters which can be interpreted by someone with *Loremaster* (master): "The View of the Winged – The Emperor's Symbar in the splendor of dawn."

The mirror is an artifact consisting of mystically charged liquid. The Theourgs inherited it from a liege troll whom they kidnapped and studied in their quest to solve the riddle of the multi-staged life cycle. They eventually managed to understand its power and bind themselves to it, but never saw it as anything more than a curiosity – something used to impress visiting nobles and emissaries from far away.

If someone puts a hand against the surface (at the cost of 1D4 temporary corruption), the reflection turns into a moving view of Symbar, as the city looked half a dozen years before its fall – actually the view of the priest bound to the artifact, as she soared over the city on her own wings. The Game Master can read the following to the group or adjust the description according to preference:

"You are gazing straight into a sun rising over majestic mountains, between snow-laden peaks. The perspective tells you that the creature whose eyes you are looking through is soaring high in the sky, at an altitude far above two hundred meters. Your eyes turn to the ground below, to a city in the shade, with firelight shining through open windows and embers glowing in several open spaces, from fires that burned through the night.

As the sunlight speeds across the landscape and the city emerges from the shade of the mountains, you immediately realize that it is Symbar you are seeing. There is no mistaking the fault scarp, nor the waters in the north. The imperial palace on its cliff is also easily identified, even though it looks very different than it does today – at least five times larger than the remaining ruin, surrounded by streets, houses and marketplaces, as well as humans moving down there, wearing draped garments in every color, looking up at the radiant herald of dawn before they continue with their daily chores.

You also see the Crown Ship with unbroken masts, its deep red sails spread in the morning breeze; the ziggurat

where you are right now rises over the surrounding buildings, crowned by a snow-white banner almost as large as the headsail of the ship, stretched on a frame, with a symbol you recognize: the symbol of Haman Dakh.

You get a sinking feeling in the pit of your stomach as the viewer accelerates and sweeps north. It is hard to make out the details of the people, buildings, markets and gardens, but you can see more banners and more symbols: a skyscraping tower whose brown flag is adorned by stair-like symbol; an oval arena much like the Dome in Yndaros, with a sword symbol on a red background; and then, by the waterline to the north, out on a peninsula, a huge round building crowned by a crystal dome that sparkles in the morning light, its black flag adorned with a symbol in the shape of a standing rhombus.

Suddenly you swoop down toward the ground, heading straight for one of the roofs below. But only for a moment, before you flinch and find yourself staring into your own wide-eyed reflection."

Note that it is the symbol on the last building that should cause the characters to react, provided that they have already visited the Crown Ship. If the players have a short memory, they can all make a *Cunning* test when they see the symbol for the second time, whether inside the ziggurat or the ship. On success they remember seeing that symbol once before, and in what context, but that the round building probably contains the Throne of Thorns is something they should figure out for themselves.

THE COMPETITORS

When the player characters arrive in Symbar, the Witches will seek an alliance straight away, in order to rescue the Weaver – an alliance strong enough to wipe out the Sovereign outpost in the area. If the player characters would rather focus on something else, Yeleta must instead wait for the Reformists to arrive before they launch their attack, which succeeds at the cost of heavy casualties. In that case the situation will have changed when the player characters get there – Xanathâ is missing and replaced by members of the Keepers of Symbar, the Sovereign warriors have been killed or routed, and Haman Dakh's monstrous forces have been reduced. However, none of these hunting parties care to search the ziggurat.

If the player characters have fallen far behind it is likely that House Kohinoor and/or Iasogoi Brigo eventually will find their way there, possibly the Sacred of the Old Blood as well. And if these groups manage to defeat the managaals, individually or in some kind of alliance, they will no doubt clear the pyramid of anything of value – the only thing left for the player characters to find will be the View of the Winged, as it is not easily destroyed.

Other Paths to Castle Thorn

Should the player characters fail to find the mirror in the salon of the ziggurat, there are of course other ways to get to Castle Thorn. First of all, they can follow some other faction who did make it to the mirror; perhaps even forming an alliance with such a group, who think they need reinforcements for a presumed confrontation (House Kohinoor, the Reformists, or the Witches). The characters can also be approached by a defector from one of the factions whose leaders aspire to sit on the throne, which the defector wants to prevent (possibly to claim the throne herself when the opportunity arises).

If none of the options presented above seem appropriate perhaps the survivor Asirial, described on page 217, can overcome her apathy and point the characters in the right direction, though without saying anything more about what happened to her in the throne room. Finally, if the characters have earned the trust of the Keepers of Symbar, and there is a risk that someone else might find the castle, the elves can initiate them into the secret, hoping that the characters will help them stop this "someone."

Castle Thorn

Completely hidden under the root blanket, but magnificent nevertheless, are crumbled gray-black blocks of stone, stacked over twelve meters high, spread in a circle which makes the castle more than three hundred meters in diameter. The iron-clad stone door facing you is shaded by a colonnaded roof, lined by four partially broken statues of cowled humans, their eyes shut and their hands stretched out in front of them. After pulling together to open the door, you step into the darkness, entering a corridor with an arched ceiling and white-patched walls where the lime paint has not yet peeled off. You stop where the corridor forks to the left and right, met with complete silence, complete stillness. No, not quite. Footsteps. Shuffling steps. And a rhythmic clang, like metal against stone. As she enters the glow of your light source, you are immediately immersed in the sweet odor of slow death. The woman with the foggy eyes and sickly yellow skin stops, leaning heavily on her rune staff, then speaks in the croaking voice of the undead...

CASTLE THORN IS where the adventure's climax will take place; it is where the characters can find the legendary throne, as well as information that leads to Alberetor and the next episode of the *Throne of Thorns*. The place is completely hidden beneath the roots, which is why the characters need clues from the Imperial Palace, the Mother Tree, and the Crown Ship in order to find it – something almost every faction in the area hopes to do, although for different reasons.

INCENTIVES

There are two main reasons to go to the castle that was once home to the Order of Dakothnic: to claim the Throne of Thorns, or to stop others from doing so. In addition, there is of course knowledge and treasure to be found, which some expeditions might find more tempting than the legendary high seat – particularly those of Iasogoi Brigo and possibly the player characters.

BACKGROUND

There was little room for moderation and reflection in Symbarian culture and religion; it was a realm founded on the most extreme interpretations of Haman's teachings, spiritually focused on the pursuit of divinity and on making one's body strong enough to wield the power of the gods, meaning

The Spider King Reborn

This group, which could actually be considered a faction in its own right, is presented in a sidebar because its presence in the adventure is not as certain as that of the other groups. It is up to the Game Master to decide whether the spiders should play a role in the story and, if so, how significant it should be, based largely on what has happened during the gaming group's previous adventures. If put into play, they could of course become relevant (as allies or adversaries) at other stages of the player characters' visit to Symbar.

The spiders as a faction were introduced in the adventure *Tomb of Dying Dreams*, expanded on in *Karvosti – The Witch Hammer*, and fleshed out even more in the *Symbaroum Monster Codex*, in the form of the Arach race. The ancient spider Xanathâ has returned to the Davokar region after a long respite in the Spirit World, only to discover that the world is changed and dying, about to be destroyed by mankind's insatiable appetite for nature's resources. She and her daughters are determined to do battle with the humans, like the spiders during the Battle of Symbar and in the days of the Spider King, preferably with the help of their old allies – the elves and the bestiaals.

Their plan is to reawaken Angathal Taar, or rather have him be reborn, to lead the growing multitude of spiders and arachs as well as their allies. The ceremony requires three ingredients: pure corruption (the Vile Water from *Tomb of Dying Dreams*), pure magic (stolen from the Huldra's power node in *Karvosti – The Witch Hammer*), and echoes of the power used by cultural beings to cultivate Creation, something Xanathâ has found in abundance in the Weaver.

The Game Master could let not only Xanathâ, but also her daughter Karathran, be present in Symbar – the latter in the outskirts of the ruined city accompanied by a delegation of bodyguards sent by Amah Ar-Haxas, queen of the region's arachs and Xanathâ's most devoted ally. She is also joined by some of her own spiderlings (Hunting and Fray Spiders), as well as a handful of bestiaal warriors. Their mission is simple: to await the mother spider's return, and then escort her to the Anghal Pyramid, located halfway between Symbar and the huge crater in the northwest. But Karathran has a problem...

Xanathâ has changed, significantly – perhaps because she swallowed the Vile Water, to keep it safe in her body pending the completion of the ceremony. For whatever reason, she has proved herself increasingly capable of calculated cruelty, and before she left for Symbar the ancient spider made it clear that no concession must be made, no mercy shown: the objective is all that matters. Karathran agrees on the objective, but is becoming increasingly convinced that her mother wants to go further than just restoring the balance. And the presence of Amah Ar-Haxas' fanatically human-hating bodyguards does not make her any calmer.

Whether or not they have met before, Karathran might choose to contact the player characters in the hope of forging an alliance (the Game Master decides whether it is appropriate). She has made up her mind and wants

Table 33: Karathran's Troops

TYPE	NUMBERS	STATS	ADJUSTED NUMBERS	REFERENCE
Hunting Spiders	EM	Hunting Spider		Monster Codex, p. 146
Fray Spiders	4	Fray Spider		Monster Codex, p. 146
Arachs	5	Poisoner		Monster Codex, p. 13
Bestiaals	4	Fighter/Hunter		Monster Codex, p. 17

help with two things. First, the arachs in her group must be eliminated in a way that does not raise suspicion among the bestiaals and her spiderlings, perhaps in an ambush in a place which Karathran can send the arachs to explore.

Once this is done, the body of Xanathâ must be destroyed and her spirit permanently banished to the Spirit World. They must then harvest three parts of her body and bring them to Karathran: a poison bladder filled with black liquid; a cluster of bone-pale, blue-veined eggs from the underside of her abdomen; and one of her six eyes – the one emitting a reddish shine. With these in her possession, Karathran can bring back the Spider King herself.

She claims that this can prevent a future war of annihilation between humans and spiders, but that is not the only thing she offers: although she does not possess her mother's full power, her bite can offer a certain protection from corrupting energies, as described in the text box Karathran's Gift.

Karathran

"I am Karathran, daughter of Xanathâ, mother of many."

Karathran is the daughter of the monstrous spider Xanathâ, one of the oldest creatures in the region, once hunted by the great princes of Symbar. Her mother has recently returned from a long stay in the Spirit World, which has given many of her daughters a new purpose – to do whatever they can to help the mother return the Spider King Angathal Taar to life.

Karathran gratefully accepted her new role. During Xanathâ's absence, she watched the humans with growing concern, and she completely agrees that something must be done. That being said, she has come to both respect and understand the barbarians and their witches, and would rather not see them hurt.

As for her appearance, Karathran resembles her mother in everything but color: her carapace is black as night. She also communicates in a similar fashion. See the description of Xanathâ on page 200.

Karathran's Gift

One of Karathran's poison glands produces a substance which, although poisonous, confers long-term resistance to corruption in nature. The bitten individual is first afflicted by a Weak poison, but is then granted a –2 modifier to all effect tests for determining temporary corruption gained from the environment (does not apply to corruption gained from using artifacts or generated by mystical powers, whether one's own or someone else's).

A side effect which Karathran cleverly does not mention is that the bite also establishes a mystical link between her and the bitten (can be detected with a successful *Vigilant* test with either *Witchsight* or training in a mystical tradition). The link allows Karathran to keep track of where those who have been bitten are, and also causes them to have frequent dreams of her and the spiders of Davokar.

If discovered, the link can be broken with the *Break Link* ritual, but then the protection against corruption is canceled as well.

Manner	Completely motionless		
Race	Beast (spider)		
Resistance	Strong		
Traits	*Armored* (III), *Natural Weapon* (II), *Poison Spit* (III), *Poisonous* (III), *Robust* (I), *Web* (III)		
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 15 (–5), **Discreet** 11 (–1), **Persuasive** 5 (+5), **Quick** 13 (–3), **Resolute** 7 (+3), **Strong** 9 (+1), **Vigilant** 10 (0)			
Abilities	*Acrobatics* (master)		
Boons/ Burdens	*Fleet-footed*		
Weapons, Accurate	Bite 6 plus poison 4 for 4 turns		
Armor	Carapace plates 4 (+2 for *Robust*)		
Defense	–1		
Toughness	10	**Pain Threshold**	5
Equipment	None		
Shadow	Sparkling white like sunlit snow (corruption: 0)		
Tactics: Karathran leaves the fighting to her offspring, but aids them with her webs and poison spit. She does not enjoy killing, not in the least, but accepts that it is sometimes a necessary means to an end.			

corruption. At the same time, the Symbarians knew that the noble pursuit of mankind could have harmful effects on the world at large, that the world was a creation of the divine, as fallible and fragile as human flesh. So, the task of guarding and tending to the Throne of Thorns fell to the Order of Dakothnic – the priesthood whose teachings revolved around humanity's interplay with, and impact on, the surrounding world.

