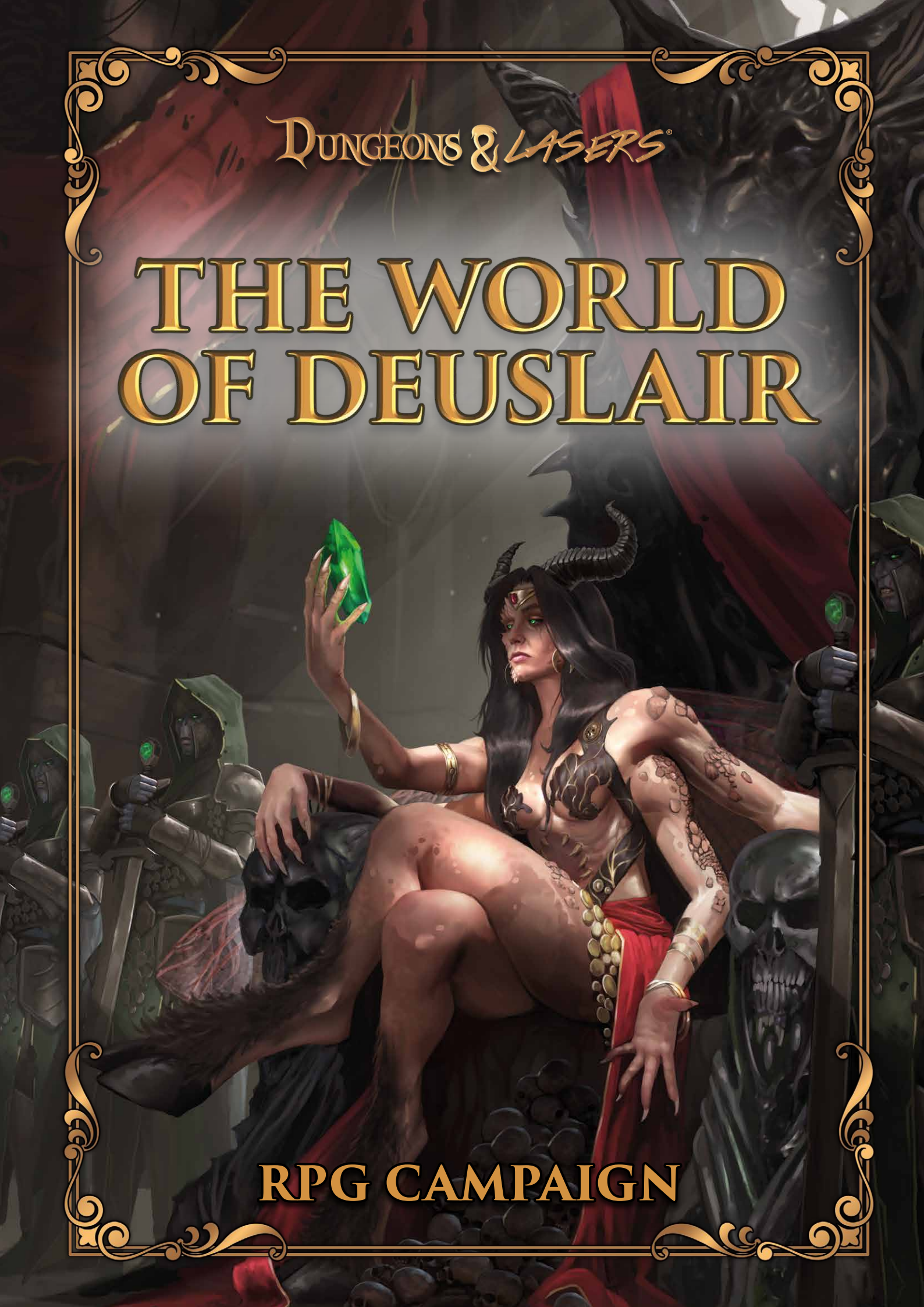


DUNGEONS & LASERS[®]

THE WORLD OF DEUSLAIR

RPG CAMPAIGN



DUNGEONS & LASERS®

RPG
CAMPAIGN

Version: 1.0 ENG



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STUDIO

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ABOUT THE BOOK

The World of Deuslair is a Game Master (GM) supplement divided into three parts—general description of the world, detailed descriptions of three most prominent regions and then the story. At the end you can also find a few additional elements.

First part, A Guide to the World of Deuslair, gives a general insight into the history that led to the current situation in Deuslair. It delves into the origins of each faction and sheds light on the enigmatic magic used by the Fortress of Dragsa—known as the Roots of Life.

The second part is a series of seven lengthy descriptions of the most important regions of Deuslair. It provides an in-depth exploration of their geography, major powers in the world, races, cultures, organizations, politics and much more.

The last part is the story. It is designed for a party of four to six characters in between lower and middle levels with the story ending around higher levels. Using the System Reference Document 5.1, it would start with a level 4 party and end with around a level 14 party. The whole campaign is designed to be system agnostic, so you can use any Role Playing Game (RPG) system you prefer.

Along with this book, you are also getting a separate digital supplement called “Additional Materials” with extra maps, handouts, list of new items and other useful material and a book called Bestiary. It describes all the creatures, or groups which are used in this book. Bestiary can also be used separately as it describes not only creatures' statistics and abilities, but also behavior, tactics they prefer or additional tips on how to use them in your own sessions.

Download Additional Materials

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The first two parts provide GMs with all the essential information about the world of Deuslair. It is also structured in a way that makes it effortless to access details about the locations that your group is presently exploring in between play sessions. Instead of sifting through multiple irrelevant chapters to find a specific piece of information, you can simply check the segment that describes the place you are interested in and then locate the relevant subchapter on topics such as culture, government, population, or any other relevant subject matter. There is also information about additional backgrounds for the characters, if players want to tie their characters more closely to the lore of Deuslair.

The second part is the campaign itself. It starts with general information about the situation in which the player's characters were put into. Then we have some inspirations on how to hook the characters personal goals into the overarching plot of the campaign making the whole story more personal and involving for the players.

After that we have the main story cut into six chapters. At the beginning of each of them, you can find a short summary of the events which will unfold for the characters and at the end there are detailed descriptions of some oside quests, the characters can participate in these chapters.

The first chapter has a pretty linear plot but after finishing it, GM and players have more freedom in choosing which path the party wishes to follow. Chapters from two to five present their own stories which can be played in any chosen order or even entirely omitted. Creative GMs can even use them as a separate mini-campaign. Each of them present players with different problems which can be resolved in multiple ways. Then in the six chapter we have once again a bit more linear story, but depending on the choices during the campaign, the final will vastly differ.



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A GUIDE TO THE WORLD OF DEUSLAIR





Deuslair is a world rife with conflict stemming from deeply rooted grudges. While some factions remain entrenched in their past, others are trapped in an endless cycle of animosity with no discernible beginning or end. At the moment where our story begins three factions fight for power—the Fortress of Dragsa, Redoe Alliance, and Disciples of Chaos. However, each of these factions is comprised of several groups with their own distinct interests and goals. Furthermore, internal discord and corruption plague them behind closed doors. The search for only “good” and “bad” guys in this conflict only leads to more misery—it is all gray and way too murky for such easy answers.

HISTORY OF THE LAND

In an era clouded by the passage of time, two deities clashed with each other—Order and Chaos. In their fierce battle, Chaos was weakened and pushed away into its own realm. But this outcome was far from a victory—Order was slain. Its followers scattered and buried the remains of their deity in the hope of its revival one day.

Eons had passed, and while the land still bears scars from that event, it became a mere legend believed by only a few. The land flourished and bore many civilizations. Among them, a human nation called “Dragsa” found a magical ore deep underground, which gave them access to unimaginable feats and technologies. They named this ore the “Roots of Life.”

Initially, Dragsa cooperated with the other inhabitants of the land, and together they developed magical technologies to extract power from these veins. But as Dragsa’s experiments with Roots of Life progressed, the other nations started to suspect the origins of the mysterious material. Soon, they forbade Dragsa from using this ore, claiming it was one of the remains of the god of Order. They forbade both its use for magic and any acts of research on it as blasphemy against the god. Whether this was the truth or a mere justification for what they planned next, nobody could say at this point, but Dragsa was already becoming too dependent on this magic.

A war broke out.

To win, Dragsa started to use even more of this newly found power granted to them by the “Roots of Life.” First, they built a giant fortress which soon became their new capital—The Fortress of Dragsa. They also started to use captured prisoners in experiments, which resulted in the creation of beastkin races. Some were used as slave workers, and others as foot soldiers in their armies. To oppose them, other groups united to create the “Redoe Alliance.”

After generations of fighting, the Redoe Alliance was pushed onto other continents, and only a small force of rebels remained within the Fortress of Dragsa. Dragsa’s armies were enough to solidify control over the whole continent. While many of the beastkin remained loyal to the Fortress of Dragsa, some rebelled and joined the other side. One group even created a whole country, outside of the Fortress’s reach...

At this perilous time in history, forces from another world invaded a continent to the south and quickly took control of it. Calling themselves the “Disciples of Chaos,” they burned everything in search of the remains of the “traitorous god.”

This is where our story begins...

TIMELINE

YEAR	EVENT
<i>Before everything</i>	Order and Chaos final fight
<i>4500 before Anara Reign</i>	Fall of the Eternal Empire from Herja
<i>1783 before Anara Reign</i>	Talmani and Germund create Hyste Talma
<i>236 before Anara Reign</i>	Creation of the Dragsa tribe
<i>159 before Anara Reign</i>	Ragon Stormrider establish base in Forgotten City
<i>114 before Anara Reign</i>	Ragon's Purge
<i>109 before Anara Reign</i>	Sects from the Herja Deserts establish Dum Ramil
<i>1 of Anara Reign</i>	Dragsa become a country
<i>56 of Anara Reign</i>	Discovery of the Roots of Life
<i>80 of Anara Reign</i>	Anara is born
<i>101 of Anara Reign</i>	Creation of the first chimera—Start of experimentation with animals using the Roots of Life
<i>159 of Anara Reign</i>	Old Anara accepts treatment for lengthening her lifespan
<i>196 of Anara Reign</i>	After refusal to stop using the Roots of Life, elves and dwarves break treaties with Dragsa
<i>219 of Anara Reign</i>	Creation of the first beastkin
<i>277 of Anara Reign</i>	Medusas escape from Dragsa's influence The Kingdom of Hyste Talma starts a war with the Dragsa
<i>292 of Anara Reign</i>	Merfolk beastkin revolts and escapes Dragsa
<i>309 of Anara Reign</i>	A port city is being reworked during war into a Fortress to shelter citizens from Redoe attacks—Creation of Fortress of Dragsa
<i>332 of Anara Reign</i>	Merfolk establish their country—Encura
<i>448 of Anara Reign</i>	The Sky Conqueror lands on the Turtle Island and starts building his kingdom
<i>508 of Anara Reign</i>	Centaurs revolt and start the era of civil wars, later called beastkin revolutions
<i>615 of Anara Reign</i>	Death of The Sky Conqueror. Fracture of the kingdom.
<i>621 of Anara Reign</i>	Forces of Dum Ramil invade Turtle Island.
<i>623 of Anara Reign</i>	United forces of the Scareguards Archipelago repeal the invaders. The birth of the republic.
<i>690 of Anara Reign</i>	Disciples of Chaos arrive in Herja
<i>747 of Anara Reign</i>	Forces of Disciples of Chaos sail to conquer the Fortress of Dragsa—this is where our story begins

The year of Anara Reign—time counted from the moment the Dragsa was created
The year before Anara Reign—...and everything before

FACTIONS

As has been already mentioned, at the time of this story there are three factions involved in the conflict—the Fortress of Dragsa, the Redoe Alliance, and Disciples of Chaos.



Fortress of Dragsa

The Fortress of Dragsa is composed of the Dragsa nation, which controls several cities across the Kallonia continent, and the Republic of Misty Waters from the Scareguards Archipelago. During the ongoing war with the Redoe Alliance, the human nation of Dragsa underwent a process of militarization, resulting in a highly regimented society under a centralized government. They also harnessed the power of the Roots of Life, which allowed them to create armies of beastkin and imbue their elite troops with magic. After transforming one of their largest port towns into a formidable fortress, it was renamed the Fortress of Dragsa, a name that soon came to represent the entire country. The nation's religion heavily emphasizes the Roots of Life as a divine blessing and regards their queen as a prophethess.

Presently, there are several distinct groups within the nation, each with its own objectives and allies. Despite appearing unified on the surface, these factions do not share a unified vision of how to lead the country or wield their power. As the Fortress grows stronger, so does their cruel treatment of the beastkin races, leaving many to wonder if their thirst for power has gone too far.

They are also allied with the Republic of Misty Waters, a coalition of pirate groups who rule over the Scareguards archipelago's floating islands. Somewhat unstable coalition to say the least. The Fortress of Dragsa also has strong ties with several overseas nations, thanks to their agreement with the pirates, allowing for safer trade.



Redoe Alliance



The Redoe Alliance is a coalition of races who have banded together to fight against the tyranny of Dragsa. Originally, this was just a feeble alliance between Elves and Dwarves from the continent of Redoe, today the Redoe Alliance consists of many different races and groups, allied with a single purpose—taking a stance against the Fortress of Dragsa. The more fiercely the Fortress of Dragsa suppressed the other races in the land, the more they joined the alliance. The first to join were the free and proud dryads, the steel-willed dwarves, the primitive bird race known as the “Kril,” and distant relatives of high elves living in the icy mountains—the blue-skinned Vindu, known to others as Snow Elves. Right now, under their protection, there

are also centaurs from the Banewood and a whole nation of merfolk beastkin who escaped from the influence of Dragsa—the Encura. Even as the factions fight for freedom and justice, however, rumors of betrayal and corruption swirl within their ranks, leading many to question if they are truly fighting for the greater good.

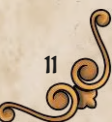




Disciples of Chaos

The Disciples of Chaos comprise an invading force hailing from a realm beyond the reach of Deuslair. Their ranks consist of both zealous devotees and less committed troops. Following their assault on the continent of Herja, they enslaved entire nations from the scorched lands they conquered, forcing them to serve as the backbone of their armies. Only those who survived the brutal tortures and the influence of the god of Chaos were deemed fit for their case, however—which seems to be finding the remains of the “traitorous god” to destroy them, as their god tried in the past. But is this all that’s hidden behind their actions? Their ultimate goal is unclear, but as the other two factions wage war, they wait patiently for their chance to strike...

Apart from these factions, there are also neutral nations living on the Kartagis desert. While they struggle to maintain their nonalignment in the face of constant skirmishes with the Scareguards pirates who have laid claim to some of their territories, they are not involved with neither of the Fortress of Dragsa nor the Redoe Alliance. While their neutrality may seem wise in the midst of a chaotic world, it remains to be seen whether it will ultimately serve their best interests. The ongoing conflict may eventually draw them into the fray, forcing them to take sides and abandon their stance of neutrality.



GEOGRAPHY

The world in the campaign consists of three continents which are not fully shown: **Kallonia, Redoe, Herja.**

Kallonia

This is a continent located in the northwest. The majority of it boasts a temperate climate with distinct four seasons. However, its western region enjoys the blessing of warm ocean currents that bring them plenty of rain and warm weather, and render winters almost snowless. The continent's prominent cities include Aeheron, Woodhaven, and the formidable Fortress of Dragsa. Controlled by humans, these cities serve as the foothold of the Fortress of Dragsa faction and are also home to most of the beastkin in these lands.

Nestled between these urban centers lies the heart of the land, characterized by expansive fields of golden wheat, rye, and various crops. This fertile region, teeming with small human villages, bears the apt name "Sunset Plains." Extending from the southern banks of the river Leose to the city of Aaheon, these fertile lands have nurtured thriving communities. However, as one ventures beyond the boundaries of Aaheon, the plain gradually gives way to a tundra forest in the northeast and to sprawling swamps in the northwest.

To the west, these plains culminate in the city of Woodhaven, marking the boundary of safe human lands. Just beyond lies the imposing Truncatop Mountain Range, a realm predominantly inhabited by the Kril who have established their rookeries there. Existence beneath these towering mountains, which cast their shadows across the edges of the adjacent forest, is fraught with innumerable challenges. Kobolds and Basilisks are regular inhabitants of these parts, and on rare occasions, even such fearsome creatures as the Dragon Wyrmling can be spotted traversing the rugged terrain.

Even further to the west lies the dense expanse of Banewood, a forest where liberated centaurs now roam freely, defiantly challenging their oppressors. To the north, beyond the borders of Banewood, stretches the expansive Frontloch Lake. Three significant rivers meet at this place: Avaloria and its tributary from the north; Silvermoon, which originates from the southern reaches of the Truncatop Mountains; and Froth, which flows from the lake then merges with the Murknen Gulf. In ages past, this lake served as a vital link between Banewood and the rest of the continent, as people could travel using the rivers connecting to it. However, it is now under the occupation of the free Kutauri. The water within this vast lake moves at a sluggish pace, giving rise to sprawling marshlands that dominate the landscape around it. These marshes create a perilous environment. The ground beneath your feet often feels soft and slushy, making every step uncertain. Despite that, a thick forest still covers the entire area, with trees either sticking out of the ground with their roots when they partially fall or being buried deep in the swamps that only the upper branches stick out.

Venturing even farther to the west, one encounters a collection of small islands that barely emerge from the water's surface. It is where merfolk had established their haven known as Encura, a free country of aquatic beastkin who found solace and safety in the waters surrounding these isles. While the islands themselves offer limited land, the merfolk use the shallow waters and underwater spaces around them to create their unique submerged kingdom.





Redoe

Redoe is the name of a continent mostly populated by elves and dwarves. Much of its expanse is covered by a dense deciduous forest known as Nanirae, which stands as one of the last vestiges untouched by the hands of civilization in the world. Redoe is graced with a climate temperate in nature, allowing one to experience the full splendor of all four seasons. With the arrival of spring, the woods burst into vibrant life, adorned with an overwhelming display of blossoms. The sweet fragrances of these blooms waft through the air as wild animals roam freely, creating a harmonious symphony of life. As autumn paints the hills with hues of yellow and crimson, the trees embrace transformation, shedding their leaves in a graceful dance before the impending embrace of heavy snowfall.

As one journeys northward one can see a shifting landscape, where verdant plains and valleys gradually yield to undulating hills and majestic mountain ranges. Alongside this shift, the once-dense deciduous forests make way for sprawling coniferous woodlands.

But do not be deceived by the surface beauty, for this is no enchanted forest from a children's fairy tale. These ancient trees stand as sentinels of untold ages, bearing witness to the echoes of forgotten knowledge and tales long gone. And within the shadowed depths of these expansive woods lurk beings old as time itself and malicious like Chaos... Awaiting naive travelers underscoring the treacherous nature of the terrain.

In the north, the formidable mountain range, named Herenyakal, forms an imposing barrier that stretches across the horizon. The name, like many in these lands, originates from ancient elvish words like "wealth," "shine," and "beard," possibly alluding to the mountains' vertical rows resembling a lengthy beard. Or, it might just be a reference to the dwarves who reside there, within the largest city of the region "Hyste Talma." This city, ingeniously carved into the mountainside, serves as a well-known landmark. But while everyone looks up to the mountains thinking how to conquer them, not many notice what is under their feet. What is unknown to most humans is that while the city itself is already impressive, it leads to an whole nation, buried underground in the mountains.

Beyond these mountains, there is a rumored land between peaks filled with never-melting ice and howling winds. This is the "Land of the Giants," as many call it. According to legend, this land served as an asylum for the castaway sons of gods who sired giants before their last breath. The truth behind these tales remains unknown... Except maybe for the race of the snow elves known as Vindu.



This secluded group of elves is said to inhabit an icy kingdom within the inhospitable plains. To access their realm, one must traverse passages concealed beneath Hyste Talma, but the fate of those who embark on this journey remains shrouded in mystery. So far, no one who has ventured there has ever returned. The Vindu elves' enigmatic nature lends an aura of mystique to the region, as they are believed to safeguard the secrets, including the legend of the giants. Ultimately, much remains unknown about the Vindu and their realm.



The Scareguards



Situated to the west, between Kallonia and Herja is a mysterious and unique cluster of flying islands called the Scareguards Archipelago. Its most characteristic feature is the floating islands, unnaturally suspended in the air. However, the islands' strangeness extends beyond their levitating nature. The water surrounding the Scareguards is unusually hot, generating rising vapor that engulfs the area in a never-ending mist. But it is not your old, familiar type of morning dew's fellow—it is hot and chokingly thick. And it changes the climate across the archipelago quite drastically. Each island's conditions are influenced by things such as altitude, proximity to neighboring islands, and prevailing winds.

Generally on the lower islands, one can experience a temperamental climate, perpetually enshrouded in mist and dense clouds which create sweltering heat and intense humidity. Rainfall becomes a constant companion, nurturing lush vegetation and transforming the islands into verdant havens. They are mostly enveloped by a soft, diffused light, though occasionally, amidst the mist a burst of sunlight pierce through, bestowing fleeting moments of warmth and illumination.

Atop the higher islands that rise above the mists, the air carries a crisp and cool quality. Gentle breezes frequently grace these regions, providing much-needed relief from the harsh conditions below. Sunlight bathes the lofty peaks, painting vibrant hues across the landscape, while intermittent mists add an ethereal feel to the landscape, inspiring stories of hidden treasures and ancient enigmas.

These conditions pose challenges to passing ships and their passengers. Many individuals tend to fall ill or faint during their journey through these regions, as it takes time to acclimate to their peculiar environment. In the western part of the sea, near the Herja shore, lies the region known as Sizzle Edge. The name might sound strange until you actually see this place—all the water there is literally boiling. The reason for this phenomenon remains a mystery.

Below the Scareguards Archipelago lies a body of water referred to as the "Sea of Prayers." It earned this name due to the treacherous nature of the area—there is a dense mist around here that makes it impossible to see anything above or around you. Whenever a ship goes directly under one of the islands, complete darkness befalls the passengers. This leads to a sense of desperation and the need for prayers for safe passage. While pirates know these parts like the back of their hand, for others venturing into them can be a daunting and risky endeavor.

Nestled in the southern part, just outside the archipelago, is a shallow gulf known as the "Bay of Sleepers." While one could argue that it is more a part of the Herja continent than a pirate's domain, their connection is undeniable. The currents flowing beneath the islands carry all that has sunk below them to this place. The remains of ships. The bodies. It is a place where all of these elements gather, creating a sight unlike anything else.

Herja

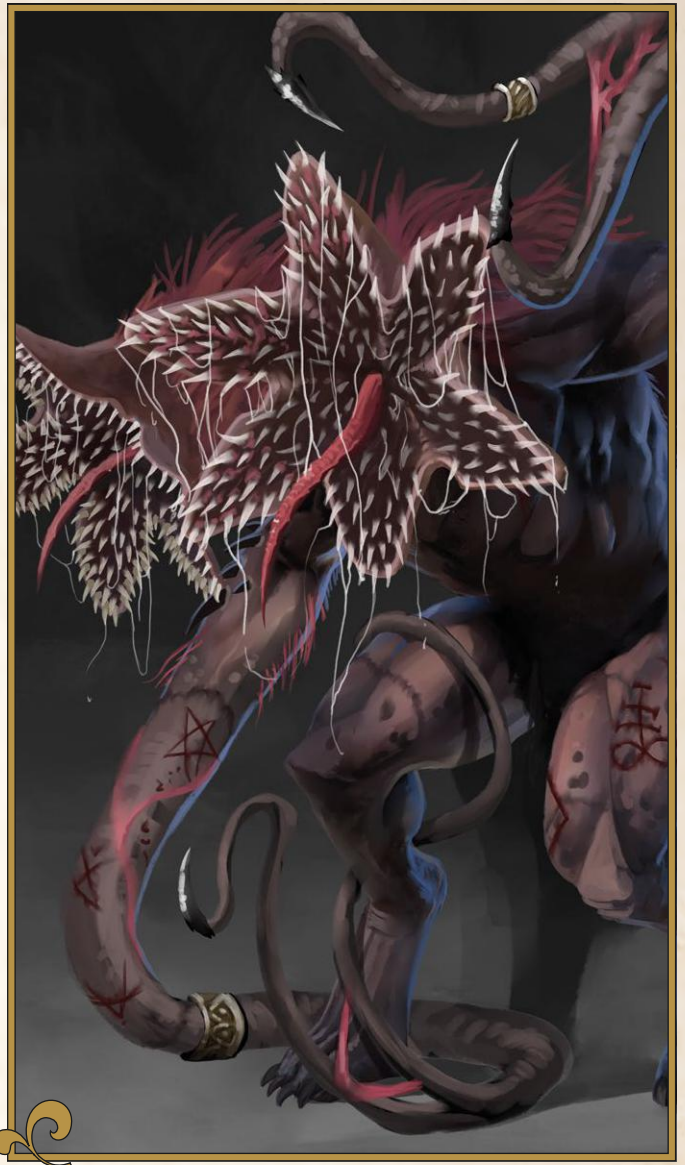
Situated to the south, this landmass possesses a complex geopolitical landscape shaped by its surrounding neighbors and its own distinct challenges. To the west lies the expansive desert of Kartagis, a vast expanse inhabited by a multitude of nations that often bear a distinctly unfriendly demeanor. Despite being in direct proximity to both the imposing Fortress of Dragsa and the enigmatic Disciples of Chaos, west side of continent has managed to maintain a stance of neutrality toward both sides, a strategic choice facilitated by its formidable geographic advantage. The daunting dunes of Kartagis form a natural barrier that would render any potential conquest a nearly insurmountable endeavor.

Nevertheless, this neutrality does not preclude conflict, as the continent remains embroiled in an ongoing war against the audacious pirates of the Scareguards Archipelago, who assert their claim over these lands.

The Kartagis deserts starkly contrast with the humid environment of the Scareguards Archipelago situated just farther up to the north. It's as if some unseen force were siphoning away the water from the region, leaving it unnaturally arid. As one ventures southward, both temperature and dryness escalate. In the southernmost reaches lies an expanse known as the Dunes of the White Eyes, where a peculiar ailment afflicts those who spend prolonged periods there. This mysterious affliction steals their sight, painting their eyes with a milky white hue, thus giving the dunes their evocative name.

Meanwhile, moving eastward, the oppressive dryness gradually abates, yet an unnatural presence lingers as the "Marsh of the Unrested" unfurls across the landscape. Its murky waters are laden with toxic gases and strewn with the grim remnants of the deceased. The origin of this eerie marshland remains shrouded in uncertainty, its ominous presence predating even the arrival of the Disciples of Chaos.

Beyond it, one is confronted with the aftermath of the initial onslaught carried out by the forces of Disciples of Chaos. The charred remains of once-thriving civilizations now stand



as haunting memorials to the devastation wrought by the invaders. The people have come to dub this desolate territory the "Godless Lands." While rain may grace these parts more often, few plants manage to take root in this blighted soil. The land itself seems to wither under the weight of suffering, struggling to sustain life. Amidst this bleak panorama, a solitary fortress rises ominously: Wurgar. Constructed by the hands of captives under the watchful gaze of the Disciples of Chaos, it stands as a symbol of the overwhelming darkness that has taken hold of these lands. A grim testament to the fate that awaits all if their ambitions are not stopped.





FORTRESS OF DRAGSA

“Morality is the shield of the weak. One that fails them in their time of greatest need.”

Queen Anara, Undying Ruler of the Fortress of Dragsa

Fortress of Dragsa. To humans, they are the symbol of strength and hope—the ones who drove away the specter of certain doom from the clutches of the ruthless elves and dwarves of Kallonia. For the non-human races, they are oppressors who only recently arrived, seizing everything in sight and driving them away from the continent. All of this is done under the command of the merciless Queen Anara, regarded by Dragsans as more of a goddess than just a mortal ruler. Oddly, I feel like both perspectives are right.

Dragsa is a human kingdom that has expanded its dominion across almost the entirety of Kallonia. Where dwarven cities carved from stone once stood, now stretch golden fields of

crops as far as the eye can see. Where the elven villages once peeked from the woods, there are now bustling communities of lumberjacks, toiling till the sun sets. At its zenith, Dragsa held near-total control over the continent, thanks to their mastery of magical technologies. Despite this, their greatest weapon which allowed them to secure supremacy over everyone has now become a threat that has turned against them—the Beastkin. Today, Kallonia is no longer under the undivided rule of Dragsa. Instead, the land has become a battleground where human and non-human forces vie for control. The once-unquestioned reign of Dragsa is now tested by the united front of the Beastkin as well as the other races, marking a new chapter in the unfolding history of Kallonia.

Short History

THE FIRST HUMANS ON KALLONIA

If you ask anyone from Dragsa how their kingdom was created, they will gladly spin a few tales of how Order itself put them on the land, or how some hungry lions granted them this land after offering them their flesh... other such ramblings. Nothing but fairy tales meant for the ears of kids. Each more fanciful than the last. My favorite one is how Queen Anara herself dragged this land out of the sea for her people, all the way before she was officially born if I read the dates correctly. It also conveniently overlooks the elven and dwarven ruins found under almost every other rock in Kallonia. Since we're on the topic of elves and dwarves, it is worth mentioning that they tell a totally different story. You might not believe it seeing how it looks today, but in times forgotten by the people currently inhabiting the land, Kallonia was mainly made up of elves and dwarves, not humans. They lived harmoniously across the vast expanse of the continents of Kallonia and Redoe. At least, that's what they claim. The elves dwelled within the dense forests, where the towering trees served as their shields, while their homes blended harmoniously with the greenery of surroundings. Thanks to an intimate understanding of the flora and fauna, they were masters of the natural world, attuned to the delicate balance of life that flourished in the woodlands and plains. The dwarves thrived in the heart of the majestic mountains and grassy fields under the scorching sun, where they were using their skillful craftsmanship to shape the very earth itself.

The tribe which would later become Dragsans were not the first humans to reach the shores of Kallonia—there were already dozens of thriving human settlements since decades ago. The land was huge and welcoming so the ones living there had no reason to drive anyone away. The land seemed absolutely stunning for the Dragsan newcomers, as they had never seen a land as rich and vivid as this one in their entire lives. Their lips felt the cool embrace of spring for the first time, and by closing their eyes, they were transported to a world of serene rivers and joyful birds. The greenery of lush forests and fruit-filled bushes painted a starkly different image compared to the untamed savannah in their homeland. Many saw this place as a true paradise, so they did what every human does whenever they see something beautiful—they cut everything down and took it home. Of course, they didn't have a place to stay yet, so they started with using the trees to create their new homes. Clearing the area was also required to cultivate the crops that they brought with them. One may think that the elves, the ancient protectors of the woodlands, were not happy about this course of actions and it would even

be possible to say that the harmony between the inhabitants of Kallonia began to fracture here. But this was not the case—the dwarves did similar things.

The seasons changed and dead leaves filled the ground. Soon, there were few villages filled with the laughter of children. At this point the elves, with their slow nature, began to interact with the various human tribes, teaching them about the woodland creatures, medicinal properties of herbs, and magic that comes from living in harmony with nature. The dwarves were much quicker on the uptake and while the humans were hostile to them during their very first meetings due to the dwarves often being grumpy, their stubbornness eventually led to them trading and visiting human settlements. Annoyed at seeing their poor excuse for a home, they taught them how to properly build wooden houses and a few things about agriculture. As the dwarves saw the human's talent for learning new things they were happy to bestow their knowledge onto them. Soon they began to recruit the humans into their guild—years of honest work is the best way to learn a few things and dwarves would never decline someone's sweat, blood, and tears. Apprentices became masters and in turn took on their own apprentices. The humans were reluctant to share their own secrets, and seemed irrational in the eyes of the dwarves, which could have possibly harmed relations. But this was not the case—the elves did similar things.

All in all, despite being newcomers to the land, the humans were fitting along nicely with the rest of the races surprisingly well. Slowly, the humans built their own home. The only inhabitants of the land who were more hesitant to interact with them were the ancient clan of Dryads called the Yv'anda. They observed the humans from the safe shadows of their trees. One could say that they were overly cautious and maybe a bit too cold toward strangers to this land. But that was not the case—because the elves and dwarves did similar things. And Dryads still remembered what that led to.

ROOTS OF LIFE AND ANARA

In the next centuries, the small human settlements began to grow, turning modest hamlets into thriving villages and towns. Their influence over Kallonia expanded as more lands were needed for new homes and fields. And although there was still enough land for everyone, and even unexplored areas where nobody lived, the denizens of Kallonia began to sense that their world was becoming crowded. It became as clear as the sky that, in the ceaseless march of time, humans would surge ahead of the long-living races. The landscape, once shaped by the wisdom imparted by these ancient races, was now being altered by the innovative and rapid actions of humanity. Initially, humans were the students, learning from the wisdom of dwarves and elves. Now it was their scholars who delved into the mysteries of magic, and their explorers

sought to conquer the seas and discover unknown lands. Some ventured deep into the sacred woods where the Dryads resided, aiming to uncover their secrets. It was precisely at that point in time that a talented human mage named Afrafasti discovered a mysterious crystal in a cave deep in the forest of Banewood. With some experimentation, he was able to discover the fact that the crystal had healing properties, and was able to cure diseases that were considered a death sentence at the time. This earned Afrafasti the title of the Heavenly Healer. The crystal was a magical ore that created branching patterns of green veins on cave walls, and was thus aptly named the “Roots of Life.”

As many human towns joined together, people started to create cities and kingdoms of their own—as if following in the footsteps of their long-living teachers. Among them was the Dragsa tribe. Some elves and dwarves were quite eager to help the new settlements, and many even joined the new human kingdoms, looking to integrate into them. On the other hand, there were dwarves that didn't want such a future for their offspring. The first to react when the wind of change started blowing in their lands, were King Ebbe of the Dwarven Mountains and elven Queen Alma of the Sunset Plains. They found themselves grappling with the perpetual advancements of humans as the new villages and towns were popping up everywhere along their borders. Amidst this unfolding scenario, both rulers recognized the need for unity against the rising tide of humanity and devised an unprecedented solution to safeguard the next generations—the creation of an allied kingdom, far away from the reach of humans. To ensure the safety of their culture no matter what happens in Kallonia. To solidify this decision and give an example for their people, they offered their own children in an arranged marriage. After that, they sent them into the continent of Redoe along with any willing citizens—all in the hopes of creating a better future for their descendants. Later on, this new kingdom, created by both dwarves and elves would be known as Hyste Talma.

Meanwhile, the changes on the continent of Kallonia were picking up the pace. In this flourishing age, teeming with diverse civilizations, the human kingdom of “Dragsa” emerged. For reasons unknown to many, they stopped going to the Banewood forest and started to look for the Roots of Life in other parts of the world. Further north, deep underground, they unearthed a large deposit of the “Roots of Life.” Today, this is where the city of Aaheron is located.

Initially, the kingdom of Dragsa harmoniously collaborated with the other inhabitants of the realm. Together, their mages started to develop technologies to harness and extract power from the veins of the Roots of Life. They were creating cures, concoctions that enhance one's magical growth, artifacts of great power, and even technologies for faster building and farming. However, as Dragsa experimented more and

more on the potential of the Roots of life, suspicions arose among the other kingdoms. They began to question the true nature and origins of this enigmatic substance. While Dragsa treated it as a natural blessing given to them by the land, the first denizens of Kallonia were a bit more inquisitive. Or maybe their knowledge of history was just deeper. One day, an elven mage found a burial chamber next to a Roots of Life deposit—all of the buried creatures were elves. What's more, is that they held staves and strange tools that had the runes of a primordial god engraved on them—the god of Order. At that point, all of the pieces came together, he connected the deposits of the Roots of Life with the myth of Order's burial. He shared this discovery with the other kingdoms and it wasn't long before they reacted to this revelation.

Soon, a decree resonated across the lands, forbidding Dragsa from wielding the Roots of Life. The other kingdoms asserted that it was the sacred remains of the god of Order, invoking charges of blasphemy against its use for magic and any further research. It is not certain whether this proclamation held the weight of truth for all of the kingdoms or maybe it just served as a veneer for ulterior motives. Seeing how all their neighbors are turning against them, the dying Queen Anara felt uncertain about her country's future. She was childless and old. But her people needed someone strong at the helm even more than ever. She also knew that the dependency of Dragsa on this magical resource had already grown too strong. Because of that, she decided to accept an experimental operation from one of the court mages. The immortalization procedure. The injection of the power of the Roots of Life directly into her veins, brought her immense pain and it seemed like she was dying for the first two weeks. But after that, her body began to regenerate, bringing forth youth and strength. Along with progressing loss of human characteristics... but that was a small price for ensuring the future for her people. The stage for a conflict was slowly setting in her eyes, and she was sure that it would pit the once-united civilizations against each other. Shattering the harmony that had prevailed for centuries was more than certain.

THE FIRST OF THE NEW RACES

In the second century of Anara's Reign, the Kingdom of Dragsa found itself embroiled in a fierce conflict with the elven and dwarven kingdoms of Kallonia. What began as minor skirmishes on the borders swiftly escalated into an all-encompassing conflict that engulfed the entire continent. Despite not being the instigators of the war, Dragsa was not the one losing. And it was determined to keep it that way. The dwarves, renowned for the prowess of their warriors, defended their mountain strongholds with unwavering vigilance, while the elves protected their sacred woodlands with unmatched archers and powerful mages that are attuned to nature's energies. While both the elves and the dwarves

were known to be superior to normal humans, Dragsa's strength stemmed not only from the magic of the Roots of Life, but also from its population of humans. As the conflict grew in scale, all the humans in Kallonia felt that in the eyes of long-living races, they are foreigners to the land. While the elven and dwarven kingdoms now viewed humans as undesirables, the kingdom of Dragsa embraced a welcoming stance towards all humans. Humans by their nature bore numerous children, which eventually resulted in a vast manpower pool. While they might not possess the sturdiness of a dwarf or the agility of an elf, their sheer numbers tipped the scales of battle. For every elven archer, there were three human archers; for every dwarven axe swing, there were four human swords parrying in response.



Yet, each victory in battle came at a great cost. Casualties were inevitable. And with each year of conflict, the people's morale and hopes for the future were fading. Cities were filled with the laments of mothers whose children never returned and full of cries from war orphans. The neighboring kingdoms were smaller, but defeat only fueled the desire for revenge in the dwarves and elves. Soon, it wasn't just a fight between the Old Kingdoms and Dragsa, but between humans and "them." Each country that fell sparked the war with another, leading to a vicious cycle of perpetual conflict. Despite Dragsa's ability to tip the scales with the power of the Roots of Life, they realized that if conflict will keep escalating, relying solely on numbers and magical might could not ensure

victory. With how the war was going, it was only a matter of time before their numbers would start to dwindle or people would succumb to despair. A new approach was needed. Something to break the cycle of war.

Then Queen Anara proposed a simple solution.

If the number of soldiers is dwindling... just create more.

If people lament the loss of loved ones... use lives that they do not care about.

That's how the idea of beastkin came into light.

Among the first races that emerged from their laboratories were the Medusas, designed to support human armies on land with their magic and unique killing skills. However, the Medusas did not fully meet all of Dragsa's expectations, as they turned out to be too individualistic. Despite this, Dragsa persevered in their quest for power. Beastkin dying instead of humans on the battlefield was still the preferred outcome. But as the conflicts escalated with each passing year, even the addition of the Medusas failed to quell the fears of the people. A sense of urgency grew, and the need for a safe haven became apparent.

If such a place could also safeguard their trading routes they could deal with two most pressing issues at the same time. Unfortunately, the majority of Kallonia consisted of flat plains and occasional hills. If they wanted to give citizen a safe haven, where no war can reach, no natural shelters were in sight. At least on land.

A rapidly growing port city called Mossveil was chosen. It was on the side of one of the biggest rivers on the continent, Leose, making it a bustling trading spot between merchants looking for ships to sell their cargo. This also meant that all food and construction materials would be easily accessible. And so, their plans began to take shape. Dragsa commenced the construction of a giant fortress nestled in the delta of the Leose, near Mossveil. The plans were big, as it was intended to house all the people in its empire.

However, as the construction was underway, Dragsa became aware of a looming threat from an overseas kingdom. Tensions were rising between them and Hyste Talma. Dragsa, unwilling to wait for their adversaries' actions, took preemptive measures by creating aquatic beastkin to protect them from any potential naval threats.

Among them, the Slithers were deemed to be the most perfected race, designed to be the equivalent of foot soldiers in naval combat. A race of perfect aquatic warriors with deadly instincts, keen senses, and agility on par with the elves.

All these events would set the stage for a rebellion that would shake the foundations of Dragsa and lead to the creation of both Encura and the Banewood Asylum.

BEASTKIN REVOLUTION

The first to rebel against Dragsa's oppression were the Medusas. They were the first beastkin created, way before people even started using that name. Created deep within Dragsa's laboratories, these beings possessed a distinctive fusion of magical prowess and predatory instinct, giving them the combat skills to freeze enemy movements and create powerful illusions. They were a strong supportive force for the human army, perhaps even too strong. Contrary to what Dragsa expected, they lacked a sense of loyalty and even had problems with proper teamwork. Instead, they possessed a strong sense of independence. This innate individualism likely led them to question their role and purpose in the service of Dragsa and caused them to disobey orders from superiors. No need to mention that this put them at odds with Dragsa's expectations of complete obedience. Medusas escape was not something which happened overnight and was a gradual process which Dragsa could not prevent. In the same year when the kingdom of Hyste Talma declared war on Dragsa they started to slowly disappear from their ranks. Through smart use of the illusion magic, they were able to slowly fake their deaths or suicides. Each year the number of Medusas dropped... but there were no bodies. It was strange no matter how you look at it, and Dragsa's mages knew what was going on. But at the same time they could not do anything about it—their armies needed the Medusas in the most fierce and hopeless fights. These chaotic battles made it easier to hide the betrayal. To explain the rapid decline of the Medusas and maintain the morale of their armies, Dragsa's highest officials started to spread fake information about the Medusas being recalled and reserved only for special operations.

In the time that the Medusas fully escaped Dragsa's grasp, usually hiding in other continents or Kingdoms, their position in the army had already been replaced by other beastkin. After perfecting the process, the number of different races Dragsa's scientists produced increased. All of the elven and dwarven prisoners that Dragsa captured helped their scientists in the creation of new creatures. Among them, two races were the most numerous—Slithers and Kutauri. The former were made to serve as soldiers of the sea and the latter were half-human, half-horses, made initially to support army supply lines but then also used across the whole Empire as workers on the fields. The army needed food and growing demands made it harder to feed everyone with each year. While the Medusas were treated as second class citizens with some control over their freedoms, their younger cousins were not so lucky—all of them were regarded as slaves.

The Slithers, the merfolk beastkin, rebelled not even two decades after them. Their rebellion was much quicker and more spectacular. But also more bloody. They joined forces with the dwarves of Hyste Talma—the first from the

Redoe Alliance. The one that led the dwarves was Brandur Rockhustle, who is the father of the current dwarven Chieftain—Tidor. It led to a naval battle known to humans as the Great Defense of Southern Path, while the beastkin called it the "Kin Blood Battle," as beastkin fought beastkin on both sides. The fighting was fierce, but neither side emerged victorious. Countless lives were lost on both sides and the final battle at the sea supposedly painted it red for a few weeks. For the Redoe Alliance, this was not enough to crush Dragsa completely. For the merfolk, this was enough to slow Dragsa's expansion and allowed them to establish their own state—the nation of Encura.

It was the first nation entirely made from beastkin who escaped from Dragsa. A nation forged in the flames of defiance and the pursuit of freedom. The aquatic beastkin who were oppressed and created only as weapons meant to be used by Dragsa marked the beginning of a new chapter in Deuslair's history. The Fortress of Dragsa was no longer an unbeatable force on Kallonia. And just like the children of abusive parents, the illusion of control over the beastkin was broken. Dragsa's battle over the continent should have been over already, as most of the elves and dwarves were either subjugated, killed or pushed away from Kallonia. And yet they found themselves in another conflict, now within their own kingdom. The tension between Dragsa and the beastkin was rising each year, leading to bigger and smaller uprisings. But it took almost 200 years for the Kutauri to successfully rebel and break free from Dragsa. This time, Dragsa was ready and had already amassed an army of their newest beastkin race—Vepri. The Queen did not take kindly to the actions of the Kutauri and ordered the "Purges of Beasts"—the death of over 10,000 beastkin, most of them Kutauri. Women and children were tortured and their mangled corpses decorated the streets of the Fortress. All while the human citizens cheered and encouraged Dragsa's armies to deal with the rebels faster. It became another bloodstain on the history of Deuslair. Nevertheless, the cruelty of the Queen could not vanquish the hope of the beastkin. They fled to the Banewoods and were taken under the protection of Yv'anda Dryads.

The Fortress of Dragsa never fully extinguished the flames of the Beastkin Revolution—both beyond their borders and within their own territories. Meanwhile, Hyste Talma and the rest of the Redoe Alliance pose a constant threat. Letting their guard down even for a moment results in yet another burned village or a naval fleet brought down. This brings us to the present day, 250 years after the last large Beastkin revolt, but the fighting never stopped. Over time, Dragsa's citizens grew accustomed to the never-ending war with the Beastkin.



The City Called the Fortress of Dragsa

TWO DIFFERENT WORLDS

Almost half of the population of Dragsa lives in a vast city known as the Fortress of Dragsa. Consequently, when referencing the kingdom, many simply refer to it as the Fortress of Dragsa. Even residents of the city tend to use it in this manner.

The city is situated on an island, nestled in the heart of a vast delta formed by the Leose River. A tremendous effort was invested in artificially expanding the island to create a foundation capable of bearing the immense weight of the planned Fortress. The city is divided into two parts. Within the protective walls reside Queen Anara and the wealthiest humans. Inside the walls, you'll find merchants, the Church of Order, the Mages of Life, the nobles and their houses, along with a handful of their servants. It's worth noting that the barracks of the Beastkin armies are still housed within the walls of the Fortress in case of an attack. The buildings themselves are constructed from sturdy, gray rocks. The architecture is simple yet robust, and the city boasts a sewage system, a point of pride not every country can claim. A special magical drain draws water from the river for the citizens, and the used water is expelled to the river, flowing towards the sea, but not before passing the slums of the city and the sailors that use the docks.

The second part constitutes the old city, situated beyond the walls. Here, the residences of the less fortunate citizens are found, along with slums where most of the beastkin live. In the past, this area was a small port city known as Mossveil, which has now been seamlessly integrated into the old city. The middle part of the old city has more sturdy buildings, made with both wood and rocks, surrounding the old dock and numerous taverns around it. While inside of the walls of Fortress you can find another dock, suited for bigger ships, not every trader is allowed to unload their goods there. Many are forced to use the old port, or wait till the guards verify that they are allowed inside. Because of the amount of the ships, this can even take weeks. To the west stands the colossal fortress itself, while to the south and east, the slums of beastkin fill the horizon. A consequence of Dragsa's policy that chose to not embrace everyone within the protective walls.

THE FORTRESS AND ITS CITIZENS

The city pulsates with life as countless people come and leave the city on a daily basis. It is a hub of trade which connects the continent and every trader coming to Kallonia via sea.

And even with the traders, people constantly come to the capital of Dragsa in search of a better life. Humans make up just over a third of the population. The remaining inhabitants are primarily beastkin, with sporadic representatives of other races who arrived on this continent. Dwarves and elves can also be found within Dragsa, although they aren't received with open arms. The looming shadow of ongoing conflicts with the Redoe Alliance casts suspicion upon these non-human inhabitants, branding them as potential spies in the eyes of the average citizen. For them, earning the trust of the populace becomes a perpetual struggle of proving themselves in the eyes of the populace. Overcoming this prejudice requires either immense talent or, at the very least, immense stubbornness. The city itself has a bigger dominance of humans, as many beastkin are serving in the armies or working on the fields all over Kallonia.

"The social structure within Dragsa is far more nuanced than the simplistic narrative of human overlords and enslaved beastkin."

***Igneus Fairylight, the current head
of Fairylight noble house***

Contrary to popular belief, even among the lowest echelons of society, humans are not an uncommon sight. Dragsa at its heart is a meritocracy—if any human shows potential and earns their place, their origins bear less of a burden than in the other parts of the world. The same can hardly be said for beastkin as they are always born as slaves. However, even for them, this is not always a life-time sentence. Similarly to humans in lower echelons of society, there are some beastkin who gained freedom in one way or another. Although the higher they go in the societal structure, the more frowns and curious looks they earn.

BEASTKIN AND SLAVERY

Whatever one may say about Dragsa, they do learn from their past mistakes. And the change in their treatment of the beastkin in the aftermath of the uprisings is a good example of that. Forcing them into a lifetime of being mercenaries, field workers, or other roles bestowed on them will naturally lead to discontent. Queen Anara perfectly understood that just creating restrictions is not enough to create loyalty. Chains can only keep someone from escaping, not from wanting to escape. One's loyalty can only be earned by giving them purpose, a goal, and maybe above all, a bit of hope. So, in place of her previous practices, she employed a strategy akin to dangling a carrot in front of their noses—a promise of freedom. While they are all born as slaves, their owners are not the nobles but the Dragsa kingdom itself. Anyone "owning" a slave, is actually given a lease on their usage.

FORTRESS OF DRAGSA



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MOSSVEIL

**PALACE OF
QUEEN ANARA**

INNER FORTRESS

**SOUTHERN
KEEP**

These contracts might last for a few years or even a lifetime, but the nobles still do not own any of the slaves as they are regarded as property of the kingdom. Beastkin also are not bound to this status for life, but rather are burdened with a huge debt—supposedly one connected with the cost of their creation. As if it was something they should be thankful for to Dragsa.

These changes made by Queen Anara altered the dynamic of slavery with the most noticeable differences being:

- Masters with the lease cannot abuse their slaves, as it would be deemed as damage to the kingdom.
- Beastkin are given the possibility to buy out their own freedom and be granted the status of a citizen. The price might be exorbitant there are some cases of this happening within the city.
- Protection during pregnancy—even if it's all to ensure that Dragsa's property is not damaged, the end result is still the same.
- Slaves cannot be brought outside the kingdom nor outside the region designated by Dragsa's officials.
- Slaves actually are required by law to be paid for their work, even if the sum is much lower than what would be paid normally.

On the “leaseholder's” side, this deal is also not so bad, as they are granted a refund for the unused time they still had on the lease whenever there are some unforeseen accidents or if said beastkin bought out their own freedom. Because of that, people can trade the slaves between themselves, similar to selling their lease, but they cannot exactly “sell” their slaves. At least not within the legal framework...

Many find themselves hypnotized by the vision that liberation awaits, if only they can manage to alleviate their debts as slaves. A spark of hope in an otherwise grim reality. Nonetheless, debt repayment remains a mere mirage to most of them. The sums demanded by Dragsa far exceed what any individual could amass within their lifetime, especially if they lead the life of a slave, with no way of earning extra funds. But to be frank, it is all within Queen Anara's expectations. That is exactly why it works.

SOCIETAL STRUCTURE

While it is not immediately apparent, because you can find both women and men in any position or job within the kingdom of Dragsa, the society operates as a matriarchy. Women enjoy a higher social status than men; they often lead families, including noble houses, delve into politics or work as higher officials. Lineage and heritage are carried through the female line and it's their surname that gets passed down to the next generation. This might be attributed to the country's ruler being a Queen, especially since many consider her to be a deity, or perhaps it stems from the influence of their

religious beliefs. However, this doesn't mean that women are encouraged to join all fields of work. Dragsans are also very conservative and strict when it comes to people's roles in society. Certain professions are deemed “impure” and considered unfit for women, as their hands should deal with more sublime works. Primarily, these are fields of work associated with sins and crimes, such as mercenaries involved in killing, law enforcers perpetually chasing criminals, or priests tasked with listening to and absolving people of their sins. While Dragsan women technically have the freedom to pursue such professions, society will perceive it in a very certain way. Women who venture into these “impure” occupations might be viewed as sacrificing themselves for the greater good or even coerced by familial expectations. Rarely is it acknowledged as a woman's autonomous decision.

Men on the other hand, while also having no limitation on their life path, are expected to focus on these impure jobs. Protect the house and humbly accept even the harshest tasks bestowed upon them by the head of family. Only the ones with evident talent are allowed to pursue something more “suitable for women.” Of course, this all varies from family to family, and in some you cannot even see any kind of special treatment for anyone.

On top of these roles, another layer of complexity to Dragsa's society is added when you look at their social stratification. At the pinnacle stand the richest citizens where human nobility and the esteemed members of the Church of Order are dominant. The latter can be seen as even more important as these individuals wield not only political power but also influence the religious doctrines that shape the kingdom.

Just beneath this exalted tier reside the common humans, a tier lower in status. They are still granted all of the human privileges and opportunities but with less access to education and lacking certain connections to move above their own social status. While they lack the grandeur of the nobility, they form the backbone of Dragsa's society, contributing to its workforce. Some of them choose to pursue life in the military organizations as it is much easier to improve their status there. A good example of that are the members of the Royal Guards whose ranks are filled with both nobility and common folk.

A status level below humans, the situation becomes more complex as the various non-human races coexist. These beings, though permitted within the societal fabric, are treated with disdain and often face systemic discrimination. At the forefront are the elves and dwarves, confined to specific roles albeit granted the ranks of citizens if they prove their loyalty and usefulness. Along with them are all the beastkin who earned their right to be citizens. A bit lower than them are the races commonly referred to as “city rats.” They hold a lower status since none of them were ever granted the rank of a citizen, forever locking them into fulfilling odd jobs or going for shady businesses. Some say that they are yet another

monstrosity that escaped from Dragsa's Laboratories, while others include them in the ranks of the beastkin. They themselves do not support any of these claims and insist on the fact that they were always there, though official historical documentation of the kingdom does not support this explanation.

At the bottom of this hierarchical structure are the unfortunate beastkin slaves. These beings are relegated to a life of servitude. Stripped of autonomy, they perform the most mundane and lowest possible jobs needed in society. Strangely enough, military ranks are the most merciful for them, as showing their usefulness can earn them a number of benefits. And while innumerable beastkin toil in deplorable conditions, the hope of gaining their freedom is always somewhere on their minds.

RELIGION AND THE LAW

Dragsans are all part of the Church of Order. At the core of this religion is the belief that the tribe of Dragsa had been chosen by Order to lead the other humans. When the times of constant war were upon Dragsa, their whole nation militarized and became more strict, while the Church became one of the most important organizations in the kingdom. This centralized religion deeply rooted itself in the everyday lives of Dragsans.

The believers follow these principles:

- I. Structure—never steer away from your destiny and chosen path.
- II. Discipline—perfect yourself and others.
- III. Adherence to the law—follow the rules of society as they are the path of Order.

And on top of that following things are considered sins:

- I. Killing without a just cause.
- II. Taking others possessions.
- III. Telling lies.
- IV. Breaking one word.

The role of the priests extends beyond the mere shepherds guiding their flock of sheep. This organization is quite an interesting mix of religious figures with law enforcers who bring the hammer of justice on the sinners. Within Dragsa, the Church members serve as arbiters of justice, ensuring that individuals are held accountable for their transgressions and that order is maintained within the realm. This means that committing sins and breaking the law is the same in this kingdom. At their core they also display unwavering reverence for Queen Anara. She is considered to be the chosen one, appointed by the god of Order, to be the undying ruler of Dragsa and its citizens. According to their teachings, her authority is divine and stems from the god of Order's blessing. And the Roots of Life are one of Order blessings.

Dragsa' Beliefs

MYTH OF CREATION

Similar to the other regions of Deuslair, they too repeat the myth of Order and Chaos fighting together after creating the world. This clash culminated in Chaos being exiled to a distant dimension, while Order succumbed to a deep slumber, after sustaining grave wounds. But in their version, just before succumbing to their eternal sleep, Order severed fragments of their divine essence and imbued them with a sacred mission. These fragments of god were entrusted with a quest to find those deemed worthy of assuming the mantle of world governance in the absence of the god. They took different forms and were scattered all over Deuslair seeking ones worthy to govern over the world.

THE BLOODLINE OF RA

To validate their claim to the royal throne, the bloodline of Ra called themselves sacred. According to them they are the direct descendants of the humans chosen by Order. The reasoning for their claim to the throne was not treated seriously, but it all changed when the last member of the Ra bloodline, Queen Anara, underwent her transformation. At the time, humanity was almost at the brink of complete annihilation, but her transformation was seen as a blessing on their queen from Order. She became someone above mortality in their eyes and the new powers she was displaying on the battlefield as she personally led armies only deepened that belief.

SACRIFICE TO THE LIONS

One time, when the people of Dragsa were forced to look for a new home they traveled the savanna for days without any food or water. When they were struggling to pass through a treacherous gorge, they encountered a formidable pride of lions. The hunger of the beast echoed like a thunderous decree, heralding the death of its prey. Yet two mothers, with a flame of determination in their hearts, made a decision. They offered their own flesh to satiate the hunger of the lions. All to safeguard the passage of the others. Just as the the lions were about to take their first bite and the rest of the people started to pass, the lions suddenly stopped and spoke with human words. Pleased by this extraordinary display of compassion and sacrifice, they revealed their true nature to the Dragsa tribe. They were in fact the fragments of the god of Order.



The power of this magical ore is seen as a sacred manifestation of the Order's invisible hand.

While the Undying Queen Anara is considered the head of the Church, she is also considered to be too important to deal with every problem of the citizens. Because of that, the Church also have a position for the highest bishop called the "Bringer of Harmony." They are tasked with the responsibility of judging the citizens and preserving the law in the most problematic cases. As the highest priest, the Bringer of Harmony acts as the moral compass for Dragsa's inhabitants. When cases of moral or ethical dilemmas arise, the priests carefully consider the circumstances and consult with him their understanding of the teachings of the Church so they can to apply their wisdom to make fair and just judgments.

Supporting the Bringer of Harmony are the Paladins of Order, who are granted authority by the Church to deal with citizens as they see necessary. While priests act as judges, paladins serve the role of law enforcers. As they view judgments by the priests as sacred, their goal is not only justice but also the salvation of souls tainted by sin. Resisting them can be perilous, as those with access to divine healing powers may stretch the bounds of "acceptable force," guided by a concern for the soul rather than the body.

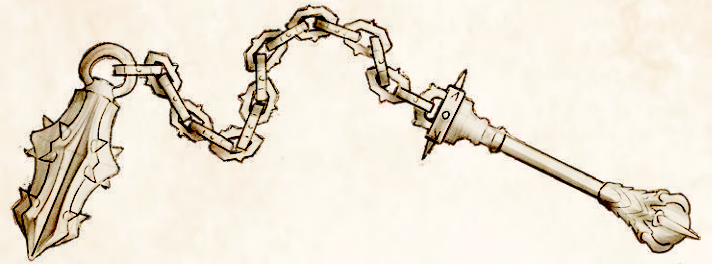
ANARA'S PALACE

In the heart of the colossal Fortress of Dragsa lies the palace of their ruler. The Undying Queen Anara. The whole place is enormous—a small castle able to hold hundreds of guests in its chambers, dozens of dining rooms, and countless chambers for her personal servants. The halls of the palace also include the Mages of Life which keep her body in check, a personal library, and a laboratory, though the last two are rarely used by her. Gardens litter the halls of the palace, where flowers and plants from all across the world can be found.

The Throne Room of Queen Anara is made to be as grand as possible to be testament to the sovereign's divine prowess. Especially since she is welcoming the dignitaries of other countries personally, but she also hears and decides on the most pressing matters of her officials, heads of houses or prominent figures within the Church. While most of the matters are dealt with by her representative or the Church of Order inquisitors, if the matter deals with crime, she is the head of both the country and the Church, some decisions need to be made by her personally.

The whole place is made to be awe-inspiring. The vaulted ceiling, soaring sixty feet overhead, echoes with the grandiosity befitting a realm touched by the divine. Majestic columns are built with intricate patterns and adorned with banners and flags of the nations that they have conquered. Many of them are partially destroyed as they bear the marks from battles—it seems like Queen Anara didn't want anyone

to fix them, so they were left in the state that they were found. On the windows of the throne room, intricate patterns on the stained glass windows tell the story of Queen Anara's victories over dwarves, elves, and beastkin. A stately balcony rises in a spiral across the ceiling, encircling the whole room. Dozens of courtiers and dignitaries who gather for an audience with the Queen describe it as the most suitable vantage point for witnessing her divine authority. In the middle of the hall lies the throne—a gift from a nation allied to Dragsa, supposedly dug out from the desert of Kartagis. Filled with symbols connected with death, skulls and twisted faces are realistically sculpted into the dark, granite rock. A relic from a forgotten empire with immense value... but it seems Queen Anara keeps it just for the imposing presence it gives on anyone who sees it.



MAGES OF LIFE

Soon after the creation of the first beastkin, the mages involved in the process began to assemble, aiming to share and refine the magical techniques involved in extracting power from the Roots of Life. As their numbers increased, so did concerns about the potential leakage of information, so they established their own organization, naming themselves the Mages of Life. In the present, this group operates in seclusion under the direct supervision of Queen Anara. They maintain several laboratories scattered throughout the city, where they conduct tests on all beastkin under Dragsa.

Their responsibilities encompass overseeing the births of new beastkin, subjecting each to immediate scrutiny for any undesirable changes. Those deemed as failures are either "corrected" by the mages shortly after birth or undergo castration to prevent the spread of any afflictions. While this seemingly ruthless practice has eradicated diseases affecting the beastkin, it raises questions about the overall goal of the mages and the extent of the changes and examinations conducted on these beings.

In addition to their care for existing beastkin, the Mages of Life are also the ones who created an elite force to protect Queen Anara—the Wardresses of Lay. These elite guards represent the latest achievement in perfecting a process long ago utilized on the Queen herself. Seeing the wonders they are bringing to Dragsa, one starts to wonder about

the full extent of what transpires within their laboratories, but due to their secretive nature, all of it remains elusive in the eyes of many.

DRAGON HUNTRESSES

They are a group specialized in handling monster subjugation quests. While this organization can be found in many places across Deuslair, its roots can be traced back to Kallonia and its first members followed in the footsteps of an extraordinary figure. Their headquarters are located within the confines of the old city.

Long ago the realm was plunged into never-ending wars under the orders of Queen Anara. The men were drafted into the armies, and even the very youngest were not exempt from the brutal realities of warfare, as the battlefield required an ever-increasing number of soldiers. Meanwhile, when the nation was too busy with its wars, the monsters were left unchecked at the borders and started to grow bolder as they hungered for human flesh. In these trying times, a lone Huntress stood against this force. Till this day her figure is shrouded in mystery as her true name was lost to the annals of time as if she just emerged from the shadow of the misty forests one day. Nevertheless, her deeds would make her into a living legend. They say she possessed an indomitable spirit and extraordinary combat skills, which set her apart from the rest. The official government of Dragsa was paralyzed because of the weight of war and barely able to fend off threats that appeared near the larger cities. But beyond the safety of the walls, the land was becoming an inhospitable wasteland.

Not being able to accept the current situation, the lone Huntress took matters into her own hands in order to protect the ones who lay beyond the reach of the larger towns. She was a beacon of hope in a land plagued by darkness, and her tireless efforts to combat monsters earned her the respect and admiration of many people. Her actions garnered a lot of attention, but humans weren't the only ones that closely followed her next step. At the time, fearsome dragons terrorized the inhabitants of Kallonia and they showed an intelligence rarely seen in monsters. During one of her hunts, the dragons lured her into a trap, confident in their ability to end her life with overwhelming numbers. Being the strong fighter that she was, she dared to stand against these mighty beasts with just one sword and nothing else but the courage in her heart. In a battle that lasted an entire day, she killed one dragon and wounded others enough to chase away from the land. This achievement earned her the title of "Dragon Huntress" and her story was spread by those she had saved, leaving them in awe and reverence of her heroic deeds. Soon, the whispers spread her name far and wide. She was known not only for her combat prowess but also for her compassion and dedication to the people she protected.

These divine emissaries, testing the character and virtue of these mortals, were touched by the selfless act of the two mothers. After this encounter, the fragments of Order showed them the path to an oasis and foretold them that if they continue on the path of righteousness, even greater rewards await them. Then they vanished as if they were a mere mirage in the scorching desert.

GUIDES OF SOULS

It is said that when mortals draw their last breath, the realm between the living and the afterlife breaks open. At that time, if the soul is unable to cross to the other side, residents of the underworld might cross over to the plane of the living. To prevent this, Order calls upon his emissaries which take the form of crows. With their obsidian wings casting shadows over the departed, they gather near the dead body and wait for the spirit to accept their death. They then begin to fly in the direction of where the souls need to go in order to reach the underworld, but the crows will always stop to make sure that the souls are still following them.

As time passed, the lone Huntress inspired others to follow in her footsteps. Adventurers and warriors from all walks of life were drawn to her cause, eager to emulate her bravery. They saw the embodiment of strength and grace in her, and they yearned to protect the realm just as she had. Under the guidance of the legendary Dragon Huntress, they trained rigorously, honing combat skills and expanding knowledge on monsters. Then one day she disappeared, leaving behind her organization. Her dedicated followers set out to protect the realm, taking on perilous monster subjugation quests. Their noble mission would continue for generations to come, shaped by individuals who have chosen to walk the path she once walked—safeguarding the realm from monstrous threats. Despite its name, it is not composed exclusively of women, although its founder's legacy continues to inspire countless young women to enlist.

It is a collective group that operates across the vast expanse of Deuslair's world. Their guildhalls are located all over the world, offering a place for those in need to ask for their assistance or seek an opportunity to join their ranks. The organization proactively seeks out assignments related to monster subjugation, aiming to safeguard the lives of the innocent and maintain peace in the regions they watch over.

Their members possess a profound understanding of monster biology, habitats, and vulnerabilities, granting them a strategic advantage. Understanding of monsters enables them to predict their next actions and adjust used combat tactics to target weak spots. Members of the Dragon Huntress Organization have established a network of

informants who relay information about recent monster activities and potential threats. Members meet regularly to exchange knowledge, share techniques, and pool their intelligence about potential targets. Organization archives are meticulously maintained, containing detailed records of past quests, monsters they've encountered, and strategies employed against certain targets.

Candidates for joining the organization are typically required to have a history of successful monster subjugation missions or any similar experience. Trophies alone are not enough—anyone with enough money in their pockets could just sneak their way in easily if it was. That's why the Huntresses require solid proof of one's worth—achievements need to be demonstrated through references, testimonials, or documented in some verifiable way. It is also not rare to them to give out quests asking for extra support during a subjugation—all so they can scout new members with potential. The quests themselves are acquired through various means, primarily by building strong connections with village leaders, town officials, and desperate travelers who seek to eliminate monstrous threats.

Regions Under Dragsa

WOODHAVEN

It is one of the bigger cities within Dragsa, located at the foot of the Truncatop mountains. As a trading hub, the traders buy out everything the local farms have to offer and transport it down the river towards the Fortress of Dragsa, where the goods are sold. Traders may exchange their goods for various products from the Fortress, which includes things from overseas traders, and bring them back to Woodhaven to sell to others. Plenty of legends from the surrounding villages say that in the past it was a town of halflings who welcomed and sheltered humans from the elves when the fiercest fights between Dragsa and the alliance was taking place. The smaller height of the people currently living there is supposedly proof of that, though whenever someone asks any resident of Woodhaven about it, they just frown at them and remain silently annoyed. The town is in close proximity of the Banewood Forest and the mountains where several Kril tribes live, making it a strategic point of interest for the whole region, despite it being quite dangerous. Of course, this isn't even mentioning the fact that monsters often attack the surrounding areas. Dragsa's armies rarely frequent the area around Woodhaven so they are mostly relying on giving out missions to the local adventures or members of the Dragon Huntresses.

TRUNCATOP AND BANEWOOD

East to Woodhaven, lies the vast expanse of dense and ancient forest protected by Dryads and Kutura—Banewood. They are in constant conflict against Dragsa, and each year some guerrilla attacks are seen at the border to these woods. Further to the north is the Truncatop Mountain Range, where most of the Kril have made their rookeries. While the tribes are relatively peaceful, living at this location is difficult due to the rough terrain and fearsome creatures. Kobolds and basilisks are regular inhabitants of these parts, and on rare occasions, even fearsome creatures such as the dragon wyrmling can be spotted when traversing the rugged terrain.

AAHERON

Aaheron is the second biggest city after the Fortress. Located near the big swamps around the river Avaloria and its tributaries which feed into Lake Frothloch, the terrain around it is humid in the summer but frigid in the winter. Unseen creatures infest the waters of the murky wetlands, alive with the soft wailing that accompanies them. Many secrets and untold mysteries lie within their depths, but the most common thing an adventurer will find is the corpse of someone that came before them. Despite this, the city near the wetlands is one of the brightest places in Deuslair. The city houses the magical academy, which trains mages for Dragsa each year, but plenty of Magic Smith workshops can also be found. It also isn't a coincidence that the city houses the biggest mines for the Roots of Life, as the whole region lives or dies off of mining the magical ore, developing powerful magic, and discovering new technologies.

SUNSET PLAINS

Nestled between urban centers like the Fortress of Dragsa, Woodhaven, and Aaherom lies the heart of the land. A breathtaking field of golden wheat, rye, and a medley of other crops stretch as far as the eye can see. This fertile region, adorned with the serenity of verdant landscapes, is aptly named the "Sunset Plains." Here, amidst the undulating sea of grains, small human villages dot the terrain like pearls on a string. The lands cradle thriving communities that have flourished over generations, living in harmony with the changes that happen during the season. The lifeblood of the river Leose courses through the southern banks, bestowing its precious waters upon the fields, which are used to ensure a bountiful harvest for the settlements nestled along its shores.

THE NORTHERN BARRIER

As inquisitive travelers venture beyond the protective embrace of Aaheron, the landscape undergoes a gradual transformation. To the northeast, the plains and swamps yield to the enchanting allure of a tundra forest, with its



snow-kissed branches whispering tales of ancient secrets and mystical wonders to anyone that passes by. Here, the air carries a crisp freshness, and the ground beneath is adorned with a delicate coating of frost. Wandering even further north brings temperatures lower, while the tundra only gets denser. If one decides to continue their journey in this direction, they will eventually meet a huge mountain range, which will block any attempts of safe travels.