The Throne of Thorns came to Symbar roughly four hundred years before the fall of the city, and is a major reason why the realm kept growing and became such a dominant power. The city's rulers, and eventually the emperors of Symbaroum, did not just inspire greatness; they also had the power to literally strengthen their people and fill them with fanatic ferocity. Additionally, they were able to "bless" the lands and waters, making them richer and more fertile. But all this came at a terrible cost, for although the emperors themselves were blessed with pure power, free of corruption, the people and nature itself started showing worrying signs – signs that worsened with the advances of the Theourgs: ritual flesh crafts, ceremonial pacts, new paths to spiritual and physical exaltation.

It was the priests of Dakothnic who made Emperor Symbar realize the severity of the situation; that the people were once again on the verge of destroying the world, along with themselves. But by then it was too late. The emperor had lost control, and as the strength of the external enemy (the Iron Pact and its allies) grew, so did the risk of internal chaos, maybe civil war, maybe a coup d'état orchestrated by the already exalted. The high priest of Dakothnic and the emperor were in agreement: The Throne of Thorns' power must never fall into the hands of the Theourgs.

Less than one year before the final battle of Symbar, the high priest fled with everyone who knew how to nourish and preserve the thorns covering the throne; they left with all remaining seeds, and poisoned all the cuttings and vines that climbed over the high seat. The throne was left behind, linked to the awesome and thoroughly corrupting power of the node, and there it remains to this day – tempting, waiting, longing.

The Powers of the Throne of Thorns

The Throne of Thorns is connected to an extremely powerful mystical node in the Yonderworld, via a link that runs through eternity. Without its suppressing layer of thorns, called Rosáe by the priests, the strength of its energies is so overwhelming that no living creature can withstand its effects – what happens if someone sits on the throne is described in greater detail under The Power Awakens on page 212. However, with Rosáe in place the effect is manageable. Exactly what happens if someone mounts a restored and healthy Throne of Thorns will be addressed in future episodes of this adventure chronicle, but we can already say that a person who binds to the thorns (as if to an artifact) and sits upon the throne will gain tremendous abilities and powers – which will fade unless they are maintained through regular visits.

DESCRIPTION

Castle Thorn is located on a peninsula, hidden beneath the root cover. On the outside, the round building is no more than twelve meters tall, but it is vast – over three hundred meters in diameter – and inside, the halls go deeper and deeper into the rock with every circle, so that the thick glass of the crystal dome is positioned thirty meters above the floor of the Hall of Thorns.

Like most buildings in Symbar, the castle is made of polished gray-black stone, with mighty colonnades connected to the iron-clad double gates of the four entrances. Each entrance is guarded by statues in various stages of disrepair, overgrown with fine-meshed roots, four meters tall and standing on meter-high pedestals. They are all humans, dressed in cowls that bear the mark of Dakothnic, with grave expressions on their faces and their eyes closed, their hands outstretched to the world around them, palms facing up.

The corruption on the peninsula is quite severe, both on the ground beneath the root cover and inside the castle. The characters must pass a *Strong* test every hour or suffer 1D4 points of temporary corruption, which does not wear off until the afflicted enters a completely untainted area.

The Outer Circle

The outer circle of the round structure mainly contains residences, fortifications, and storage areas. As shown on the map, many sections are equipped with basements descending up to three stories into the earth, mainly containing storerooms and residences for the order's novices, apprentices, and servants. There is also an upper floor which will not be described in-depth, made up of empty rooms and hallways.

The outer circle's southeast section belonged to the staff mages, Dakothnic's fearsome warrior monks sworn to defend the Throne of Thorns from all enemies, foreign and domestic. Kitchens and dining halls were found in the northeast, while the northwestern section contained residences and



CASTLE THORN

1. Staff Mages
2. Kitchen & Dining
3. The Priesthood
4. Study- & reading halls
5. Library
6. Mess Hall
7. Reliquary
8. Gymnasium
9. Hall of Thorns
10. High Priestess Private Chambers

salons for the priests. And finally, the southwestern section contained a library, meditation chambers, and reading and examination rooms for teaching the order's initiates.

The members lived ascetic lives with few personal belongings – something that was emphasized more over time, as the rest of the realm slowly fell into darkness. Consequently, there is nothing of value in the outer circle; all that remain is debris in the form of cracked, peeled, or otherwise damaged items of glass, metal and stone. There is one exception, however – a set of chimes, described in detail on page 216. Also, characters conducting a thorough search of the catacombs under the southeast section can find the sole remaining resident of the castle...

Three floors down under the staff mages' quarters were the prison cells where the Theourgs brought their most striking failures, unless they were deemed too dangerous to examine. For it was the priesthood's responsibility to study corruption's effects on the human body, with the aim of curing individuals who proved to be too weak to handle the divine power, or at least undoing some of its side-effects.

Still trapped in one of the cells, behind a meter-thick stone door locked from the outside with three thick bars of rusting iron, sits the last emperor's niece, Savagarala, blight born from a ceremony meant to free her from the innate limitations of the human body. Her neighbors have managed to break free due to the weakened state of the rusty iron bars, and now roam free under the root blanket, but Savagarala has neither the strength nor the mobility for something like that. Her naked body, covered in black scales, is emaciated and dehydrated, and her joints seem to bend in all directions. She lies huddled on the floor like a dropped puppet, but alive, with her head tilted toward the ground, her mouth gaping like that of a fish, and her reptilian eyes blinking eagerly – starving with blight-induced hunger, but unable to raise her arms and legs more than a centimeter or two.

The Inner Circle

The middle circle of the castle consists of four large halls that were open to all members of the order, albeit with certain restrictions depending on the individual's status in the hierarchy. The player characters must pass through one of these halls on their way to the Throne of Thorns; which one depends on where they are coming from. Their competitors will likely arrive through one (or more) of the other halls. There is a wide stairway leading inwards from these halls, down to a six-meter-high gate of stone. Beyond that gate waits the Hall of Thorns and its legendary throne.

The Reliquary: In the Reliquary, the Order of Dakothnic kept hundreds of items that had been confiscated or submitted to them because the divine power they emitted was so powerful they posed a threat to humanity and the world. The priesthood protected and studied these objects, seeking a way of reducing their harmful effects without diminishing the items' power.

The first thing the Keepers of Symbar did after establishing the root cover and the fettering mycelium was to neutralize this collection. The vast majority of items were destroyed, leaving only a handful of less tainted mystical treasures for the fortune hunters who later found the hall. Now the Reliquary is completely empty – the wooden balcony that once ran halfway up the ten-meter-high walls has long since collapsed and decayed along with the shelves it carried; and the stone pedestals rising from the marble floor hold nothing but dust. However, the curious and scholarly can get

The Staff Mages

The members of the mysterious order occupying the Staff Mage's castle are indeed descended from the guardians of the Throne of Thorns. At the time of the city's demise, their order consisted of fourteen Staff Masters, fifty-six Rune Staffs, and forty-nine Staffless. All of them fled before the battle against the Iron Pact; they even hoped that the enemy would prevail, but could not bring themselves to wage war on their own people.

Six months after the battle, twelve guardians returned and gained the Iron Pact's permission to keep watching over the throne, but never more than one dozen at a time. The guardians were relieved once a month by replacements sent from the castle being built a two-week march to the west. The arrangement was only known to the order's leading Staff Masters and Rune Staffs, as was the knowledge of Symbar's location and the true purpose of the warrior monks. This turned out to be a mistake.

When the new castle suffered its first massive skullbiter attack, the mages did not stand a chance – those who did not flee were killed, including everyone who knew about the arrangement with the elves. The disaster took place five centuries ago, and since then the staff mages' legends about the history of their order and their country have slowly been diluted and changed; the task of watching over the Throne of Thorns has been distorted into the mission to keep the emperor alive; the shame of having left their people at the mercy of the Iron Pact has turned into them blaming themselves for the fall of the emperor, and Symbaroum as well. But irrespective of these misunderstandings, one thing is certain – if the current members of the order learned where Symbar is located, they would gladly risk their lives to cleanse the imperial capital of darkness!

a sense of what items were stored here by reading the inscriptions on the copper plaques mounted on the pedastals (requires a *Cunning* test with *Loremaster* at master level).

Mess Hall: The Order of Dakothnic worshipped no god, but an aspect of humanity: the ability to concentrate, to focus on how thoughts and actions interact with the environment. Hence, the castle's sanctuary differs in one key respect from what most Ambrians and clan members associate with temples or chapels – there are no symbols of gods, no podium or alter to look up at. Instead, the castle's mess is a hall of pillars with a flat floor and smooth walls, whose sole distinguishing feature is the order's symbol covering the south wall, made of black and white mosaic tiles which long ago lost their luster.

The order's members gathered in this hall before breakfast and after supper, not to listen to some high priest, but to discuss, and later summarize, the tasks of the day. However, during the last decades before the Battle of Symbar, this tradition changed, as the order's last high priest in the city, Othelia, often held speeches from a place near the center of the hall, meant to lead both priests and warrior monks step by step toward the insight that the Symbarian people were on the verge of destroying both themselves and the world.

The Library: The collection of Castle Thorn's great library contained texts written on all kinds of materials – paper, parchment, copper cylinders and stone tablets, as well as glass in the form of slabs or orbs. The library had two upper galleries which lined the entire hall, one set three meters above the floor, the other at six, both made of wood just like the bookshelves they carried. The shelves and the galleries themselves have long since rotted and collapsed, as have the reading desks that once covered most of the bottom floor. But those who take the time to search along the walls can actually make some interesting discoveries.

All paper-like material has obviously decomposed and along with the furnishings created a layer of dirt lining the walls. Those who contribute can make two *Vigilant* tests per hour of searching. An ordinary success reveals a tablet of copper or stone, carved with Symbarian cuneiform or the incomprehensible symbols used by the scribes of Asbarast or possibly even older civilizations. These texts are mundane in nature – a poem, a list of inventories, a legal contract, or something similar (valued as a Curiosity, see page 95).

If the test succeeds with a difference of 5 or more, the character finds something more remarkable. The Game Master determines the exact nature of the find by rolling 1D4 and consulting Table 34: Finds in the Library or choosing from among the listed items.

Table 34: Finds in the Library

1D4	MATERIAL	DESCRIPTION
1	Glass orb the size of a human head, engraved with cuneiform characters too small to read without a magnifying glass.	The acclaimed and multi-award-winning novel The Beast Awakens penned by the skald Maina Ohnaak, engraved in glass for posterity. Tells of a farm girl's unlikely journey to becoming the first lady of Asbarast: the tyrannical Magantha II.
2	Bound book of parchment, damaged by moisture and mold; illegible until the pages have been treated with the *Alchemy* ability and a successful *Cunning* test (requires access to a laboratory).	The book describes the ingredients, preparations and procedure for a mystical ceremony supposedly aimed at "treating the living dead." The ritual works; it really does bring undead people back to life, but with a terrible side effect that does not become apparent until six months later: the body spontaneously and unstoppably generates one point of permanent corruption per month, until the person is blight born.
3	Book with pages of alchemically prepared fabric, bound in disintegrating leather.	A book of patterns for tapestries, carpets, and drapes brought on the Crown Ship Saroklaw's journey between the worlds, rebound on several occasions. Worth 100 thaler to a skilled expert, but ten time as much to a collector of historical curiosities.
4	The castle's logbook, written on mystically prepared paper, bound in prepared leather and therefore completely unscathed. Once it rested on a reading desk in the middle of the hall, but may have ended up somewhere along the walls.	The Librarian made short entries in the logbook every night, until the last high priest Othelia stole the thorns from the famous throne and fled with many of her fellow priests. When the theft came to light the Priesthood of Dakothnic was banished, and only its monastic order remained to watch over the dangerous high seat. The final entry is recounted on page 215, under the Investigations heading.

Examples of Items

The Crown of Attoan
suspends gravity, but eventually boils the wearer's cerebrum

The Key of Elian
opens any door, but sometimes makes them lead to darker worlds

The Gold Tooth of Samos
freshens the breath, but fills the mind with unsound desires

Cidriana's Parasites
grants regenerating power, but slowly deprives the blood of its ability to clot

The Sheath of Aske
keeps the edge sharp, but sometimes refuses to let go of the blade

The Gymnasium: Physical and spiritual discipline was crucial to all members of the Church of Haman. In this hall, staff mages, priests and initiates devoted themselves to shaping their bodies and strengthening their will, often while simultaneously solving intellectual problems of mathematical or philosophical nature. Dakothnic's followers strived to maintain their focus regardless of situationional and environmental factors – solving equations in the middle of a staff fight was one way of practicing this; solving complicated puzzles on the bottom of a deep swimming pool was another.