Dragsa's Magical Technologies

Currently there are two official organizations which deal with the advancement of Dragsa's magical technologies and studies concerning the Roots of Life: the Magic Smiths and the Mages of Life. The former focuses on the creation of artifacts and tools used for supporting the army. The latter are responsible for the creation of beastkin and other experimentation on living beings. Apart from them, there are also some noble houses and few individuals who also delve into magical studies, though without bigger achievements to their name.

MAGICAL CONCOCTIONS

Magical energy from the Roots of Life are extracted in order to create potions which enhance the abilities of whoever drinks it. These potions are sometimes used in armies, though the prolonged usage of this magic has shown to bring quite unfortunate side effects, such as cellular necrosis. It seems that without special filtering, the power from the Roots of Life is too much for anyone to handle and slowly destroys them from the inside. So the development of these fields focus on finding solutions to problems of properly filter the magical power in concoctions or dealing with the side-effects.

SOUL LAYERING

The exact procedure is only known by the Mages of Life, but by mixing souls, new races such as the beastkin can be created. The souls of both specimens are extracted from their bodies and are crushed into particles while they mixed in with the Roots of Life to stabilize these souls fragments and prevent natural disintegration. Each of the specimens' soul particles are then designed to be put as different layers atop of each other. After using all of the soul particles, this agglomeration of souls is coated with a heavy layer of Roots of Life and then put into huge magical pressures to extract back Roots of Life while the soul particles join together as a new soul. After the new soul is created, it is put back into

one of the bodies, from which the initial souls were taken. The body naturally follows and adjusts itself to new soul.

IMMORTALIZATION PROCEDURE

This process was initially created to prolong Queen Anara's life. Conceptually, it is quite similar to the Soul Layering process, but rather than mixing both souls, the soul particles are randomly injected along with the Roots of Life. Then the whole soul is coated with a heavy layer of the Roots of Life to prevent its self-disintegration and the soul is then put back into the body.

ESSENCE ALLOYING

The Magic Smiths utilize a technique that has allowed them to create great artifacts in order to support Dragsa's armies. The founder of Magical Smithing has had problems with proper modification of the Roots of Life for decades as their initial artifacts were usually too harmful for the users. Yet, after years of practice, they perfected the process to both lower the excessive use of power and alter its properties.

MAGIC SMITHS INNOVATIONS

Apart from Essence Alloying, Magic Smiths are also masters of experimenting with innovative usages of magic. Because of this, they have created a plethora of magical trinkets and useful tools. While they refrain from using their magical knowledge to manipulate living beings, like the Mages of Life, some of their creations bear an uncanny resemblance to the real thing. They create constructs that remarkably emulate true life, but they're crafted entirely from steel.

The official currency in Dragsa is known as Ra coins. There are silver, gold, and platinum coins. Ten coins of a lower denomination are worth one coin of a higher denomination. While there are no official coins for anything lower than one silver coin, people use small copper pieces from other kingdoms or chunks of metal. The most popular form of currency are leftovers from mining, with the metal often being shaped like a twig, and as such are colloquially known as just twigs or sticks. The Ra currency is widely used in Kallonia and also accepted by traders outside of the continent.

Politics, Trade, and Chaos

The city stands as a bustling and prosperous trading hub with its lively harbor and the constant ebb and flow of ships. From Kallonia, the Fortress collects the wood, crops and other farm products from the whole continent as it flows to them via the Leose river. Each day, a multitude of vessels arrives and departs, laden with goods that traverse the entire continent. Simultaneously, ships from Dragsa navigate upstream, carrying the crafted wares from the Fortress's workshops or the exotic treasures acquired from overseas merchants. Similarly, merchants from allied nations embark on journeys to Dragsa, seeking to exchange their goods for the abundant crops or the intricate magical trinkets and tools crafted in the city of Aaheron. The perpetual exchange of commodities links the distant regions in a web of economic exchange.

The political landscape of the Fortress of Dragsa is complex, yet oddly stable. As the dominant power on the continent of Kallonia, the Fortress holds sway over the majority of the land, with only the Banewood Forest and a few scattered islands remaining under the rule of the rebellious beastkin. While Encura's existence has a huge symbolic effect for the beastkin, they are not a threat to Dragsa neither politically nor economically. Despite this, the ongoing Beastkin Revolution

fuels tension among the citizens of Dragsa, sparking sporadic uprisings within their own territories.

To the east lies the continent of Redoe, controlled by the kingdom of Hyste Talma. The ongoing conflicts primarily manifest as skirmishes on the sea, forcing Dragsa to disperse its armies widely to safeguard its extensive territories. This constant state of tension divides the Fortress's forces into smaller units, each tasked with securing its share of the contested sea routes. Despite the military challenges, Dragsa's strategic position on the western trade routes puts a heavy strain Hyste Talma's economic situation. Ships must pass through their territory to reach Redoe, providing an advantage to the Fortress. If the Fortress can offer the traders a deal that is equivalent to or better than what they'd get at Redoe, they will surely go for the trading partner who is closer to them.

To the southeast lies the Republic of Misty Waters. The Fortress is in a somewhat unstable coalition with them. The alliance primarily exists to ensure safe passage for traders from various overseas nations. Through an agreement with the pirates, the Fortress secures safe trade routes, shielding merchants from the threat of sudden attacks.

Dragsa finds themselves in an uncertain predicament regarding the Disciples of Chaos. Thus far, the faction has refrained from establishing direct contact with the Fortress, seemingly confined to the distant continent of Herja. Queen Anara keenly observes the rapid advancement of the Disciples from afar as all the kingdoms who were either neutral or allied to them on Herja are collapsing. Despite the fast expansion of the Disciples, the Fortress remains embroiled in their own internal conflicts, rendering them incapable of extending assistance to other kingdoms. Queen Anara, with the wisdom borne of several centuries of existence, perceives the unfolding events to be unnaturally accelerated, which leaves her to ponder the reasons behind this unsettling phenomenon.

Slang and Idioms

“Offer one's flesh to the lions.”

It is used when you say that someone is sacrificing themselves for the greater good. The whole saying is a reference to the Dragsan myth, where two women offered their own flesh to sate the hunger of a lion pride and let their family pass.

“People inside and people outside.”

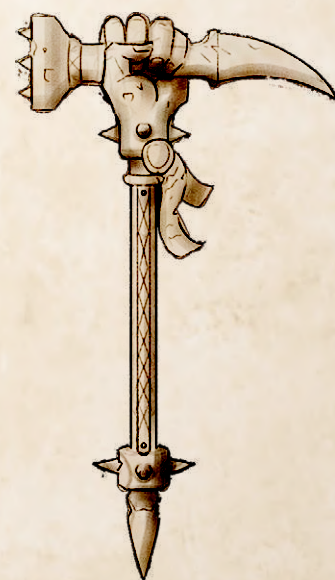
These terms refer to the people who live within the walls of the Fortress of Dragsa and the people who live outside of these walls, in the poorer regions.

“Wall Huggers”

A derogatory term which the beastkin use against people living within the walls of the Fortress of Dragsa.

“The line of Ra...”

Whenever someone refers to the line of Ra, they're referring to the royal bloodline of Anara. It can also refer to Anara herself since she is the last living descendant of that bloodline, excluding the related families.



Dark Secrets of Dragsa

SINNALOR TU'UR

“Sinnalor Tu’ur” is a name for the fighting arena created by the beastkin. A place where gladiators fight to prove their worth, earn money, or just fight to the death. The place started pretty small but as people from both inside and outside the walls started to frequent the matches, and a few sponsors wanted to invest in it. The money started to flow and the beastkin expanded the arena more and more until it grew to its current massive size.

As is usually the case with names created by beastkin, this one also stems from mispronounced elvish words. The “Tu’ur” is commonly used by Vepri as synonym of strong, while Sinna comes from elvish word “Srinna”, a word used for someone testing the limits of what is possible. The ending “lor” shows up in many names of the places, so overall it might just mean “a place to test one’s strength” or maybe the limits of said strength. Though when asked, even beastkin themselves are not sure of the true meaning.

While the existence of the place is widely known to the public, the betting which takes place are in a legal gray zone. The Church of Order doesn’t treat gambling as a sin, so technically nothing illegal is taking place, but the fights often only finish when one side dies, which quite clearly goes against the teachings of the Church. Despite this, countless beastkin who frequent these fights are aware of the fact that that lots of money is passed through the hands of people and beastkin. Even the royal guards and nobility frequently bet on them.



The Eight Most Prominent Noble Houses of Dragsa

HOUSE FAIRYLIGHT KEEPERS OF KNOWLEDGE

Sigil: An open book set on a root-like background.

Motto: “In Wisdom, Strength.”

House Fairylight takes pride in its scholars, scribes, and keepers of ancient lore. Nestled in a grand library within their mansion in the Fortress of Dragsa, they amass an extensive collection of scrolls, manuscripts, and arcane knowledge. Their family members often serve as advisers to generals or rulers from other countries. Their reputation puts them as prime candidates for insightful counselors or court historians. The Fairylight see knowledge as the ultimate power and strive to preserve it for future generations.

HOUSE EMBERHEART PYROMANCERS OF RENOWN

Sigil: A blazing flame against a backdrop of crimson.

Motto: “From Ashes, We Rise.”

House Emberheart commands the arcane arts of fire and pyromancy. Skilled in both practical applications and magical endeavors, they are sought after as both artisans and wielders of destructive power. With a grand tower dedicated to the study of flame, members of house Emberheart often serve as court pyromancers, enchanting weaponry and contributing to the military might of Dragsa. They never took much of an interest in the Roots of Life outside of using them as power sources for destructive magic. Their mastery over fire also extends to grand displays during celebrations, earning them the favor of the people as well as prestige.

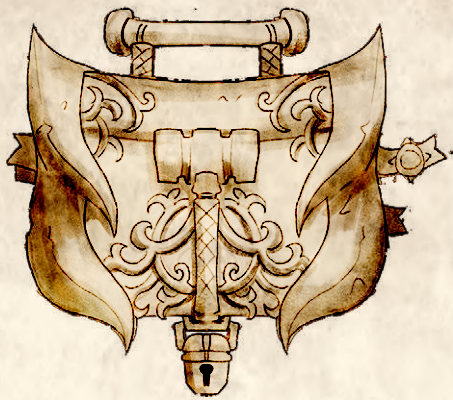
HOUSE IRONSONG MAESTROS OF MUSIC AND ART

Sigil: A lyre crossed with a paintbrush against a canvas.

Motto: “Harmony in Every Stroke.”

The Ironsongs have sheltered themselves outside of the grim reality of war, focusing on fostering art and culture. They are renowned patrons of the arts, fostering generations of musicians, painters, and performers. Their grand halls echo with symphonies, and their estates serve as cultural hubs. While war takes its toll on everyone outside the safe walls of the Fortress of Dragsa, the family organizes grand festivals and galas, celebrating

their creativity and artistic expression, often earning disdain from the more grounded houses. Despite this, Ironsong's artists often find themselves as esteemed court entertainers or creators of masterpieces, frequently listened to by the highest officials in the kingdom.



HOUSE LOWFEATHER ADVOCATES OF LEGAL PROWESS

Sigil: A gavel and scales crossed against an open book.

Motto: "Words Shape Reality."

Lowfeather nobles are renowned for their mastery of law and legal proceedings. They produce some of the most astute lawyers and judges, serving not only in Dragsa but also in the countries across the Sea. Their expertise extends to matters of governance and diplomacy. Lowfeather lawyers often join Dragsa's Church of Order to interpret divine laws and ensure the legal structure aligns with the teachings of Queen Anara.

HOUSE IRONSMITH INNOVATORS IN MAGIC AND INVENTION

Sigil: A bubbling cauldron with gears intertwined.

Motto: "Talent over Blood, Magic over Body."

House Ironsmith stands at the forefront of alchemical discoveries and mechanical inventions. They have unrivaled knowledge and have nurtured numerous genius Magic Smiths, making them masters at crafting magical items. While other Houses usually keep their lineage "pure", the Ironsmiths often adopt or marry any talented individuals to hold them close to themselves. Their laboratories hum with the creation of potent elixirs, hammering of new artifacts, and ingenious contraptions. Ironsmith magicians often serve Dragsa as Magic Smiths or advisers in matters of warfare, enhance the equipment of the soldiers, or unleash destructive forces upon the enemies of Dragsa. The house's inventions are highly sought after, making them influential contributors to realms in need of technomagical marvels.

HOUSE SILVERROOT GUARDIANS OF THE ROOTS OF LIFE

Sigil: A root entwined with a golden ore.

Motto: "Blessing on those that protect the future."

The Silverroot nobles are entrusted with the protection and preservation of the Roots of Life. They oversee the mining operations and safeguard the precious magical ore that fuels the city's advancements. Their knowledge is essential to the Magic Smiths, who rely on them to provide a stable source of magical ore for their enchantments, as well as Mages of Life, who constantly need the ore for the creation of life-extending concoctions or their new experiments.

HOUSE BLOODOAK BLOODMAGES AND LIFEBINDERS

Sigil: An oak tree entwined with vines and a crimson heart.

Motto: "The chains of one's life are made of blood in their veins and on their hands."

Nobles from the House of Bloodoak specialize in blood magic and life-binding arts. As many of their members joined the Mages of Life, they have access to secrets known only to a select few within the inner circles of Dragsa's society. Because of this, they are also one of the most well guarded and secretive Houses. It is known that they were involved with the creation of countless magical hybrids, including the Wardress of Lay and other enchanted guardians.

HOUSE SALTSPIRE: SEAFARING ALCHEMISTS AND POTIONMAKERS

Sigil: An alchemical symbol of the sea over a salt crystal.

Motto: "Alchemy from Brine and Breeze."

Saltspire nobles are skilled alchemists specializing in crafting potions for maritime purposes. They work closely with the Kings from the Republic of Misty Waters in developing elixirs for enhanced endurance at sea, help in preventing the gas leaking from the airship balloons, create water-breathing and featherfall concoctions, or even concoct potions to resist the harsh conditions of the open waters. Saltspire alchemists also experiment with sea-based ingredients, contributing to both the medical and magical needs of Dragsa. Some believe that members of this noble House are also involved in a few of the more known heists done by the pirates of the Misty Waters, but no evidence was found so far.



ASSASSINS GUILD DUVAK

The Duvak are rumored to be unmatched masters of the blade, wielding razor-sharp knives and short axes with deadly precision. They are shadows in the night, striking swiftly and silently, leaving no witnesses behind. In a world fraught with violence and chaos, they are said to undergo rigorous training within brutal gladiator pits nestled amidst the beastkin slums. There, they refine their combat skills and hone their expertise in the art of assassination.

On top of all of that, they are a group made entirely of “City Rats.” One of the few races of beastkin which never became slaves of Dragsa. It seems as though Dragsa wasn't intending on releasing them, but rather they escaped the laboratory one day. Initially, the people in the Fortress of Dragsa despised them, considering them vile vermin. Accepting these seemingly monstrous beings was unthinkable. However, over time, these city rats found some level of acceptance in Dragsa's society. They got low-paying jobs, ran haphazard markets, and were allowed in stores. People realized they had a strong sense of community and resourcefulness. Despite their usefulness, the deep-rooted prejudice against the city rats never ceased to exist. Soon, their unique skills became known to everyone. They navigated the city's tunnels and passageways, becoming guides, especially for the underbelly of the city—the black market.

Going back to Duvak, they are one of the most well known organizations ran by the City Rats—they evoke both fear and respect from all who possess knowledge of their existence. Surprisingly, despite their reputation for ruthlessness, the Duvak are said to hold values of the loyalty and honor dear. Once they accept a job, they are unwaveringly committed and willing to lay down their own lives to protect their clients. They are beastkin of their word, executing their missions with unparalleled efficiency and unwavering resolve. The mere thought of their existence sends shivers down one's spine.

Yet, it is this very loyalty and honor that has garnered them a certain level of respect, even among the darkest corners of the city. In a world teetering on the precipice of uncertainty, where trust is a rare and fragile commodity, the dark side of the city yearns for something solid to depend on. And perhaps it is the Duvak, with their unwavering commitment and unyielding resolve, who provide that sense of stability and reliability that transcends the boundaries of legality.

DRAGSA'S LABORATORIES

While the Mages of Life officially only operate in a few places in the Fortress of Dragsa, countless rumors claim that there are secret laboratories under the city where much more sinister experiments are taking place. The Mages obviously deny such claims, but quite a few strange hybrids and monsters have

escaped outside of these “non-existent” laboratories. So far neither the guards nor the hired adventurers were able to find them in the maze-like sewers under the Fortress. It seems that without a proper guide finding them would be impossible, if they truly are located there.

SLAVES ON THE BLACK MARKET

In Dragsa, slaves are actually owned by the kingdom and not by individual people. People can buy a lease for them, which is in effect for a specific amount of time. If at any point the slave buys out their freedom, the leaseholder gets a refund for unused time they still had on the lease. Because of that, people can trade the slaves between them, similar to as if they were selling their leases, but they cannot exactly “sell the slaves.” Because of this, trading slaves to other countries is not possible... at least within the legal framework of Dragsa. Many beastkin can be found in black markets in the other parts of the world, or in cages atop of Misty Waters' ariships. Seeing all of that it is not hard to guess that quite a lot of noble houses disagree with these laws or just plainly feel above them. There are several ways of getting slaves out of the Fortress:

- Faking a death, either in an accident or murder.
- Pretending they escaped.
- Not registering births made by slaves within noble households in order to resell them as teenagers.
- Reselling the lease to black market agents, who fake their identity and cannot be traced when it expires.

...and so on. Still no matter what tricks the nobles use, it is treated as damage to the kingdom's property and these cases are meticulously checked, especially if one demands refunds on top of suspicious circumstances, unless said noble has someone from the Church in their pockets. Corruption always spreads its roots deeply.

Dragsa actually measures time not from Anara ascending to the title of Queen but from the founding of their kingdom. However when the Church of Order grew in power they had chosen to rewrite how dates are recorded in homage to the Queen. This has led to curious and somewhat absurd entries in history books, such as stating that Anara's birth year is year 80 of the Anara's Reign.



THE REPUBLIC OF MISTY WATERS

“Scareguards Archipelago welcomes all.”

Francisco Perez, the Sky Conqueror

In every tavern, you can find at least one person whispering about the Misty Waters, a massive sea veiled in vapors. However, it is not the treacherous depths that captivate most of these tales. High above steaming waters, defying the laws of nature and reason, lies the archipelago of floating islands. What is even more astonishing, these ethereal islands are inhabited.

The residents of the floating archipelago bear the reputation of bloodthirsty pirates, useless vagabonds, or mad inventors. Who else would dare to embark aboard the flying contraptions they called airships? Tales of the untold treasures concealed on their islands captivate the imagination of many. Around is not just gold and silver that await discovery but also a trove of secrets.

Short History

CONQUERER OF THE SKY

They say that Nuestra, a behemoth among airships, could fracture the sky in half. Its hull was able to eclipse the sun, while its thunderous broadside salvo threatened to bring the moon crashing down. Yet, the most formidable force aboard this legendary airship was none other than its captain—Francisco Perez, the Sky Conqueror. Where did this individual and his airborne marvel emerge from? Most will weave tales of their origin in the East, but can these claims be true? Eastern seas beyond Herja and Redoe are a desolate expanse of treacherous waters. Surely, no one could inhabit such a place. Wherever they came from, the airship Nuestra and its escorts of smaller units landed upon Turtle Island, the biggest landmass of the floating archipelago. Not long after that, the raids commenced.

For years, fleets of airships instilled terror upon the seas of Misty Waters. Cannons of regular vessels proved futile against agile aerial adversaries. With Nuestra joining the fight, the best recourse was to raise a white flag and pray that the infamous Sky Conqueror was in a benevolent mood. Astonishingly, more often than not, he was. Each captive was given an opportunity to join the ranks of his fleet. Those who declined were often left alive to spread Francisco's message—"Scareguards Archipelago welcomes all." The Sky Conqueror was not a mere pirate driven by a thirst for quick wealth; he was constructing a kingdom of his own, one airship at a time—each being a piece of his domain, a testament to his unwavering ambition.

As the years passed, the Sky Conqueror's influence grew, and his ranks swelled with loyal allies. Men and women from all walks of life were drawn to his cause, enticed by the promise of adventure, riches, and the chance to be part of something truly extraordinary. With each passing decade, the legend of the Sky Conqueror grew stronger, shrouding him in an air of mystery that only deepened his allure. People whispered among themselves, wondering about the man behind the legend. Who was he truly? Was he an immortal, blessed by the gods? Some even claimed he had made a pact with dark forces, granting him eternal youth in exchange for his soul. Speculation ran wild, and the truth remained elusive. The Sky Conqueror's appearance, however, offered little insight into his true nature. He lacked the ethereal beauty of the long-lived elves or the rugged strength of the dwarves. Yet, despite the passing of the years, there was no trace of aging upon his face. His beard remained untouched by gray, his eyes devoid of the fog of time. Only the scars etched upon his weathered visage told the story of his countless battles and unwavering determination. Legends and myths entwined

Aerothium

Aerothium is a mythical substance used to power the engines of the republic's airships. These crystals can interact with the aetheric currents in the atmosphere, generating an anti-gravitational effect that enables airships to fly through the skies.

The first step in creating Aerothium involves collecting the dense mist that blankets the archipelago. Specially designed mist collectors, capture the swirling mist particles. These collectors utilize a fine mesh and a network of condensation chambers to gather and concentrate the mist into a liquid form known as Mist Essence.

Once collected, the Mist Essence undergoes an alchemical transformation. Skilled engineers blend it with various catalysts and alchemical agents to stabilize its properties and enhance its energy potential. Through refinement and purification, impurities within the Mist Essence are removed, leaving behind a concentrated mist solution.

To solidify the mist solution into the desired Aerothium substance, engineers utilize a unique combination of alchemical reactions and infusion techniques. This process involves exposing the mist solution to a carefully calibrated alchemical apparatus, where it is subjected to specific energy frequencies and infused with additional alchemical essences derived from rare plants and minerals. The mist solution gradually undergoes a phase transition, transforming from a liquid state into a solidified form called Aerothium Crystals. Then in the airships themselves, the process is reversed, creating gravity-defying steam.

around him, creating an aura of fear and reverence. Some saw him as a devil, a harbinger of chaos and destruction. Others believed he was a chosen one... as silly as it sounds. But the truth remained elusive, lost in the vastness of the sky.

FRANCISCO'S DEATH

The demise of the Sky Conqueror did not unfold on the battlefield but within the frigid embrace of the Medina docks, the very heart of the fledgling kingdom. Many individuals flocked to join the armada led by Francisco Perez, the Sky Conqueror. It was only natural that within this sea of faces, a few dozen desired to witness the downfall of captain Francisco. Many had attempted to end his life, only to be met with failure. The captain would mock these feeble endeavors,

inviting all who sought his demise to make their move swiftly, for he is very busy and doesn't have time for such nonsense.

For nearly two centuries, the captain had defied death's grasp, skillfully eluding its icy touch. But fate is a persistent adversary, and after 167 years following the initial landing on Turtle Island, death finally caught up with the Sky Conqueror. His foes infiltrated the ranks of the fleet's flagship, *Nuestra*. When the opportune moment arrived, they sabotaged the vessel's main engine, claiming the lives of the better part of the crew, including their captain.

With the demise of Francisco Perez, his former officers fought for supremacy. Yet, their struggle lacked a clear victor, ultimately resulting in the fragmentation of the Kingdom of Misty Seas into several smaller island states.

The wreckage of the *Nuestra* stayed in the Medina. Regardless of how his tale ended, the legacy of the Sky Conqueror endured. Songs were sung, and stories were told, passing down the legend of Captain Francisco Perez to future generations.

BIRTH OF THE REPUBLIC

The struggle for control over the remnants of Francisco's kingdom culminated in a state of impasse. None of his former officers managed to rally the others under their banners. Yet, each claimed the title of king and considered themselves the sole rightful heir to the Conqueror's legacy. Such a state of affairs could not persist. Years of internal conflict within the archipelago had weakened its overall strength, and opportunistic enemies sought to exploit this vulnerability.

One of Francisco's officers—Hugo Oquendo, seizing the chance for personal gain, used his airships to ferry foreign troops from Dum Ramil to Turtle Island. He planned to conquer the capital and assert his alleged worthiness of the title of king. However, fate intervened. Miguel, the Sunbringer, leader of Celestia Island, knowing that his domain might be next, set aside old animosities and rushed to aid Alvaro Cruz—the leader of Turtle Island. Together, the combined forces of the two kingdoms repelled the first wave of attacks. In the wake of this victory, Miguel successfully persuaded the remaining leaders to unite against the common enemy.

Thus, the War Council came into existence. The united kings convened at the wreckage of *Nuestra* to discuss their military endeavors. To everyone's surprise, they found common ground, forged solid strategies, and ultimately triumphed over the invaders. Even after the war, these meetings persisted. They shifted focus towards reconstruction projects and devised strategies to prevent the recurrence of similar events in the future. While the frequency of the Council's gatherings has diminished, regular sessions continue to be organized to this day.

Politics of the Republic

KINGS AND QUEENS

In the expansive archipelago, each major island boasts its own ruler, self-styled as king, though this regal title is not inherited but earned through a test of strength. The islanders firmly believe that weak leadership is the root of all troubles, and bestowing the position by birthright only hastens catastrophe. Hence, an official duel is the prevalent method of selecting a new leader. Any citizen who commands their own airship possesses the legal right to challenge the current ruler to a fight, wherein the entire sky becomes the battlefield. These duels eschew rapiers or pistols in favor of clashing ships. The battle rages until one crew hoists a white flag. The triumphant claims the title of king and the defeated's ship, or what remains of it.

Should an old king meet their demise through means other than a duel, the selection of a new leader falls to the esteemed War Council. During this pivotal rally, substantial sums of money exchange hands, debts are conveniently forgotten, and numerous promises are made. Many perceive this method as more civilized than conventional duels, particularly those with deep pockets and influential connections. As time passed, a growing number of kings met their end, not on the battlefield, but in their cabins with daggers protruding from their backs.

THE WAR COUNCIL

Every month, all kings of Misty Water congregate in Medina, the capital of the Turtle Islands, to engage in discussions about prevailing matters. This gathering transpires within the hallowed remains of *Nuestra*, the legendary airship of the Sky Conqueror himself. As per age-old customs, decisions with potential ramifications for other islands must be made and sanctioned within these sacred halls, necessitating unanimous agreement from all kings. Voting holds no sway, and every decision must be reached through consensus, employing all possible means of persuasion. When words and bribes fall short, the time for fists and knives ensues. Even in times of peace, the name "War Council" remains fitting, for its members engage in intense deliberations where survival is not guaranteed. Suppose one or more rulers fail

Sayings from Misty Waters:

*Every coin earned is a coin stolen
from the clouds themselves.*

to endure the proceedings. In that case, the remaining council members select a new leader who, knowing the fate of their predecessor, is more inclined toward cooperation.

GOVERNORS

The Minor Islands of the archipelago are governed by appointed governors who exercise considerable autonomy within their domains, provided they fulfill their tax obligations to their respective kings. The selection of governors occurs through highly anticipated events known as Auctions. During these occasions, aspiring candidates present their bids to the king, proposing the amount of taxes the island will contribute under their leadership. The highest bidder secures the position. While governors commit to collecting a specific sum of taxes, nothing prevents them from amassing additional funds, with the surplus finding its way into their coffers. Consequently, intelligent governors have the potential to amass great wealth, comparable to that of kings. The tenure of governors spans ten years, though this period can be curtailed if tax obligations are not met. Upon the expiration of their term, a new Auction is convened to select the next governor.

CAPTAINS

In Scareguards Archipelago, any citizen who possesses their own airship can call themselves a captain, but with this honor comes a solemn duty: enlisting in a local king's fleet. Enlisted captains bear the responsibility of standing by their king's side in times of war, ready to engage in battle for the greater cause, and, in times of peace, to fulfill a tax, the amount of which is determined by the number of cannons adorning their vessel. How these captains earn their coins holds little interest for the kings as long as their payments are made promptly and their actions do not undermine the ruler's interests. Captains enjoy considerable autonomy, pursuing their chosen endeavors without undue interference. Many engage in the old practice of hunting down those who defy the laws or deliberately equip their ships with not enough cannons to evade their fair share of the tax burden.

While it is true that every crewmember has the right to challenge their captain to a duel for control over the ship, very few individuals dare to exercise this law. Even if a younger and stronger skyfarer manages to overpower their captain in such a duel, their triumph is short-lived. The life expectancy of this fortunate soul can be measured in mere hours, for the remaining crew members are sure to express their discontent with such an abrupt shift in leadership. The bonds of loyalty and camaraderie that tie a crew together are immense, and the crew's collective resistance to change can swiftly extinguish any flicker of rebellion, ensuring the status quo remains intact.

Current Pirate Kings

Below is a list of the kings currently ruling over the main islands of the archipelago. All of them are members of the War Council.

GUZMÁN MARTINEZ, CAPTAIN OF NUESTRA, KING OF TURTLE ISLAND

In ages past, Guzmán Martinez commanded the respect and fear of all who traversed the archipelago as the most dangerous pirate to roam the Misty Waters. However, he abandoned his life of infamy and piracy, redirecting his unwavering determination toward fostering the republic's prosperity.

With a sincere desire for unity and progress, Guzmán Martinez envisioned a republic in which the governors of smaller islands would be empowered and actively involved in the decision-making processes of the War Council. He ardently advocated for their voices to be heard, striving to create a more equitable governance structure across the archipelago.

Yet, despite his impassioned pleas and tireless efforts, Guzmán found himself unable to sway the minds of his fellow council members. Undeterred, he clung steadfastly to his beliefs, well-aware that pursuing a just and united republic was a noble cause worth fighting for. Recognizing the limitations of effecting change at the highest level, Guzmán redirected his focus toward the islands under his jurisdiction.

In a display of visionary leadership, Guzmán established a small council, inviting the governors within his domain to come together and voice their concerns, aspirations, and ideas. He wished to foster an environment where each governor's input held weight, where collaboration and collective decision-making could flourish. Through this council, he aimed to create a microcosm of the republic he yearned for, setting an example for others to follow and sowing the seeds of change at a local level.

DIEGO, THE ARM OF RAGNA

Diego, known as the Arm of Ragna, is an enigmatic figure whose peculiarities have not gone unnoticed by the members of the War Council. Despite their disagreements on almost every matter, they find common ground when describing Diego as "weird." In each council meeting, he assumes the position of a silent observer, his hands deftly manipulating a sleek black knife, creating an air of unease among his colleagues.



Main Regions of the Republic



TURTLE ISLAND

The largest landmass in the archipelago holds significant historical and political importance. Once captured by Francisco Perez, it became the cornerstone of his ancient kingdom, with the vibrant city of Medina serving as the capital. Even today, Medina retains its status as the unofficial capital of the republic, drawing kings from other islands for the pivotal War Councils. The island is also renowned for its prestigious Academy of the Sky, where the brightest minds in the republic study secrets of airship construction.

Situated at a moderate altitude, Turtle Island enjoys a respite from the dense mists and clouds that cloak other regions throughout most of the year. This climatic advantage fosters fertile agricultural lands, where vast fields of Skyroots have replaced much of the island's original dense jungles. The civilization here thrives in relative peace, shielded from the perils of marauders and erratic weather. Yet, for some people, the island's tranquil existence and laborious daily

routines leave them yearning for greater opportunities. Those seeking a life beyond tilling the fields often set their gliders toward other islands in search of their fortunes.

RAGNA

Ragna Island, nestled at the lowest altitude among the main islands of the Scareguards Archipelago, is a place of remarkable craftsmanship. It is known for housing the most skilled gunsmiths in the entire realm. These master craftsmen possess unparalleled expertise in firearm production, honed through generations of dedicated work and a deep understanding of metallurgy.

The island's rugged terrain hides substantial iron deposits and other precious minerals, making it a vital resource hub for the archipelago. The relentless pursuit of these resources has shaped the landscape, creating mines that delve deep into the earth, extracting valuable ores. Life on Ranga Island is a testament to resilience and adaptability. The islanders face unique hardships brought about by a high crime rate,

harsh living conditions, and a scarcity of sunlight. Yet, it is precisely these adversities that have forged a tenacious spirit among the islanders.

UROBORO

Uroboro Island, the most distant of the main islands of the Scareguards Archipelago, boasts the largest fleet among all the regions. This skyfaring nation thrives on the thrill of raids and plunder, with its economy intricately woven around the spoils of those exploits. Situated far from the archipelago's heart, Uroboro Island experiences fewer mists, providing its people with clearer skies and broader horizons.

The islanders of Uroboro are mostly disinterested in the power struggles and rivalries that consume the archipelago, preferring to chart their own course in the vast expanse of the sky. They focus on maintaining their impressive fleet, constantly expanding their arsenal, and refining their tactics to remain unrivaled in the open skies.

MISTRALA

Mistrala Island, the epitome of tranquillity and commerce, is a haven of peace amidst the turbulent skies of the Scareguards Archipelago. Unlike its more notorious counterparts, Mistrala's citizens prefer the art of trade over raids and conquest. The island's gentle aura and thriving markets make it a sought-after destination for merchants and travelers alike. Beneath the island's serene exterior lies a hidden wealth of rare minerals crucial to producing Aerothium, the mystical substance that allows the islands to defy gravity.

Historically, Mistrala's rulers have harbored jealousy toward their neighboring Turtle Island. Decades ago, this underlying tension led to a fierce conflict that scarred the collective memory of both islands. The wounds of that war have yet to fully heal, and the mutual animosity between the two populations persists. Despite countless efforts to foster unity, the residents of Mistrala and Turtle Island maintain a wary distance, often viewing each other with suspicion and maintaining a cautious sense of separation.

CELESTIA

Celestia, the island that reaches the highest altitudes in the Scareguards Archipelago, is bathed in golden sunlight and brimming with natural beauty. As the island flies above the mists, it enjoys an abundance of sunlight, which blankets the landscape in a warm and radiant glow, creating a paradise for both flora and fauna, as well as breathtaking views, with the sprawling archipelago and a vast expanse of open sky visible from its elevated vantage point.

The island is renowned for its vast plantations of Cloudfruits, a rare and delectable fruit that grows exclusively in the high

However, beneath his quirks and the discomfort they provoke, Diego proves to be an exceptionally astute and effective leader. His every move is marked by precision and calculated decision-making. Under his guidance, Ragna Island, long regarded as the poorest among the main islands, has undergone a remarkable transformation. Industrialization has swept the land, propelling it to become the preeminent manufacturing hub of the entire archipelago. The island's fleet has expanded year after year, while its economy thrives, all owing to the mysterious influence of its enigmatic leader.

MENDOZA MEDRTUGAL OF UROBORO

More a brute than a politician. Even after claiming the island's throne, Mendoza never seized his duty as the airship captain. He continues to traverse the skies alongside his trusted crew, leaving a trail of success in his wake. Rumors circulate among the populace, suggesting that a third of Uroboro's wealth stems from Mendoza's raids. While exaggerated, there is no denying his crew's unmatched prowess and skill.