The four narrow but deep pools are still there, now half filled with debris and dirt. Some of the order's training equipment remains as well, such as the different-sized iron dumbbells (the heaviest weighing as much as a full-grown barbarian warrior) and the fasteners of climbing ropes in the ceiling, fifteen meters above the floor.

The Hall of Thorns

No matter which hall the player characters pass through on their way to the throne room, they are first met by a six-meter-high and three-meter-wide double gate of iron-clad, mottled gray stone, adorned with patterns of patinated copper in the shape of winding thorns. None of the doors are locked or bolted, and two of them are ajar – the ones facing the Mess Hall and the Reliquary respectively.

The hall is roughly one hundred meters in diameter and completely round, with the crystal dome resting almost thirty meters above the floor. During the day, there is a faint light streaming down in a foggy cone, focused on a three-meter-high, round platform at the center of the hall. On the platform stands the most desired artifact in the Davokar region, if not the world: the Throne of Thorns.

It is a thing of beauty, made of shiny black obsidian, with curved armrests and a three-meter-high back shaped like a half-open hand-fan. Its only ornaments are inset bands of white gold that outline the contours of the back, seat and armrests, as well as an irregular shard from the power node to which the throne is bound, set high up on the back. Finally, there are four urns standing at the foot of the high seat, one at each leg. With a volume of about ten liters, they are made of the same material as the throne, without ornamentation, and currently filled with ordinary, hard-packed, bone-dry soil.

Apart from the throne the hall is empty, save for the giant skull of an abomination and the mortal remains of six individuals – the expedition that included the survivor Asirial (see page 217). The cranium lays about halfway between the podium and the northern doorway, big as a curled-up ogre and resembling the head of the abomination illustrated on page 215. From a distance, a passed test against *Vigilant* with the *Medicus* ability reveals that the bone between its horns is cracked as if from a crushing blow – possibly the cause of death. Furthermore, a successful *Cunning* test with *Beast Lore* or training in *Sorcery* lets a character know that abominations often disintegrate after their death (melting, evaporating or crumbling into dust), but that the cranium, or parts of it, sometimes remains intact.

Characters who get the chance to examine the six bodies will find that they were utterly massacred, judging by the broken bones and smashed skulls; many also show signs of having been chewed on by huge, monstrous jaws. There are four humans, one goblin and an ogre; a successful *Cunning* test with the *Medicus* ability indicates that they were killed between eight and nine months ago. Their belongings are still scattered across the hall, mostly weapons and items found during their brief exploration of Symbar. The players may roll six times on Table 6 (page 95) to determine what they find, and the Game Master must come up with five mastercrafted weapons/sets of armor that can be useful to the player characters – each with 2–3 qualities in addition to their base stats.

EVENTS

This section presents a number of suggested scenes that may occur as the player characters reach and explore Castle Thorn. At this stage it is more difficult than ever to predict what will happen, so the Game Master must be well-prepared and ready to adjust the course of events based on the player characters' aims and alliances, as well as their experiences in Symbar up to this point.

The basic idea is that the events at the castle should be played in five phases. The first phase covers the characters' path to the Throne of Thorns and will likely involve an encounter with the undead staff mage Sidril, while phase two is about the encounter/conflicts between the player characters and at least two other group with different objectives.

Phase three begins if/when someone sits on the high seat and turns into a (nearly unstoppable) Throne Beast that attacks everything and everyone, while the fourth phase occurs if the abomination is vanquished and the survivors must decide what should happen to the Throne of Thorns. Only when that matter has been settled does phase five begin, where the survivors get to explore Castle Thorn in search of information that can lead them back to Yndaros, or rather, to what remains of the nomadic

people who offered sanctuary to the Dakothnic priesthood: the Lindarians.

Sidril

Shortly after the player characters enter one of the castle's gates, those who pass a *Vigilant* test can hear a sound, slowly rising in volume, as if someone or something is heading towards them. A subsequent *Cunning* test reveals that it is a person walking with slow, shuffling steps, leaning on a metal-tipped staff. What they hear is the last remaining guardian of the castle.

The approaching woman is wearing a cowl that may have been white before it was discolored by dirt, dust and dried blood; it is also full of holes and tears – the fact that it is still in one piece suggests that it is blessed or infused with mystical energy. A successful *Vigilant* test aimed at the woman reveals a symbol under the dirt of the cowl: the symbol representing the Order of Dakothnic.

She leans heavily on her staff, which someone with *Loremaster* or training in a mystical tradition will recognize as the rune staff of a staff mage; she is dragging her left leg behind her and is clearly very ill. The *Medicus* ability or *Beast Lore* with a successful *Cunning* test identifies her appearance as a sign of undeath – dry, sickly yellow skin, cloudy eyes and the sweet odor of drawn-out decay.

She stays just outside the light from the player characters' torch or lantern, silent and absolutely still. After composing herself, she utters a few words in Symbarian, which only those with *Loremaster* (master) can understand: *"Stop. Turn back. Not welcome!"*

She will not resort to violence. Since there is no one else left, she must live on to warn all who seek the great treasure of the castle, and convince them to leave the throne be – not exactly an easy task, as she knows no other language than ancient Symbarian and also has trouble focusing and expressing herself clearly. The latter means that she cannot hold a sensible conversation, but if the player characters try to protest or question her, Sidril adds the following (not necessarily in this order):

"Dangerous. The greatest danger."
"High seat poisons. Transforms. Death!"
"Not touch. Turn back. Go, there [points a trembling finger at the exit]."
"You die, all of you!"

Startled, she glances over her shoulder before turning back to the player characters with darkness in her eyes: *"You should be killed, now. But I can't. Must live. Must warn. I have said my part. Now, choose your fate."* She turns around and walks off to intercept another group that has arrived through one of the other entrances.

Sidril

Shortly after the skullbiters attacked the staff mages' new castle, a young crow slipped in through a crack in the crystal dome. Drawn to its gleaming white gold, the bird landed on the Throne of Thorns and was blight-born, transforming into a monstrous blight beast. Two warrior monks were killed, but worse still: the ten survivors were infected with a daemonic parasite that claimed their lives within a week, before bringing them back as undead.

For five hundred years Sidril has walked the corridors of Castle Thorn, remembering only fragments of what life was like before her undeath. The other nine have been destroyed, one by one – the last three at the hands of the explorers who now lie scattered across the floor of the throne room. She survived, and it was she who finally slew the throne beast spawned from one of the treasure hunters, with a powerful staff projectile to the head.

Manner	Wheezes to herself		
Race	Undead (human)		
Resistance	Strong		
Traits	*Undead* (III)		
Accurate 11 (–1), **Cunning** 10 (0), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 9 (+1), **Quick** 13 (–3), **Resolute** 16 (–6), **Strong** 7 (+3), **Vigilant** 10 (0)			
Abilities	*Anathema* (master), *Polearm Mastery* (adept), *Sphere* (master), *Staff Fighting* (master), *Staff Magic* (master), *Staff Projectile* (master)		
Boons/ Burdens	*Slow*		
Weapons, Accurate	Rune staff 5		
Armor	Blessed robe 2 (+2 for the Rune Staff), half damage according to *Undead* III		
Defense	–5		
Toughness	10	**Pain Threshold**	4
Shadow	Billowing matte black, like a black flag in the wind (thoroughly corrupt)		

Tactics: Really does not want to fight. If attacked, she activates her *Sphere* and tries to make the enemy break off the attack. When there is no other choice, she prefers to use her *Staff Projectile* from a safe distance.

The Defenders of the Throne

Should the player characters be explicitly on the side of the Iron Pact, the scene/scenes in the Hall of Thorns could be designed as a defensive scenario, where the player characters (possibly accompanied by representatives of the Keepers and the Witches) must try to hold off multiple waves of aggressors – perhaps starting with the undead army of the Sacred of the Old Blood (see page 218), followed by Odralintos and his monster cultists, and finally what is left of House Kohinoor and its allies. Note that the Reformists and the Black Cloaks may come to the player characters' aid, especially during the final showdown with Ralgai Melion and company.

Conflicting Wishes

The player characters may well have different ideas about what to do when the Throne of Thorns is within their reach. Perhaps someone wants to run in and take their seat on the throne, while others wish to prevent the high seat from ever having another owner. Yet another character may want to safeguard the throne for someone else – out of loyalty to a faction, perhaps, or in the hope of selling it to the highest bidder.

If this is true for your gaming group, it could be enough for the player characters to enter the Hall of Thorns by themselves, with no other factions present. There could perhaps be someone (Sidril, Yeleta or Ardil) standing between them and their goal, to attempt a negotiation before any potential conflict can escalate. And if no one ends up on the throne, it is always possible for Odralintos and his followers to show up, as described under The Power Awakens below.

Before the Throne of Thorns

When the player characters first lay eyes on the Throne of Thorns, perhaps some other group has gotten there as well. It may also be the case that they arrive in the company of allies, in the hope of claiming the throne or stopping others from doing so. We would like to suggest the following scenario, which can serve as a basis for the Game Master's own plans.

As soon as they peer into the Hall of Thorns, the characters see a number of people standing on the steps of the platform with their backs facing the throne. These are part of a faction that wants to prevent others from accessing the power of the throne; it could be members of the Keepers of Symbar (possibly reinforced by Prince Eneáno, as described on page 222), or Yeleta and one of her companions.

The people on the platform are facing another group, recently arrived from a different direction than that of the player characters. Ideally, this second group should be made up of individuals who want the throne for themselves and are prepared to kill anyone standing in their way (e.g. House Kohinoor or the Sacred of the Old Blood). The situation is tense, to say the least; it should not be long before the more or less evenly matched groups collide.

As long as the player characters are just peeking through the double gate, the people in the hall will not notice them. It is time to choose a strategy, based on their own objectives. Broadly speaking, their options are as follows:

Stand by: They can stay put and wait for the groups in the hall to kill each other off. One side will of course be victorious; the Game Master decides which one, or lets the players roll 1D6 without telling them why: 1–3 = the throne's defenders, 4–6 = the attackers. Needless to say, the winning side is significantly weakened when the player characters make their entrance.

Intervene before combat begins: The player characters can side with either group before they collide. Whichever side they choose, and even if the other party chooses to retreat (to bring reinforcements), the player characters' allies will decide to attack their antagonists. If the characters join the fight, they will face half the enemy's forces (perhaps the leader and two or three stronger subordinates); if not, a die is rolled as above to decide who wins.

Intervene during combat: Perhaps the hesitant player characters cannot make up their minds before the fighting breaks out. If their goal is to prevent others from reaching the Throne of Thorns, they will obviously side with the defenders, but if they wish to claim it for themselves the choice is not so obvious – no matter which side prevails, the victors will not let the player characters claim the prize without a fight!

The Power Awakens

The following might never take place in your particular version of the story, but it probably will, and we would even argue that it should – an adventure location of Symbar's caliber requires a proper boss fight!

If someone sits on or touches (directly or indirectly) the Throne of Thorns, that ill-fated individual will immediately be hit by an awesome wave of corruption that alters her physiognomy and mental capacity beyond recognition; the same happens if someone tries to manipulate the throne with mystical powers. The person dies, and out of her body bursts an abomination of pure corruption, insatiable in its hunger and ruthless in its brutality. There is no way to avoid this: death is instantaneous, and the transformation takes one turn, during which the newborn Throne Beast is completely invulnerable. However, this brief window gives everyone else a chance to escape...

There is ample indication that the Throne of Thorns is not functioning properly; much also suggests that it is dangerous in its current state. But then, cultural beings have a tendency to overlook unwelcome information, or at least interpret it in a way that suits their purposes – as lies, exaggerations

or misunderstandings. The risk is therefore great that someone will ignore the signs and defy the direct warnings.

Here are some suggestions on individuals who may be desperate, narrow-minded or greedy enough to reach for the black blessing of the Throne of Thorns.

Player Character: Exactly why a player character would want to sit on the throne is hard to predict, but stranger things have happened. Let the player describe how the character approaches the throne; if the plan leaves room for the other player characters to notice and react to this attempt, they should get a chance to stop their greedy or self-sacrificing friend.

Odralintos: Grandfather Lint pays no heed to warnings and is so fundamentally arrogant that he thinks they do not apply to him anyway, being the wise, strong and powerful creature he is. But he is mistaken...

If the lindworm manages to follow or track some other faction to Castle Thorn, his plan is to wait until the other groups are distracted, by combat or intense negotiations. When the time is ripe, he orders his monster cultists (see page 167) to storm the hall from one direction, while he himself charges toward the throne from another. He stakes everything on this one maneuver and will not stop until he is successful, or beaten.

Junia Dardall: If Junia Dardall has not already been killed or left the area, she would be a perfect candidate in this context – greedy for power and convinced that her noble blood can never be corrupted. She could turn up in the middle of a fight between the player characters and other factions, or after the fight, when victory seems certain and the apparent threats have been neutralized. Her ability to teleport up to twenty meters will come in handy in the final push towards the throne.