Mendoza believes that the War Council has outlived its purpose. He advocates for a greater degree of autonomy among the islands, emphasizing their agency in decision-making. Often absent from council meetings, Mendoza always claims that he could not attend due to other responsibilities. Unsurprisingly, those "other responsibilities" often turn out to be daring raids undertaken with his loyal crew.

RECALDE PEREZ, KING OF MISTRALA

The leader of Mistrala carries a belief that runs deep within his veins—the belief that he is a direct descendant of the Sky Conqueror. In his eyes, this lineage grants him a divine right to be treated with the utmost respect and reverence.

With enthusiasm and conviction, he openly challenges the existing political system of the republic, asserting that the scattered islands of the archipelago should be united under the rule of a single king. Who better to ascend to this position than a true descendant of the Sky Conqueror? He holds steadfastly to the tradition seen in the eastern kingdoms, where the title passes down to the eldest son as a matter of birthright.

Recalde is met with a mixed reception on the War Council. While he may not be the most liked or admired member, many rulers view him as ineffectual and lacking the strength to turn his ideas into reality. Thus, they tolerate his aspirations, recognizing the impracticality of his grand plans.



altitudes of Celestia. With their unusual appearance and sweet taste, these succulent fruits are prized by locals and sought after by traders from all corners of the archipelago. The Cloudfruit plantations stretch across rolling hills, and their bountiful harvests bring the island's inhabitants prosperity.

Legends and tales echo through the island, recounting the exploits of Miguel, the Sunbringer who once called Celestia home. It is said that this enigmatic pirate amassed a colossal treasure hidden away in a secret location on the island. Though many have tried to unravel the mystery, the treasure's whereabouts remain elusive, still waiting to be discovered.

SLEEPLESS ATOLL

The treacherous realm made up of thousands of small, tightly packed floating islands presents a challenging maze for airship navigation. The islets are clustered closely together, creating narrow channels and precarious passageways. It is a haven for bands of marauders who have found refuge amidst the labyrinthine islands. These daring and audacious pirates call this place home, setting up their makeshift hideouts and encampments in hidden coves and secluded pockets throughout the atoll.

Sleepless Atoll remains a magnet for bounty hunters. Drawn by the promise of valuable targets and the potential for substantial rewards. The abundance of marauder bands ensures that bounty hunters will always find an opportunity to test their skills and earn a worthy prize.

THE SLOPES

The Slopes are a collection of underislands suspended at a remarkably low altitude within the southern borders of the Scareguards Archipelago. These islands are nestled near the continent's edge or connected to it.

The underislands of The Slopes are predominantly untamed and uninhabited, their rugged terrain and untouched landscapes a testament to nature's raw beauty. The lack of permanent settlements allows nature to spread its dominion, with dense forests, winding rivers, and hidden valleys flourishing amidst the untrodden paths. Within the depths of The Slopes, peculiar and unexplained phenomena unfold, giving rise to countless strange and mysterious encounters. Whispers of lost spirits, ethereal lights dancing behind tree lines, and elusive creatures that defy categorization create an aura of intrigue and fascination.

Despite the proximity to the continent, all attempts to create a land bridge to establish a more permanent connection have failed. The unpredictable nature of The Slopes, with its treacherous terrain and unpredictable weather patterns, has proven to be an impossible challenge for those seeking to bridge the gap between the floating archipelago

and the mainland. It is as if the archipelago itself resists any tethering to the solid ground, preserving the mystery of The Slopes.

Most Known Places

THE HULL OF NUESTRA

The Hull of Nuestra, situated in the middle of Medina—the capital city of Turtle Island—is the wreck of the ancient ship of Francisco Perez. A long time ago, a group of traitors detonated its engines and have been rotting in this place ever since. After centuries of bad weather, countless renovations, and at least three fires, today, Nuestra barely resembles its original form, but to this day, the kings of Turtle Island title themselves as the captain of Nuestra.

Nuestra holds an unequivocal significance within the republic, serving as the nexus of power and authority. It serves a dual role as the residence of the ruling king of Turtle Island and the esteemed gathering place for the War Council. Within the grand chambers of Nuestra, pivotal decisions that shape the republic's course are deliberated and decided upon.

The majestic vessel's presence bestows an unparalleled prestige upon the king of Turtle Island, elevating his status above all other monarchs within the archipelago. The mere sight of Nuestra instills a sense of awe and admiration. It is no wonder that other rulers look upon it with envy, yearning for the privilege of commanding such a splendid ship as their own.

ACADEMY OF THE SKY IN SIDONIA

Dominating the skyline of Sidonia, the bustling second-largest settlement on Turtle Island, stands the majestic tower known as the Academy of the Sky. This renowned institution is the sole bastion of knowledge where aspiring engineers can acquire the necessary education and skills to maintain and construct airships.

The Academy of the Sky commands a position of reverence and admiration, its imposing structure inspiring wonder in all who behold it. Its towers soar toward the heavens, their architectural grandeur a testament to the pursuit of knowledge and innovation that permeates every facet of its hallowed halls.

THE FORGEHEART WORKSHOP

This legendary workshop is the heart and soul of Isle Ranga's gunsmithing prowess. Located in the island's heart, it is a sprawling complex where the most skilled artisans gather to hone their craft. The air is filled with the rhythmic pounding

of hammers and the intense heat of forges as master gunsmiths work their magic to shape and mold the raw materials into works of art.

STORMBREAKER SHIPYARDS

Located on the outskirts of Valdez, Uroboros' main settlement, these sprawling shipyards are the biggest in the archipelago. Skilled engineers and craftsmen toil tirelessly, shaping timber and iron into magnificent vessels designed for swift maneuvers and fierce sky battles.

THE WHISPERING CLIFFS

On the outskirts of Uroboros' territory, towering cliffs offer breathtaking panoramic views of the open sky and distant horizons. Winds whistle through the narrow gaps, creating a melody that echoes across the landscape. The cliffs are said to hold ancient secrets, and it is believed that those who listen closely may hear whispers of forgotten tales and hidden knowledge carried on the breeze.

THE PEARL BAZAAR

A true gem of Mistrala's commerce, the Pearl Bazaar is a vibrant market teeming with colorful stalls and enchanting aromas. Here, traders from all corners of the archipelago gather to showcase their finest wares. Delicate pearls, exquisite jewelry, and rare artifacts from the depths of the underislands are displayed, enticing visitors with their beauty.

CAVERNS OF THE SUNBRINGER

Deep within the heart of Celestia Island, a labyrinthine network of ancient caves harbor untold riches. These treacherous caverns, rumored to be protected by traps and guardian spirits, attract daring treasure hunters and risk-takers across the archipelago. Only the most skilled and courageous adventurers dare venture into the depths, facing perils in search of legendary treasures hidden within the winding tunnels.

Facing the Disciples of Chaos

In the wake of the Disciples of Chaos invasion, life in the Scareguards Archipelago has begun to undergo a profound shift. The once bustling trade routes dwindle, and the scarcity of ships forces them to travel in heavily guarded convoys. Meeting tax obligations becomes increasingly challenging, affecting all levels of power within the archipelago. The gravity of the situation weighs heavily on everyone's minds, yet finding a viable solution proves to be an overwhelming task.

The pirate kings, who once reveled in their autonomy, now face a dilemma. Should they wait for the tides of fortune to

LADY VALDALUSIA OF CELESTIA

Lady Valdalusia has an uncanny ability to bend others to her will, employing tactics that include promises, threats, and strategic bribes. Her persuasive skills and manipulative nature have earned her a reputation for consistently achieving her desires.

While she commands the respect of her fellow council members, recent decisions made by Lady Valdalusia have raised eyebrows and cast doubt on her motivations. The once unquestioned wisdom of her choices now appears shrouded in uncertainty. Many within the council suspect that her actions primarily serve her own interests rather than the welfare of her people. Whispers and speculations circulate among the islands, suggesting that she wishes to relinquish her position, seeking to engineer a challenger who will rise and claim the throne, thus freeing her from the burdens of leadership.

turn in their favor? Should they seek potential allies who may aid them against the Disciples of Chaos? Or should they consider the unthinkable and align themselves with the invading forces? Their knowledge of the invaders and their treacherous nature make such a proposition highly dubious. Trusting the Disciples of Chaos would be akin to inviting a magpie into one's nest.

The War Council, tasked with making crucial decisions for the archipelago, still hasn't made a call.

The Republic of Misty Waters maintains a rather fragile non-aggression treaty with the Fortress of Dragsa. The treaty's original purpose was to ensure safer passage for ships bearing appropriate documents and markings through the Republic's waters, with the agreement that a "passage tax" would be collected by any ship requesting. However, as time passes, the treaty has gradually lost its significance in the eyes of the Republic's skyfarers.

Yet, some leaders believe that an alliance with the Fortress of Dragsa is the best option for them. But none are willing to bet much on uncertain outcomes. The tension between them has been growing for a while, and the diminishing significance of their treaty has not gone unnoticed in Dragsa either. The Fortress, once imposing and unwavering, now finds itself dealing with a growing number of incidents involving Republic ships attempting to overexert their rights. It makes all the potential proposals even more difficult.

As of today, a sense of cautious neutrality has settled upon the Republic of Misty Waters as they observe the conflict from a distance, reluctant to entangle themselves in a war they cannot yet navigate.

Life in the Floating Archipelago

CITIZENS OF THE REPUBLIC

The average citizens of the floating islands in the archipelago lead lives shaped by the unique challenges and opportunities of their exceptional environment. They are a diverse mix of individuals, each with their own aspirations, dreams, and struggles.

Many citizens are involved in the skyfaring industry, either as members of an airship crew, engineers, or workers in dockyards. Skilled skyfarers are well-versed in navigating the skies and flying their airships with finesse. They are experts in plundering and raiding tactics, honing their combat skills and strategizing to outwit their adversaries. Despite their reputation as pirates, they are not solely focused on pillaging. Many trade and barter, using their airships to transport goods between islands and establish economic networks. They possess a deep knowledge of the archipelago, its trade routes, and the best hiding spots amidst the shifting mists.

While citizens of the republic hold a reputation that may evoke images of lawlessness and danger, the islanders maintain their own code of honor and loyalty. They operate under camaraderie and mutual respect, forging strong bonds within their pirate crews and fostering a sense of unity among their fellow skyfarers. Their allegiance to their respective kings or governors, who hold dominion over the islands, forms the backbone of their pirate society. However, it is essential to note that not all citizens may actively participate in acts of piracy. Most are forced to choose different occupations, such as artisans, traders, or craftsmen, providing essential services and goods to support the pirate community.

Life on the floating islands is not without its hardships. The constant threat of marauders' raids and the unpredictable nature of the skies require resilience and resourcefulness. The citizens must navigate the delicate balance between self-preservation and cooperation, ensuring their own safety while fostering unity within their communities. Their collective strength lies in their ability to adapt, innovate, and support one another in the face of adversity.

BLEEDING ISLANDS

The citizens of the floating archipelago dream of caressing the gentle winds, entwining their fingers in the clouds, and breathing the cold air of the vast beyond. Alas, these aspirations have quite a blood price to pay, and for many, they remain unfulfilled.

During the republic's early years, the citizens of Misty Waters were urged to join the crews of flying vessels or even construct their own. The fledgling country faced numerous adversaries, and the contribution of every able hand was deemed crucial. Looking at it from today, this proved to be a grave misjudgment. Traditional sea voyages can claim countless lives.

Long ago, Francisco's words echoed across the Scareguards Archipelago like a glorious message of freedom and dreams. A promise that all who sought refuge in the floating republic would be embraced with open arms. Yet, with the passage of time, the once-pristine message has transformed into a twisted caricature of itself.

With each passing year, the return of ships from their inaugural voyages dwindles, leaving ports bustling with the desperate task of constructing new vessels to replace those lost. The republic finds itself in a perpetual state of losing

Remnants of Nuestra

While engineers of the present day hold a respected position in society, they pale compared to their predecessors who arrived on the islands aboard the *Nuestra*. None of the current engineers can replicate a ship of such magnificence. Modern vessels are smaller, slower, and less efficient, but some strive to bask in the faded glory of the past by claiming fragments salvaged from the ancient vessel.

There exist hundreds, if not thousands, of cannons that purportedly originated from the decks of the *Nuestra*. However, most are mere replicas, ordinary weapons adorned with superficial embellishments. Yet, a select few parts sourced from the *Nuestra* can still be found adorning the airships of pirate kings and fortunate adventurers—engine boosters, wind recoverers, and, of course, cannons. Few have witnessed weapons of the *Nuestra* in action, and fewer still have survived to share their accounts.

The sidearms once wielded by the crew of the *Nuestra* face a similar fate. Many have been lost to the ravages of time. Some gather dust in private collections, while only a few remain on active duty, claiming the lives of countless sailors and unruly crew members. The fate of Francisco Perez's weapon—the *Almiranta*—is uncertain. Most believe that Perez's officer cast the pistol into the sea after the *Sky Conqueror* met his demise. However, unsurprisingly, numerous captains boast possession of this legendary firearm—at least a dozen claim to possess its storied power.

resources and manpower. It is constantly bleeding. Thus the unending influx of newcomers from far-off lands is the sole lifeline keeping the floating realm afloat.

“Scareguards Archipelago welcomes all.”

Because it has to.

Francisco's message now carries the weight of both blessing and curse upon these islands. It serves as a reminder of the necessity to welcome all who come seeking refuge, regardless of the consequences. The Scareguards Archipelago no longer has the luxury of choosing who enters, as it must receive any who come, or risk sinking into oblivion.

THE LAW OF SKYCALL

To conquer the problem of a dwindling populace, the law of Skycall was created, comprising a list of requirements to become accepted as a skyfarer, whether as a member of an airship crew or as a pilot of one's own vessel. Those who fail to comply with the Skycall law are labeled as marauders and are cast away from the brighter side of republic civilization.

The Skycall law outlines three simple rules for granting one the title of a skyfarer:

To be granted the privileges and obligations of a skyfarer, one shall prove themselves capable of flying in the sky by either:

- I. *Killing another skyfarer.*
- II. *Being accepted by at least half of the airship crew.*
- III. *Being granted the title of skyfarer by the island's ruler.*

These rules were devised by the War Council during the early days of the republic with the intent of mitigating losses during voyages.

Originally, the privilege of being a skyfarer solely entailed the act of flying the ship, and their primary obligation was piloting the vessel. Over time, the list was expanded to include new elements. But even then, it was meant to enlist anyone who defeated pirates during an “abordage,” making the crew stronger while maintaining a similar number of individuals. However, this also meant that if a drunkard was killed in a bar fight, the unfortunate soul holding the weapon was also conscripted into the crew.

The second point of the Skycall law opens up opportunities for people from the islands to join the ranks of the skyfarers. Should they prove themselves capable and gain the crew's approval, they can become a part of the crew. While this rule was intended to ensure that only skilled and capable individuals fly the ships, it has also paved the way for shrewd individuals to convince the crews with something other than skills. Bribes and various forms of persuasion have become all too common. Some individuals have found creative ways

to gain acceptance into the ranks of the skyfarers through unorthodox approaches, such as being granted the title of skyfarer by a crew of merely four people, disregarding the common sense calling for a larger crew.

As for the third rule, it is self-explanatory. Rulers always seek out ways to be above any law.

Those who attempt to deceive the law of Skycall by sneaking onto a ship without proper adherence to the law, are at the mercy of the crew. This way countless naive youngsters, dreaming of a shortcut to their aspirations, find themselves facing the crew's judgment. The common practice is to tether such individuals to the airship, casting them overboard and dragging them behind the vessel for as long as the crew demands—sometimes even for the duration of the whole journey. Should these hapless souls survive the scorching mists and merciless winds, they earn the chance to join the crew as full-fledged members. Few have ever received such a blessing, yet each season witnesses a handful of individuals, whether by choice or coercion, attempting to test their luck. No skyfarer would question those who willingly partake in those trials. Life holds little value if one cannot spread their wings and touch the sky.

HUNGRY SKIES

In the shadow of the magnificent floating armada, life on the islands of the Scareguards Archipelago is far from paradise. Sustaining such a great number of flying ships is daunting, demanding countless hours of preparation on land for every hour spent in the sky. While some take to the heavens, others remain rooted to the earth, supporting the airborne armada by ensuring a constant supply of essential resources. The relentless demand for resources to sustain the ships leads to an ever-deepening hardship for those rooted to the land. Faced with the harsh reality of scarcity, hunger becomes a constant companion. In many of the islands' once vibrant marketplaces, you can see merchants with meager supplies, often asking for absurd prices. A stark contrast emerges between those who are airborne and those who are landbound, leading to an ever-widening gap between the privileged skyfarers and the forgotten islanders.

For the fortunate few who possess extraordinary skills or relentless determination, there exists a glimmer of hope. They can navigate the treacherous winds of survival and eke out a modest living. Such individuals stand a chance to stay afloat amidst the ongoing struggle, where each day becomes a battle for sustenance. Not the say one dignity as a living being. However, for the vast majority, life unfolds within ever-growing slums, where despair and deprivation create a relentless cycle of hardship.

In an attempt to combat this, some Kings and Queens of the islands decided to resolve the problem with more

conventional means. Similar to one of their allies, they ask the ship captains to bring not only goods but also people as valuable commodities. This could be a task given directly as part of their skyfaring title or in exchange for a promised high reward. Money always speaks the loudest. Thus, the sight of slaves on the plantations of the underislands is not uncommon. It is rather a stark reality in the quest for survival and prosperity. Nonetheless, the Scareguards Archipelago remains a place where dreams and nightmares intertwine, where the sky battles the harsh reality of life on these rocky islands.

ENGINEERS

Airships fly through the heavens, defying gravity and embracing the vast unknown. Yet, these magnificent vessels require the touch of skilled engineers to keep them roaring. The consequences can be dire for those suspended hundreds of meters above the sea, stranded with a malfunctioning engine with no one to repair it. That is why certified engineers hold a special place in the republic, exempt from the constraints of Skycall law. If you possess the knowledge to sustain an airship, you are welcomed aboard, particularly if your services come without exorbitant hourly fees.

Sayings from Misty Waters:

On these islands, you sail the skies or sink into obscurity. We've chosen the former. We will sway to the rhythm of adventure and sing the shanties of the high skies!

However, becoming a certified engineer is a challenging feat. The republic boasts only a single school, nestled on Trotule Island near the settlement of Sidonia, dedicated to imparting this invaluable trade. The entrance exams are rigorous, and the tuition fees are even more so. Many aspiring engineers can only complete their education with the patronage of wealthy sky captains, but such support comes at a price. In exchange for tuition, young engineers must serve on their captain's ship for up to five years, an apprenticeship that shapes their skills and forges strong bonds.

As engineers gain experience and expertise, their demands grow. They command superior wages to other crew members and often negotiate new contracts mid-mission. What will you do if an engineer insists on claiming half of the spoils for themselves? Fly onward without them? Good luck with that, for on an airship, something is bound to break every passing hour. Expressing gratitude upon reaching a port is also not recommended. The islanders deeply respect engineers and do not take kindly to those who mistreat them. After all, without

their unrivaled expertise, traversing the skies would become an impossible task. Most captains, therefore, prefer to accept the cost and, when needed, ensure everyone is well aware of the engineer's exceptional cooperation.

AIRSHIPS

The construction of airships is the biggest secret of the republic. Even captains of those magnificent vessels have no idea how their machines work. Only certified engineers are allowed to obtain this knowledge.

At the heart of every airship lies the Enchantor Core, a remarkable device that acts as a power source. This core, infused with a unique alchemical concoction known as Aerothium, can manipulate and control the essence of the air itself. By tapping into the fundamental properties of Aerothium, the Enchantor Core generates a powerful steam that is pumped directly into balloons. It possesses unique anti-gravitational properties, allowing the ships to defy the natural order of things, allowing them to float effortlessly in the sky.

Additional smaller cores are strategically positioned throughout the vessel to further enhance the maneuverability and propulsion of airships. These engines, when activated, release controlled bursts of stored steam, creating thrust and propulsion, enabling the airship to navigate the skies with agility and speed.

Additionally, a network of intricate mechanisms and gears ensures the precise control and stabilization of the airship. These mechanisms, driven by clockwork systems, allow the pilot and crew to manipulate the airflow around the ship, adjusting its altitude, direction, and speed.

GLIDERS

Gliders are the primary means of transportation between islands for those who lack their own airships and cannot afford passage on a ferry. While initially appearing precarious, locals learn how to use them before they pick up on how to eat with a fork and knife. Well, quite a few never learn that.

Gliders come in various types and designs. The simplest ones utilize the warm air currents found above the Misty Waters, allowing them to ascend and float gradually toward their intended destination. Ingenious engineers have developed more advanced gliders with small thrusters, providing greater control and maneuverability.

Gliders are essential equipment aboard every airship, primarily serving as emergency safeguards in the event of critical malfunctions. However, they are also used as boarding tools during encounters with other vessels, whether airborne or floating on the water. When an airship approaches its target, it dispatches dozens of these contraptions toward the

intended vessel. Pilots of the gliders are armed with an array of tiny grenades, which are dropped upon reaching the target. Following the initial barrage, the boarding team descends gradually, opening fire with handguns upon any survivors. Once the aggressors set foot on the attacked vessel, they often encounter little resistance.

ENFORCING THE LAW

The Republic of Misty Waters lacks a unified code of law, with each island possessing its own codex. Generally, these rules revolve around respecting the law of Skycall, obeying the king, and avoiding harm to fellow islanders. Despite the simplicity, some individuals still find these rules too restrictive. However, those who break the law within the republic will not escape unpunished.

Rather than employing a permanent police force, the kings of the republic rely on bounty hunters as a more cost-effective solution. Apprehending lawbreakers and bringing them before the nearest judge results in well-deserved compensation. This system has proven successful, although the scarcity of bounties means that only a few can sustain themselves as full-time bounty hunters. Nonetheless, completing a bounty or two provides an opportunity to earn extra coins for those in dire need.

The form of punishment varies across the islands. In less civilized regions, criminals are pushed off the island without much ceremony. More civilized regions opt for less entertaining methods, such as compelling offenders to pay substantial fees as reparations.

MARAUDERS

While many bounties within the Republic of Misty Waters are typically fulfilled within a matter of days, a significant number remain unresolved. Some lawbreakers avoid the hunters by banding together in larger groups. If they access an airship, a new group of marauders is born.

These marauders often establish bases on inhabited islands below the mist line, sustaining themselves by preying on the trading ships of the republic. Rarely do these groups venture beyond the Scareguards Archipelago, as the reputation of the republic extends throughout Deuslair. A lone airship and its crew will unlikely find many allies beyond the republic's borders.

OF WIND AND RAIN

The climate across the archipelago islands is varied, offering many atmospheric conditions. Each island presents its own microcosm of weather patterns, influenced by altitude, proximity to other islands, and prevailing winds.

On the higher islands that hover above the mists, the air is often crisp and cool. These elevated regions are frequently kissed by gentle breezes that carry a refreshing vitality, providing respite from the sweltering heat that engulfs the lower realms. Sunlight bathes these lofty peaks, casting vibrant hues across the landscape, while intermittent mists create an ethereal ambiance, giving rise to tales of hidden treasures and ancient mysteries.

In contrast, the lower islands bear witness to a more temperamental climate. Shrouded in perpetual mist and veiled in a rain cloak, these islands experience a moody, atmospheric character. Dense clouds hang low, casting a soft diffused light over the landscape and giving the surroundings an otherworldly aura. Rainfall is a constant companion, nurturing lush vegetation and transforming the islands into verdant havens. Yet, occasional bursts of sunlight piercing through the mist offer fleeting moments of warmth and illumination, creating an interplay between light and shadow that captivates the senses.

UNDERISLANDS

The Scareguards Archipelago is shrouded in an omnipresent mist, a sight as familiar as the islands themselves. While the higher islands may often bask in the sunlight, descending to lower altitudes reveals a landscape where sunny days grow increasingly scarce. This atmospheric phenomenon reaches its zenith at the line of the mists, an altitude where light struggles to penetrate. Navigating through this dense mist becomes a difficult task, causing airships to venture into this treacherous territory rarely. These mist-veiled islands, known as underislands, largely remain uninhabited, as the inhospitable conditions deter all but the most intrepid explorers.

Many legends exist about mysterious encounters that took place below the line of the mists. Whispers speak of ghostly apparitions, eerie voices carried by the wind, and unexplained occurrences that defy rational explanation. Some airships fly into mists only to vanish without a trace, swallowed by their murky embrace. Some believe these unfortunate souls fell victim to the Mistwraiths, lured into their clutches by illusions and deceit.

RELIGION

On the floating islands of the archipelago, you won't find any form of organized religion. Nonetheless, citizens of every island have a rich tapestry of beliefs and ceremonies that they participate in. While no single dominant faith exists, several key elements and common themes emerge across the various traditions observed on the islands.

Islanders often engage in ceremonies to ensure luck and safety during their voyages. These rituals rarely involve prayers and

chants and, more often, take the form of simple gestures like carrying a splinter from your house rooftop during a whole journey or throwing off the board a single coin before embarking.

The act of flight, integral to the islanders' lives, carries profound symbolism. It represents physical transportation, spiritual transcendence, and liberation from earthly constraints and worldly concerns. Wings, feathers, and other avian motifs frequently appear in the republic's iconography.

CARNIVAL OF THE WIND

Every late summer, the west winds surge with renewed vigor. During this brief period, the misty veils that shroud the archipelago are swept away, revealing a clear, sun-kissed sky. With such strong air currents rendering flying conditions nearly impossible, many captains seize the opportunity to grant their hardworking crews a well-deserved rest. Crewmembers return to their homes, reuniting with families, while others seek more indulgent diversions in the lively taverns and brothels.

Yet, it is not just the skyfarers who revel in the joyous atmosphere. The entire community joins in the festivities, for these cherished sunny days hold a special significance. Overhead, thousands of kites take flight above the bustling settlements. While most fly under the guidance of children, ambitious young engineers partake in spirited competition, crafting intricate and technologically advanced kites. Miniature fleets grace the heavens, each endeavoring to showcase its prowess by ascending to greater heights and maintaining unwavering stability. Truly, a sight to behold.

ARCHITECTURE

The architecture across the archipelago islands displays remarkable diversity. The distinctive character of islander architecture is shaped by the varying altitudes and climatic conditions prevalent in different regions.

On the highest islands, tall edifices pierce the skies like outstretched fingers. The most affluent citizens occupy prestigious residences nestled in the highest reaches of these islands. Atop these abodes, rooftop terraces provide respite from the veiling mists that often enshroud the lower realms. Here, the affluent few find solace, gazing upon the landscapes that stretch beneath them.

In contrast, the lower islands, shrouded in mist and rainfall, evoke a sense of acceptance and adaptation. The resilient people eschew lofty aspirations and instead favor stout, robust structures fortified against the whims of the ever-present elements.

Notably, on Turtle Island, a distinct architectural trend emerges. Inspired by the king's regal abode, many residents

seek to emulate the grandeur of old airships in their homes. These houses are adorned with intricate details and embellishments reminiscent of the majestic vessels that dominate the skies. Through this homage to the past, they honor the enduring legacy of their rulers and embrace the spirit of adventure and exploration that defines their culture.

RASHERS

Before Francisco Perez set foot on Turtle Island, the floating archipelago was home to a peculiar species of small, goblin-like creatures known as Rashers. Even if they are now not as numerous as they used to be, to this day, Rashers are a menace who give headaches to many governors of the Republic.

Rashers may not pose a significant threat individually, but they are rarely encountered alone. Those creatures prefer to work in combat pairs to overpower their foes. If one pair member is injured, both creatures immediately retreat to safety. However, what truly sets the Rashers apart are their shamanic powers. As more Rashers gather in one place, their magical abilities grow stronger. The pinnacle of their power lies in their capability to construct wooden golems. These magical beings, animated by the collective magic of the Rashers, pose a genuine threat to expedition groups venturing into the depths of the jungles. Typically, a group of Rashers operates a single golem, but exceptionally powerful individuals can create golems on their own. While these solo-operated constructs may be smaller, they are still threatening enough to deter expedition groups from further incursion.

Presently, the major islands show no trace of Rashers, but skirmishes with these creatures are still common in less significant places. Many underislands, particularly those of little value to the republic, remain under the Rashers' control, and any expeditions into their territories are considered risky endeavors.

Legends and tales from those who foolishly ventured into Rasher-infested territories speak of a mysterious figure occasionally seen alongside the groups of natives—a horned humanoid riding a creature resembling a goat with a skull for a head. The nature and intentions of those enigmatic beings remain unknown. Some superstitious individuals believe these creatures to be avatars of death itself, prompting them to avoid engaging with the Rashers whenever this figure is present.



Technology

The citizens of the Scareguards Archipelago are renowned for their remarkable technological advancements, surpassing those found in many other regions of Deuslair. While the awe-inspiring airships may be the archipelago's most famous creations, their ingenuity extends far beyond this. The inventiveness of the republic's engineers has led to the creation of various other groundbreaking contraptions, from clockwork mechanisms that power everyday devices and steam engines that drive heavy machinery to many forms of exotic armaments.



HANDGUNS

In battle, striking your foes from a distance is a priceless advantage, though not easily attained in the vast realms of Deuslair, where heavily armored soldiers pose a severe challenge, even to the most skilled archers. While many turn to the power of magic or magic-infused weapons, the resourceful citizens of Misty Waters have chosen a different path—the path of gunpowder.

The crews aboard the airships of the Misty Waters Republic are armed with muskets and pistols, embracing the explosive potential of firearms. Handguns utilized by the republic require a loading before every shot, a process that, even under optimal conditions, can take up to a minute. Many pirates carry multiple loaded pistols to circumvent this time-consuming task instead of relying on a single musket. The most skilled gunsmiths can create special revolvers with rotating clusters of barrels that can be fired in succession. Even if not very accurate, those weapons could generate a whole avalanche of bullets.



While it is undeniable that a devastating magical blast unleashed by an experienced wizard holds more power than a gunshot, the people of Misty Waters have chosen a more accessible approach. They understand that teaching the average person to aim using iron sights and to pull a trigger is a far more attainable feat than imparting the arcane arts

required to conjure fireballs. By embracing the simplicity and effectiveness of firearms, the citizens of Misty Waters empower their crews to engage in battle with a level of proficiency that can be attained by the many, not just a few skilled in the intricacies of magic.



SHOULDERCANNONS

Standard handguns have a fearsome reputation, but when the need arises to penetrate the hull of an enemy ship, they prove inadequate. In such situations, a more formidable weapon is required—the popper cannon. However, aiming these bulky monstrosities, particularly during encounters with other airborne vessels, poses quite a challenge. Recognizing this, the gunsmiths of Ragna have devised a more portable variant of board cannons. Though the term “portable” may be generous, as they demand the strength of only the hardest crewmembers to bear their weight, the true value of those weapons lies in their remarkable accuracy, compensating for reduced size.

Yet, finding a skyfarer who possesses the necessary strength to handle one of these cannons is merely the first step. The user must learn to align the weapon with the intended target and compensate for the cannonball's trajectory. Proper positioning before firing is paramount; the cannon must be firmly braced against the marksman's shoulder, for any deviation in grip or posture risks the weapon flying from grasp.

GRENADES

The warships of other nations are not defenseless against the airships of the Scareguards Archipelago. While standard cannons and arrows may pose a limited threat to airborne vessels, the presence of wizards and their magical devices can present significant challenges.

Many airship captains opt for a strategic approach to avoid direct engagement with these potentially dangerous weapons, flying high above their adversaries and bombarding them with a relentless barrage of incendiary grenades. Although this tactic may not yield immediate success, it gradually weakens the opponent, making it possible for the airship to descend to a lower altitude.

In closer-range encounters, grenades are unleashed with devastating effects. While they may not be the optimal choice for open-field combat, their efficacy is demonstrated time and again on the confined decks of a ship, where there is not enough room to escape the destructive blast.

Economy and Trade

TRAVERSING THE SKY

When most people hear the phrase “to traverse the sky,” they usually think about a fleet of bloodthirsty pirates ready to sink their ships and plunder seaside settlements. That is not true to reality, however. Not always, at least. Often, when a captain of the airship looks for a crew to traverse the sky, they are planning just that—to sink ships and plunder settlements. In the speech of the archipelago, however, “to traverse the sky” means “to earn money with your airship.” Some decide to make a fortune by raids and plunder, some by trade and barter. For the islanders, it's all the same.

AGRICULTURAL

On the agricultural front, farmers work diligently to make the most of the limited land available on the floating islands. They have adapted their farming techniques to suit the unique environment, growing crops such as Skyroots and other resilient plants that thrive despite the challenges posed by mist and irregular weather patterns. Local farmers contribute to their respective islands' food security and self-sufficiency, ensuring that their communities have sustenance amidst the vast expanse of the open sky.

NOT FOR SALE

Trading, an undeniably lucrative endeavor, entices merchants and their crews with the promise of wealth. However, there exists a treasure far more precious than any cargo carried by any airship—the weapons of its crew. These armaments possess a value that surpasses the desires of many common traders. Alas, fortune does not favor them, for these weapons are not for sale. Technologies created in the republic are a closely guarded secret, a commodity beyond any bargaining table.

Occasionally, rare occurrences unfold where foreigners find themselves possessing the weapons of skyfarers. Some are lost amidst the chaos of battle, while others fall prey to the greed of unscrupulous merchants. In rare instances, fragments of these armaments are bestowed as gifts upon foreign monarchs and nobles. Bestowing one's weapon upon another, especially to outsiders, symbolizes the utmost trust, a gesture often misconstrued by those beyond the islanders' society.

TRADE GOODS

The citizens of the archipelago often exchange goods with nearby regions. They may acquire imported wares such as grains, spices, and preserved foods through trade, enhancing the variety of their diet.

Journey to the East

The origin of the Sky Conqueror has always been a topic of speculation and wonder among the people of the floating archipelago. The vast expanse of the Eastern seas has sparked curiosity about the existence of different landmasses and kingdoms beyond. The question that lingers in the minds of many is whether it is possible to reach these distant lands and unveil their mysteries.

Numerous expeditions have set out to venture across the eastern seas, driven by the thirst for knowledge and the desire to explore the unknown. However, most of these daring endeavors have been met with challenging fates. Some return battered and disheartened, while others simply vanish, leaving behind nothing but unanswered questions.

Nevertheless, there have been accounts from sailors and seafarers who claim to have witnessed peculiar objects flying near the eastern horizon whenever they leave continents far behind. These sightings have ignited hope and speculation among the people of the archipelago. Could these reports be the first glimmers of evidence that another civilization lies beyond the seas? Or are they merely tricks of light and imagination?

Sayings from Misty Waters:

*Gold in the hand is as fleeting as the wind,
but the legend that echoes through these
isles is eternal.*



Examples of Local Fauna and Flora



ROCK BEES

Rock Bees are enormous insects that have adapted to the challenging conditions of the floating archipelago. The Rock Bee gets its name from its ability to build elaborate nests using materials readily available on the islands. They construct their hives using rock fragments, dried moss, and plant fibers, creating sturdy and well-insulated structures that protect them from ever-changing weather conditions. These nests are often nestled in the crevices of the rocky outcrops that dot the archipelago, providing the Rock Bees with natural hiding spots and shelter.