Prince Eneáno: If the Game Master decides to have the elven prince show up in Symbar, it could be he who takes his seat on the throne, when the battle against other pretenders is over and the dust has settled. Eneáno is not well; he is fickle, impulsive and often finds it hard to take the real world seriously. On a whim, he may decide to try out the legendary high seat; he walks casually up to the throne and sits down before anyone has time to protest. If the Game Master wants to give the player characters a chance to stop him, an in-depth description is found under The Elven Prince on page 222.

Throne Beast

No matter the vessel of its birth, the Throne Beast emerging from the victim's body is both huge and extremely dangerous – roughly ten meters tall, with abnormally swollen muscles. Its horned head looks like a mix between a bull and a toad, with the horns and black eyes of a bull, and the wide mouth of a toad, in addition to its three rows of triangular fangs. The rough-skinned body is pale as bone and covered in what looks like glowing tattoos in non-figurative patterns; its arms are long like a gorilla´s and end in lengthy hands equipped with half-meter bone claws.

Note that the *Colossal* (II) trait means the following:

- Anyone who tries to harm or affect it with mystical powers has two chances to fail their success tests.
- Anyone attacked by it has two chances to fail their *Defense* tests.
- Anyone hit by the creature's attacks must roll twice for *Armor*; the lowest outcome applies.

Manner	Ferociously unstoppable
Race	Abomination
Resistance	Legendary
Traits	*Armored* (III), *Colossal* (II), *Corrupting Attack* (III), *Death Struggle* (III), *Devour* (III), *Grappling Tongue**, *Mystical Resistance* (I), *Natural Weapon* (III), *Regeneration* (III), *Robust* (III), *Sturdy* (III)
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 9 (+1), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 10 (0), **Quick** 16 (–6), **Resolute** 16 (–6), **Strong** 18 (–8), **Vigilant** 5 (+5)	

Combat Strategies

The abomination has one clear weakness which the player characters and their allies can exploit, and which can be identified with the *Beast Lore* ability and a successful *Cunning* test: because of its huge, ungainly body the creature cannot perform reactive actions while moving. In other words, on the turn after it has moved the abomination gets no free attacks and is hit automatically by enemy attacks. A clever strategy can therefore be to spread out and mostly rely on ranged attacks.

Destroying or Moving the Throne

As long as the Throne of Thorns is infused with power from the Yonderworld, it is impossible to destroy or even damage it. The link to the power node can only be broken from the other side, and it is not possible to use rituals such as Dimension Walk to follow the link to the source – those who initiate such a ritual will be blight-born, same as if they had sat upon the seat.

The latter also prevents any attempt to move the Throne of Thorns. It was possible while it was covered in Rosáe, but without the thorns it cannot be touched with tools or manipulated with mystical powers (e.g. *Levitate*). Doing so would immediately cause an individual to be filled by a sudden wave of overwhelming corruption.





Abilities	*Berserker* (master), *Exceptionally Quick* (master), *Exceptionally Resolute* (master), *Exceptionally Strong* (master), *Iron Fist* (master), Man-at-Arms (master), *Natural Warrior* (master), *Rune Tattoo*** (master), *Steadfast* (master)		
Weapons, Strong	Claws 22/20 (long), two attacks at the same target, plus 1D8 temporary corruption per damaging hit		
Armor	Tough blight skin 7, +6 for *Robust* and *Berserker*, regenerates 5 *Toughness* per turn		
Defense	–2		
Toughness	54	**Pain Threshold**	9
Shadow	A black sun blazing in the blackness of space (thoroughly corrupt)		

Tactics: The Throne Beast does not use tactics per se, but it does have several tools in its arsenal. It prefers to use its claws for attacks and free attacks (the latter with one attack per target, damage 20). If badly injured by a mystic or ranged warrior, the monster uses its grappling tongue and tries to devour the person, or at least drag the enemy into melee range. Finally, opponents must watch out for its death struggles, which are just as dangerous as its regular attacks.

* Due to its immense size, the creature's grappling tongue is twice as long, with a range of up to four movement actions.
** Always active on all levels, since the creature is thoroughly corrupt

Investigations

The priests of Dakothnic were ascetics, especially during the last fifty years of Symbar, when the effects of mankind's rapacious greed became as frightening as they were obvious. Hence, there is not much for the player characters to find in terms of treasure or information. Some conclusions can be drawn from the mere sight of, and interaction with, the Throne of Thorns; there is also a logbook in the ruined library which may be of interest. But even more important is the set of copper chimes located in a corner of what was once the quarters of the last high priest...

The Throne of Thorns: Even at first sight, the throne looks different than depicted – it is not covered in vegetation. Touching or sitting on it should prove that the legendary high seat really is a source of great power, but also that said power makes it fatal to anyone foolish enough to try and tap into it.

If the players cannot figure it out by themselves, a successful *Cunning* test with a mystical tradition or *Witchsight* can tell them that the plants had some kind of suppressing or filtering function, and that the throne is exceptionally dangerous without them.

Logbook: The logbook in Castle Thorn's library only covers matters related to the order's internal affairs, or more specifically, things that took place within the rounded walls of the castle – as a kind of account of daily activities. The book which the player characters (or others) may find contains entries from seventy-three days, one page per day. Apart from the excerpt below, its entries cover everything from humorous to serious events of purely curious interest – salt cellars dropped into the evening soup, training sessions with hopelessly inept initiates, the ailments and deaths of elderly members, etcetera.

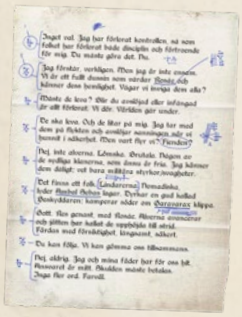
The tome in question is not even half full, ending on page seventy-three out of three hundred. The final entry was written by the Librarian after the discovery of the high priestess' theft and departure, but before it was reported to the city's worldly authorities (also see handout on page 230). A translation by someone with *Loremaster* (master) reads as follows:

Year 8–34, phase 9, day 43
Today it is all over. The honorable Othelia has lost her mind, fallen from High Priestess to traitor overnight. And she is not alone. Everyone who tended the thorns, who knew the secret of Rosáe, has left us. But not before they poisoned the high seat's Rosáe and stole every seed and sapling. The seat of Symbar is ruined, Symbar is ruined, Symbar is doomed.

In the morning we found Sem, hand of the high priestess, poisoned but not dead, only dying. The interrogation took her life, for nothing. She was howling about the south; pleading for understanding and forgiveness. And when we thought she was breaking, she too lost her mind. She cried and sobbed and whimpered, moaning incomprehensibly; it sounded like "linda" or "lindra," over and over and over. Not a word about the enemy, the elves.

The Staff Masters are on their way to the emperor with a full report. Soon it will be over. Everything.

The Chimes: In the final year of Symbar, High Priestess Othelia and Emperor Symbar conspired behind the backs of other authorities. They told no one, neither the emperor's advisor nor Othelia's order, for fear that their plans would start an uprising among the aristocracy and the clergy, as well as the populace. They rarely had a chance to meet and talk; instead they had two trusted servants



You can find the translation on page 231 in this book and on *freeleaguepublishing.com*

smuggle copper cylinders back and forth between them, belonging to a small set of chimes, on which they carved messages in tiny cuneiform signs.

The chimes' broken stand and cylinders are practically all that remain in what used to be the high priestess' private bed chamber (see map on page 207). Finding the patinated items is easy, but noticing that they are worth a closer look requires a successful *Vigilant* test.

A person with the *Alchemy* ability can make the symbols legible by heating the cylinders and washing them with chemicals to get rid of the patina. It then takes *Loremaster* (master) and a successful *Cunning* test to read the messages. If the player characters succeed at this, the person with *Loremaster* is eventually able to translate the texts and compile them as follows (also see handout on page 231):

No choice. I have lost control, as the people have lost both discipline and faith in me. You must do it. Now.

I understand, really. But I am not alone. There are twelves of us who nurture Rosáe and know its secret. Dare we tell them all?

Must they live? If you are discovered or captured, all is lost. We would die, and the world with us.

They shall live. And they trust me. I will bring them with me when I go, and tell them the truth once we are safe. But where should we go? The enemy?

No, not the elves. Devious. Vicious. One of the southern clans, who are still free. I know little about them; only military strengths/weaknesses.

There is a people. The Lindarians. Nomads obeying the laws of Ambal Seba. Worship a god called the Guardian. Encamped south of Garavarax's cliff.

Very well. Leave at once, with Rosáe. The elves are advancing, and the giant has called the exalted to arms. Travel carefully, slowly, safely.

You can come with me. We can hide together.

No, never. My fathers and I brought us here. It is my responsibility. The debt must be paid. No more words. Farewell.

Special Events

SYMBAR IS A vast and varied adventure landscape, full of ruins to explore, creatures to encounter, and competitors to fight or collaborate with. On page 141 we have already presented a handful of suggested scenes that can take place in Symbar and its vicinity, which the Game Master may insert when appropriate or use as inspiration for coming up with new challenges. The events presented below, on the other hand, are directly connected to the other hunting parties and what they might get up to over the course of the adventure.

As usual the Game Master should adjust the events according to the gaming group's preferences and play style. Remember that everything described below can be excluded from the adventure without it affecting the story at large; the events can add drama and in several cases a sense of grandeur, but are by no means indispensable.

THE CARAVAN

Shortly after the player characters arrive in Symbar they learn that a caravan full of supplies is on its way to the main camp of the Sovereign's Oath. It is closing in on the dead area where the final battle of Symbar raged the hottest, west of the root cover, between the fault scarp and the water. The information could come from the Witches, House Kohinoor, or the Iron Pact, whose scouts have spotted columns of smoke from the caravan's morning or evening fires.

The caravan consists of half a dozen covered wagons that have fought their way through northern Davokar. Most of the escort has been killed, but there are still too many able-bodied clan warriors for the player characters (or other hunting parties) to dare attack without allies – for example: one Commander, three Squad Leaders, and thirty Warriors.

Stopping the caravan from resupplying the Sovereign troops (which is in every hunting party's interest) is not the only reason to attack; if successful, the participants will be able to replenish their own supplies with dried/smoked meat, sweet jams/marmalades, and not least the clan folks' version of waybread. The player characters can grab enough for their whole group's journey home if they attack with one ally. With two allied groups the supplies will cover 75% of their needs, and with three allies 50%.

We suggest that the noise and blood from the battle awakens one of the many blight-born monstrosities slumbering beneath the dry soil of the battlefield. Exactly when the monster bursts out of the ground is up to the Game Master, but it may be particularly effective if it happens just as the battle appears to be won.

As for the battle at large, the guideline is (as always) that the player characters' part of the fight should be less challenging the more allies they have on their side, and that their success or failure determines the outcome of the battle as a whole. With one ally the player characters must take on the Commander, one Squad Leader, and ten Warriors; with two allies, the Commander and five Warriors; with three allies they can leave everyone but the Commander to their allies.

Meshuggax

The spider Meshuggax fought alongside the elves against the hordes of Symbar, slaying more than a hundred enemies before it was surrounded by a group of mystics who showered it with a wave of dark energy. Meshuggax was blight-born and started slaughtering indiscriminately, no longer capable of distinguishing between friend and foe. It was the Iron Pact's mystics who lulled it to sleep and lowered it into the soil, and there it has slumbered until now, when the fetters of the Keepers are losing their power.

As an abomination, Meshuggax is larger and more robust than she was in life, as large as the caravan wagon. She has retained her spider form, but lost all of her hair, so that her body is now covered by a shiny black shell with horn-like outgrowths at all joints.

Manner	Skitters eagerly
Race	Abomination (spider)
Resistance	Mighty
Traits	*Acidic Attack* (III), *Acidic Blood* (III), *Armored* (III), *Leap* (III, page 102), *Natural Weapon* (II), *Regeneration* (III), *Robust* (III), *Sturdy* (III), *Web* (III)
Accurate 13 (–3), **Cunning** 10 (0), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 9 (+1), **Quick** 15 (–5), **Resolute** 11 (–1), **Strong** 10 (0), **Vigilant** 7 (+3)	
Abilities	*Berserker* (master), *Natural Warrior* (master)
Weapons, Accurate	Two bites 15/11, plus acid 5 for 5 turns
Armor	Shell 4, +6 for *Robust* and *Berserker*, regenerates 4 *Toughness* per turn
Defense	–1
Toughness	30 **Pain Threshold** 5
Shadow	Shiny black like the creature's shell (thoroughly corrupt)

Tactics: Meshuggax starts by spitting a web at oncoming melee fighters. Then it leaps at lightly armored targets to sink its acidic jaws into their warm flesh.