These insects are known for their resilience and cooperative behavior. They live in tight-knit colonies, working together to protect their nests and gather resources. Rock Bees possess a highly organized social structure, with specialized roles for worker bees, defenders, and reproductive individuals.

JELLYBIRDS

These creatures, which resemble a hybrid of a bird and a jellyfish, possess a unique adaptation that enables them to extract moisture directly from the air. They have elongated tendrils that act as natural sponges, absorbing the water particles present in the mist. This adaptation allows them to sustain themselves without the need for traditional water sources. Jellybirds have a harmonious relationship with the islanders. They are often seen as symbols of good luck and prosperity. Islanders build tall perches and nests on their rooftops, welcoming jellyfish to rest there.



Sayings from Misty Waters:

A morning jellybird brings no rain.

SKYBLOSSOM

The Skyblossom is a remarkable plant that brings the floating archipelago vibrant bursts of color. It grows in clusters, with each plant consisting of slender, flexible stems that reach upwards, resembling delicate tendrils. At the tip of each stem, a flower blooms. The petals of the Skyblossom come in a range of mesmerizing hues, including azure blues, lavender purples, and pale pinks.

During the night, the Skyblossom undergoes a transformation. The petals emit a gentle bioluminescent glow, casting an enchanting radiance across the islands. This luminosity not only attracts pollinators but also serves as a natural navigation aid for airships traversing the archipelago during darker hours.



MISTWINGS

Mistwings are mysterious creatures that call the floating archipelago their home. These majestic birds have adapted to their unique environment, possessing feathers that change colors as they move through the air, allowing them to camouflage seamlessly within the misty atmosphere. With wings spanning several meters, Mistwings effortlessly glide between the floating islands, riding the updrafts and currents. They are known for their incredible agility and speed, capable of maneuvering swiftly through the skies.

Legend has it that Mistwings possess mystical abilities. Some skyfarers claim that they have seen Mistwings harnessing the power of the elements, manipulating the winds to aid their airships during storms, or guiding lost travelers back to safety. Encountering a Mistwing is considered a rare experience. Islanders tell stories of flying alongside these magnificent creatures, feeling the rush of wind as Mistwings perform intricate aerial displays. Their beauty, grace, and enigmatic nature captivate the people of the floating archipelago.



Characters Background

ENGINEER OF THE SKIES

You were born and raised on the floating islands of the Scareguards Archipelago. From a young age, your fascination with machines and engineering was evident as you eagerly observed the intricate workings of the airships that graced the skies above your island home.

Your passion led you to seek formal education at the prestigious Academy of the Sky. Unable to pay tuition yourself, you decided to look for a patron. Years in the academy have given you a comprehensive understanding of the principles behind airship propulsion and the intricacies of Aerothium manipulation. After completing your education, you took a position on your patron's airship. Your role involved maintaining and enhancing the vessel's performance, ensuring it remained cutting-edge.

Skill Proficiencies: Investigation, Arcane

Tool Proficiencies: One type of artisan's tools

Languages: Common

Equipment: Common clothes, one type of artisan's tools you are proficient with, small pouch containing 5 gp.

Leaving the Misty Waters

Within the republic, engineers are revered for their invaluable knowledge and expertise, safeguarding the secrets of their craft within the confines of the floating archipelago. The expectation is clear: engineers should never venture beyond the republic's borders for more than a few fleeting moments, for their knowledge is deemed too precious to be shared with lowlanders. Yet, you defied this unwritten decree. You left behind your home, people, and cherished position as an esteemed engineer. The question lingers with curiosity: What caused you to go down this unexpected path?

D6	LEAVING THE MISTY WATERS
1	My patron betrayed me.
2	I was captured in battle.
3	Unforeseen family circumstances compel me to depart from the republic.
4	I seek to expand my knowledge.
5	I want to sell my knowledge.
6	I desire recognition and fame.

Feature: Secret Technology

You possess extensive expertise in the intricate workings of airships, handguns, gliders, and other technological marvels crafted upon the floating archipelago. Your profound understanding allows you to operate and manipulate these devices proficiently. Additionally, you can impart your vast knowledge to others, should you decide to do so.

Suggested Characteristics

D8	PERSONALITY TRAITS
1	I always work in a systematic and organized manner.
2	I have a logical and analytical mindset and assume everyone does as well.
3	I ask too many questions.
4	I focus a lot of attention on details.
5	I'm driven by a desire to create and innovate.
6	I refuse to give up when faced with challenges.
7	I constantly seek to learn and understand new concepts, technologies, and methodologies.
8	I always ensure that my measurements, calculations, and specifications are precise.

D6	IDEALS
1	Islander: I believe that the well-being of the republic is more important than anything else. (<i>Chaotic</i>)
2	Innovation: I'm driven by a desire to create the greatest airship in the world. (<i>Any</i>)
3	Discovery: I want to know why Nuestra was better than modern airships. (<i>Any</i>)
4	Community: I want to share knowledge of the republic with the world. (<i>Chaotic</i>)
5	Wisdom: I believe that the pursuit of knowledge is the highest value. (<i>Neutral</i>)
6	Peace: I believe that humans and Rashers should live in harmony. (<i>Good</i>)

D6	BONDS
1	I will always remember the years I spent in the academy.
2	I failed on my first mission, but my fault was never discovered.
3	I never got paid for my last job, but I will get that money back somehow.
4	My old workshop was robbed and my inventions were stolen.
5	I worked on many different ships and have many connections.
6	My patron and I became good friends.



D6	FLAWS
1	I don't understand the value of teamwork.
2	I resist change or new approaches, especially if it challenges my established methods.
3	I struggle with effective communication, especially when explaining complex concepts to non-technical individuals.
4	I'm impatient with those who do not grasp concepts as quickly as I do.
5	I rely too heavily on technology and tools, sometimes neglecting the importance of human intuition and experience.
6	I always prioritize safety and risk mitigation and try to avoid conflicts.

Local Cuisines



MISTY GREENS

In the lower regions of the islands where mists and rains prevail, hearty and resilient plant species known as misty greens thrive. These leafy greens have adapted to the moisture-rich environment and are rich in vitamins and minerals. Islanders harvest them for salads, stir-fries, and other vegetable dishes.



SKYFISH

The archipelago's skies are teeming with various species of flying fish adapted to the misty atmosphere. These skyfish have evolved to glide through the air, and their nutritious meat provides a staple protein source for the islanders.

AERIAL SHELLFISH

Along the edges of the islands, peculiar shellfish species have adapted to thrive. These aerial shellfish cling to the rocks and feed on airborne microorganisms. Islanders carefully collect and prepare them, often incorporating them into skyfood dishes or using their shells for decorative purposes.



MARAUDER

The floating islands have been your cherished home for as long as your memories span. From a tender age, you eagerly joined the ranks of an airship crew, absorbing the intricacies of the trade and swiftly honing your skills as a seasoned skyfarer.

Yet, the winds of fate turned against you, casting a shadow over your once joyous existence. Ensnared in a web of unfortunate circumstances, you found yourself embroiled in trouble, a bounty placed upon your head. Determined not to succumb without a fight, you made a bold choice that would forever alter the course of your life. Seeking refuge amidst a band of marauders, you boldly cast your lot with these rogues and outcasts, hoping to forge a new path among their ranks.

Skill Proficiencies: Survival, Deception

Tool Proficiencies: Vehicles (airship)

Languages: Common

Equipment: A simple pistol, a set of common clothes, and a pouch containing 10 gp.

The Crime

No one willingly joins a marauder group; it is a harsh and unforgiving life, typically chosen by those who have committed serious crimes. What act of transgression led you down this path? What crime did you commit that forced you to make this desperate decision?

D6	THE CRIME
1	I broke the law of Skycall.
2	I made a crucial mistake that resulted in losing a vessel I worked on.
3	I was part of the crew that ambushed and plundered another airship.
4	I brought justice to someone who wronged me.
5	I openly disobeyed my king.
6	I did nothing wrong. I was framed.

Feature: One of Us

Through years of dedicated service in a group of marauders, you have cultivated a network of connections within the criminal underworld of every major island of the archipelago. Your reputation precedes you, and your name carries weight among those who operate outside the boundaries of the law. This vast web of contacts and favors owed to you provides a unique advantage—whatever you require, you know whom to approach and how to leverage your influence.



Suggested Characteristics

D6	PERSONALITY TRAITS
1	I believe that bounty hunters are constantly on my tail.
2	I always maximize limited resources.
3	I prefer to work alone.
4	I trust my instincts.
5	I always suspect hidden motives or betrayal.
6	I lie a lot.

D6	IDEALS
1	Explore: Sky Conqueror's homeland must be discovered. (<i>Any</i>)
2	Anger: The justice system of the republic is corrupt. (<i>Chaotic</i>)
3	Greed: I want to find the legendary treasure of Miguel, the Sunbringer. (<i>Any</i>)
4	Freedom: I won't be free until I own my airship. (<i>Chaotic</i>)
5	Justice: I must take the bounty off my head. (<i>Lawful</i>)
6	Power: I will become the most fearsome skyfarer in history! (<i>Evil</i>)

D6	BONDS
1	Whenever I see a Mistwing, I believe everything will go fine.
2	A friend helped me join the marauders.
3	My old airship was confiscated.
4	I rely on my fellow marauders.
5	My loved ones have been affected by my criminal status.
6	I have a tamed Jellybird.

D6	FLAWS
1	I find it difficult to trust others.
2	I'm reluctant to form dependencies on others.
3	I prioritize my survival and self-interest.
4	I often react impulsively when provoked.
5	I often act without fully considering the consequences.
6	I'm stubborn and resistant to changing my viewpoint.



CLOUDFRUIT

Growing in the higher regions where sunlight is more abundant, the cloudfruit is a unique fruit that possesses a sweet, juicy flavor. It is a coveted delicacy known for its refreshing taste and high water content.



SKYROOT

Beneath the surface of the floating islands, there exist special tubers known as skyroot. These starchy root vegetables are well-suited to the archipelago's soil and can be harvested for cooking. Islanders use skyroot in various dishes, from soups and stews to roasted vegetables.





BANEWOOD ASYLUM

“There’s no force in this world capable of chaining the soul that was born to be free.”

Medi, The Father of Free Kutauri

If you turn your eyes to the west of Kallonia, you’ll find the vast forest of Banewood Asylum. An ancient home to Yv’anda and a precious sanctuary for liberated beastkin, Kutauri. There, in the lungs of the continent, life flourishes unburdened by outside interference. At the heart of this miracle stands the Oldest Tree, created out of Chaos and Order, it remembers when the world was born. It is said that its branches reach so high toward the sky, that they once intertwined with the Gods, and that the remnants of their glorious power protect the Tree and its children.

It is this protection that makes Banewood a thorn in Dragsa’s side. For centuries now, the woods have sheltered the beastkin; the peaceful Harass and the vengeful Harrat Wing. For centuries, it has remained unconquered, all attempts at cutting the trees or storming the woods thwarted by powers beyond a simple mortal’s comprehension.

Not many of the generals, leaders and scientists of Dragsa have ever paid much attention to the history of this place, busying themselves instead with dreams of crushing its inhabitants and exploiting its resources. That is their mistake. Make sure you do not follow in their footsteps, adventurer. Use the knowledge I freely share and decide for yourself, which side of history you favor.

Treat the next few pages as your personal guide to Banewood Asylum and its neighboring lands of Truncatop Mountains and Lake Frothloch. I will gladly teach you about Kutauri’s new-found traditions, Yv’anda’s sacred legends, and Kril’s surprising mischievousness. I will guide you through dense and dangerous forests, treacherous mountains, and dark dungeons, until you safely reach the peaceful glades and clearings. All you have to do is follow.

Short History

To understand the true power and importance of these lands, we must delve deeper into the history of the world than any human before us had dared to. It is an exciting journey, but also one that's bound to shake your understanding of the world.

THE MYTH OF CREATION

Every culture on these lands has its own stories of Chaos and Order, of the beginning of life on Deuslair. You can learn about most of them from scholars, historians, and well-rounded explorers, but there is one that cannot be so easily found. Yv'anda, the Dryads that have inhabited the woods known to you as Banewood Asylum since the first tree bloomed to life, made sure of it. Many humans claimed to have glimpsed at the hidden knowledge, to have befriended an Yv'anda and learned its secrets, but none of them have been truthful. Not one of them understood the world as the Dryads do. Perhaps you'll be the first.

You won't hear about that from your priests or teachers. No Yv'anda will speak of it, either, for the knowledge about the creation of humans is a dark secret buried in the roots of the Oldest Tree—and it is there for a good reason. Eons have passed since Chaos and Order fought and left the world to its own devices. In that time, plants grew, animals provided, Yv'anda remembered and humans—we changed. We evolved, created our own civilizations, and conquered the continent.

The Ancient Yv'andas watched our progress, had seen our kindness and our cruelty, and decided to simply let us forget. After all, it was not our purpose to remember, was it?

Some of us believe in Gods. Follow and worship Order, unaware that our existence would have been different had it not been too weak to bind us. Some of us believe in science, shunning the idea of higher beings. And some of us forget that it has any importance at all. But Yv'anda remember our origin and continue their watch. Every year, they bury their memories in the roots of the Oldest Tree, immortalizing our deeds. The foundation of Dragsa, the birth of Queen Anara, and then, her reign. The creation of beastkin and their slavery.

THE LEGEND OF BANE AND HIS CHILDREN

There is a unique and powerful magic in names; what we name, we can understand. So, why are these woods called Banewood? This one secret has become a legend amongst Yv'anda, has trickled down to the Kutauri, Kril and Medusas, and whenever you sit with them for the evening, there's a chance that it'll be told. I suggest you listen to it carefully and take to heart the lessons it teaches, for at its core, the Legend of Bane involves humans.

Once upon a time, there was a little village nestled at the foot of the mountain. Though its name is long lost and its inhabitants forgotten, there's one person the Dryads remember fondly. A child that was born with a promise of change. A boy who grew up curious, asking questions and yearning for knowledge. And finally, a man who came to know the very definition of regret.

Dance of Order and Chaos

The world was born, as many worlds are, with a thought. It was willed into existence, shaped and formed, until it resembled what you can see with your own eyes. Before the sky was blue and the grass green, Order and Chaos roamed here, unbound and in harmony with each other. When Chaos ran across the world, the ground shook and the earth parted. Order followed, shaping the landscape, rising mountains and carving canyons. When Chaos wept, Order took its tears, drained the salt out of them and filled the rivers and lakes. When Chaos touched the surface it created life. Engulfed in its passion, Chaos poured itself into every part of the world, elated and free. Order named all of its creations and gave them a purpose. Thus, plants became plants and their purpose was to grow; animals became animals and their purpose was to live and provide; and Yv'anda

became Yv'anda and their purpose was to remember. When the world tilted on its axis and the two deities tore each other apart, Yv'anda were there to witness it. With its dying breath Order cast out Chaos, caging it in its own universe and sealing its access to Deuslair. It was too weak, however, to put a name to Chaos' last creation, thrown at the world with malice. Yv'anda watched as they grew and as they formed themselves and molded their hearts. Unaided and asunder, they gave themselves a name—humans, and a purpose—to thrive. But they did not fit into the structure that Order had in mind for the world. They were too bold, too curious and too ambitious to be put in place. But more importantly, they had one thing that Order couldn't have accounted for—the power to create, in the image of Chaos.

Slang and Idioms

“Like a child of Bane”

A phrase commonly used by parents scolding their children for all kinds of misbehavior and shenanigans.

“Pray that Ra doesn’t get you”

Used when one flees from consequences of their ill thought out actions. Usually, when a husband displeases his wife.

“Chasing Astrid’s whale”

Pursuing a grand goal without care for consequences nor a thought spared if one should even achieve it.

“To bind one’s soul to the Tree”

Used when there’s nothing more to be offered or done to help. Sometimes used with indignation as in: “What else do you want from me? Should I bind my soul to the Tree?!”

“Afracasti’s help; to lend someone Afracasti’s hand”

Used when someone is helping you because they want something in return.

“As swift as Abraham’s gold rush”

Used when something becomes incredibly popular in a very short time; usually having to do with new trends or gossip.

“Touched by change”

In the past it was used to mean that someone is affected by the influence of the magic of Chaos, but now refers to those who ostensibly break the mold and want to reshape the world.

“Glade”

Refers to Bane’s Glade. People tend to shorten it while talking less formally.

“Dam”, “sire”, “foals” and “filly”

While Kutauri reject most of the terms used by Dragsa to dehumanize them, they still hold to these four words which respectively mean: mother, father, children and young female. It might be done so to distinguish between them and despised by them humans.

Yv’anda and names starting with Yv’

Yv’anda is the name of the Dryad clan from Kallonia meaning “the ones who remember.” Whenever

Bane was an ordinary human on the outside, with an extraordinary mind. When he saw how the villagers fought with Dryads for every cut tree and how they challenged Krils for every piece of mined ore, he was the only one to ask: why? Curious, one day he dared to venture into the forest, making sure to carry neither a weapon nor a tool. Yv’anda noticed his presence and though they were prepared to defend their home, they soon discovered that they didn’t have to. Bane had an inquisitive soul and an open mind. He quickly befriended the tribe and convinced the Dryads to allow humans to collect fallen trees for wood. In exchange, humans would share their innovations freely.

With time, similar deals followed. Kril allowed the villagers to mine iron in exchange for tools and trinkets, and Sirens let them fish in exchange for songs and tales. For years, humans fit in, as if Order itself placed them there. Bane met a woman named Ra and together they started a family. But as he grew older, the true nature of humankind twisted his children.

Astrid, his precious daughter, was the first human to conquer the seas. She invented faster, more durable ships and returned to the village with a whale she had killed herself. Her ships could endure the harshest of storms and her crew could navigate the waters with ease. Soon, there was nothing that could stop her voyages—but sirens and their request for tales. Astrid, too busy with perfecting her trade, forgot how to sing and craft stories. When the sirens rejected her improvised tale, she reached for her harpoon. With blood still fresh in the salty waters, Astrid felt like a goddess.

Abraham, Bane’s only son, had no mind for seas or long journeys. His practical mind was always focused on providing for their village. When coal and iron became insufficient, he went to the caves of the Kril’s Mountains and after thirty days in darkness, found gold. The metal could not be used to make either tools or weapons, but its enchanting glimmer wedged itself into Abraham’s heart. He ordered his men to mine it, disregarding Kirl’s distressed warnings. Then the world of humans shifted. Golden jewelry and trinkets became a symbol of status and soon, the first life was forfeited in its name.

Afracasti was born different—a child with both sexes in one body, and talent for magic. Following legends of gods who were also neither male nor female, for years Afracasti thought of themselves as the favorite. With Ra’s almost undivided attention and Bane’s gentle hand to guide them, Afracasti lacked nothing. But that was the beginning of their downfall. They were friends of the Sirens and of Kril, but most of all, they were followers of Bane’s footsteps of Yv’anda. It was Afracasti who first discovered what you now know as the Root of Life. A little crystal in a cave, deep in the forest, but so potent in magic that Afracasti could not leave it be. In no time they discovered its healing properties and used it to help the



villagers. They kept it a secret from Bane and Ra, and instead proudly called themselves: the Heavenly Healer. The allure of power was too much. The more they used this power, the more strain it put on their mind and soul. The selfless act of healing changed, as they started to ask for things and deeds, more and more each year. After a while, they would not even lift a finger if the reward was not up to their demands. Their soul was slowly being corrupted by Chaos without anyone noticing.

Years passed, while the Dryads, Kril, and Sirens watched in horror as humans changed themselves and the world around them. The agreements made by Bane barely held, with tensions rising and blood spilling, shrouded in darkness. Sirens could not bear to see the cruelty born in the hearts of humans nor the slaughter of their kin. They decided to leave this land—free like the water flowing in the vast expanses of the ocean, they went to realms beyond human grasp. The Kril became reclusive and stopped trusting humans as they did at the beginning. Yv'anda silently observed, as they did in the centuries before.

Meanwhile, three siblings plotted against their father as they could no longer stop their aspirations and desires. One day they set a trap under the innocent guise of inviting him to a family dinner. In their greed, pride, and lust for power, they forgot—as many humans did “inthe” past—that Bane was never one of them and that his biggest strength was his mind. Afrafasti started slowly gathering magic into a crystal in their hand, ready to unleash it at a moment's notice. Astrid reached for her weapons with determination in her eyes. And then the men hired by Abraham surrounded him. Though his heart broke when all three of his children were ready to kill him, he was prepared and acted without hesitation. He cast a spell so powerful that even the crystal shard in Afrafasti's hand could do nothing to break it. The roots of the Oldest Tree sprung from the ground, crushing the men and imprisoning his children—forever.

Bane returned to the forest, never to set foot outside of it again. Yv'anda acknowledged his noble sacrifice, the blood of his own children spilled and their spirits bound to the tree. But it was too little, too late. Ra, outraged at her husband's lack of mercy, riled the men and declared war on all friends of Bane. Soon, she took another husband, and in honor of her lost children, named their first daughter An'ra—wrath of Ra.

In his last breath, Bane tugged at the magical core of the world, shredding his soul in the process, but managing to focus enough for one more spell. “No kin of Ra, no subject to her whims, shall ever survive in these woods. No human shall ever cut a tree or take a life, for as long as my will lasts.” The spirits of his children, guided by magic, rose from the roots of the Oldest Tree and bound by their father's last request, swore to protect the forest.

After several dozen centuries, we forgot the true origins of our Queen, the descendant of An'ra, Daughter of Ra. Anara has always been there, ruling over Dragsa and pushing humans towards innovation and greatness. What can Yv'anda know of her and her kin? Is there even more to this story? It remains an undisputed fact that the Queen has never set foot in Banewood. That her armies have never conquered the whole land of Kallonia. It is no wonder then, why Kutauri fled there.

The legend of Bane lives on and you can find traces of it all throughout the forest. The biggest clearing, inhabited by Kutauri and Yv'anda is called Bane's Glade, for that is where the man built his homestead. Parents tell children amazing stories of Bane and his adventures, though most of them have little in common with truth. I've prepared for you a handy dictionary of phrases and idioms that sprung from this legend.

THE BREAKING OF CHAINS

The myths and legends of the Dryads aren't really what you're here for, are they? No, I wouldn't think so. As rich in culture and knowledge as Banewood is, nowadays its significance on the maps of Dragsa is singular—as a patch of land yet to be conquered An asylum to the beastkin that broke the chains of slavery, opposing the reign of Glorious Anara and spitting on her might. But are you curious enough to ask: how? How did the beasts manage to win their freedom?

He was born as a seventh son to a dam that could not name her foals. The pedigree was of no importance, as they were all bred much as draft horses were—to spend their lives working tirelessly, hauling goods and plowing fields. His tail cut at the dock, blinders permanently fastened to his head and a bit keeping him from making a sound, he was broken in, as were all of his kin. Had any of his slavers bothered to look closer, however they would have noticed the hatred shining red in his eyes. The determination to persevere out of spite; the heart breaking with every hit of a crop that fell on a child's back.

Much like the humans of eons ago, he gave himself a name—Medi. And a purpose—to be free. And there must have been enough Chaos in him, passed down through generations and mutation and magic, because as he changed, the world changed with him. There were three signs given by fate, harbingers sent to warn Yv'anda of what was to come. A red moon, to bathe the land in blood; a cyclone, as wild as a mustang, to destroy everything in its path; and a dream that all Kutauri dreamt on the same night.

What we know for sure is this: two hundred years ago, when the sun rose to a land tinted red, Medi rode the fields he used to plow, his master bound and dragged behind him. As the blood of the man seeped into the ground, Kutauri answered

someone joins the ranks of the clan and is fully accepted, they discard their old name and are given new one. It always starts with "Yv'," which is taken from the clan name. While there are more nuances to it, it can be roughly translated as "carrier of memories..."

"May your branches reach the gods, and your roots grow deep with history"

A prayer for safe passage in the woods. It is also used as a greeting to show deep respect for Dryads. Younger generations of Kutauri often use modified versions, which include only half of the sentence.

the battle cry of one of their own. There was no rhyme nor reason to the fight that followed, only desperation driven not by fear of death and pain, but by a yearning to follow a dream. Medi picked up a rusted scythe and with madness in his eyes, cut a path through the slavers. One by one, the heads of their tormentors rolled. No blade, no arrow, no spell touched him that day.

The news of the rebellion reached the Fortress and the Queen demanded blood. Soldiers and beastkin were dispatched to deal with the unruly centaurs. In three days, they found the escapees and planned to have them all killed. Medi prayed to all of the gods, known and unknown, and when the first raindrops fell on his bloodied back, he rose once more, to face the enemy. And though he led not warriors, but workers, to battle, there was no hesitation in their hearts. Just as Yv'anda were forewarned, nature itself aided the Kutauri; the clouds swirled in angry circles, the wind howled the battle cries of the oppressed centaurs.

The consequences of the rebellion were severe. The Queen did not take the failure of her soldiers kindly and thus, the Purges of Beasts became another bloodstain on the history of Deuslair. In the weeks following the battle, Anara ordered the death of ten thousand beastkin, most of them Kutauri. Women and children were tortured and their mangled corpses decorated the streets of the Fortress. Men were sent to mines and forced to work themselves to death in the futile hope of saving their families. Nevertheless, the cruelty of the Queen could not vanquish the sudden hope of beastkin.

Medi led his people to Banewood, and as Yv'anda welcomed them with open hands, the forest gained a second name—Asylum. There's no solid evidence and even the Dryads would be hard-pressed to explain the shift in the very fabric of the world that changed the weather around Banewood during that year. Frequent storms have been known to hit the Truncatop Mountains and a blizzard was quite normal for Lake Frothloch. However, after the freeing of beastkin, it felt as if nature had grown sentient. Every time the Queen gathered her forces to strike against Banewood, her generals had to battle not only Kutauri, but terrible weather conditions, as well.



The image of a centaur looming over their human oppressor has solidified itself in the consciousness of Kutauri. If you venture deep enough into Banewood, you would be wise to recognize the warning signs of Harrat Wing. The symbols of lightning striking down slavers and horseshoes painted red indicate that you're trespassing near their outposts or secret routes. It might be best to retreat or at the very least, be extremely cautious.

Inhabitants of Banewood Asylum

**“Every change is brought to life by Chaos...
and Chaos needs change to thrive. You cannot
think of them as separate entities, for they are
one and the same.”**

Yv'Aman, Ancient Yv'anda and the Keeper of the Tree

Bane showed humans a path forward, plucked at the strings of destiny, and offered his kin both knowledge and cunning. Medi plunged the realm into a new era—one where beastkin could have hope, could evolve. One, where the Queen was no longer an all-powerful ruler, for she had lost to her own slaves.

Since then, the Kutauri split into two groups; the peaceful Harras and the vicious Herrat Wing. Similarly, a schism separated Yv'anda into Observers and Volunteers. The Kril moved from their secluded mountains to establish outposts within Banewood and worked tirelessly with Kutauri to dig secret tunnels through the unyielding Truncatop Range. Meanwhile, merfolk from Encura continuously sent them food and resources from trade with kingdoms from the vast expanse of the sea, so that the flame of rebellion would never cease. One could say that this situation resembled the times forgotten by humans, when different Sirens, Kril, and Dryads were brought together by Bane. Some would say that the two were even too similar. Ancient Dryads observe it all with a mix of hope and fear. Will this last till the end of times? Or will history repeat itself?

FACTIONS AND POLITICS OF THE WOODS

Banewood was a home to the Yv'anda for eons before the world suddenly became a smaller place and other humanoid creatures began seeking shelter in the glory of The Oldest Tree. During the seventh century of Anara's uncontested reign, the political landscape of Banewood was constantly shifting between the violent Herrat Wing and peaceful Harras. Even the Yv'anda weren't saved from the schism, and now consider themselves either passive Observers, serving only their God-given purpose, or Volunteers who believe that they too, can change the world around them. The Kril and Medusas from Encura have their own agendas and are ready to do anything to achieve their goals.

OBSERVERS

Observers consider themselves traditionalists, protecting their old way of living and following their God-given purpose—to remember. They dwell near the Oldest Tree,

in small hoks and dug-outs. They don't engage with other races beyond the necessary trade of goods and information, though even then they put effort into avoiding “new technologies” or “inventions” that their counterparts embrace. All Ancient Dryads are Observers and are reluctant to part with their knowledge, though they might make an exception for those who offer the memories they do not yet have in their possession.

If you dare enter the Clearing of the Oldest Tree, be prepared for a cold welcome. It would be wise to show respect to the ancient beings that protect it unless you wish for a swift and brutal death. In times of need, remember the simple prayer that one might utter as a greeting:

“May your Branches reach the Gods and your Roots grow deep with history.”

Though I've never been able to witness more than a glimpse of this ritual, there's a way for the Dryads to pray to the Oldest Tree and to exchange one's mind for a memory. Some of the wise folk I've discussed this with have a theory that the older the memory, the bigger the sacrifice. Some claim to have seen Dryads and Kutauri losing themselves completely in the roots of the Tree. Nonetheless, all agree that whenever there's magic involved, the price is always steep.

VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers are Yv'anda touched by change, or at least that's how they like to think of themselves. In the eyes of older members of the clan, they're simply youngsters with too much energy and too little reason. Yet, the Volunteers play a crucial part in the politics of Banewood. They align themselves both with Herrat Wing and Harras, playing arbiters, guides, and healers. Though not many of them directly participate in raids against Dragsa, they are more than ready to use their magic to help the newly freed Kutauri.

Volunteers seek all knowledge of the healing arts and embrace the inventions that trickle down to Banewood through Lake Frothloch and Encura. They're curious, yet remain polite in their endless inquiries. If you're willing to lose an evening or two sharing knowledge, you might as well forge a friendship that will last for years to come.

To further separate themselves from the old traditionalists, Volunteers decorate their faces with fluorescent paints and choose more vibrant colors for their clothing. Most of their outfits are inspired by venomous snakes and toads and poisonous plants that can be found in Banewood. Make sure not to underestimate them, for they use their knowledge in much more creative ways than their elders.

HARRAS

When the Kutauri split into two groups, those who chose to live in peace named themselves Harras. They've dedicated their lives to healing the wounds of slavery, both those of the body and those of the mind. In the early days, when Medi was still leading their forces through bloody rebellion and called for no-mercy to the slavers, Takah—just a young filly at that time—decided to start the first tradition and build their culture one day at a time. She gave Medi his Name—The Father of The Free Kutauri—in hopes that his thirst for revenge would diminish and that he'd grow into the title.

For centuries, Harras cultivated old traditions and added new ones. The Name Giving is a highly celebrated event and the Sweat Lodges are as much a part of the healing process as a treat for tired muscles. The races, story-telling, weaving, and many more elements of what now is associated with Kutauri, were born as ideas of young centaurs, yearning to belong.

Harras preaches to everyone the importance of balance and personal growth. Even though their society isn't fully utopian and struggles economically, it remains a safe haven in the midst of Banewood. All asylum-seekers are welcome there.

HARRAT WING

Harrat Wing took its name after Medi's first squad of trained warriors and much like their predecessors, they carry hatred in their hearts. They embrace those whose wounds could not have healed amongst the peaceful Harras; whose only road to freedom leads through the fields of corpses of Dragsans.

To join them, one must prove their worth by the trial of blood. The highest in value is the head of a slaver, though the leaders of Harrat Wing are known to accept kobolds, basilisks, or other monstrosities.

The Kutauri serving in the Harrat Wing do not suffer nincompoops or weaklings. The rules are strict and those who break them are heavily punished, without exception. If a fledgling is found hesitating to kill a human, they are whipped in front of everyone; treated like the slave they obviously still are. Yet, through hardship and pain, Harrat Wing creates bonds stronger than any other—bonds that they'll gladly kill and die for.



The Conflict

Though the Yv'anda are in general a peaceful folk, the conflict between generations is evident. None have raised arms nor sought to directly hurt one another, but families have been torn apart and trust has been broken by the schism. For us, it might look like a natural order of things, for the young to seek their own path and renounce the ways of their parents. For Yv'anda though, this is the first time in history that such a thing has happened and on such a large scale. Most of the Observers aren't willing—or perhaps they lack the ability to—understand their youth, blaming Kutauri for the disruption of their peace. On rare occasion, Elder Kril would issue a notice to all Yv'anda, calling for unification. Rarer still are the Volunteers who try to bridge the gap between the two factions, risking their feelings. Neither group will directly support one another. Should a Volunteer get injured during a raid, they'll be reliant only on their peers.



Though Harras and Harrat cannot exist without each other, the communication between those factions is fragile and ridden with secrets. It's not uncommon for Harras to smuggle younglings from under Harrat's wings when it becomes clear that they've bitten more than they can chew. It's also not uncommon for feisty youth to run from the Glade, chasing dreams of bloody glory, completely unaware of the brutal reality. Harrat hides its true, cruel visage from their peaceful brethren and cultivates an image of gallant heroes, fighting for freedom.

Economy and Trade

Banewood Asylum is a place where different cultures and races meet and mix, and their trade and economy couldn't be more different. Whereas Harras, the peaceful Kurauri living in Bane's Glade don't often use coins for trade—instead preferring their internal system of communal exchanges and equality—Harrat Wing has embraced all sides of capitalism. Similarly, Kril do not shy away from trading with the outside world.

Merchants traveling through Kril territory can expect to face capricious weather conditions, bandits, basilisks, and of course, scorned Kril with their illusions and traps.

THE WISHING TREE OF HARRAS

Right next to Bane's Hut in the Glade, stands the Wishing Tree, proud and tall. It's the main source of currency, as Harras has renounced Abraham's sin—gold, and instead focused on cultivating an equal, compassionate society. Anyone is welcome to fill a clay tile and hang it on the tree—the higher, the more important or difficult the task is to complete. Common courtesy dictates that if you hang a tile on the tree, you also fulfill someone else's wish. However, the Kurauri leave that to their own conscience and do not verify it.

The currency used at the Glade isn't coin, but work put into bettering the community.

A few decades ago, the Yv'anda set up a Wishing Tree right next to Bane's Hut, where everyone could hang a little tile with their wish. The requests varied greatly—from helping someone skin a deer to building another hut. Once fulfilled, the tiles could be used for barter.

BRUTAL EFFICIENCY OF HARRAT WING

Under the leadership of Red Lye, the Harrat Wing has become vicious in its quest to end slavery. Their main source of income is the settlement near Lake Frothloch, a hub of trade in the north. They have imposed taxes on imported goods and the coin gained from that is used to support their military. Information has as much, if not more, value than well-made swords and armor. That is precisely why they do what they can to keep the relationship with Encura blooming.

KRIL TRADE ROUTES

Kril trade routes are often perilous to inexperienced merchants or overconfident travelers. It's much smarter to hire a guide than navigate treacherous mountain passes. Kril tribes, of course, benefit from their immense knowledge of the land. Their fees are steep, but most are willing to pay and live through the journey.

Table of Goods and Services Offered by NPC of the Region

YV'ANDA

Healing salves and potions, herbs, seasoning, saplings and plants, wild berries and other wild fruits, woodworking.

WANDERING MERCHANTS AT LAKE FROTHLOCH

Newest inventions of the Fortress, precision tools and quality materials, books, and luxury items.