THE SURVIVOR

Roughly eight months before the player characters' arrival in Symbar, a group of independent explorers accomplished the same feat, led by the adventurous noble Erad Erast. They arrived from the east along the waters in the north, and were thus (un)lucky enough to come across Castle Thorn relatively quickly. Sidril's warning was ignored, kindly but firmly, and soon there were cheers and laughter as the group found what they assumed to be the legendary Throne of Thorns. But the jubilant atmosphere immediately died out when Erad Erast placed himself on the throne.

The group fought the abomination and with Sidril's help they managed to defeat it. But everyone died, except for the guide Asirial who fled immediately after their leader was blight-born. Thanks to her wilderness expertise she has managed to survive in the area, moving between different caves and caverns, always careful to stay out of sight. But she has not been able to shake off the terror. Something broke inside her when her beloved Erad transformed before her eyes, something that will never be whole again, something that has left her apathetic and unable to communicate. Except in her dreams...

The Game Master can let the player characters run into the changeling Asirial on their travels east or south of Symbar, or maybe she has been found by another group who is holding her prisoner? We recommend the latter: that she has been captured by the Knights of Dead Prios, and that the Witches or House Kohinoor have heard about it from an infiltrator or a scout. The player characters are offered the mission of rescuing the woman in exchange for a favor or direct payment – a mission whose challenge should require negotiation or stealthy maneuvers rather than combat.

If the player characters get hold of Asirial she seems to be in good physical health, but when they try to question her it turns out that she neither makes eye contact nor answers when spoken to. They may of course subject her to the *Telepathic Interrogation* ritual, but in that case they are limited to yes/no questions and she will become absolutely frantic if she realizes what is going on, even risking hurting herself in order to escape.

To obtain the information the changeling has to offer, the player characters must wait until she

falls asleep. She talks in her sleep every night, but usually in the form of senseless gibberish mixed with her lover's name: *"Erad, Erad, no Erad, no!"* However, the following fragments can be picked up – all in one night or spread out over several nights, depending on what the Game Master thinks is appropriate:

"Erad, no, back away! Don't sit down! Don't!"
"Not you, it's not you! No, Erad, stop. STOP! Don't eat me."
"We didn't listen, we didn't obey. Our fault. My fault. Erad, oh Erad..."
"RUN! No, not like that, not like that! Not the darkness, don't grow, don't become hunger and death and jaws..."

As mentioned earlier, Asirial can be used as a last resort if the player characters cannot find Castle Thorn any other way. Perhaps she hears them discuss their precarious situation; perhaps the memories catch up to her, particularly the thought that someone may have survived the battle against the abomination. If so, she grabs one of them without warning, pointing north, moaning *"Erad slaughters! The throne, Erad, there!"* If she is quickly handed a sketch map of the area, she can even point out the exact location of Castle Thorn, before slipping into apathy again.

THE ARMY OF THE DAMNED

Three or four days after the player characters' arrival in Symbar (or whenever the Game Master deems appropriate) there may be reason to return to the battlefield mentioned under the Caravan header. Agramai Kalfas is determined to claim Symbar for himself, and for that he needs an army. As a sorcerer with access to a ceremonial codex for Mass Resurrection, everything he needs lies buried beneath the earth of the old battlefield.

Information on what is about to happen can once again come from the scouts of the Witches or House Kohinoor – they have learned that the "independent treasure hunters" led by Agramai are preparing a complex ritual, possibly a ceremony, at the northern edge of the upper plateau, with a view of the plain. Perhaps they have also noticed that the group has been reinforced by barbarian warriors (i.e. raised undead)!?

What has happened is that the Sacred of the Old Blood have, for the past few days, distanced themselves from their previous allies and increased their numbers with the *Raise Undead* ritual, performed on corpses from the mass grave left by the Sovereign's Oath. These have stats as Dragoul (page 230 in the *Core Rulebook*) and are equal in number to the player characters, adding to the Warriors and Pathfinders (see page 159) of Agramai's expedition.

Rules for ceremonies in general and Mass Resurrection in particular are described in both *Yndaros – The Darkest Star* and the Game Master's Guide. The player characters' challenge will be to abort the ceremony before it is completed, which requires that they take out its Officiant (Agramai) or enough of its participants that they fail to satisfy the required minimum: one Officiant and three participants. When this is done the danger is over; if the characters fail, however, their future in Symbar will be very difficult.

Obstacles on the Way

The Game Master can split the challenge into the following steps, based on the assumption that the player characters arrive at the ritual site just as the ceremony is nearing completion. Table 35 shows what the outcome of the ceremony will be depending on how quickly the player characters and their allies manage to abort it. The countdown starts when the characters make the success test for Obstacle 1, for themselves or for an ally acting as an advance party/diversion.

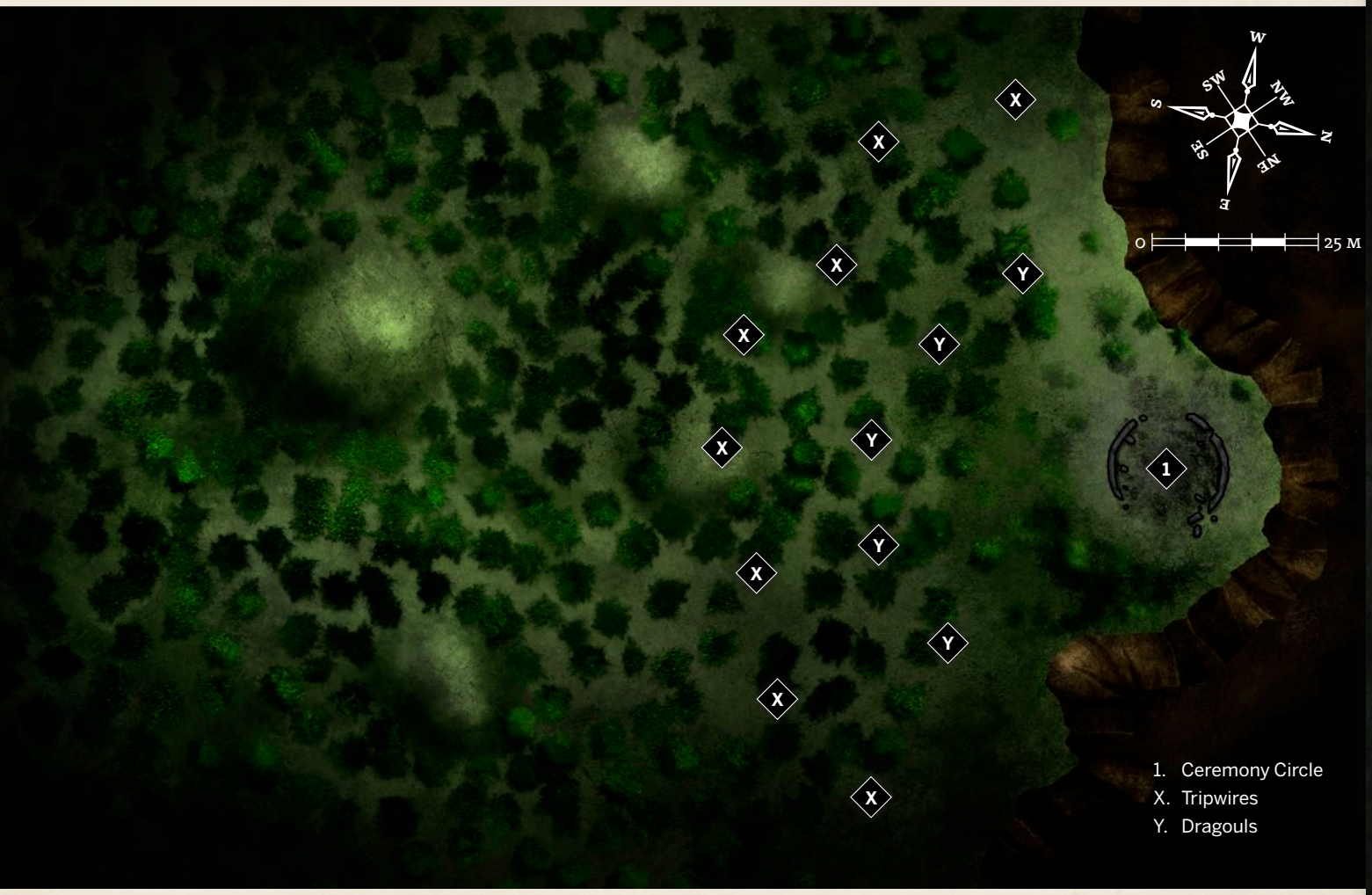
Obstacle 1: A network of tripwires connected to bells has been set up in a semi-circle roughly fifty meters from the edge of the cliff where the ceremony is taking place. It takes a successful *[Vigilant –3]* test to notice the wire – on success it is easily avoided; on failure the silence is broken by the shrill tinkling of a bell.

Obstacle 2: PC number of dragouls are posted in a semi-circle thirty meters from the ceremonial circle. If one is attacked the others come charging; they move at a rate of 20 meters per turn, which means that all but two will reach the characters on the second turn of combat. Note that if the player characters have triggered the alarm, the dragouls are forewarned and ready to face the intruders.

Obstacle 3: The group's remaining warriors and pathfinders have orders not to leave their posts right next to the ceremonial circle. They are standing in two lines around the vast thicket of trees that has been partially cleared to make room for the ceremonial site and protects their southern side, the warriors on the outside and the pathfinders on the inside.

Outcomes and Effects

First and foremost, regardless of the outcome, Agramai and any other surviving cultists will try to escape down two ropes hanging over the edge



of the cliff. The precipice is roughly twenty meters deep and it only takes one turn to slide down to the ground. A player character who passes a *Quick* test and deals 5 damage or more with a cutting weapon can sever one of the ropes before the climbers have made it down. The fall inflicts 1D10 damage. Alternatively, the characters may of course climb after them, but that would be a bad idea if the ceremony reached at least half effect – Agramai Kalfas wraps himself in the Stone Cloak of Alial, and soon the ground below is swarming with undead, attacking everything and everyone who is not under the Prince's protection.

Half effect means that the Prince only controls half of the hundreds of undead rising from the ground; combat breaks out, and when the dust settles the sorcerer has far from an entire army to command – enough to besiege and later storm the Imperial Palace, but not to dominate the entire city.

Should the player characters fail completely, so that the ceremony has full effect, the Prince suddenly commands an army of over 2000 undead

Table 35: Outcome of the Ceremony

THE CEREMONY IS ABORTED BY...	OUTCOME	EFFECT
Turn 5 or earlier	Failure	The ceremony is aborted, but the place where it is performed suffers one side-effect
Turn 6–8	Late failure	The Ceremony is aborted, but the site where it is performed and the targeted area suffer one side-effect each (same or different)
Turn 9–11	Half effect	The Ceremony results in what the description refers to as a Half Effect; between one and two side-effects afflict the site where it is performed and the area where the effect occurs
Turn 12 or later	Full effect	The Ceremony results in what the description refers to as the Full Effect; between one and three side-effects afflict the site where it is performed and the area where the effect occurs

warriors who follow his every order. Perhaps he uses 500 of these to take over the Imperial Palace, before posting ten hundred-man patrols in strategic locations up on the root blanket, with orders to kill anything in sight. Finally, he divides the remaining 500 warriors into ten hunting parties with the task of searching the lands east, south and west of Symbar for threats.

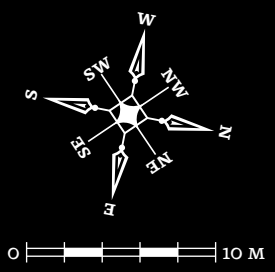
The player characters' continued adventure in the city has suddenly become much more dangerous. Perhaps they can negotiate with the Prince and make him believe that they are at his service in the search for the Throne of Thorns? Otherwise they will have to sneak through the city, mostly on the ground beneath the root cover, where darkness reigns...

MIDNIGHT IN SYMBAR

If the gaming group's escapades during the adventure *Wrath of the Warden* ended with the characters seeing the "exalted" Erlaber Ambreagos fly north from Thistle Hold, it may be time for another encounter with the abomination Midnight. After rampaging around in the darker parts of Davokar, Midnight recently arrived in Symbar and was immediately drawn to what remains of the city's once soaring library spire – mainly because of the artifact known as Vaesar's Gift, which is built into the seventeenth floor, now the uppermost level of the spire, fourteen stories above the root blanket.

It was the priests of Vaesar who operated the library, built in the form of a tall tower to emphasize that knowledge, and ultimately wisdom, never comes easily. Their collection was organized so that the most advanced and intellectually demanding works were kept at the top – understanding them took decades of schooling, but reaching them also required considerable physical effort, or great patience.