WINTER TRIBES

Warmer and sturdier pelts, books and knowledge from Hyste Thelma, rare herbs, magical items of unknown origin and purpose.

KUTAURI

Weaved and leather cloth, grain, hunted game, simple weapons and armor, smiths, and farriers.

KRIL

Ore and gems, magical ingredients such as basilisk's eyes or parts of kobolds, illusions.

ENCURA

Abundance of food and weapons made from repurposed ship parts, sea jewelry, information about the world and Dragsa movements.

D12	TABLE OF RANDOM WISHES THAT ONE MIGHT READ IF THEY CHECK THE TREE
1	I wish for a basket of Whispering Willow Bark so that a salve to reduce inflammation and pain can be made for the elderly.
2	I wish for a supply of Glowing Aloe from the deep coral reefs of Murknen.
3	Mr. Flufferbutt, a faithful canine companion, has been lost in the forest near the Oldest Tree. I would very much wish for his swift return.
4	I wish to learn a new recipe so that I can bedazzle my wife with my culinary skills.
5	A Shambling Mound has been spotted northwest of the Glade. I wish for it to be stopped before someone gets hurt or before it multiplies and becomes an even bigger problem!
6	I wish for a stroke of genius or artistic inspiration for my next painting. Come and pose for me and I'll be sure to show my gratitude!
7	Neigh-borhood Bar looks for a bard to entertain guests with songs and stories.
8	Our scouts spotted a family of owlbears near the river. It's apparent that the adult is injured and in need of help. I wish for someone to help them.
9	A substitute teacher is needed for a day. All well-mannered and patient souls will be welcomed.
10	My son, Corwin, has run away to join Harrat Wing. Please return him to me before the consequences of his foolishness catch up to him!
11	A farmhand needed to fill a temporary shortage. Help us with planting and tending to animals.
12	I wish more of you fought for the freedom of the beastkin! Join Harrat Wing! Destroy the enemy and free your brothers and sisters from slavery.

Most Known Places

I've traveled for most of my life and I must admit, a well-drawn map and a good sense of where you're going is the most vital information for any adventurers. If you were to look at Banewood Asylum in any of Dregsa's atlases, you wouldn't find the details that I share with you freely. Make use of my generosity and beware—bad luck waits for those who do not plan for it.

THE OLDEST TREE

The Oldest Tree in Banewood grows in a northern clearing, amidst ancient oaks and elms. Yv'anda call it Eldraithar, Kutauri— The Great Spirit, but its true name is known only to Chaos and Order. Only those who have proven their worth to the Yv'anda are free to enter the clearing and approach the tree; all intruders are met with the swift wrath of scorned Dryads and centaurs.

At the core of its trunk, Chaos guided by its companion, etched runes and symbols that to this day remain untranslated. Yv'anda believe that the truth of the world and all being, the path to godhood, is carved into the bark of Eldraithar and that one day, a being capable of reading them will ascend. They also fear that Anara wants this knowledge and power for herself.

THE EASTERN BORDER

The terrains around the border between Banewood and Truncatop Mountain Range are where most of the Kril have made their rookeries. Life under the majestic mountains, looming over the edges of the forest is beset with countless challenges. The Kril have long learned how to deal with kobolds, basilisks, and on occasion, even a dragon wyrmling. Yet, to this age, humans remain their greatest enemies, for the Fortress still seeks to mine the Truncatop for its riches.

If your players are looking for a challenge and want to test their mettle, look no further than the mountains. It's the perfect location to place a dungeon in, as well as some old ruins full of forgotten enemies of times long past.

Those who foolishly decide to enter Banewood from the east will soon realize the dangers and hardship of this wild, untamed domain. The best amongst the Kril can predict the capricious temperament of the weather, for the skies often unleash torrents of rain, only to blast it with deceptively warm sunrays in the next moment. These torrential downpours swell the streams and create treacherous mud pits, which the Kril are all too willing to use as traps. Perhaps you've been to Woodhaven and heard that something isn't "worth losing

your legs in the mud for” or that someone is stupidly “chasing gold into a pit.”

Yet, as if the fury of the heavens were not enough to dissuade you from seeking Kril, the biting gusts of the mountain winds descend at night with their icy breath. Many a corpse has been found in the morning sun, and those unfortunate enough to pass in such a way are said to be “kissed by the wind.” Any life that endures here is shaped by a fierce determination and a deep-rooted understanding of the dangers of these lands. I suggest you never stray away from a friendly Kril who takes pity on you.

WINTER TERRITORIES

These are nomadic clans of liberated beastkin that explore the Wild North of Kallonia. They venture deep into the northern tundra, but very rarely speak of what they find there. In the winter, they move south, near Forthloch, to trade animal pelts and rare herbs for tools, clothes, and spice. Not much is known about their culture or hierarchy, but those who have dealt with Winter Tribes know that the only rule out there is survival of the fittest. In the early spring, the Winter Tribes begin their migration north. Some of them reach the Herenyakal Range and trade with Hyste Talma, though the journey there is arduous and oftentimes, deadly.

Harrat Wing and the Winter Tribes have an agreement to provide aid. The Kutauri will continue to liberate not only centaurs, but any beastkin that can think for themselves, and the Tribes will accept all the refugees that do not fit among the Kutauri. There are rumors that humans who betrayed Anara can disappear there and not even the Queen will be able to find them.

LAKE FROTHLOCH

This is the connection between Banewood and the rest of the country. It connects three rivers: Avaloria and its distributary from the north; Silvermoon from the southern parts of Turnealop Mountains; and Froth, which joins the lake and the Murknen Sea.

Over the centuries, the lake was a point of congestion between the Fortress of Dragsa and Banewood. Seven years ago, Harrat Wing under the leadership of the Red Lye, managed to take control of the region. They’ve taken over an old fort, built by enslaved beastkin as Dragsa’s foothold, and named it Medi’s Will. Nowadays, it’s the only official base of operation connected directly to the Harrat Wing. The village built around the fort is inhabited the Yv’anda, Kutauri, Medusas, and Kril, all working to support the cause. It’s a hub of trade and military innovation, as well as a truly astonishing mix of cultures.

Last year, a shrine dedicated to Medi was built on the only island on Forthloch and a magical relic, a bone of Medi,

The Sacrifice

Observers still diligently follow their ancient traditions, among which is the Sacrifice. Yv’anda who witnessed historical events or have gathered knowledge or secrets that are best left buried under the Tree, give up their memories—and themselves. I do not know the exact words of the ritual, for I have only heard of it in passing, but the Sacrifice’s face etches itself into the bark of the Tree at the end of the ceremony. The Yv’anda then gather around them and sing until the morning. The Sacrifice wakes with the first rays of sunshine, a blank slate, open to experiencing the world for the first time.

It is said that to access the knowledge guarded by the Sacrifice, one has to, pardon the pun, face them first.

was buried there. A giant statue of the centaur keeps watch over the lake, protecting it from Anara’s cruelty. It is said though, that Red Lye hid something in the catacombs, along with the relic.

The village near the lake might be a well-protected fort, but the same cannot be said about its surrounding area. As always, when there’s opulence or even a chance at gain, there are those creatures who won’t hesitate to benefit from other’s weaknesses. It’s common to find goblins, kobolds, or simply thieves and bandits waiting in ambush for unsuspecting merchants.

KRIL ROOKERIES

The two best known rookeries of Kril are The Rock Where Sygil Lost His Beads and The Meadow That Shielded Marakhai From The Wind. Though to the scholars of Dragsa, the simple traditions of including the story of a place through its name might seem childish or even ridiculous at times, it serves the Kril well. Behind the name of each rookery, there’s a story and a lesson.

The Kril that live in The Rock Where Sygil Lost His Beads will look around themselves thrice every time they drop something in hopes of never repeating their ancestor’s mistake. If you’re lucky enough, they might even tell you the whole story of how that poor bird wallowed in self-pity for nearly a century. Though, if they call you “as blind as Sygil”, you might reconsider your life choices or invest in a pair of glasses.

Dangerous Weather Conditions

TORRENTIAL RAINSTORMS

The heavens weep uncontrollably, as relentless torrents of rain descend with an unyielding fury. The world blurs into a watery haze, obscuring distant horizons and muffling sounds beneath the incessant drumming. Roads transform into treacherous rivers, and once-parched fields become a sea of mud. Seeking shelter becomes an instinct, as the deluge tests the resilience of both nature and those who dare to venture within its watery embrace.

- heavy rain reduces visibility—disadvantage on ranged attacks and perception checks
- the ground becomes slippery, requiring DC 12 Dexterity ST when moving quickly to avoid falling prone
- open flames are extinguished instantly
- higher chance of a mudslide



FOGGY MISTS

Ethereal tendrils of mist unfurl like ghostly fingers, weaving a shroud that veils the land in mystery. Visibility shrinks to a mere whisper, leaving behind a realm of soft edges and uncertainty. Familiar landmarks become elusive specters, and distant sounds are swallowed by the enigmatic embrace. Each step into the mist is a tentative journey into the unknown, where enemies lie hidden and the ordinary world fades into a realm of nightmares.

- thick fog reduces visibility—disadvantage on ranged attacks and perception checks
- creatures more than 20 ft. away are considered heavily obscured
- movement speed reduced by half
- perfect conditions for a Kril ambush

HAILSTORMS

The world transforms into a battlefield as hailstones descend from the sky like icy artillery. Nature's fury hammers the earth with unrelenting force, creating a symphony of shattering glass and rattling ground. Each hailstone becomes a miniature menace, leaving dents in armor and bruises on exposed flesh. The air is filled with a chilling urgency, a dance of danger that forces all beneath to seek refuge from the tempest's frozen assault.

- hailstones pelt the area, causing not-sheltered creatures to take 1d4 bludgeoning damage at the start of their turn
- open flames are extinguished
- ranged attacks roll at a disadvantage
- perfect conditions for a basilisk to attack

HEATWAVES

The sun's merciless gaze intensifies, turning the very air into a blistering inferno. Heat waves ripple across the landscape, distorting reality and draining strength. Shadows provide only fleeting respite from the sun's scorching touch, and the ground radiates waves of oppressive warmth. Every breath feels like inhaling fire, sapping energy and blurring the line between reality and mirage. In the midst of this searing crucible, survival becomes a test of endurance as the world itself seems to wither under the relentless sun.

- intense heat saps energy; creatures must succeed on DC 12 Constitution ST or suffer 1 point of exhaustion every 1d4 hours
- heavy armor becomes uncomfortably hot and burdensome, slowing down PCs to half their movement
- if PCs don't have access to water they run a chance of hallucinating or passing out from the heat (Constitution ST DC 14)





BLIZZARD

Snowflakes dance in a relentless ballet, driven by howling winds that bite into exposed skin. Visibility is reduced to mere feet, rendering the landscape an icy labyrinth of uncertainty. Each step becomes a struggle against the biting cold, as frost forms on every surface, and air itself seems to freeze in place. In the heart of the blizzard's fury, the world becomes a frozen desolation that only the most resilient can hope to endure.

- vicious winds and snowfall obscure vision; disadvantage on Perception checks that rely on sight and hearing
- movement speed is halved
- creatures not adequately protected must make a DC 13 Constitution ST or suffer 1d6 cold damage every hour
- perfect conditions for Yeti to attack

MUDSLIDES

A deafening roar fills the air as the earth trembles beneath the weight of impending disaster. Saturated soil gives way to the relentless force of gravity, triggering a cascade of sludge and debris. Trees snap like fragile twigs, caught in the maelstrom of brown chaos. The surging mudslide engulfs all in its path, leaving behind a desolate landscape of destruction.

Small Mudslide

At its deepest, the soil reaches up to 1m. Creatures must succeed on a DC 12 Strength ST to avoid being restrained by the mud. Movement is halved.

Mudslide

At its deepest, the soil reaches up to 3m. DC rises to 14.

Greater Mudslide

At its deepest, the soil reaches up to 5m. DC rises to 18

Inhabitants of The Meadow That Shielded Marakhai From The Wind are the most peaceful and most numerous group of Kril. They rarely wander beyond the protection of the trees and rocky hills that shield them from the harsh elements. It's there that you might encounter the Ancient Krils and seek their infinite wisdom. But it might be worth remembering that Marakhai's story ended in tragedy.

Rookeries aren't as sophisticated as the dwellings of Dryads or Kutauri, mostly due to the scarcity of resources. Their wooden houses are smaller and usually tucked in between rocks or trees. One might not even notice that they've entered a rookery, partially due to the clever disguises and partially to the inherent magic of illusion that these bird-folks wield with such proficiency.

HARRAT WING'S CAMPS

These are hidden at the edges of the forest, skirting the line of magical protection. They move constantly, never staying in the same place for more than a fortnight. Most of them guard the border with Woodhaven and the Kril, but Harrat Wing patrols the eastern and southern edges of Banewood with all due diligence.

The camps are masterfully designed to blend with the environment, camouflaged beneath the canopies of ancient trees or hidden within the caves of Turnealop. Simple wooden structures are easy to fold and transport, and the members of Harrat Wing carry all of their belongings in small bags.

Each outpost has a Kutauri leader to follow and an Yv'anda healer, should anything happen. The number of scouts and warriors vary, but Harrat Wing usually sends around a dozen of capable centaurs to each camp. The leaders communicate with each other by sending stones, enchanted by Yv'anda Volunteers. As a safety measure, the outposts are never farther than a day's ride from each other.

RUINS OF URMUZ

These are located on the Island of Whalers, north of Banewood, between Encura and the Murknen Gulf. Centuries ago, when Astrid, daughter of Bane, honed her ship-crafting and seafaring skills, she led the best seamen and fishers through the woods and to the island. A small settlement was soon built and named Urmuz, after the name of the first great whale hunted by Astrid. After her death, the settlement was abandoned by humans, but the Yv'anda consider the place cursed. To dissuade people from taking



the island, the Dryads placed a protective spell around it, obscuring it from view by thick, stifling fog. Some say that before the Sirens left these lands, they pushed rocks upwards and created deadly whirlpools, making it nearly impossible to access by boat. But Dryads never confirmed it, and Encurans who ventured there below the island's water in the vain hope of looking for the lost Sirens only met their end.

Nowadays, there's very little left of the buildings and structures built for the whalers. All that's escaped the decaying touch of time are the bones of gigantic whales, used to decorate the island, the biggest belonging to Urmuz. It is there, in the center of the village, where Astrid placed her throne, amid the remnants of whales, dolphins, and narwhals. Among them, one can supposedly see the skeletons of slain Sirens. But the bones are so mixed that it is hard to say for sure. The legend says that if anyone dares to put on the crown of pearls she had fashioned for herself, they'd be cursed to her fate and yearn only for power.

Unbeknownst to Yv'anda and Harras, the Ruins have been recently repurposed. Harrat Wing discovered a secret underground tunnel, dug as an escape route when Astrid grew paranoid. Expanding on the infrastructure, Harrat Wing uses the system of natural caves as their base and prison. Humans captured during their raids are kept there, tortured for information or put to grueling work.

BANE'S GLADE

This area lies near the southern edge of the forest, sheltered by oaks, maples, birches, and poplars. There, untouched by time, sits the hut Bane built, with the blessing of the Yv'anda. The simple, wooden structure doesn't serve as a house now, but rather a temple where Kutauri place their offerings in thanks for the protection and peacefulness of the glade. If you ever find your way there, be sure to show proper respect and offer a trinket or a kind word at the unconventional shrine.

The settlement consists of tents made of animal hides and pelts, high and spacious to accommodate the size of Kutauri. The placement of the lodges isn't random; they spiral from the center of the glade and branch out in all directions, those Kutauri that live near the outskirts are usually the most able ones—men and women in their prime, capable hunters, foragers and even warriors. Children, mothers and elderly populate the heart of the camp. Though Kutauri and Yv'anda are the vast majority, the Glade offers shelter to all races—sans humans.

The inhabitants of Bane's Glade remain steadfast in their wish for peace. The Kutauri who live there call themselves Harras and focus on cultivating their culture, learning, and connecting with the Yv'anda and other creatures native to the forest. This is always a point of contention, as any Kutauri belonging to the violent Harrat Wing criticize the pacifistic, complacent nature of their kin and vice versa. Yet, the

existence of the Glade is what allows Harrat Wing to operate without worrying about their children and elderly, or about food supplies.

Meditation Circle

Smaller meditation circles tend to spontaneously pop up here and there, but there's one in the Glade that's a regular meeting spot for elderly Kutauri. If you're in need of guidance, take a moment to visit and ponder the meaning of life.

Public Campfire

There are two public campfires in the Glade. Anyone is welcome to the flames and the food. Some of the inhabitants choose to stay there for most of the nights when the weather isn't too chilly. During the evenings, Kutauri and Yv'anda share stories of old.

The Weavers

This is a group of very colorful tents, full of tapestries, blankets, rugs, and other carefully woven clothes. The Weavers, if needed, will enchant any piece of clothing and if you have time and patience, maybe even teach you a trick or two.

Stargazing Spot

This is the best spot in the whole clearing, away from other people and with an excellent view of the sky. If you find yourself unable to sleep, perhaps the stars will calm your mind and soul.

Hunger's Lodge

This is a hut at the edge of the spiral, close to the woods, where most of the hunted game is taken to be butchered and prepared to distribute around the Glade. Most of the hunters set up their tents in the vicinity, for convenience's sake.

School

Situated toward the center of the spiral, the school is made up of a set of big tents, where most of the younger Kutauri and even a few Yv'anda spend their days learning. It's always loud, full of kids running every which way, and, well, chaos.

Race Track

Hidden among the trees and secretly passing through parts of the spiral is the Race Track. You might spot blue arrows, painted here or there, indicating the path, but the adrenaline-seeking youth of the Glade makes sure to change it regularly. If you think you're fast—test your mettle against four-legged Kutauri.

Public Tents

These are located at the very end of the spiral, set aside for guests and newcomers, who'd need a moment to adjust

to the life of the Glade. These tents are very basic and belong to the whole community. A designated custodian keeps a careful eye on who comes and who goes.

Neigh-borhood Bar

In the middle of the spiral, you'll find your Neigh-borhood Bar, where you can drink and eat your fill. There's no charge for the first couple of rounds, but those who are regular patrons usually find smaller ways to help the owner keep the place up.

The Trotting Tankard

Set next to the Public Tents, The Trotting Tankard is a much darker establishment. Freshly-freed Kutauri, who haven't yet learned how to deal with their trauma, often pick alcohol as their anchor. The ale in this bar is cheap and of low percentage, and the company is mostly miserable.

Yv'anda's Shrine

One of the oldest structures at the Glade, the shrine is a place of devotion. Yv'anda pray there several times a day and even the youngest of the children are taught to respect its sanctity. The shrine holds a sapling of the Oldest Tree, the only one freely given.

Sweating Lodge

Visiting a sweating lodge is a ritual of passage; those plagued by their demons seek out the ceremony and after it is finished, they never return the same. Be warned, though, those who lie to the spirits do not return at all.

Fields

The Glade's main export resource is the crops they grow around the main settlement. It's mostly wheat, but you can also find cotton. Between these, you can find wild gardens, where vegetables such as potatoes, tomatoes, and carrots are left to grow. The Yv'anda's blessings allow the food to grow safe from infestation.

Culture and Traditions

A detailed map might be an adventurer's best friend, but it won't help you get out of hot water when interacting with the inhabitants of the lands you're visiting. It's always nice to know a few phrases in the local language, and to have some familiarity with what is considered acceptable behavior. Of course, if you have keen eyes and a sharp mind, you'll be able to deduce all of that on your own, but why do the work that's already been done? Here, take a look at the cultures of Banewood Asylum.

KUTAURI

Name Giving

This is the first tradition that the freed Kutauri established. Medi was the first to be given a name—The Father of the Free Kutauri—and also the first to reject it and take another—The Wrath of the Beast. Nowadays, Name Giving is a rite of passage and a milestone for every centaur. Usually, the ceremony takes place on the birthday of the recipient, to mark their crossing into adulthood. Age, however, is not a requirement. Instead, to be given a Name Kutauri have to:

- have a passion
- have a mastery of a skill
- have a strong spirit

The Name is given by the oldest relative or guardian of the centaur, and oftentimes the names chosen can be fully comprehended only by those closest to them. There are, however, notable exceptions, like Lakota, The Talking Raccoon. However, her story is better told over good beer and in the company of friends.

Of course, Harrat Wing has its own, twisted version of Name Giving. A Kutauri has a right to a name only when they shed the blood of the slavers.

Meditation Circles

If you allow your nose to lead you through Bane's Glade, it'll surely take you near the center of the spiral, to a tent filled to the brim with burning sage. Most of the elderly Kutauri dedicate their days to meditation and careful contemplation of life there. Much like Yv'anda, they tend to watch the world around them and usually know everything about the ins and outs of Banewood Asylum. They congregate around one of the lodges, outfitted with pillows and blankets, to provide as much comfort for their tired body as they can afford. If you wish to see the colors of the wind or hear the whispers of forest critters, sit next to a meditating Kutauri and ask them to guide you through the veil of reality and onto a profound, spiritual journey.

If you attempt to gain insight of a spiritual nature, roll for Religion. Hitting DC 13 is a success. However, if your PCs have a spiritual guide (Ahiga, The Sleeping Sage, or other proficient NPC) to teach them, you can settle the matter through narration. Each true vision starts with a spiritual animal leading the characters towards the scene.

Storytelling

Every evening after supper, the youngest Kutauri are ushered in front of Bane's Hut, around a campfire. Adults come and share their wisdom through stories, passing down generational knowledge and teaching their children about morality and heritage.

Spiritual Animals

ANTELOPE

For visions about survival against all odds, willingness to sacrifice oneself, or protectiveness.

BAT

For visions dealing with illusions, journeys, and rebirth.

COUGAR

For visions granting foresight, sensing danger, or testing loyalty.

CROW

For visions about magical items or places, change, and higher perspective.

GRASSHOPPER

For visions of good luck, creativity, and gaining wealth.

OWL

For visions of ancient wisdom, messages from the beyond, and secrets.

When the sun fully sets and the kids are sent to their beds, the campfire is a safe haven for those who can't find rest at night. Especially those bearing the marks of slavery find solace in the flames and comfort in the quiet companionship of their kin. Fears and doubts are traded for gentle assurance and hope. Every now and then, an Observer will ask to listen to a memory to immortalize it.

Weaving

Carpenters, craftsmen, and workers live in the middle of the spiral and their daily life focuses on the same routine. Amongst fishermen, smiths, farriers, potters, and cooks, the most vivid lodge belongs to the weavers. Their tent stands out, with just as much color as was used to craft it—and if one looks closely, a story of Medi of the Free Kutauri is weaved into the fine material.

Taught by the Yv'anda, some of the Kutauri practice magical weaving. In exchange for fulfilling Wishes, they'll weave protective magic into a garment of your choice, giving it +1 to AC.

Stargazing

The Yv'anda love to stare at the night sky and regardless of the divide amongst them, still meet to do just that. The Dryads lie on the grass and look at the stars as if all the truth of the world was written there. Sometimes, they'll share their wisdom with those who are willing to listen.

If you spend the night stargazing with Yv'anda, you'll get a chance to become their friend. Though they're wary of humans and unwilling to share secrets, they'll provide you with a chance to prove yourself.

Dance-off charades

Though Kutauri abhor hazard and gambling, the young centaurs have found a way to circumvent the rules of the elderly to have some fun. If you want to quickly gain wealth at the Glade, you might try to challenge youngsters to a dance-off charade. Two teams face each other, in every round one member of the team draws an animal tile and then comes forward. To the sound of rhythmic thumping and clapping, they need to dance like the animal on the tile. The teams will alternate in their guesses and if they get the animal correctly, they score a point. The team that gets 5 points first, wins.

RULES

You cannot make any sounds. You cannot stop dancing when you're performing. You cannot cheat.

The chosen PC rolls for performance. If they hit DC of the tile, they might give their team a description of the dance that actually resembles the behavior of the animal. If they roll

D12	DC	CHARADES DANCES RANDOM TABLE
1	12	Frog bringing luck
2	12	Squirrel protecting its nuts
3	12	Snake seducing a crow
4	13	Rooster that lost its voice
5	13	Peacock with depression
6	13	Mouse trying to sneak past a cat
7	14	Spider frustrated by centaurs destroying its net
8	14	Monkey in love
9	14	Salmon fighting the fisherman
10	15	Woodpecker composing a song
11	15	Beaver building a dam
12	16	Horse mistaking a Kutauri for its mother

The Ritual

Liwanu, Joyful Rain, leads the sweat lodge and performs the purifying ceremony. She's the one to diligently heat the stones and prepare herbal incense, as well as initiate the chant. Every willing participant must shed their clothes, bathe in the cold water of a spring, and walk into the hut with head bowed low and shoulders hunched. Liwanu sits outside the lodge and leads the participants through the experience.

lower, the team is unable to guess and the point goes to the Kutauri.

Betting: to the winner go the spoils. However, Kutauri very rarely deal with coin. Instead, they'll bet with tools, food, small favors, or trinkets.

Sweat Lodge

Being allowed entrance to the sweat lodge is a sign of great trust for the Kutauri. The door of the hut faces southwest, the direction of the Fortress, but the exit is turned toward the heart of the Glade. Those who enter, accompanied by their demons, leave pure and ready to join the community.

After each repetition of the chant, the participants must renounce their demons. They voice their fears and regrets and allow the heat to purge the darkness. If the PCs are honest and succeed on a DC 12 Religion skill check, all previously acquired curses are lifted and injuries healed. If the PCs are dishonest, they need to succeed on the DC 15 deception skill check. If they fail, they'll be forever banned from any Kutauri settlement.

The chant:

*Great spirits of old, hear my plea
protect this vessel, set my spirit free.*

KRIL

Spirituality

Spirituality is a part of their culture. The bird-folk tend to temples and shrines pressed between the rocks of Truncatop mountains with diligence and single-minded determination. It is said that those who make the pilgrimage to the Owls Peak—a most treacherous and arduous journey—and back will have earned the title of a sage. The Kril pray through their illusions, visualizing their gratitude and hopes, sharing their innermost thoughts with the Gods and the spirit world.

Illusions

The Kril love their magic and show it off as often as they can. Usually, it results in trickery and mischief, but Kril are quite imaginative. Oftentimes, when traveling or passing the time, they'll sit around a campfire and share intricate illusions. Those who can create the most intriguing, creative, or astonishing mirage, gain popularity and respect. If you want to get some information out of a Kril, offer to show them parts of the world they've never been to before. I'm quite sure that they'll be eager to add the illusion to their repertoire.

YV'ANDA

Winter and summer solstice

These are the two dates that hold the most importance to the Dryads. All Yv'anda, no matter their faction, gather twice a year in the Clearing of the Oldest Tree to pray to the Gods. These days and nights are some of the most magical in Banewood, for the veil between planes is the thinnest and the power of the Gods seeps through the branches of the Tree. During the day, Yv'anda fast and meditate, share memories with each other, and contemplate their purpose—something that has recently brought much discord into their community. At night, they conjure lights to rise above the treetops and float towards the moon.

Forest, Plants and Animals

Apart from the settlements and peculiar locations, the major part of Banewood Asylum is simply a forest. I say "simply," but really, any adventurer knows to never underestimate nature around you. What might look like an easy path, could quickly turn deadly. To prepare you a little bit, I've compiled what I know of the woods.

DIFFICULT TO NAVIGATE

Beneath the trees, among ferns and moss blankets, the forest floor conceals footprints with ease. If you need to lose your trail, it might prove to be an invaluable aid, but one would be wise to remember—the forest will hide you as well as your enemies. Lithe deer tread softly, while nimble foxes dart through the undergrowth. Melodic trills of songbirds echo from the treetops, but you can never be sure if it's not Harrat Wing watching you.

If your PCs are tracking someone in Banewood Asylum, they have a disadvantage on survival and investigation checks, unless they're Rangers with favored terrain. If there's an inhabitant of the forest with them—either Yv'anda or Kutauri—they can grant the PCs an advantage.





ENCURA

“Gods are nowhere. Gods are everywhere.”

Selene's Followers

Encura is a nation that has captured the imagination of many with its rich history and unique way of life. Known as a nation of marine beastkin, they proudly rebelled against the oppressive rule of Dragsa and carved out their own destiny. Located on the coastal islands of the western part of the Kallonia continent, Encura is a partially submerged country, where the merfolk thrive in the damp climate. The beastkin inhabitants have adapted to the aquatic environment, as well thriving alongside the diverse marine creatures that call this place home.

Initially starting as a humble city-state, Encura has since expanded its reach by establishing smaller villages on the surrounding islands, creating a network of interconnected communities. What truly sets Encura apart is its remarkable geography. The capital and other settlements are situated on nearly submerged islands, with only the peaks of these landmasses peeking above the water's surface. This extraordinary environment presents an awe-inspiring sight, as the nation seems to emerge gracefully from the depths of the sea.

Short History

REBELLION STARTS IN ONE'S HEART

Like many stories throughout the annals of history, this one starts with a single child.

She belonged to the first generation of the race called slithers, born to elves forever altered by the magic of the Roots of Life. Her mother chose to end her own life when the child was just an infant. Maybe the transformation was too overwhelming. Maybe life under Dragsa was unbearable. Or maybe it was her final act of defiance against Dragsa's tyranny. Maybe all of it. It was not an uncommon story at the time, as many elves were unable to accept what Dragsa did to them. It's a sentiment I find entirely understandable—I doubt I would have embraced it any differently. That was no mere shift in look, but a twisted corruption of their very essence and soul. Some were even driven mad by it, taking not only their own lives, but their children's, as well.

To deal with the issue of the rising number of orphans, the mages from Dragsa devised a controversial solution: they decided to use "leftover" elven captives who were deemed too old for physical labor or experiments. Thus, grand sages were reduced to mere nannies. Buildings that were given to them were jokingly called "nurseries." Selene, along with four other children, was entrusted to the care of a pair of elves—Lasheal Enobril and Gaweyr Rash. Her mother did not leave her anything, not even a name. So the responsibility fell to them. They chose "Selene Ö Nen," a name inspired by a goddess of the moon from a distant land.

When she grew older, they told her that it came to them when they first laid their eyes upon these changed children. Turquoise scales that gleamed in the light, delicately pink webbing between fingers and tail. A sight, unlike any creature. And no trace of elvishness. As they cried over how little remained of the noble elves' blood in them, Selene tugged at one of their robes and met their eyes. In her gaze they saw a sense of pride, strength, and determination. Her soul still emanated the essence of her heritage. She was akin to the moon, distinct from the sun in every way, yet radiating a brilliant and captivating light when the sun cannot. That was when they decided to take on the role of nurturing these children—to preserve the purity of their souls.

Lasheal Enobril was a former sage and possessed an extensive wealth of knowledge about magic and history. She shared with Selene elven legends, ancient myths, and timeless poems. Night after night, Lasheal sang to the children tales of the noble sirens who graced the waters of Deuslair long before the avarice of humans drove them away. On the other

hand, Gaweyr Rash, an elderly elven warrior whose prime had passed, might have been unable to directly challenge the might of Dragsa, but her skills were far from rusty. From her foster siblings, Elion Cuendel learned about it with his own skin. Though later he became her best pupil as she taught them combat and strategy, passing down tactics known only to the elves from a time of past glory. Selene showed an insatiable thirst for knowledge, eagerly absorbing everything she could about the world around her.

As Lasheal and Gaweyr poured their wisdom, experiences, and love into nurturing Selene, they unknowingly shaped the course of her destiny. Under their watchful gaze, Selene's potential began to bloom and as she grew older, the world around her began to change. Dragsa's mages created something akin to a military academy for merfolk, where children underwent rigorous training. This served two purposes—developing capable soldiers and purging unwanted individuals. Those deemed unfit were condemned by Dragsa "for the good of the new race."

At the same time, tensions between Dragsa and the Hyste Talma's forces were escalating. Around the time Selene was a teenager, the declaration of war resonated through the elven communities, igniting a mixture of fear and hope. As Dragsa had anticipated, naval battles became more common, and merfolk involvement evolved from mere observation to active participation. Selene found herself drawn into this escalating conflict. Through her bravery and strategic prowess, she ascended the ranks of the army. From her patchwork family, Elion Cuendel showed even more promise as he single-handedly tipped the scales of a few battles. They both demonstrated leadership and tactical brilliance, earning the recognition of Dragsa's officers. Soon, they were sought after for their strategic insights and asked to design entire battle plans.

With growing respect, Selene began to earn more. Better quarters and presents were bestowed upon her and her foster family. She was overjoyed, making every effort to prove her worth while Elion fought braver than anyone. Yet each time she brought more food to the tables than usual or Elion shared a new battle story, they were only met with distant stares. The house, once full of songs, now echoed with Selene's frustrated cries and the silence of the nursemaids. She did not understand why. But then again, she was very young.

In the midst of Selene's battles, Dragsa captured even more elves and dwarves. All of them were transported to laboratories that were built below the Fortress of Dragsa, even before any work on the walls had begun. In one of the transports, Elion Cuendel took pity on a young dwarven woman who was pregnant. He tried to sneak her out of the prisoners' convoy but was apprehended. Selene naively pleaded with the officers who commended her battle plans and showered her with so many gifts in the past. However,

Slang and Idioms

“The Gift of Freedom is wasted on you”

This means that someone's choices are wrong, or just a more polite way to call them stupid. It is referring to the core laws and beliefs of Encura.

“Dragsa Blood runs deep in you”

This is used when you call someone a traitor, but it can also be used as an insult to provoke someone.

“The Forgotten” and “Scrap”

These two terms are used for people who left or were banished from their Shoals and are no longer under Encura protection. The first term is an official name for them while, the latter is an insult, as they are equal to the discarded remains of a fish that serve no purpose.

“Your voice will be heard”

This is a more official way of saying that someone will not be forgotten or that their duty will be carried out by others. Usually said to dying, sick or very injured people.

“You kelp” and “Nothing gets inside your shell”

These are two cheerful ways of saying that someone made a stupid mistake or is not very smart.

“Share your waters”

This can be translated as “sit with me and tell me what's new in your life.” It is used both when meeting old friends or meeting new people from afar.

“Dwarves would be proud”

This is used when someone makes a really good deal, usually by shrewdly selling something. For some reason, Encura citizens see dwarves as the best merchants in the world.

“Outsider” and “Dead Wood”

These two terms are used for anyone who is not a citizen of Encura. The first one is pretty polite and commonly used, while the latter is a derogatory nickname. It comes from the fact that many slithers mockingly say that drowned people look like dead wood floating on the surface of the water.

“Never row over a slither”

This term is used only toward outsiders. It roughly means that you should not try to trick anyone from Encura.



despite the accomplishments attributed to both of them, as well as all the efforts they exerted, her pleas only earned laughs and curious stares. Then came the decision of punishment. Death. Seeing all of her frantic efforts to save someone who opposed Dragsa, the officers decided to give her the role of the executioner during the public execution. Should she refuse, her entire makeshift family would be labeled traitors, and they would all suffer the same punishment. Selene found herself facing a horrifying dilemma. Summoning all her resolve, she made the excruciating choice. To end the life of her own family member.