Vaesar's Gift was used for rituals in which the entire priesthood participated, initiates and masters alike, often in front of a crowd of spectators. The artifact is cemented into the floor on the seventeenth level, which is designed as an amphitheater with galleries running all around. The purpose of the rituals was of course to demonstrate the basic doctrine of Vaesar: that morality and sentiments must never stand in the way of the pursuit of knowledge and enlightenment.





LEVEL 14

1. Balcony
2. Vaesar's Gift
3. Stairwell
4. Gallery
5. Stone Benches
6. Preparation Room

The Library Spire

The Spire of Vaesar was once over one hundred and fifty meters tall, but the top two thirds have long since collapsed. Seventeen stories remain, connected by a spiral staircase that runs all the way up through the tower's center, with a diameter of fifty meters at ground level and forty meters at the top.

Inside there is nothing left. The round floors are divided into everything from large halls to small alcoves, but there are no furnishings or any books remaining. The reason for this is that the priesthood's leadership had their disciples destroy everything once it was clear that the enemy was at the gates – burning all books and parchment, melting down all engraved tablets, and breaking everything made of stone. The texts could be reproduced if Symbar managed to hold its ground, but they simply could not risk their *"exalted knowledge and profound insights"* falling into the hands of the enemy.

The tower is still stable and has many entrances, in the form of a doorless opening at ground level and numerous windows on each floor, some of them level with the root blanket. Once inside, the characters can go up via the spiral staircase; parts of it have eroded, but the missing steps can be jumped over by a person with *Acrobatics* or a successful *Quick* test. But on the sixteenth floor the staircase comes to a dead end, as Midnight has used a huge boulder to block the opening to the upper floor, with the hope of trapping its future victims.

The boulder can be smashed, of course, but not without Midnight noticing what is going on. Another option is to climb along the facade, toward the balcony – ideally when the abomination is out hunting. No success test is required from characters with the *Acrobatics* ability, but without it the climber must pass a *Vigilant* test on the way up to avoid placing weight on a loose stone. It is also possible to use a grappling hook, if the characters have access to one (*Accurate* to make it catch). When someone has gotten up there, a rope can be used to help the others, with no need for success tests.

Midnight

When Midnight arrived in Symbar, the Sovereign's Oath was already there. Midnight grabbed a warrior with its claws and flew away to feast in peace. Whether it was chance that made the creature land on the top balcony of the library spire or whether it really felt drawn to the place is not important – what matters is that it dragged the barbarian inside and tore him to shreds right next to Vaesar's Gift. It is hard to say why the abomination found the rush of clear thinking so satisfying, but probably because fragments of Erlaber Ambreagos still linger in its being. In life the inquisitive sorcerer would have done anything to get his hands on such an artifact, and he would not have hesitated to use it.

Since then Midnight has spent his days hunting Sovereign warriors; between three and four of them have been brought to the spire every day, and had their arms and legs broken to stop them from escaping. A couple of times a day someone has been sacrificed to satisfy the hunger of the stone and the abomination, so even though a few have dropped dead or hauled themselves over the railing, the number of prisoners has grown. When the player characters become aware of the abomination's existence, six battered and terrified individuals are held prisoner by Midnight – most of them belonging to the Sovereign's Oath, but a few from other hunting parties as well.

The player characters could see one of their own companions being dragged away screaming by the abomination, or maybe the mere sight of their old enemy makes them want to finish the battle that started in Thistle Hold. Lastly, it is possible that some other faction will ask the player characters to help them free one of their members – for example Iasogoi Brigo, the Reformist or the Witches. In the latter case, the player characters should of course make sure to demand a sizable favor in return!

Midnight

Over three meters tall, wiry and covered in a coat of gray, hairy scales. The head and face resembles that of a bat, but with the mandible jaws of a spider and curved goat's horn reaching down to the shoulders. The last thing that happens before the creature attacks is that it unfolds a set of huge, leathery wings.

Manner	Pure rage
Race	Abomination
Resistance	Mighty
Traits	*Armored* (III), *Corrupting Attack* (II), *Natural Weapon* (II), *Regeneration* (II), *Robust* (III), *Wings* (III)
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 9 (+1), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 7 (+3), **Quick** 11 (–1), **Resolute** 13 (–3), **Strong** 18 (–8), **Vigilant** 10 (0)	
Abilities	*Berserker* (master), *Exceptionally Strong* (master), *Natural Warrior* (adept), *Steadfast* (master)
Weapons Accurate	Claws, two attacks at the same target 14/10, +3 in temporary corruption

At the Foot of the Tower

Some of the barbarians Midnight caught and intends to sacrifice have committed suicide by crawling to the balcony and hauling themselves over the railing; others have died from internal bleeding and therefore been thrown out by the abomination. And then there are Midnight's victims, who after the bloodletting have been hurled over the railing. This has left twelve mangled corpses lying on the root cover below the balcony, half of them drained of blood, while two of the others have been partially devoured. There are also a handful of holes in the root blanket, where falling bodies have crashed through thinner roots on their way to the ground.

Vaesar's Gift, artifact

Vaesar's Gift looks like a shimmering black pumice stone, roughly the size of a huddled child and irregular in shape. Its origin is shrouded in mystery, but in Symbarian times it was said that the stone belonged to the high priest of Vaesar and came to this world on the crown ship Saroklaw. Technically it has only one power, but one that can be used by anyone without first having to bind oneself to the stone.

If someone performs a blood sacrifice of a cultural being and lets the blood flow over, and sink into, the stone, that person becomes extremely clear-headed during the following scene – he or she gains +10 *Cunning* and is thus endowed with a superhuman ability to see connections and draw conclusions about the effects of complicated systems with interconnected factors. The price for this wisdom is 1D6 points of temporary corruption.

Although it takes a bit of effort, the stone can be broken loose from the floor and hauled back to civilization. Like other artifacts it should be worth 1000+1D1000 thaler, if the player characters find the right buyer for such a blood-soaked treasure.

Armor	Leathery hide 10		
Defense	+3		
Toughness	18	**Pain Threshold**	9
Equipment	None		
Shadow	The deepest black, a light-consuming stain on the night sky. (thoroughly corrupt)		

Tactics: Midnight's hatred drives it forward without concerns; all that matters are death and destruction.

THE ELVEN PRINCE

Prince Eneáno's time is almost up. Elori, the elves' former envoy in Yndaros and one of the Reformists' advisors, is currently undergoing his third hibernation, and when he re-emerges as a winter elf he will be ready to take over as the leader of the increasingly weakened Iron Pact. In light of this, it seems only fair to let the ancient elf prince go out in a blaze of glory!

For several weeks the Keepers have been begging and pleading for reinforcements from the Halls of a Thousand Tears. The Game Master decides when these reinforcements arrive and how many troops they bring along – remember that the gatekeeper Ka'eroan has some control over where in the forest the Halls' entrances and exits lead, which means that the reinforcements do not have to travel very long through Dark Davokar to reach their destination.

Presented below are three suggestions on how Prince Eneáno can add a sense of grandeur to the adventure location. However, the Game Master is free to come up with something else or exclude the ailing prince completely. The same goes for the player characters' role in these scenes. Eneáno is unlikely to engage in conversation; at most he might acknowledge the characters' presence with a glance and a brief smile, like a human who sees a cute pet but has more important things to do. The text below is written as if the player characters are spectators rather than active participants – something the Game Master is free to change if so desired.

The Last Stand of the Prince: The elves can show up when the player characters are in the company of the Witches or the Keepers, at the edge of the root cover or under it, visiting the adventure location around the Mother Tree. Yeleta and/or Ardil walks up to greet the prince with a short "Eneáno," but the newcomers' leader does not seem to care.

Looking around, his eyes grow darker with every breath, his face twisting in a grimace of hatred and disgust. Finally he utters a few words in Elvish (can be understood by someone with *Loremaster* at adept level): *"The Keepers of Symbar have failed. The blackness is unbearable. Must be cleansed. Now!"* After a brief pause he takes a few determined strides forward, adding: *"Daughters, sons, the battle is upon us. Win or rest, win or die!"* He picks up the pace and the autumn elves fall in behind him; soon they are running, charging silently at the awakened darkness of Symbaroum.

Should the player characters go with them, Yeleta and/or Ardil will try to stop them, kindly but firmly. If asked why, their answer is something like: *"It is for the best. The prince's time has passed; let him meet the end he desires."*

The twenty-five elves comprise an extremely capable fighting force, but against the endless darkness of Symbar they will fall, one by one, and the area they cleared of abominations and undead will be darkened within a few hours after their departure. Eventually Eneáno dies as well, in futile battle against a giant blight beast.

The Prince to the Rescue: Prince Eneáno can be used as a Deus Ex Machina (see page 195 in the *Core Rulebook*) and come to rescue the player characters during a seemingly unwinnable battle. It can happen during a random encounter under Davokar's root cover or during one of the

encounters described in conjunction with the adventure locations – for example the battle against the exalted managaals at the Haman Dakh's ziggurat.

Whenever it occurs, the elf prince sweeps in with two of his daughters and wipes out the player characters' enemy in a couple of turns. They look as described above, except that their robes have become bloody and dirty (the prince has sustained a bleeding cut over his right eye and cheek). No success tests are required; the Game Master can handle their contribution to the battle on the basis that a) their attacks hit and deal damage, and b) they themselves are hit but take less damage than they should, as if they are blessed with some form of mystical protection.

Once the enemy is vanquished, the prince stops for a moment, only long enough to look the characters quickly in the eyes. No smile, no greeting, as if he is just checking whether they should be killed as well. Then the three elves disappear in a suitable direction, on their way to the next battle.

The Black Coronation of the Prince: It could be tempting to introduce Prince Eneáno at the final stage of the adventure, when the player characters and their allies have won the battle for the Throne of Thorns. He enters the hall, alone and unarmed, and it is easy to assume that he has come to honor the victors – at least that is what Yeleta, Ardil and/or Sarvola believes if they are present.

The prince seems relaxed, at least in terms of his body language. His face is harder to read; the eyes are wide open, flicking back and forth and unable settle on anything; the lips are locked in what looks like a fake smile, teeth bared. Rumor has it that he is insane, and judging by the expression on his face, it may be true...

> They come out of nowhere: two dozen towering autumn elves in snow-white robes, armed with spears, with dark eyes and stern faces. Leading the V-formation is an even taller gure, almost three meters from his naked feet to his clean-shaven head, wearing the same simple robe, but with re burning in his gaze.

Everyone present lowers their eyes and bows their heads in reverence, silently waiting for him to speak, as Eneáno steps up onto the podium, where he stops and turns to face those gathered. His face softens into a smile that now looks perfectly genuine, and the eyes wandering between the throne's defenders are warm and heartfelt.

He opens his mouth as if to speak... But changes his mind. After a quick glance across his shoulder at the legendary high seat, his mouth opens anew. Not a word. Instead he takes two quick steps back, and before anyone has time to react with more than a squeal he takes his place on the Throne of Thorns...

The Prince and the Siraphs

As already mentioned, Prince Eneáno can use the winter elves in the Halls of a Thousand Tears to take control of changelings located in Symbar, and is thus able to monitor the situation on the ground. It could be Iasogoi's partner Orlandor, who in that case is suffering from recurring "memory lapses" and sometimes his eyes become fixed on the player characters and what is happening around him.

If one of the player characters is a changeling, it could be that person who is used by the elves. How it works and how it is portrayed is for the Game Master to decide, with the following reminder:

Technically, *Create Siraph* feels and works like the *Possess* ritual, except that no *[Resolute←Resolute]* test is required for it to take effect. Another exception is that the control can last indefinitely, provided that the host is given enough time to rest.

Aftermath



THIS FINAL CHAPTER offers tips and guidelines regarding the time after *Mother of Darkness*, up until the start of the fifth episode of the *Throne of Thorns*. First we address the immediate aftermath of the expedition to Symbar, followed by a section describing the game world's development at large and what the player characters might get up to while awaiting the next major challenge – the journey to the dead land of Alberetor and its equally blighted neighbor, Lyastra. Our hope is that the chapter's contents will be useful to players who want (or have) to create a new character, by giving them an idea of how to connect the new character's backstory and properties to the overarching story.

The Journey Home

THERE IS REALLY no reason why the journey back from Symbar should be easier or less dangerous than it was to get there. Quite the opposite, in fact, as the player characters are probably encumbered with items they have found and exhausted from having spent more than a month in the depths of the forest.

After a few paragraphs summarizing the knowledge and insights the player characters have gained from *Mother of Darkness*, this section offers a number of suggestions regarding the journey home to Ambria. No matter what state the characters are in as they leave Symbar and its dangerous shadows behind, they will of course encounter new and somewhat different dangers on their travels...