This traumatic event would haunt her for years to come. Yet it was also a turning point in her path. No matter what she did, how much praise she garnered, or benefits she earned, she would never be regarded as their equal. In their eyes, she was naught but an animal—a devoted dog. She understood her parents' empty stares.

The turmoil in her heart crystallized into a single desire. The desire to break free.

AGAINST THE CURRENT

As Selene grieved the loss of her family, a plan began to take shape in her mind. She understood that confronting Dragsa head-on would be futile, if not suicidal. However, she was no ordinary soldier. In her grasp were the strategic prowess and historical knowledge of the elves. Furthermore, after demonstrating her “loyalty” to Dragsa, she was promoted—a gift that must have felt like a sick joke to her. But this promotion gave her access to information known only to higher-ranking officers. And she was determined not to waste any advantage.

She needed allies. The Redoe Alliance, of which Hyste Talma was a part, seemed to be the obvious choice. However, direct communication with them was out of the question. Even if she managed to arrange it, they would likely view it as a trap. Given how many of their kind she had sent to Dragsa's dungeons, it was hard to envision any other outcome.

However, within the classified documents, she discovered something peculiar about the dwindling numbers of Medusas deployed on the frontlines. According to rumors, it seemed that the inland battles had been progressing positively for years, leading the Queen to opt for a gradual withdrawal of Medusas, reserving them only for the most critical situations. But it was all a fabrication. The truth was that they had rebelled in the very same year when the kingdom of Hyste Talma had declared war on Dragsa. It was impossible to dismiss this as a mere coincidence.

And so, she had her first target: the reclusive and mysterious Medusas of Kallonia. Rumors were whispered of their arcane powers of illusion and their tendency to avoid interaction

with crowds. On top of that, she needed to contact them under the nose of Dragsan officers. Yet, Selene knew they were her best shot at finding an intermediary to Hyste Talma. With determination coldly burning in her eyes, she embarked on a treacherous journey to locate the Medusas and seek their alliance. After a few fruitless years, she finally made contact with one of them in a port city where her platoon was stationed. Initially reluctant, they started to treat her more seriously after Selene shared her own story and spoke of the atrocities committed by Dragsa. The suffering of their people was one thing they undoubtedly shared. After hearing her plan, they agreed to join the cause.

With the Medusas' pledge of support, Selene's next step was to contact the Dwarves of the Redoe Alliance. After careful planning, she managed to arrange a meeting with one of their leaders—Brandur Rockhustle, an ancestor of Tidor, who currently serves as the chieftain of the Redoe Alliance's attacking forces. She shared her vision of overthrowing their common oppressor and reclaiming the freedom of their people. The negotiations were not easy, but the dwarves eventually agreed to lend their aid.

Together, they began crafting plans. The merfolk's most significant advantage undoubtedly lies in their mobility at sea. However, even they would eventually fall prey to Dragsa's naval forces with enough time. To counter this, they needed to cripple Dragsa's naval power for years. As sharing these plans with all merfolk could be disastrous, they had to gather scattered forces in one location. The final piece of the puzzle involved securing a safe passage for the younger generation of merfolk—especially those from nurseries like the one in which Selene's foster parents were raising another group of children. At the same time, the dwarves' involvement was not entirely altruistic here—they aimed to deliver a decisive blow to Dragsa's supremacy with this battle.

As the rebellion's momentum grew, Selene found herself at the helm of a diverse coalition—merfolk, medusas, and dwarves united by a shared purpose. They meticulously crafted their assault, exploiting Dragsa's overconfidence and enticing their ships into a carefully devised trap. Dwarves would craft intricate naval traps while aquatic beastkin would guide Dragsa's vessels into these traps. The medusas' role would be to provide support through their illusion magic, to both create confusion on ships and secure safe passage for the children from nurseries.

After years of meticulous preparation, the long-awaited day finally arrived. Beneath gathering storm clouds, the dwarven fleet assembled near the shores of the fortress of Dragsa, which was still under construction. In response, Dragsa gathered their scattered merfolk and ship forces from various fronts. Selene's heart raced as she observed from her vantage point atop the rocky cliffs. The Medusas' magic marked

the start of the operation, engulfing the ships in dense fog. The merfolk divided into two groups—the first spreading the word of the revolution among all, while the second, under Selene's command, swam towards the Dragsan ships. Then under the pretense of navigating them in these conditions, they were lured directly above the traps. In the distance, fires burst from nurseries—an illusion woven by the medusas to veil the escape. At the same time, it signaled the second phase of the plan. The merfolk swiftly plunged into the sea, as the masterful creations of the dwarves unleashed devastating salvos. As the magical fog dissipated, the coalition beheld a sea speckled with floating wrecks—or so they anticipated. Some vessels remained unscathed, and protective barriers shone from below the water's surface. Upon these ships, merfolk were seen talking with the army officers.

In her quest for freedom, Selene never imagined that some merfolk would choose Dragsa over their own kind.

Selene was still naive.

What's worse, fires in the distance started to spread over the city in ways that were not included in the plan. With horrifying realization, her eyes widened as she understood—these were real flames.

What followed is known to historians as “Kins' Bloodbath.” Information about the details is obscure, as none of the sides wanted to reminisce much about that day. What is known is that merfolk fought on both sides of the conflict. Waters became crimson with all the blood spilled, while the air filled with the pungent stench of burning bodies. In the end, neither of the fleets could be called victorious. Though thanks to their mutual annihilation, Selene's goal of crippling Dragsa's naval forces was met. The same could not be said about evacuation—less than one-third of merfolk survived the onslaught and just a bit under half of the kids from the nurseries. None of the elves survived. Selene was told that her foster parents carried children from the smokes till they collapsed in their last attempt.

For Selene's Followers, nature is a grand cathedral, and every creature is like a single note in the sacred song of life. Thus all acts of kindness and stewardship toward nature are seen as acts of devotion to the divine. Similarly, finding fruits outside of season or receiving something from an unknown animal are considered to be signs of luck.

“Are your fingers cracking?”

This can be translated as “are you getting old?” or “are you not up to the task?” It refers to one of the common diseases in Encura, where calcium and other minerals slowly deposit on the skin. It usually starts with the fingers.

“Did your gill shut?” and “Don’t shut your gill”

These idioms are used when asking someone if what they just heard shocked them or telling them to not be shocked by what they will see or hear.

“May the Selene soul guide you”

This is used when you are wishing someone luck or a safe journey.

“May the water be clear and the land foggy”

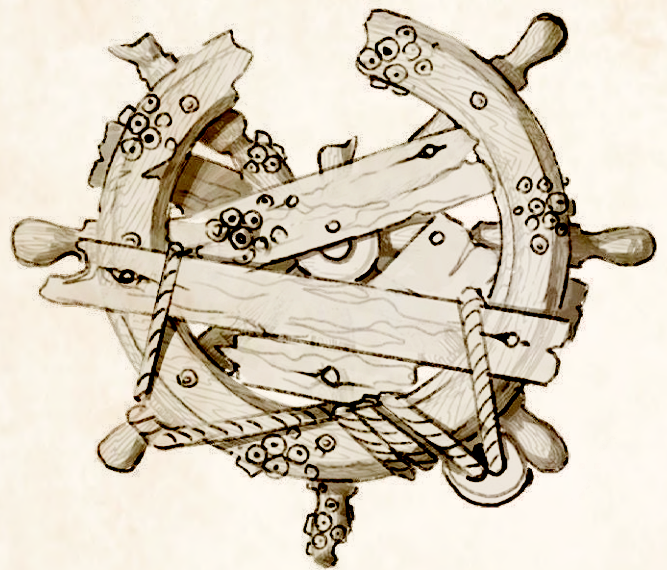
Similar to the saying before, this can be used when wishing someone good luck. Unlike the earlier term, however, it is less about one’s safety and more about success. In the past it was used more before dangerous situations or going to war, but now it is more commonly used for mundane tasks.

“Never catch shells when sharks are waiting”

This Encuran saying roughly means that you should not do something that can wait, while a more urgent matter needs your attention.

health was also deteriorating. For a few years, she had trouble with moving her muscles the same way as in the past.

On a day when scouts brought Selene promising news of newfound islands near the Kallonia shore, she decided to end this quest. She gathered her people on the shore of a nearby island and waited till the sun’s rays painted the ocean in hues of gold. With a heavy heart, Selene spoke the truth they had all come to accept. “It is time for us to shift our course,” she said with a mixture of sadness and resolve. “The true sirens, if they ever existed, remain a mystery we may never solve. But let us not despair, for our journey was not in vain. Behold our new home. Behold Encura!” When asked where the name came from, she smiled and said that she wanted to honor her deceased family. So that their spirits would remain with their people.



DRIFTING TOWARD THE FUTURE

With Dragsa’s naval dominance shattered, Selene’s reputation as a valiant leader only grew stronger. While it was never formalized, she was treated as the leader of the whole nation. Only her three remaining siblings still treated her in the same way as they did in the past. Under Selene’s guidance, they embarked on a journey to find their new home. They started with the search for the elusive true sirens. While they proudly called themselves merfolk, according to whispered elven nursemaid tales somewhere in the vast ocean, these beings still existed. Selene was unsure about their credibility, but she allowed it anyway—after what had happened, her people needed that glimmer of hope. And the search for a suitable place would take years. So Selene’s group journeyed through the deep waters and explored uncharted territories. Some were driven by the belief that they would uncover the truth behind the legends, some with the hope of bringing a new era of prosperity for their kind. However, as the years passed and their quest continued, doubts began to creep into their minds. Wherever they swam, there were no signs of such a being and potential clues often lead to dead ends. As the years turned into decades, the realization dawned that perhaps the sirens were nothing more than a beautiful myth. Selene’s

Soon the island’s shores and shallow waters started to buzz with construction and people’s everyday lives. Meanwhile, Selene settled down in small quarters on the outskirts. Her health was not getting better and her skin started to fill with white patches resembling stones. Making any movements started to become painful for her. When she was barely able to speak, Selene summoned her three remaining siblings. She felt her end was near and asked them to protect her people, to provide for all their needs and craft a better future together. They divided tasks between themselves, which later gave rise to the Four Shoals.

After that, Selene remained in her quarters with a few caretakers. Many merfolk visited her during these last days, sharing stories with her about newly created homes, visions of happy children floating among vibrant fish’ shoals, or their own worries. She listened to them all and gave them advice. When she became unable to speak, her caretakers took that role while she silently listened—until her last breath.

Though Selene never witnessed the full glory of Encura, many believe she didn’t need to. She knew what the future held.

Life Under the Water Surface

ENCURA TODAY

The beastkin inhabitants have seamlessly adapted to the aquatic lifestyle, embracing both the surface and underwater realms as their home. The coral reefs, adorned in vibrant colors, paint a mesmerizing tapestry, while schools of fish move in perfect harmony, their graceful movements captivating all who witness them. Light dances through the water, creating a spectacle of shifting hues and illuminating the depths with an ethereal glow. Encura is a place where the very fabric of nature weaves together into a breathtaking panorama, inviting you to explore the unknown and discover the hidden treasures of the sea. The surface area of Encura showcases its bustling nature with people's ports and temples. The cityscape boasts a harmonious blend of architectural marvels, combining elements of both land-based structures and designs suitable for underwater living. Ports teeming with activity provide a gateway to the nation's maritime trade and ensure their connection to the outside world. While there are some farms, carefully cultivated to harness the bounties of the land, most of the surface is still in firm grasp of nature. It is beneath the water's surface where Encura truly comes alive. As one descends into the depths, a captivating world awaits. Vast expanses of seaweed farms undulate with the gentle currents, cultivated to serve as a vital source of food and other resources. Intricate stone structures adorned with vibrant marine life form the foundation of the underwater cityscape. Since none of its citizens are obligated to stick with the ground surface, they access each building layer directly through windows or balconies. Thanks to this, towering buildings, like nothing I had seen anywhere else, rise majestically, their architecture reaching new heights—literally. The whole realm's unique culture is infused with a deep appreciation for the enchanting beauty that surrounds them.

THE WATER EMBRACE RITUAL

Life underwater in Encura is an enchanting and captivating experience that remains largely inaccessible to outsiders. While most visitors are limited to the surface, a privileged few who manage to earn the trust of the Encurans can be granted access to their sacred temples, where a truly magical ritual takes place. These hallowed ceremonies are performed in the pre-dawn hours by the revered priestesses known as "Waterbeast Summoners," a title intricately connected to one of their religious festivals that marks the end of each season. But more on that later. Let us delve deeper into the ritual of Water Embrace and the fascinating customs surrounding it.

The process of acquiring the ability to breathe underwater is not as swift or pleasant as one might imagine. It is a meticulously orchestrated affair, carried out with great care and precision. Yet, amidst the intricacies of the ritual, there is an undeniable sense of festivity. Picture yourself surrounded by the marine beastkin, their mystical presence accentuated by the aromatic marine herbs they employ during the ceremony. The air is thick with anticipation and excitement, and a profound sense of reverence pervades the atmosphere. As the ritual unfolds, time seems to elongate, stretching out into a realm of suspended anticipation. The priestesses guide the participants through ancient chants and elaborate gestures, invoking the very essence of the deep sea. The ambient light dims, giving way to a subtle luminescence that emanates from the enchanted artifacts adorning the temple walls. The transformative moment arrives as the culmination of the ritual draws near. A surge of energy courses through the participants, infusing their beings with a palpable connection to the vast underwater realm. It is at this precise juncture that the extraordinary occurs—temporary gills manifest on the necks of those partaking in the sacred rite. The physical sensations that accompany this metamorphosis are disorienting yet exhilarating. Equipped with these, the guests are now capable of navigating the underwater world. Or rather, venturing into its depths without suffocating. The sensation of breathing underwater is unlike anything experienced on the surface—a fusion of both awe and fear. Each inhalation fills the lungs with pristine, oxygen-rich water, invigorating the body and mind. Though the experience of utilizing these temporary gills may be nerve-racking initially, the rewards far outweigh any trepidation. Exploring the vibrant underwater landscapes of Encura, with its coral gardens teeming with exotic marine life, is an adventure that transcends the boundaries of the ordinary. Swimming alongside gracefully gliding creatures, witnessing the kaleidoscope of colors that dance upon the coral canvases, and feeling the weightless embrace of the water enveloping every movement—all contribute to an experience of unparalleled wonder. However, as with all things bestowed temporarily, the gift of water breathing bestowed by the ritual eventually fades. With the rising of the sun on the next day, the enchantment dissipates, and the initiated must bid farewell to their aquatic abilities until the next ritual comes around. If they will allow it again. Yet, even as the gills recede, the memories of this extraordinary journey linger, forever etched within the depths of their beings.

CITIZENS OF THE SEA

Encura celebrates freedom and exhibits a diversity of groups within its borders. In their attempt to foster an environment where all can thrive and contribute their unique perspectives, they embraced individuals from various races and backgrounds. This resulted in a citizenry composed

of diverse races from the enchanting, with their beautiful Jellymaids, as to the less captivating aquatic beastkin. However, the most prominent and varied group among them is known as the Slithers. The Slithers possess a unique physical form that combines a humanoid upper body with a mesmerizing fish-like tail as their lower half. Their bodies are adorned with scales, which display a captivating range of colors, from ethereal shades of light green to deep, almost black purples. This is one of the elements of Encura that travelers remember the most. But while the Slithers make up the majority in Encura, the realm also welcomes anyone who earns the trust of Encura and has chosen to make this underwater world their home. So the sight of some humans and elves is not that rare. While the “Water Embrace” ritual is one of the options for anyone coming from outside, it is worth noting that many of the people seeking to stay there use other powerful transmutation magic, enabling themselves a more long-lasting form fit for the underwater life—all so they could thrive and coexist in the water’s depths.

Beyond the aforementioned races, Encura is home to many creatures of more ambiguous origins. These beings are usually the descendants of merfolk and other races, blurring the boundaries between species and forging new paths of existence. They showcase Encura’s heritage, embodying the fusion of different lineages and backgrounds. These hybrids serve as a reminder of the endless possibilities that arise from the mingling of different races. But with such possibilities, comes a whole set of new problems.

CLASH OF CULTURES

Freedom stands as a cornerstone in Encura’s society. A cherished value deeply rooted in their history. However, Encurans recognize that true freedom requires responsible governance, as unchecked liberty can devolve into mere sentimentality. In the merfolk’s philosophy of life, freedom encompasses the ability to express oneself and pursue individual goals, but it also entails a duty to ensure the collective well-being of the entire community. Striving for a balance between individual autonomy and the greater good, they recognize that their actions impact not only themselves but also those around them. This keen awareness instills in them a strong sense of commitment to upholding values like compassion, fairness, and justice.

Yet, as with any society, Encura faces its share of challenges. Disparities persist, and tensions between different ethnicities are not unheard of. For the beastkin, descendants of captives altered in Dragsa’s experiments, the longing to reconnect with their lost culture is always present. Meanwhile, an influx of outsiders with their own cultures poses a challenge to Encura’s way of life. While the merfolk are generally welcoming, introducing foreign customs and traditions does not rarely clash with the established norms. Encura

often faces the dilemma of finding a way to embrace the ones they accepted while preserving the essence of their own culture and values. Sometimes this is just impossible and conflict arises.

Religion and Encura

SCARS FROM THE PAST

The scars of their rebellion against Dragsa run deep. Because of this, Encurans strive to distance themselves from any lingering ties to their oppressors. The mere thought of their similarities makes them sick even today. This sentiment echoes the doubtful stance they adopted toward the true meaning of religion, especially in the context of Dragsa’s Church of Order and its teachings.

In Dragsa, the Church of Order staunchly believes that their ruler, Queen Anara, is the divine messenger—the embodiment of Order itself. They worshipped her with unwavering devotion, as she holds divine authority given by the gods. The Church upheld the benevolent god of Order, who had triumphed over the god of Chaos in the past. According to their teachings, Chaos was a malevolent force, tainting Order’s creations with evil desires and lust. Corrupting the perfect world given to us by the Order.

However, after the merfolk’s rebellion, they encountered the wise Dryads of the Banewood, who shared a different narrative of creation. In their version of this tale, Chaos was the original creator of life, and Order took on the role of providing purpose to all of its creations. The Dryads revealed a fascinating perspective—Chaos and Order coexisting in harmony, unbound, and at peace. Chaos sculpted the landscape as it roamed, shaped the earth and the elements, and created beings roaming these lands. Order followed, naming and giving purpose to every creation, giving the plants destiny to grow, or the animals a purpose to live and provide.

With these vastly incompatible images, they began to question the rigid beliefs they once knew. Question even the very idea of religion itself. But as they lack any answer themselves, and the ones given to them hold no certainty, they decided to never impose answers.

Where Dragsa gave clear answers, Encura sees places to wonder.

Where Dragsa ordered strict discipline, Encura asks for permission.

Where Dragsa sought to discard your desires, Encura seeks answers within them.

Thus you won’t find any forced religions in Encura. You can find believers of many different gods—some from far away

lands, some from travelers who settled in this place, and some who don't believe in any. Everyone is free to believe in what they want, as long as they don't impose it on others. Encura's merfolk embraced a philosophy that reveled in the unknown and the myriad wonders of existence. Instead of seeking concrete answers, they simply cherish the freedom to wonder, to question, and to seek their own truths.

SELENE'S FOLLOWERS

While Encurans have no enforced religion in their country, you can find a group of beastkin that are unified by a certain philosophy of life. They call themselves "Selene's Followers" as they try to follow the example of "Selene Ö Nen", the Encura's founder. The core of this philosophy lies in how they perceive desires. While Dragsa saw desires as potential distractions, urging their citizens to suppress these yearnings and focus solely on serving the state, Selene took a completely different approach. She viewed them as guides of the soul. The only thing that separates us from controlled puppets.

Thus her followers try to embrace desires as essential aspects of being alive. They believed that desires held the keys to discovering one's true self and finding a deeper connection with the world around them. Instead of discarding desires, they encourage introspection and reflection, seeking answers and wisdom within the core of each longing.

Selene's Followers take it even further and believe that these desires are fragments of the gods who created the world. This notion says that all life possesses a fragment of divinity within it, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant. As they tend to say, "Gods are nowhere. Gods are everywhere." They view the gods not as separate entities but as inherent aspects of the natural world surrounding them. To them, the gods are present everywhere and should be revered in all forms of life. Their philosophy emphasizes cherishing and respecting all living beings.

A RAINY SEASON

As the summer comes to a close, the winds from the west and south surge with vigor, heralding the arrival of the much-awaited rainy season. This period brings forth a few weeks of heavy downpour, accompanied by awfully hot and humid air, creating an ethereal atmosphere that envelops the islands. It is during this time that an extraordinary phenomenon occurs—a spectacle of nature that locals and visitors alike eagerly anticipate—the Animal Mating Season.

The seas surrounding Encura immediately teem with an abundance of fishes and various creatures, all drawn to the beaches for their annual mating. Schools of fish glide gracefully through the waters filling it with every color imaginable—sapphire blues, emerald greens, fiery oranges, and coral pinks. Their bodies adorn intricate patterns as if

each fish were wearing a unique and iridescent coat—nature truly is an artist of the finest strokes. In this vibrant seascape, larger marine creatures make their appearances, like proud dolphins dancing with grace as their bodies glisten in a fusion of silvers and blues. While their actions seem playful, they tirelessly weave through the currents showing off their skill to their partners. And it is no wonder why all of these things happen, as only the best can count on getting a mate to pass on their blood.

Among these marvels, majestic dragon turtles sail through the waters. These colossal beings possess shells, encrusted with swirls of iridescent opals and glimmering crystals, which peek out from the centuries-old mossy greens growing on their backs, creating a mesmerizing sight.

The dragon turtles' life cycle is also quite remarkable. While the adults show themselves only every few years, their legacy is secured through the hatching of their offspring's eggs on the beaches of islands around Encura. The eggs are huge and sturdy, buried deep within the sandy shore to protect the precious life within.

All of that would be just a spectacle for the eyes, filling the hearts of travelers and inhabitants with warm joy. But nature has a terrible knack for mixing beauty with danger.

As the eggs hatch, the beaches come alive with the birth of the newborn dragon turtles. These cow-sized wonders, resembling adorable miniatures of their future grandeur, emerge with a true longing for adventure—and an insatiable appetite. Their hunger knows no bounds, and they voraciously attack and devour everything within their sight, which turns the initial marvel of this event into mayhem along the coastline.

After the creation of Encura, their rampage was a natural disaster feared each year. But nowadays they learn how to safeguard their island paradise from the unintentional destruction caused by these ravenous infants. They call upon the gifted Waterbeast Summoners. These priestesses possess a unique connection to the sea, and through their magical bond with the aquatic world, they can speak with nature itself. Thanks to them, it is possible to guide most of the newborn turtles away from citizens and make them venture into deeper waters. The rest who hatch too close to Encura buildings or for some reason reject the Summoners' gentle guidance are dealt with by the hunters and warriors. Eat or be eaten, as the saying goes.

FEAST OF THE FADING MOON

When the Raining Season concludes and the dragon turtles have safely set sail in the vast ocean, the people of Encura come together to celebrate the bountiful blessings of nature. During this time, everyone joins in a sense of unity and gratitude, and the islanders hold a grand feast to honor

Dangers and Challenges

the majestic creatures and their life-giving environment. The festivities span from the Full Moon to the New Moon, with each day marked by laughter, music, dancing, and an array of delectable dishes made from the abundant seafood that the sea has so generously offered, along with bounties of the land like berries and other fruits. Countless visitors from around the world also gather during the Feast, either to witness it firsthand or to present their exotic wares—ranging from dishes unseen in Encura to luxurious clothing and tools—thus transforming the entirety of Encura into a magnificent festival.

Each evening, the grandest event unfolds on the Shore of The Seasons' Dance. As the name implies, this beach becomes the focal point, where people gather and kindle campfires, initiating enchanting dances to the tune of music. Throughout this Feast, the air in Encura resonates with music and is filled with cheerful people singing melodious songs in harmonious voices. These songs frequently recount tales of grand battles and historic events from times of yore. The merfolk have a deep-rooted appreciation for storytelling, a tradition through which they pass down myths, legends, and narratives of their ancestral heritage from one generation to the next. These stories often interweave elements of their rich history with the wonders of the sea.

Time and Changing of the Seasons

In the morning after the Feast of the Fading ends, the echoes of music gradually fade, allowing the vibrant notes of the festival to drift into the past. This day, often referred to as the “Dawning of the Cycle,” signifies the start of a fresh chapter in the merfolk's life. As the sun rises on this day, Encurans witness the dawning light with a mixture of contentment and anticipation as their daily routines await.

Encura undergoes a literal reset, for this day heralds the inception of a fresh “cycle.”

Encurans do not count years like in other parts of the world as the date of the “new year” is not really set in stone. Their time's cadence is gauged by the moon's graceful dance. Each month features a central Full Moon and continues until the emergence of the New Moon. Subsequently, a new month commences the following day. This lunar ebb and flow crafts a year that comprises 13 distinct months, where the second half of last month is the Feast of the Fading Moon.

THE DISEASES THAT PLAGUE ENCURANS

Life in Encura is hard and the country is poor. Everyone needs to work to feed themselves and work with their own hands and fins. Most of the citizens either fare in procuring food as hunters, gatherers, or caretakers of seaweed plantations. The sea is pretty merciful when it comes to food, so food shortages are rare. But the diet itself lacks variety, especially during the colder months when the land's bounties are scarce, and reliance on sea resources, like seaweed and fish, becomes vital.

Moreover, Dragsa never had the luxury to meticulously refine their created races, weeding out individuals with undesirable features. Whether these decisions were morally right or not, I leave to your own judgment. The undeniable fact remains that this lack of perfection has resulted in significant diversity among the aquatic beastkin, even extending to the slithers, who appear outwardly uniform. However, this diversity comes with a cost, including health issues, deformities, and hereditary diseases, as well as too many stillborns.

Both of these aspects resulted in one thing: a rise in diseases in their society. Encurans detest all things that take away their freedom—be it other people or nature itself. So they don't even consider casting aside individuals who carry these ailments. This is, nonetheless, a significant problem facing Encura.

This situation is also not helped by the simple fact that there are not many people with good knowledge about medicine among Encura citizens, since most known herbs are from the land. The Listeners have been gathering knowledge about sea herbs only for the past few centuries. Meanwhile, they rely on the blessings of magic with their healers, but even the most powerful spells are unable to heal all diseases.

Their knowledge of herbs is limited to those found in the land, and while the Listeners have been diligently gathering information about sea-herbs for centuries, their healing capabilities are still reliant on the blessings of magic. Unfortunately, magic is not a panacea and it cannot cure all diseases, leaving many to suffer from afflictions that are resistant to magical healing.

LIFE IN THE SHADOW OF WAR

Another problem that Encura is currently facing is the looming danger posed by Dragsa. Despite the ongoing war between the two, Dragsa has yet to acknowledge Encura as a country. Instead, they are preoccupied with their conflict with the Kutauri, which indirectly grants Encurans a semblance

More Noteworthy Diseases Include:

Marble Fingers

Symptoms usually show up after 80 years, but there are some cases when they appear as early as 40 years old. It starts with fingers. The first sign is severe stiffness in the fingers each morning, which gradually fades throughout the day. But as weeks pass, the time it takes gets longer. At some point, the skin on the fingers starts to glitter, as if veiled by a white dust. Then, these white dots gradually enlarge, forming bigger spots, and eventually develop into whole patches on the hands. At this stage, moving fingers becomes increasingly painful, and the stiffness spreads throughout the entire body. The entire process unfolds over the course of several years, culminating in an unfortunate transformation in which people's limbs become covered by thick layers of mineralized skin, resembling marble, giving them an appearance akin to living statues. The prognosis of this affliction is grim. Marble Fingers is a deadly disease for which no known cure exists. As the patches begin to spread to cover the head and chest, patients slowly lose their ability to breathe, eventually succumbing to eternal slumber. Despite its horrifying nature, some view Marble Fingers with a touch of sanctity due to its connection with Selene, one of the most renowned founders of Encura. She was also affected by the disease. For these individuals, the ailment serves as a symbolic link to the legendary figure, forging a sacred bond amidst the suffering. To this day, the true nature of Marble Fingers remains an enigma, and it is uncertain whether the disease is hereditary or triggered by external factors.

Elves' Rash or Magic Intolerance

These are two names for the same disease. The first name comes from the fact that most affected Encurans are either elves or have one as their parent or a more distant relative. It is an affliction that makes one react to any magic in their bodies or surroundings with a rash and fever. Both symptoms become harsher the longer one is in contact with magic. While it might not sound that serious, it is a grave problem for anyone relying on the Water Embrace ritual or other forms of magic to remain underwater. Affected Encurans are forced to live on land.

Varicose Webbing

This is a fungal disease affecting aquatic beastkin. It is very hard to treat, as any effective medicines also weaken the patients, including their magic. It starts with the appearance of red and yellow lines, resembling enlarged

veins on the webbings. These lines gradually become thicker, then grow and start branching. It quickly spreads into the hands, limbs and fins. At the same time, the webbings and skin around these veins seem to dry and crumble, presenting a peculiar sight deep on the seafloor. Untreated, affected beastkin end up with severe open wounds and may die due to inflammation or loss of blood. Even if the disease is initially cured, it has a tendency to return after years, and each time it resurfaces, the symptoms become more severe. While it is not always a death sentence, quite a lot of beastkin have met their end because of it.

Short Breaths

The symptoms show in children who begin their growth spurts. As the name suggests, their breaths become short and quick. When they try to do more demanding physical work, they tire really fast. While it is not a serious condition, it makes one quite unsuitable for life in Encura and reliant on relatives.

Sealable Gills

It is a hereditary disease, with symptoms that show up in children, and, similar to Short Breaths, this affliction involves problems with breathing. However, the case is different as their gills have a tendency to seal and stay shut. This happens because the skin near the gills starts to overgrow and dam the places where water can enter. As a result, they must regularly visit Listeners to have the excess skin cut off, otherwise, they risk suffocating underwater. These treatments leave injuries making them vulnerable to inflammation, which overall makes them much weaker and prone to illnesses. It also leaves scars. The disease is more common in hybrids and mixed children, but even those considered "pure" can be afflicted. Some of them decide to live on land to cope with the challenges this condition poses.

Heir of the Taint

This is used to describe individuals born with deformed bodies or missing limbs in Encura. Initially, they were seen as ones in whom all the atrocities and dark magic of Dragsa accumulated. However, as generations changed and their healers began to trace the heritage lines, it became clear that it is simply a disease carried in the blood. While some of the stigma still lingers within society, affected individuals are not viewed with the same animosity and disdain as in the past.

of peace. In other words, Encurans can enjoy peace because someone else is paying the price.

This leaves many Encurans feeling conflicted about their situation—that their peace comes at the expense of others and they do not deserve it. But while some citizens believe they should actively support the rebellion against Dragsa and not simply enjoy the distance and safety of their island's shores, the official stance remains hesitant to engage in direct military intervention. Encura does provide aid in the form of sending food and welcoming refugees from the continent. Still, when it comes to plans for the future, the notion of sending an army to actively assist in the war is dismissed. Encura keeps quite a large number of soldiers in the Shoal of Protectors, but they never send them anywhere, just keep them close to protect islands, in case the rebellion falls. Encura does maintain a significant number of soldiers within the Shoal of Protectors, ready to defend the islands should the rebellion reach their shores. However, these forces have not been deployed elsewhere to aid in the conflict beyond their borders.

As time passes and generations come and go, it seems that Encurans have grown accustomed to the war being far from their immediate concerns, accustomed to the sense of distance and detachment from the ongoing conflict—a false sense if you ask me.

UNREST AMONG THE YOUNGER GENERATION

As we already established, life in Encura is undoubtedly challenging. The country's rural nature becomes quite apparent to anyone familiar with other parts of the world. While some might envy the absence of food shortages, the lack of culinary variety in their meals leaves much to be desired. Overly salty dishes are a common occurrence, and the limited options can leave its citizens yearning for more. Moreover, there is a sense of stagnation in the daily lives of many. The more talented individuals are sought after by Listeners to carry the weight of Encura's history, become healers, or assist with administrative tasks. However, the majority of citizens find themselves engaged in routine roles as hunters, gatherers, or caretakers of seaweed plantations. The Protectors stand vigilant, shielding the community from dangers, while others venture into uncertain roles as Crafters, unsure if their creations will ever find buyers.

The prevalence of health problems, deformities, and hereditary diseases within Encurian society also leaves its mark. This reality evokes both tension and compassion among the citizens. Some provide unwavering support and care for those affected, while others harbor prejudices and stigmas attached to certain conditions. As Encura grapples with these issues, some have even begun labeling

unmixed races as “pure” and others as “impure.” But most dismiss such distinctions as meaningless, especially due to the fact of how beastkin came to Encura. This internal division has caused a rise in tension within the community, as different viewpoints clash.

It has led some young beastkin to venture beyond Encura's shores in search of something else, even if it means becoming one of the Forgotten—a status viewed as shameful by the society they leave behind. Some are driven by the scarcity of effective cures for diseases plaguing their home and the desire to seek solutions. The allure of finding a remedy to their afflictions propels them to brave the unknown, no matter how perilous the path ahead may be. Others choose to leave simply to find a better life for themselves, seeking opportunities beyond the confines of their rural homeland. And one cannot really blame them for it.

THE ANIMAL MATING SEASON

One of the less obvious threats to unwary visitors of Encura is the Animal Mating Season. Every year, when the Rainy Season arrives on the surface of Encura, warm currents lead an abundance of fish and other animals to this region—of all sizes. During this period, marine life is teeming with activity, as various species gather to mate and lay eggs. The influx of creatures can lead to unexpected encounters, and even normally docile creatures may act aggressively during this time to protect their territories or nests. The predators in the area become more active and aggressive as they search for abundant prey, which can make it dangerous for those who are not well-versed in navigating these waters. Large sharks, deadly young krakens, or even venomous amoebas—the list just goes on.

For Encurans, this season is an essential part of their cultural and ecological balance, providing an opportunity to sustainably harvest all kinds of fishes for their livelihood. However, visitors to the region must exercise caution and seek guidance from the local experts, such as experienced hunters, who are knowledgeable about the behaviors and dangers associated with the Animal Mating Season. But even with their help, proper preparation and respect for the natural environment are crucial here.

DANGERS OF THE SEA

Apart from the problems described above, life in the sea presents several other challenges. Many smaller problems and dangers may fall upon unsuspecting travelers...

Below you can find tables showing potential dangers you might encounter.