INSIGHTS

During their investigations in Symbar the player characters can uncover a great deal of information relevant to future episodes of the chronicle. While the knowledge about Symbaroum's history is important, it is the information concerning the Throne of Thorns and the Order of Dakothnic that matters most. A summary of what the characters should carry with them on their journey home, apart from treasures and fresh scars, is as follows:

- The Throne of Thorns is not a myth; it is very real and clearly linked to a source of immense power, probably based in the place where mankind set off on its journey to The First Realm and Asbarast.



- The throne is destroyed, or at least unusable in its current state; its coat of vegetation (called Rosáe) is needed to dampen or channel the power, and it was stolen by the guardians and defenders of the throne: the Priesthood of Dakothnic.
- Leading representatives of the Order of Dakothnic fled south with their knowledge and the stolen seeds. The player characters may also know enough to link their destination to the Lindarian people and then make further connections to the city state of Lindaros.

Even if your players fail to piece together the insights above, you can rest assured that it will not become a problem later on. The next episode of the chronicle will not assume that the player characters have been to Symbar, or that they carry knowledge or items from the ruined city.

HOMEWARD

How the journey back plays out depends entirely on what has happened during the characters' time in Symbar – perhaps they can prepare for the journey in peace, buy they could just as well be forced to leave the ruined city in a hurry, running for their lives. Either way, the journey south should not be too dangerous or eventful, as many players can find it exhausting or even boring if their player

Hardly even the gold and other finds in the backpacks can make the journey home endurable.

characters are forced to endure further hardships before they can relax. And there is actually one factor that makes such a development plausible: the river Malgomor.

The snow is still melting in the northern parts of the Ravens, its runoff making the river flow swift and fresh. The player characters may be able to build their own rafts, or maybe band together with other handy survivors who want company on the journey south, or a witch who knows the *Quick Growth* ritual. If any of their companions arrived together with House Kohinoor's expedition, there is yet another possibility – that one or a few of the riverboats Ralgai's hunting party dragged upstream and made sure to hide are still there, perhaps in a ruin near the place where the tributary of the volcano converges with the Malgomor.

The Game Master should prepare two or three challenges for the journey. Why not let some aquatic monstrosity attack the characters' vessel during the first leg, with the risk of them losing some of their hard-earned treasures? Perhaps a second challenge will occur as they are poling through, or spending the night at, the Black Pitch Mire? If the player characters are traveling with company, one of the challenges might arise when their fellow travelers run off with some priceless item, or even attack/poison them in order to take all the credit and riches for themselves.

HOMECOMING

The player characters could try to sneak back into Ambria. But if they are known to have been part of an expedition to Symbar, it will be difficult to stay hidden for long, at least if they happen to be in (or passing through) one of the country's border settlements.

Once they have been recognized as adventurers returning from Symbar, whether amid a triumphant procession's return to Thistle Hold or accidentally at one of Kastor's grubby taverns, they should expect to be ridiculously famous for a long time to come. People are staring wherever they go, they are invited to storytelling nights everywhere, at simple beer halls, nobles' mansions and Ordo Magica's chapter towers. There will be bidding wars over every single curiosity they claim to have found in Symbar, and a never-ending stream of artists will be lining up to produce a chronicle of their travels, set music to their experiences, paint them in their "authentic" travel outfits, or gauge their tastes to create a special menu of treasure hunters' delights.

Depending on how things turned out for House Kohinoor, the Black Cloaks, and the Reformists, the player characters might also catch the eye of these powerful factions. The Queen's representatives will try to make sure that they do not recount any experiences or observations that might lead others to the ruined city or that could harm House Kohinoor in general – first with flattery and bribes, then with increasingly serious coercive measures. The Reformists, on the other hand, will want them to do the opposite – to vilify the Queen's expedition members, or at least paint them as ruthlessly greedy in their quest for domination over the legendary heart of Davokar.

Developments

REGARDLESS OF WHAT does or does not happen during the player characters' stay in Symbar, life goes on in the rest of the world. Sure, what happens in the shade of the root cover may well affect future developments, and the Game Master might have to make adjustments to what is described below, as it is written with the following premise in mind:

- By the end of the adventure, no faction has established dominance over Symbar.
- The Weaver, Valarai-Aia, is saved from her tormentor and slowly re-establishes the fetters that protect Symbar.
- Sarvola survives and eventually heads back to Ravenia; the same goes for Yeleta, who returns to Karvosti.
- Prince Eneáno dies, leaving the door open for someone else to assume leadership of the Iron Pact.

SYMBAR & THE IRON PACT

When Elori rises as a winter elf he feels summoned to the Halls of a Thousand Tears, where he is crowned Prince Elori. He manages to gather and unite the Iron Pact – the war against humanity cannot be won with weapons; forces of good must be supported, and Symbar must be kept in slumber. Guarding the ruined city becomes the top priority of the Ironsworn – it remains under strict taboo!

Meanwhile, Symbar is changing. The emperor and a growing number of spirits continue to cleanse and restore the city; rebuilding what was

destroyed and lulling the corruption back to sleep, slowly pushing the darkness away, upon which Valarai-Aia adjusts her pattern so that the root cover starts to recede.

THE SOVEREIGN'S OATH

Razameaman and the Blood-Daughter receive a report of what has happened. They make further attempts with smaller expeditions, but are repelled by the Iron Pact and soon decide to focus on gaining control of Davokar before making another serious attempt at taking Symbar.

Late in the summer, the armies of the Sovereign's Oath march south once again and conquer Karvosti after hard-fought battles against the High Chieftain's alliance. The Blood-Daughter proclaims herself as the Exile Empress of Symbaroum, and thousands of slaves begin work on fortifying the cliff and raising a new stronghold after tearing the old one down. The Witches seal themselves in the mountain along with a group of surviving wrathguards.

THE QUEEN & AMBRIA

Queen Korinthia's popularity wanes even more when word gets out that she failed to reach the Throne of Thorns – a rumor fueled by the Reformists. The situation deteriorates further when she decides to secure her hold on Ambria instead of honoring her alliance with the High Chieftain in the battle of Karvosti: they say she is weak, cowardly, and losing her grip; the speculations about her true identity are rekindled.

Instead, many turn to the Sun Church, increasingly dominated by the Reformists. Korinthia responds by invading Templewall and bringing Prios Domain under the crown's control. Realizing that it will not go down well, many nobles condemn this act, but none more loudly and forcefully than her own nephew – Duke Ynedar, called the Crown Duke by his followers and a growing section of the population. By the start of the chronicle's next episode, Ambria is in the midst of civil war.

Korinthia finds herself under increasing pressure, and in her desperation she concludes that the Throne of Thorns is her only chance at redemption.

THE SUN CHURCH

The Queen's actions are causing more and more sun priests, theurgs and Black Cloaks to join the Reformists and the older interpretation of Prios. In the autumn, Brother Eumenos declares that he has allowed himself to be *"led astray by the Prios of War"* and steps down as head of the Twilight Monastery in the Titans. Shortly thereafter Anabela Argona resigns as well, whereupon Father Sarvola is elevated to the position of First Father – with the official blessing of Queen Korinthia and Crown Duke Ynedar, who are both hoping for the reformed Curia's support.

What Comes Next?

ACCORDING TO THE proposed timeline, the next adventure will take place in the autumn of year 22 after the Victory, which should mean that the player characters have at least a couple of months to kill before it is time to take on the fifth episode of the chronicle. After a section on the distribution of *Experience* and a few words about possible entries into Professions, we present a number of ways to keep the characters busy in the wake of *Mother of Darkness*.

EXPERIENCE

For each scene that contains at least one challenge, the player characters will have earned one (1) *Experience*. The Game Master has the power to decide what counts as a scene, which becomes something of a challenge in itself due to the open structure of this scenario. We recommend that a protocol be established early on, whereby either the Game Master or one of the players records the scenes the player character experience over the course of the adventure.

As a rough estimate, each player character should earn between 60 and 80 *Experience*. However, the gaming group is free to change this, should they want their characters to progress faster or more slowly than that.

PROFESSIONS

Many of the professions described in the *Advanced Player's Guide* are represented in Symbar, from Ironsworn to Templar and Queen's Spy. But for there to be someone who can serve as a teacher to interested player characters they must not only survive, but also regard the characters as friends and allies. This makes it difficult to predict what career paths will open up; the Game Master and the players must together decide what is reasonable, based on the developments around the gaming table.

THE PRICE OF FAME

There could of course be one or several minor scenarios about situations that arise because of the player characters' status as famous explorers of Symbar. Celebrity is not always an advantage, particularly in a place like Ambria where fortune hunters are held

in high esteem, and especially when one's fame is rooted in the legendary Symbar – strongly symbolic and supposedly brimming with priceless treasures. Here are a couple of more specific suggestions on things that might befall the player characters:

- A Count, Baron or some other noble desires the riches of Symbar and spends a small fortune recruiting sellswords, bounty hunters and assassins for the purpose of kidnapping one of the player characters or someone who accompanied them on their journey. The goal is of course to force this person to reveal the exact location of Symbar.
- A notorious band of robbers concludes that raiding the player characters' presumed treasure trove might be more profitable than attacking merchant caravans and riverboats. They start by rummaging through a home, headquarters or the equivalent, where they find something the characters want to take back. And they do not stop there, but proceed to target friends, relatives and others, all in an effort to convince the characters to give them access to *"the great treasure trove."*

THE WAR BEGINS

Considering that the player characters can actually be allied with any of the game world's factions, it is difficult to predict exactly how the coming civil war will affect them. But needless to say, their friends and allies will require assistance in these uncertain and difficult times, even before the real fighting breaks out. Here are some generally applicable suggestions on missions the player characters can receive or initiate themselves:

- Murdering, imprisoning or kidnapping key members of an enemy faction. It could be a military strategist, a beloved figurehead, or someone with information that could harm the player characters' allies.
- Razing an important enemy stronghold. It could be a noble's castle, a military fort or a series of secret spy outposts.
- Sabotaging the enemy's stockpiles of weapons, supplies or war machines. The items could be found on board a convoy of riverboats or a caravan following the highroads, or behind the thick walls of a fortress.
- Conspiring and planting false information to sow discord between the main enemy and its allies.
- Seeking out a handful of Dukes or Counts who must be persuaded to sign a document pledging loyalty to the characters' allies/quest giver.

THE THORNS OF THE THRONE

Ordo Magica has actually already dug up a great deal of information about the Order of Dakothnic, the Throne of Thorns, and the mystically cultivated thorny plant which the Symbarians called Rosáe. The sources that could confirm that High Priestess Othelia's descendants co-founded Lindaros and that the Order of Dakothnic continued to exist were mostly unearthed during Master Marbela's excavation beneath Old Kadizar, particularly in the chamber next to Emperor Symbar's crypt (see *Yndaros – The Darkest Star*, page 148).

But these sources have yet to be analyzed and as a result of Ordo Magica's internal disorder, caused by political conflicts in the realm and (possibly) the death of former Grand Master Seldonio, the chests of material from Marbela's excavation have gone missing. They were first shipped to the order's headquarters in Agrella, but ended up in the hands of an ill-fated robber band who did not stand a chance when the intended recipient managed to track the chests to their camp. But the recipient, the archmage Elionara Yellowcat, had barely laid eyes on them before she was visited by the Royal Sekretorium with a requisition order signed by Her Royal Highness, Queen Korinthia of House Kohinoor.

Player characters who are familiar with the excavations can personally contact Ordo Magica and ask about finds relating to Symbar, the Throne of Thorns and the Order of Dakothnic, but it could also be Marbela or one of her adepts who asks them to find the politically sensitive material (the master herself does not want to risk displeasing other senior colleagues).

The exact structure of such a scenario is for the Game Master to decide, but it should end with the player characters reaching the end of the road – they do not find what they seek, but know with absolute certainty that the items are in the hands of the Queen and/or the Royal Sekretorium, which of course is publicly denied by everyone involved.

TO ALBERETOR

At some point in early autumn, before the snow closes the passes of the Titans, it is time to prepare for the next episode of *The Throne of Thorns*. The player characters will be offered several reasons to leave the civil war-ridden Ambria in favor of the blight-stricken south; there they will face a host of challenges, as well as lots of shocking insights and several important discoveries.

It is safe to say that the hunt to unlock the power of the Throne of Thorns is far from over!



Year 8–34, phase 9, day 43

Today it is all over. The honorable Othelia has lost her mind, fallen from High Priestess to traitor overnight. And she is not alone. Everyone who tended the thorns, who knew the secret of Rosáe, has left us. But not before they poisoned the high seat's Rosáe and stole every seed and sapling. The seat of Symbar is ruined, Symbar is ruined, Symbar is doomed.

In the morning we found Sem, hand of the high priestess, poisoned but not dead, only dying. The interrogation took her life, for nothing. She was howling about the south; pleading for understanding and forgiveness. And when we thought she was breaking, she too lost her mind. She cried and sobbed and whimpered, moaning incomprehensibly; it sounded like "linda" or "lindra," over and over and over. Not a word about the enemy, the elves.

The Staff Masters are on their way to the emperor with a full report. Soon it will be over. Everything.

No choice. I have lost control, as the people have lost both discipline and faith in me. You must do it. Now.

I understand, really. But I am not alone. There are twelves of us who nurture Rosáe and know its secret. Dare we tell them all?

Must they live? If you are discovered or captured, all is lost. We would die, and the world with us.

They shall live. And they trust me. I will bring them with me when I go, and tell them the truth once we are safe. But where should we go? The enemy?

No, not the elves. Devious. Vicious. One of the southern clans, who are still free. I know little about them; only military strengths/weaknesses.

There is a people. The Lindarians. Nomads obeying the laws of Ambal Seba. Worship a god called the Guardian. Encamped south of Garavarax's cliff.

Very well. Leave at once, with Rosáe. The elves are advancing, and the giant has called the exalted to arms. Travel carefully, slowly, safely.

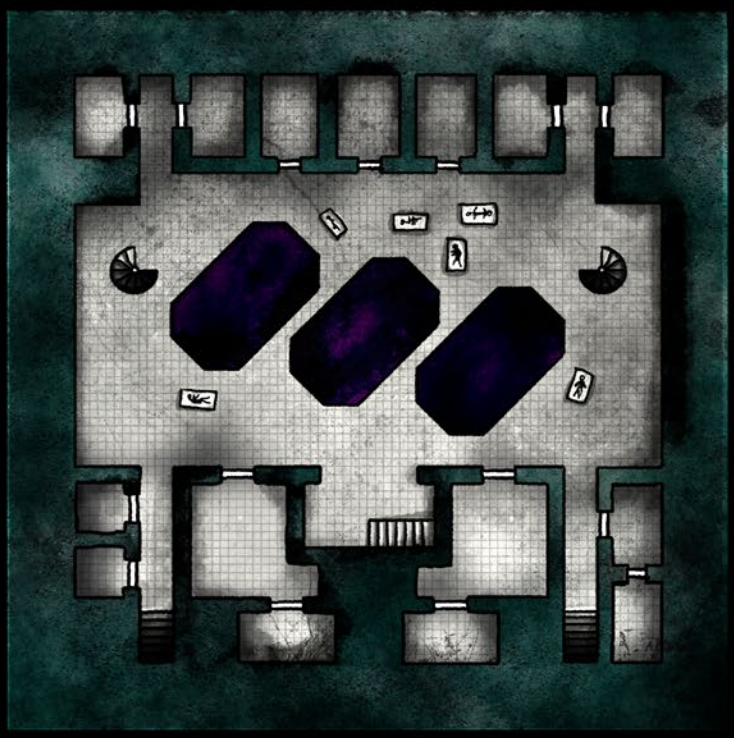
You can come with me. We can hide together.

No, never. My fathers and I brought us here. It is my responsibility. The debt must be paid. No more words. Farewell.

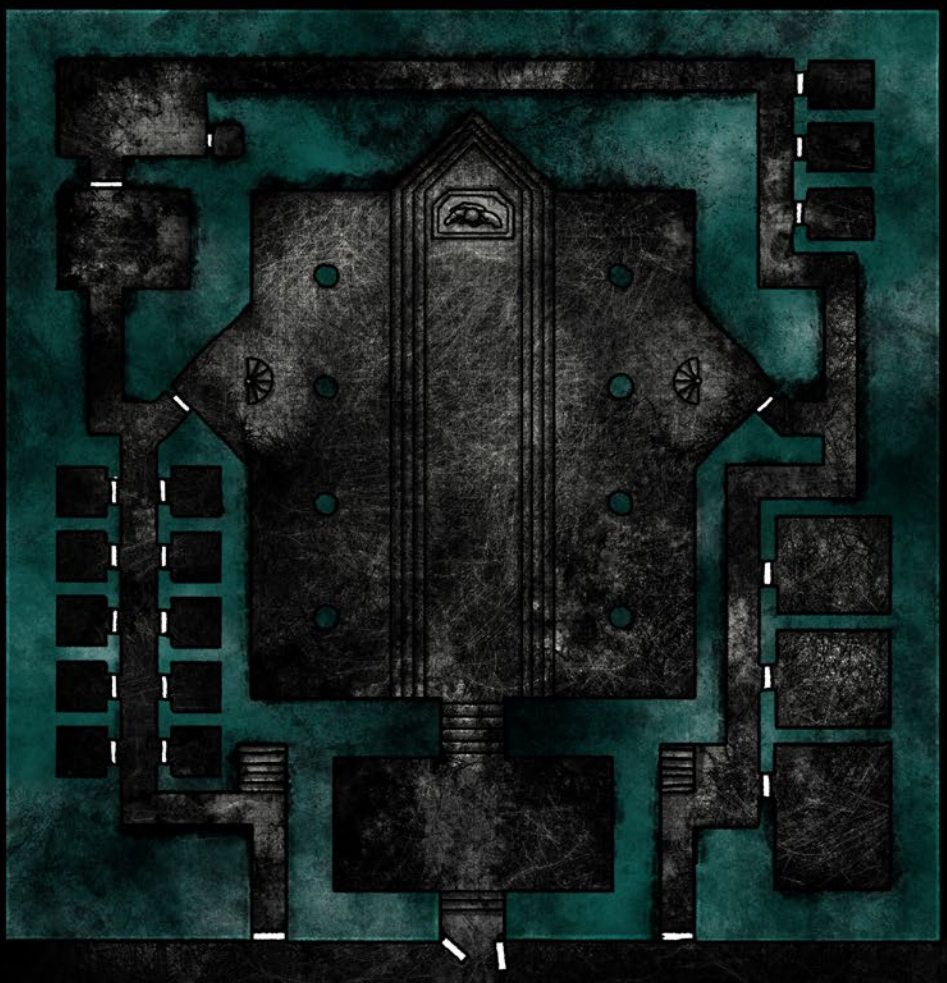


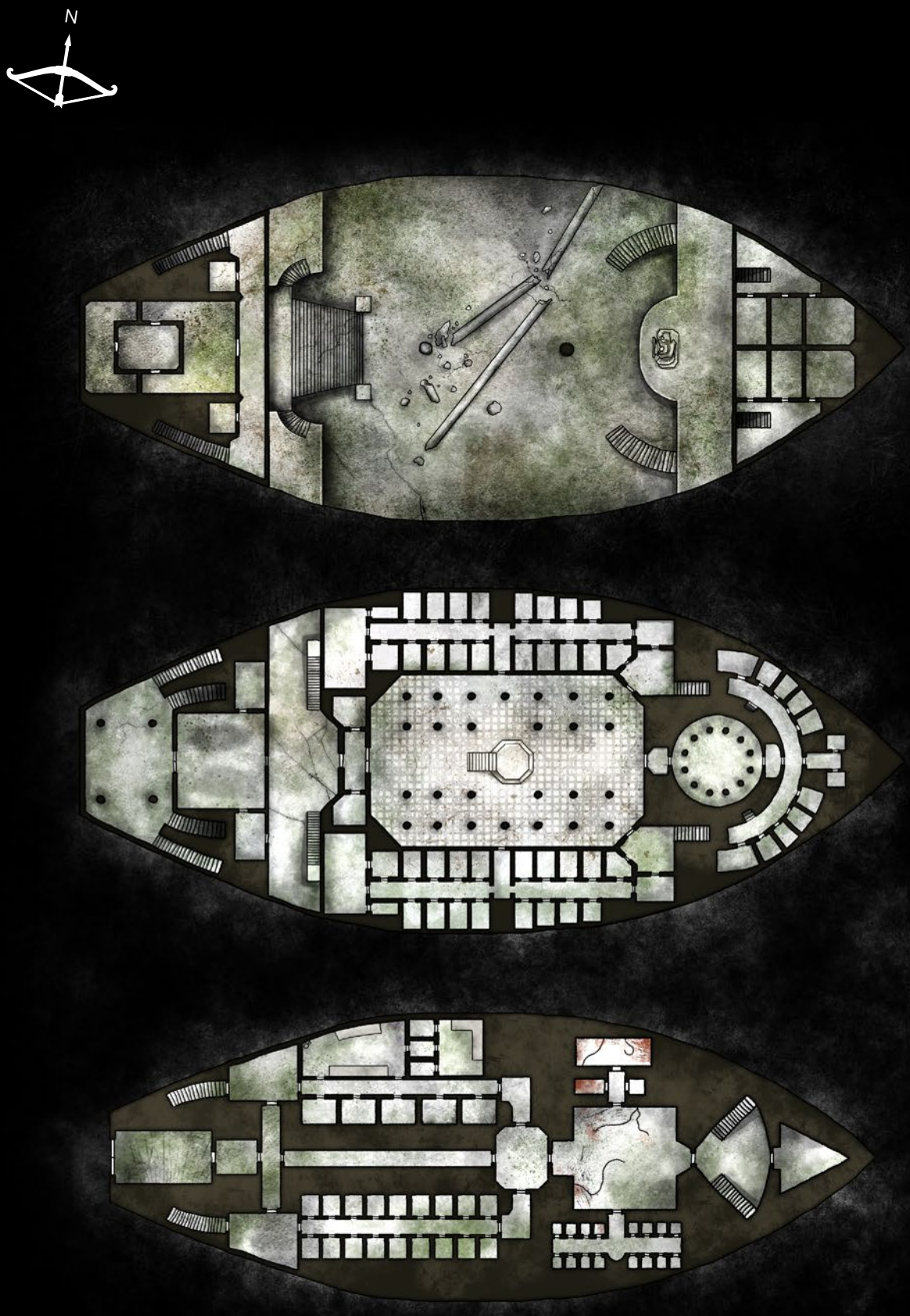
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Ambria AND THE FOREST OF Davokar
DRAWN BY CARTOGRAPHER TABEO CRANEPLUME
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N NE E SE S SW W NW
DAVOKAR
THE RAVENS
GAOIA
SAAR-KAHN
ENOAI
GODINIA
YEDESSA
VARAKKO
BAIAGA
ZAREK
ODAIOVA
VOLGOMA
MALGOMOR
KARDHAR
VAIVOD
BLACK PITCH MIRE
THE MARSHES
EANOR
NEW BERENDORIA
NARUGOR
PRIOS DOMAIN
KASANDRIEN
SERAGON
YNDARIEN
MERVIDUN
OORA
NEW BERETOR
Jerak's Stokhole
Setand's Pyramid
Sun Temple
The Ruin City of Odaban
The Columns of Hagamor
Earth Towers of the Black Leech Rät
Karvosti
Jakaar
Melima
Karos Fen
Thistle Hold
Templewall
Kastor
Ravenia
Kurun
Agrella
Redina
YNDAROS
Merelis
Dark Davokar
Wild Davokar
Bright Davokar

Yet another leaf fell into his hand,

fiery yellow with a rust-red rim. Ardil regarded it without feeling anything at all. The torrent of hate, sorrow and dread he suffered when he first noticed the shift had subsided, leaving him in a state beyond hope, beyond despair.

A tortured cry cut through the morning haze, made him turn his gaze to the south. It didn't sound like one of the newly awakened dead, or one of the otherworldly creatures haunting the ruined city below. A human? He knew they were coming, hungering for the riches of Symbar, too greedy to be stopped by warnings or threats. He let the leaf fall, nocked an arrow and started moving towards the source of the cry.

For a millennium, the Dark Watch had managed to keep the darkness fettered in peaceful slumber. But that was before the humans of the south came fleeing across the mountains, before they entered the woods hunting for more. And if Ardil's guess was correct, they had now reached the heart of the forest, where the perpetual summer had shifted to autumn, and the fetters were losing their strength. Where darkness had already awakened.

WE WISH YOU A WARM WELCOME to the deadly depths of Davokar. This fourth episode in the Chronicle of the Throne of Thorns does not only feature the adventure Mother of Darkness; it also provides rules for you to stage your own expeditions to the wilder and darker parts of the forest. With this book as your guide, the time is finally here to embark on the journey of every fortune-hunter and explorer's dreams, to the place the witches call "the Mother of All Darkness." To Symbar.

FEATURED CONTENT

- The adventure Mother of Darkness, where the player characters get a chance to explore the ruined city of Symbar. If they survive the journey...
- A traveler's journal written by the explorer Vidina, meant to be read by both players and the Game Master.
- Two freestanding ruins with color maps, which may be explored as stand-alone adventure landscapes or encountered during the journey to Symbar.
- A chapter for the Game Master, introducing the older history of the Davokar region and describing developments within and between the game world's factions.
- Rules and guidelines for expeditions into Davokar, to be used in order to design or randomly create thrilling treasure hunts and journeys of exploration.
- A chapter with rules for new traits, artifacts, creatures and an expanded version of the Bushcraft boon.

Symbaroum

FREE LEAGUE