D10	POTENTIAL DANGERS YOU MIGHT ENCOUNTER
1	A stranger approached your party and became charmed by one of its members. As a token of their feelings, they gift them an expensive-looking, piece of coral jewelry, then walk away saying to look for them in one of the nearby taverns. Sometime after the event, the Protectors swarm the party and accuse them of robbery. The said jewelry seems to be a stolen good from one of the workshops, and of course, the real culprit is nowhere to be found.
2	A jellymaid is running from her abusive partner and asks the party to hide her. Soon the described man arrives. If he finds out they're helping her, a fight starts.
3	(Only in the water) An astray and very hungry kraken youngling wanders into the Encura boundaries. It starts attacking hunters to eat their catch. While Protectors are nowhere to be seen, the party can decide to deal with this problem.
4	(Only on the surface) A party is attacked by the sea harpies from the sky. The whole thing is so sudden that people around start to panic and run to hide—it does not make the situation any easier.
5	A storm shows up on the surface. While it is of no concern for the residents of the sea, a nearby ship that was headed to Encura has been pushed into rocky cliffs. Now the whole ship is sinking, and its crew asks for help to retrieve the cargo.
6	A party bumps into three Encura soldiers from the Protectors. They are clearly drunk and they take it as provocation. A brawl follows.
7	A Husk Hermit awakens just below the party's feet. After digging itself out of the sand, it runs past the party and attacks nearby people.
8	A party is passing near the entrance to a tavern and two jellymaid offer their services for a very cheap price. . . if anyone decides to go with them to a more secluded place, they quickly realize that the warmth spreading through their limbs is actually numbing. Their new friends are poisonous. After they are fully paralyzed, the two ladies walk away with whatever valuables they were able to find.
9	While on the outskirts of Encura, the water starts to become murky, blocking visibility. Then something tries to grab the party by the feet. It's the tentacles of an adult Kraken, whose enormous body shortly emerges, when water currents clear visibility for a moment. The party needs to save its grabbed members and deal with tentacles. After that, a Waterbeast Summoner shows up and chases away the adult.
10	(Only on the surface) An adult Dragon Turtle shatters a nearby ship and starts attacking its crew. Soldiers and hunters from the islands gather to subjugate the rampaging creature and the party is asked to help them. The battle is brutal and several people are heavily injured both before and after the party arrives.

Politics and the Laws

THE LAW OF THE SEA

Freedom is a cornerstone of Encura's society and is held as an essential value. Looking at their history, it is no wonder why they cherish it so much. But while it is a good value for any civilization, without any rules to govern it, it becomes only a nice sentiment. In their philosophy of life, true freedom entails not only the liberty to express oneself and pursue individual goals, but also the responsibility that comes with it—responsibility for ensuring the collective well-being of the whole community.

That's why the central and most important laws for Encura are:

- I. Never take away anyone's freedom of choice.
- II. Never take away anyone's freedom of growth.

III. Never take away anyone's freedom of thought.

IV. Never take away anyone's freedom of belonging.

These four laws as a whole are called "The Gift of Freedom."

The rest of the laws in Encura are as fluid and ever-changing as the water itself. So the citizens are not bound to respect them to the letter. Instead, they try to balance between individual autonomy and the greater good, recognizing that their actions impact not only themselves but also those around them. This keen awareness instills in them a strong sense of accountability and a commitment to upholding the values of compassion, fairness, and justice. This might sound like a perfect society to some, but at the same time, they are quite strict with one another. Every citizen keenly observes others and judges their actions. If they are not happy with what they see, they are quite quick to go to the Hall of the Voices to say what is on their mind.

CHOOSING ONE'S WAY OF LIFE

The citizens of this underwater kingdom are divided into four groups, or castes, if you prefer, called Shoals. After the Feast of the Fading Moon ends, a new generation of merfolk is faced with the big choice for their future—choosing which Shoal they will join. In Encura it is called choosing your Way of Life. This choice is also given to anyone who wants to stay in Encura as its citizen.

When someone reaches the age of becoming an adult, which differs for each race, they are given the choice of joining one of the four Shoals: Providers, Protectors, Listeners, and Crafters. Each Shoal has its unique responsibilities and purpose within the underwater kingdom.

After making their selection, they have one cycle to find and begin working under a master of their choosing. Sometimes, they choose a master from among their parents, but this is not always the case. At the end of the subsequent Feast of the Fading Moon, they have the option to either confirm their initial choice or change it. This flexibility results in many young merfolk exploring different roles and occupations for a few years before settling on a permanent path. However, once they confirm their decision, it becomes a lifelong commitment.

The system ensures a balance of responsibilities and allows the young merfolk to explore different paths before committing to their chosen Shoal for a lifetime. But not everything in this solution is perfect.

One cannot disobey this rule of Encura nor change their decision after confirming it—at least unless they are ready to being citizens entirely—these individuals are referred to as “The Forgotten.” They become people who shall be erased from the collective memory of Encura, losing the blessings and benefits of citizenship. However, there is also a less pleasant-sounding name which many folks there use for these people—scraps, akin to being the discarded remains of a fish that serve no purpose.

FOUR SHOALS

The four shoals differ in what they are meant to do.

Providers are tasked with ensuring that Encura is forever abundant with food and other vital resources. They take on various roles, such as hunters, gatherers, and caretakers of seaweed farms. Additionally, they scavenge the remains of ships that have crashed on the ocean floors, gather animal bones and corals from the reefs, and occasionally search for precious minerals in caves. That last one, however, is not that often practiced as Encura rarely uses them. Their dedication ensures the sustenance and prosperity of the kingdom.

Protectors are warriors responsible for keeping the safety and security of Encura. They ensure the country's safety by

scouting both the sea floors and surface for any potential dangers and responding with appropriate means, if needed. The Protectors are also responsible for enforcing the laws, dealing with severe crimes, and maintaining order within the society. Lesser misdemeanors are dealt with by the individual Shoals themselves.

From among the Protectors, the one with the sharpest mind, strongest fighting skill, and exceptional magical abilities is chosen as the leader and bestowed with the prestigious title of “Merfolk Shaman.” As the leader, the Merfolk Shaman is entrusted with making quick decisions during crises and dealing with threats from outside forces. They are trained not only in combat and tactics but also in diplomacy, as they often have to interact with outsiders and handle potential conflicts with grace and wisdom. Their role is vital in maintaining the security and well-being of the kingdom.

Some believe that the transformation due to Marble Fingers disease is a divine blessing from Selene, turning the afflicted into living statues that stand witness to the goddess's eternal grace. In certain rituals, worshippers might use the dust from these marbled beings, believing it holds a sacred connection to Selene's realm.

Listeners are chosen from individuals with a deep connection to the sea. As their name suggests, their primary role is to listen—to the problems of their fellow merfolk, to the voices of the sea, and to the propositions of visitors from other lands. From the perspective of land-dwellers, the Listeners can be seen as the religious leaders of Encura, serving as diplomats and healers. Within the kingdom, they provide counseling for both mental and physical health issues, utilizing their knowledge of herbs and magic to help with diseases and ailments. Their empathetic nature and ability to connect with others make them trusted advisors and healers, offering solace and guidance to those in need.

For outsiders, the Listeners serve as a bridge between Encura and the rest of the world. They act as the kingdom's representatives during interactions with visitors, conveying the will of the Encura's council and ensuring that communication flows smoothly. Their insights and understanding of the sea's secrets make them valuable resources in establishing alliances and trade relations with other civilizations.

Among the Listeners, a select few who exhibit the highest connection to nature's voice are chosen to perform critical tasks. These individuals are bestowed with the prestigious

title of “Waterbeast Summoners.” The name originates from one of their most significant responsibilities—the Ceremony of Summoning. During this ancient ritual, the Waterbeast Summoners call upon the powerful sea creatures and spirits to bless the kingdom, protect its shores, and ensure a bountiful harvest from the sea. In addition to their spiritual duties, the Waterbeast Summoners are also entrusted with preserving the kingdom’s history and traditions. They keep detailed records of important events, maintain sacred rituals, and pass down their knowledge to the next generation. This ensures that the merfolk’s customs and heritage are not forgotten and are faithfully upheld with the passage of time.

Crafters are among the most diverse groups in Encura, responsible for creation. They create tools for everyday use, weapons for the warriors or hunters, and even art that touches the hearts of the merfolk. Encura does not differentiate between the ones who make tools and the merchants who sell their creations, so many Crafters are also involved in trading. It is common to find entire families engaged in the process, with one family member acting as the face of their shop. Some Crafters choose to set up shops in the Submerged Bazaar, a bustling area near the island’s edge where trade between the underwater realm and the outside world thrives.

COUNCIL OF THE VOICES

Encura does not possess a single governor, king, or queen; instead, they uphold their own unique tradition, which traces back to the early days of their country’s history. It began with a meeting of the founders of Encura and, over time, evolved into what is now known as the Council of Voices. This Council is responsible for establishing laws and short-term orders that govern the citizens of Encura.

The Council is created by choosing representatives from among the Shoals—three from each of the groups. These representatives are called Voices. Positions are not permanent, and they are chosen for only one cycle during the Feast of the

Fading Moon. However, if they prove themselves capable and effective in their roles, they have the chance to be chosen again in subsequent cycles.



They serve as the voice of the people, advocating for the needs and concerns of their respective Shoals. This ensures that the perspectives and interests of all merfolk are considered in the decision-making process.

The selection process for becoming a Voice is a highly anticipated event in Encura. During the Feast of the Fading Moon, which is a time of celebration and reflection, the eligible candidates present themselves to their fellow merfolk. They showcase their achievements, demonstrate their commitment to the well-being of the community, and share their visions for the future of Encura. Becoming one of the Voices is seen as an honor and a duty, but it is not like a matter of personal ambition and gains is not playing a role here. Wherever there are positions of power, corruption seeps in.

The Voices gather regularly to discuss the needs of the merfolk and address any issues that arise. They deliberate on matters of law, community welfare, and the overall harmony of Encura. Their gatherings take place two times during the month, once during the New Moon and once during the Full Moon. For a meeting to proceed, more than half of the Voices must be present; otherwise, the entire session is dismissed.

Each meeting typically spans three days or longer.

On the first day, they propose potential solutions to the problems faced by the citizens of Encura. These solutions can

Request from the People

Whenever the Council is not in session, the same building serves as a gathering place for requests from Encurans. Throughout the day, anyone can visit and submit an official request to one of the workers designated by the Voices themselves. To accommodate this process, the entire Hall is divided into four sections, with each section dedicated to one of the Shoals to receive and address requests from their respective groups.

All the requests are carefully assessed and if the problem or issue is deemed to be within the purview of the Voices’ concern, it is passed on to them. However, if the matter can be handled by someone else, the request will be added to the list along with an official task from the Voices themselves.

Many outsiders see it as a good place to earn money through small odd jobs, though some of the requests are not small at all. As a result, many citizens and travelers alike tend to frequent this Hall, seeking something extra to do.

range from new laws to orders given to the different Shoals, or the retraction of existing laws.

On the second day, the Voices engage in discussions, providing their insights and thoughts on the proposed solutions. These discussions are essential as they allow the Voices to consider different perspectives and weigh the potential outcomes of their decisions. In the evening of the same day, a vote is held to determine the acceptance or rejection of each proposition.

On the third day of the meeting, the Council of Voices receives reports detailing ongoing problems and challenges within the kingdom. They are tasked with finding effective solutions to address these issues until the next meeting.

Additionally, if there are any grave crimes committed in Encura, the assembly can be extended beyond the initial three days to judge and decide upon the appropriate actions. However, such cases are rare and typically involve only the most severe atrocities or complex dilemmas.

Artists and sculptors hold a superstition that if they mix into their work materials taken from a Marble Fingers victim, their creations will carry a piece of Selene's essence. These works are believed to possess an otherworldly beauty but are also considered haunted, as if the suffering of the original victim echoes through the art.

COUNCIL GENERATOR

Use the generator on the next page to create your current composition of the Council, or use it as inspiration for your own ideas.

STANCE TOWARD OTHER NATIONS

Because of the Redoe Alliance's assistance in the creation of Encura, the country maintains a strong bond with the alliance and plans to remain a part of it. Ships bearing the alliance's markings are welcomed as allies, and favorable trade deals are offered to them. The relationship with both Banewood and Yv'anda Dryads is also one of warmth and cooperation whenever contact occurs.

Encura engages in trade with countries to the south and north, taking advantage of its strategic location along their shipping routes. However, many potential visitors are hesitant due to Encura's history with Dragsa. While some are drawn to the allure of the wondrous place, others fear the beastkin or are simply wary of angering Queen Anara.

With regard to the Republic of Misty Waters, Encura adopts a neutral stance. Although their allegiance to Dragsa contributes to a somewhat colder attitude.

Nevertheless, the emergence of the Disciples of Chaos has disrupted the balance in Deuslair, and many Encurans view this as an opportunity. Some see the potential of forming an alliance with this group, hoping they might act as a force to challenge Dragsa either independently or in conjunction with Encura in the future. This perspective might appear unthinkable to those with a broader understanding of the world and the Disciples' actions. However, the same does not apply to Encurans, who spend most of their lives within the safety of their islands. They just lack knowledge of the invaders' true nature.

Their awareness of the Disciples of Chaos is limited to the fact that these forces are conquering kingdoms in the south—the same kingdoms that never lifted a finger when their people suffered under Dragsa's rule. Nor now, when centaurs' blood soaks in the groves of Banewoods.

In the words of the Ecurians, you could say they are just “dead wood” to them.

Economy and Trade

FOOD SUPPLY

The feeding habits of Encura's inhabitants are linked to both the land and the bountiful depths of the sea—nothing surprising here.

While there are some plantations and smaller farms on land, primarily managed by refugees from non-aquatic races who have made Encura their home, the majority of the land remains as it was in the past, untouched by any intelligent races, dense and vibrant forest full of life. The merfolk, being denizens of the water, did not cultivate the land and never really adapted the skill to farm. They primarily rely on the natural offerings found within these lush green havens. In other words, they just take advantage of the abundant resources already present, such as nuts and berries, or savor the flavors of the surface fruits. Occasionally, during hunts, they may also capture birds that traverse the land, providing a supplementary source of meals. A change in diet is always welcome.

However, it is beneath the shimmering surface of the water where Encura truly comes alive, offering a cornucopia of nourishment. Out there, a vast expanse of seaweed farms awaits. All are carefully cultivated by the Shoal of Providers, who keep it in good condition, forever undulating gracefully with the gentle currents. These seaweed farms serve as a vital source of food, offering a diverse array of

D6	THE FIRST MEMBERS ARE...
1	Two slither women Listeners and one slither man Provider. The women are whimsical twins while the man is their older brother, who discarded family traditions.
2	Jellymaid Listener and two slither men Providers. Both men are infatuated with the Jellymaid and privately try to court her.
3	Pacifist half-human, half-slither man from the Shoal of Listeners and a slither man from the Shoal of Providers who is always angry and quick to violent solutions.
4	Four slither women, two from the Shoal of Providers and two from the Shoal of Listeners. They appear to be at odds but secretly cooperate.
5	Four slither men, two from the Shoal of Providers and two from the Shoal of Listeners. They are at odds with each other because of their family businesses.
6	Three Jellymaid women from the Shoal of Listeners. One looks young, the other is in her prime, while the last is very old. They finish each other's sentences.

D6	THEN WE HAVE...
1	Three slithers women from the Shoals of Providers, Protectors, and Crafters. They are very emotional and agree with people with passion.
2	Three elves with gills from the Shoals of Providers, Protectors, and Crafters. They try to act neutral and always want more time to think about problems.
3	Three slithers, from the Shoals of Providers, Protectors, and Crafters. They are greedy and easily corrupted, always seeking their own benefit.
4	Three hybrids of mixed origins from the Shoals of Providers, Protectors and Crafters. They support whoever is winning at the moment.
5	One Slither man with a head of a shark from the Providers, and two Jellymaids from Protectors, and Crafters. They only think about the good of Encura and will sacrifice any outsiders to do that.
6	One alligator-like hunter from the Providers, one human druid with fish scales from Protectors, and one slither merchant from the Crafters. They act as voices of reason for the whole Council.

D6	AND THE LAST ONES ARE...
1	Three Slithers, two from the Shoals of Protectors and one from Crafters. They want to wage war against Dragsa now that it is weakened.
2	Four hybrids of mixed origins, two from the Shoals of Protectors and one from Crafters. They want to cut off Encura from the outside, believing that people coming from the land are leading the young generation astray.
3	Two slither men who are twins and come from the Shoal of Crafters. They support the Disciples of Chaos and want Encura to join them as they are fighting the humans, which they deem to be enemies of all beastkin.
4	Two very young slithers with looks opposite to their genders, one from each of the Shoals of Protectors and Crafters. They want to expand Encura's trade and even create their own ships, to make themselves not solely reliant on outside offers.
5	An old Slither woman, who was a warrior in the past from the Protectors, accompanied by two shrewd women, half-slither and half-human Crafters. Together, they harbor a vision for Encura to establish settlements on the land near Murknen, where the terrain is damp and suitable for aquatic beastkin. They assert that these territories rightfully belong to Encura, yet they are under the control of the Kutauri.
6	Two slithers who are a married couple from the Shoal of Protectors. They are crude but want to develop Encura more to make the future better for the next generation.



nutrient-rich marine plants. The merfolk have developed almost a symbiotic relationship with these underwater farms, tending to the seaweed to ensure its growth and sustainability. They understand the delicate balance required to nurture the crops and maintain the health of nature. From colorful kelps to nutritious algae, the seaweed farms provide an abundant and reliable food source for the population of Encura.

Beyond seaweed, the merfolk from the Providers are skilled hunters and fishermen. With their unique bodies, they easily navigate the waters. The merfolk employ their natural talents and keen senses to engage in successful hunts, capturing fish and other aquatic creatures to supplement their diet. Schools of fish, brimming with life and vibrant hues, grace the underwater landscape. Later, the dishes made out of them, grace the houses of Encura citizens.

In this way, the feeding habits of the merfolk of Encura reflect a harmonious integration of land and sea. They appreciate the offerings of the land while recognizing that their true sustenance lies in the depths below. Through their careful cultivation of seaweed farms and their prowess as hunters and fishermen, they ensure a steady supply of food for their population, sustaining their thriving civilization in harmony with the natural world that surrounds them.

SEA CUISINE

While this harmony with the world is something we could all learn from, and the seaweed farms of Encura provide a reliable and abundant food source, which could bring envy to more starved regions of the world... I cannot say the same for their cuisine.

The flavors and textures of the seaweed-based dishes are unique, to say the least. Frankly speaking, I wouldn't call it the most delicious food I've ever had. Quite the contrary, their food is excessively salty and lacking in texture variety.

Be it a necessity or just upbringing, the merfolk of Encura have become accustomed to the distinct flavors of the seaweed they cultivate. Nourishment and sustenance in these nutrient-rich plants are for sure to be found. At least from what I have been told. However, the taste may be difficult to accept for land-dwellers, and it hardly offers the same diversity as land-based cuisine. The fact that meals are entirely raw, as lightning fire underwater is not really an option, doesn't really help with that either. The seaweed itself varies in texture, presenting a range of characteristics. Some varieties may be meaty, yet tough and thick, requiring considerable effort to chew. On the other hand, certain types of seaweed can be excessively soft and lack the desired texture. There's hardly anything in between. They incorporate the catches from their hunts, such as flavorful fish and other marine delicacies, which surely provide a break from the predominant taste and texture of seaweed. That's about it, however.

Recognizing the limitations in their primary food source, the merfolk of Encura have created quite a few creative ways to infuse flavor and diversity into their meals. They complement their fish and seaweed-based dishes with an array of other ingredients that help to enhance the overall culinary experience: nuts and berries from the surface, natural herbs and spices found within the underwater realm—all infusing their dishes with aromatic flavors to add depth and complexity, and sometimes, fruits, though they are treated more like delicacies given to children or akin to desserts served on occasion.

While the cuisine of Encura may not be the most pleasing in terms of taste, its significance transcends mere flavors. Mealtimes are more than just a means of satisfying hunger in this place. They are cherished occasions. The main meal of the day takes place at dusk, as the sun begins to paint the water surfaces with a gentle, dim, red light, signaling the approaching night. This atmospheric setting adds a touch of magic to the communal gathering. The merfolk come together during this time, forming a close-knit community, to share in the abundance provided by the ocean. It is a time when they express gratitude for the bountiful offerings of the sea and celebrate their interconnectedness with the underwater realm that sustains them. The meal becomes a collective experience, fostering a sense of unity and belonging among the merfolk. During these gatherings, conversations flow freely, stories are shared, and laughter fills the air. The merfolk take joy in each other's company and relish the opportunity to strengthen their bonds through shared experiences. Whether grand battles fought by warriors, weird discoveries made by scouts, or just normal happenings from their daily lives, they recognize that mealtimes serve as more than just a moment to replenish their bodies; they are opportunities to nourish their souls and reinforce the sense of community that defines Encura.

The shared appreciation for their connection to the sea and the recognition of their reliance on the ocean's generosity elevate mealtimes to a sacred tradition. In this way, mealtimes in Encura transcend the notion of a mere culinary experience. They embody a celebration of unity, gratitude, and the interplay between the merfolk and their watery home. As the sun sets, casting its serene glow upon the waters, the merfolk of Encura gather around, forging stronger bonds and finding solace in the shared warmth of their communal feasts.

TRADE WITH NEIGHBORS

The citizens of the submerged islands of Encura often engage in trade with travelers who stop with their ships on longer voyages or come from nearby settlements. The place where most of these exchanges take place is the "Submerged Bazaar," an area near Selene's Temple with a very shallow sea level. Here, merfolk have created countless smaller semi-open

buildings or plain old stalls where they exchange goods produced in the kingdom's depths. Encura's society thrives on creativity, and the merfolk express themselves through various forms of art. The shops are brimming with intricate seashell sculptures, coral jewelry, and trinkets made from wood found on the sea floor. They also fashion tools and weapons from the resources available to them. In addition, the bazaar offers an abundance of fish and other foods—everyday essentials that can be found in many places. Though they hold significance for the underwater realm, they are not things of much value to most travelers.

On the other hand, the merchants of Encura eagerly welcome goods from outsiders. They readily accept tools

made with sturdy metals, weapons crafted by land-dwellers skilled smithies, or books and scrolls containing knowledge unattainable to them through other means. They also delight in receiving herbs, spices, or preserved foods that enrich the variety of their diet.

Encura lacks many things that cannot be produced underwater. As a result, the merfolk are more than willing to acquire imported wares, especially if it is something unique or not typically found in their underwater homes.



The act of sharing dreams under the moon is considered a sacred ritual among Selene's Followers. They believe that dreams, being the subconscious manifestation of desires, hold special significance. Dream-sharing sessions are said to strengthen the spiritual bond within the community and invite Selene's blessings.

Most Known Places

SELENE'S TEMPLE

Selene's Temple stands tall on the coastline of Encura. It is an awe-inspiring pyramid constructed by the hands of the first generations of Encurains using massive rocks unearthed from the deep sea floors. Twin stairs grace the temple's entire height, leading inside to various chambers dedicated to the tasks of the Listeners. In some chambers, counseling sessions for citizens take place, offering solace and guidance in times of need. Some areas are designed as treatment rooms, where patients wait for healers. Other rooms serve as archives, meticulously preserving the rich history of Encura. Listeners rely on traditional writing materials, as it is easier to procure writing utensils from trade and ink from sea creatures. Whenever something needs to be preserved underwater, letters are carved directly onto the sturdy rocks, so it is not a rare sight to see sculptured memorials, shop names, and other important information that must remain below the water's surface. Everything else, however, is stored inside these archives.

The top two floors of the temple contain two chambers dedicated to rituals. At the very top, the official rituals are conducted, within a small space where only the most needed are asked to come. This includes the Water Embrace Ritual. The second chamber is known as the "Hall of Silence." It is reserved for everyday contemplation, offering a breathtaking view of the surrounding islands and sea from every side. Within the Hall of Silence, no specific deities are worshiped. Instead, it serves as a place for people to connect with nature and the voice of the sea itself. As the Followers of Selene proclaim: "Gods are nowhere. Gods are everywhere." This belief permeates the atmosphere, creating a sense of reverence for the natural world and its gifts.

In the heart of the Hall of Silence stands unique "statue" of Selene, one of the legendary founders of Encura, commanding attention. The statue takes the shape of a mermaid but appears weathered and fragmented, with several missing pieces, including most of her face. If one comes closer, they realize that it is empty inside, and that it is not a statue, at all. Instead, it is the mineralized skin of Selene herself, a tragic reminder of her final days, afflicted by the "Marble Fingers" disease. The hollow interior adds an air of mystery to this poignant memorial.

SUBMERGED BAZAAR

This is a unique area nestled near a beach with a very shallow sea level that can be found near Selene's Temple. The creative and ingenious merfolk have built countless smaller

semi-open buildings and quaint stalls that form a bustling marketplace. It is a vibrant hub where they exchange a wide array of goods produced in the depths of the kingdom.

As one navigates through the Bazaar, they are greeted by a kaleidoscope of colors and scents, as exotic treasures from below the water's surface and rare finds from distant lands above are laid out for display. The intermingling of cultures during these exchanges creates an enchanting atmosphere, as merfolk and travelers from various backgrounds come together.

On one side you can witness the merfolk artists proudly showcasing their latest creations—delicate seashell sculptures or intricate coral jewelry. Visitors from distant lands can marvel at the unique craftsmanship and artistic expressions of Encura shown in the trinkets crafted from wood found on the sea floors. Each piece reflects the soul and essence of the underwater realm. On the other side, the bazaar boasts an ample supply of fish and local foods. While these things might hold great significance for the underwater realm, they do not carry as much value for most travelers.

Amidst the hustle and bustle of trade, the Submerged Bazaar also serves as a gathering place for social interactions. The intermingling of cultures during the exchange of goods in the Submerged Bazaar and a fascinating blend of goods from above and below the water's surface are a spectacle of its own. Though more shady individuals mix with them, too. Still, it is a place where travelers and locals alike come together, sharing tales of voyages, exciting encounters, and newfound discoveries. The marketplace echoes with conversations—both the melodious sounds of laughter and angry shouts of failed negotiations.

SHORE OF THE SEASONS' DANCE

Between Selene's Temple, the Bazaar, and the forests of the islands stretches a broad expanse of beach, untouched by buildings or other architectural elements. This location is known as the Shore of the Seasons' Dance, a place where merfolk gather to commemorate the onset of new cycles during their Feast of the Fading Moon. Throughout the rest of the year, this beach serves as a venue for official ceremonies, including weddings, funerals, and the Choosing of One's Path ritual. During periods when it is not used, workers employed by the Listeners take up the task of maintaining its cleanliness, while volunteers from the Crafters, known for their artistic prowess, contribute to the beach's aesthetics by adorning it with intricate designs and sculptures.



WRECKED VESSELS HANDLERS

Located on the seafloor, on the outskirts of the main settlements, lies an expanse where numerous workshops stretch as far as the eye can see. Resembling abandoned shipyards, this area is dotted with an array of seemingly unfinished ships. Yet, the truth behind this scene is much simpler. One could even say it is very utilitarian. It serves as a place where skilled Crafters engage in the craft of repurposing ship parts into a diverse array of tools.

Salvaged wood is meticulously fashioned into practical utensils and tools, while harpoons and chains are honed and converted into effective weapons. This resourceful process breathes new life into discarded ship fragments. While many Crafters maintain shops across Encura or within the Submerged Bazaar, citizens frequently opt to approach these workshops directly, requesting specific items tailored to their needs.

In more recent times, the ocean's waters have been cleaned from most of the well-preserved sunken vessels, posing a challenge to the Crafters who must now contend with a dwindling supply of high-quality ship materials. Nevertheless, many skilled Crafters choose this path, to toil tirelessly shaping sourced timber and iron into magnificent creations.

HALL OF THE VOICES

Nestled just beneath the waves, close to the shore, the Hall of the Voices emerges as a majestic underwater edifice, its architecture seamlessly merging with the vibrant marine environment. Both coral formations and handiwork of the first generation of Crafters adorn its surfaces, painting it in hues that rival the most splendid sunsets. Inside, you will find a vast hall, its walls made from onyxes and bluish stones adorned with the meticulous handiwork of the most accomplished Crafters, showcasing intricate creations that seamlessly blend with the aquatic world. These creations serve a dual purpose, being both functional and artistic in nature. Though as an outsider, I sometimes failed to grasp what purpose they might present.

The Hall of the Voices serves as a sanctuary of governance for the Encurian people. It is within these walls that the esteemed council of the Voices convenes, deliberating and deciding upon matters that shape the course of their island nation. Here, the currents carry the weight of decisions, while the wisdom of the chosen representatives echoes through the azure chambers.

The significance of this grand structure extends beyond its role in governance. In moments when the council chambers remain unoccupied by the sessions of the day, the hall transforms into a bustling hub of communal interaction.

It is divided into four distinct sections, each dedicated to a particular Shoal. Sunlight filtering through the water's embrace illuminates the bustling scene, where Encurans from all walks of life converge upon this spacious chamber, drawn by the opportunity to present their desires and appeals.

All requests are presented to the officials delegated by the Voices. Then, said representatives carefully assess them and, if the problem or issue is deemed to be something which the Council should deal with, it is passed on to them. However, if the matter can be handled by someone else, the request will be added to the list. These problems are then dealt with by hired people, be it a citizen or outsider willing to help.

DRAGONTOOTH MEMORIAL

In the middle of the underwater city, bathed in the gentle embrace of the currents, is the solemn merfolk memorial. It is known as the "Dragontooth Memorial" and serves as a tribute to the fallen merfolk whose stories intertwine with the very essence of Encura's history.

Carved from the bedrock of the seafloor, its form mimics the natural curve and rugged texture of a massive dragon tooth. On it, one can find carefully sculpted names of the merfolk who courageously journeyed through the vast depths of the ocean before the founding of Encura—or ones who fell during the "Kin's Bloodbath."

Over time, intricate coral gardens have grown around the Dragontooth Monument, nature itself weaving its vibrant threads into the memorial's narrative. Schools of colorful fish dance around it as if they also want to pay an elegant tribute to the lives commemorated by the monument. Below you can see the delicate, intricate work of the Crafters who transformed the stone into a canvas of remembrance, honoring the lives and sacrifices of those who came before.

The memorial serves as a sacred meeting place. A connection between past and present. A place where merfolk of all generations can come to reflect. And as merfolk gather to pay their respects, the water's gentle rhythm seems to echo the whispers of these ancient heroes.

CAVERNS OF THE TAINTED SOULS

Deep within the heart of the seafloors of Encura's islands, lies a labyrinthine network of ancient caves. These caverns, predominantly inhabited by sea creatures, occasionally find use as homes by merfolk, although often driven by necessity rather than preference. Among these depths, one can find a society of outcasts, those who have chosen to reside there due to their association with the shady underbelly of merfolk culture or their own sense of shame. These caves also provide refuge for individuals affected by the "Hair of the Taint," seeking solace away from the prying eyes of society.

Characters Background

SEA WAYFARER

Almost all of the folks born in Encura share one thing in common: they live out their lives without ever traveling more than a few miles beyond its borders. You aren't one of those folks.

Life in your underwater homeland has sharpened your instincts and filled your mind with knowledge about animal life and seas. How much of that will be useful on land is another matter. Nevertheless, you have the courage and determination to venture there. You can be sure that you will undoubtedly find the ways of living and doing things on land to be strange or maybe discomfoting, while your customs and habits will be seen as bizarre by others. At the same time, you can take it for granted that every new scenery, every new horizon, will be full of wonders that you've never laid eyes on before.

You have started treading unfamiliar waters, or rather, lands, all to satisfy your curiosity and perhaps some other desires held in your heart. Chances are good that quite a few people you meet have heard of your homeland. But whether they know something more or just merely the name and perhaps a few outrageous stories is another question.

Skill Proficiencies: Survival, Nature

Tool Proficiencies: One type of artisan's tools or musical instrument

Languages: Aquan

Equipment: A set of traveler's clothes; any one musical instrument or artisan's tools you are proficient with made in the style of your homeland's craftsmanship; poorly wrought maps of the seas from your homeland that depict sea routes, animals and currents of these regions; small pouch containing precious crystals and pearls worth 5 gp.

Variant: Land-walker Returnee

While you were raised in Encura, your heritage lies somewhere else. Your race, or the one which is dominant in your blood, comes from the land. Still, whenever you step into water, your gills show up to help you breathe. Maybe it's that small traces of something else in your blood, or perhaps it's the residual magic from their constant rituals. Nonetheless, life in Encura left its blessings and curses on you. You will need to live with them for the rest of your life.

In addition to your normal features, you can also breathe underwater for one hour per day.

Why Did You Leave?

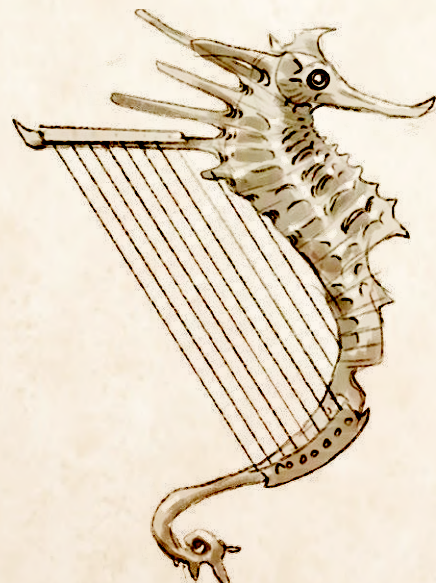
As a Sea Wayfarer, you were previously a citizen of Encura. While you were free to go, most of its inhabitants never leave that place. They have family, a safe home, a certain future ahead, and the warm embrace of the community. You discarded all of that and stepped into the cruel and unfriendly world outside. Was the departure voluntary or involuntary?

To determine why you are so far from home, roll on the table below or choose from the options provided.

D10	REASON
1	I was always so curious about the outside world that I needed to go.
2	I was captured in battle.
3	I seek a way to cure the sickness of someone dear to me.
4	I did not want to stay in that bland place with no future.
5	I want to learn the land-dwellers' knowledge to better my people's lives.
6	I desire power beyond what can be found there.
7	I seek revenge over someone dear to me.
8	I am looking for someone who left Encura in the past.
9	I felt out of place there, it was never my home.
10	They exiled me for breaking the law.

Feature: In harmony with the water

Your extensive knowledge of marine life makes it easy for you to understand its intentions, even if you cannot communicate with it. You also can predict changes in water current and adapt accordingly.



Suggested Characteristics

D8	PERSONALITY TRAITS
1	Seek adventure, for it is the gateway to experiencing the boundless wonders of life.
2	My affection or contempt is expressed in ways that are unfamiliar to others.
3	I live in the present, unburdened by the past, and unafraid of the future.
4	I refuse to give up when faced with challenges.
5	I deeply connect with all who suffer.
6	My training gives me peace of mind, even in the face of disaster.
7	I live to learn and understand everything in this world.
8	To stay calm each day, I need my intimate, traditional rituals unique to my heritage.

D8	IDEALS
1	Cunning. While I do not know their ways, they remain unaware of mine, which is all the edge I need. (<i>Evil</i>)
2	Beauty. This wondrous world is a realm of endless adventure, and I relish every moment of it! (<i>Chaotic</i>)
3	Emotions. The heart always knows the path, all we need to do is follow. (<i>Chaotic</i>)
4	Freedom. Chains are the killers of souls, so I will not allow them in my sight. (<i>Good</i>)
5	Empathetic. As I explore, I strive to understand the perspectives and struggles of those I encounter. (<i>Neutral</i>)
6	Fairness. I must learn their ways before judging their actions. (<i>Neutral</i>)
7	Suspicious. In a land of strangers, I must remain vigilant, for anyone may be a friend or foe. (<i>Any</i>)
8	Adaptability. Each day presents fresh challenges, and I eagerly adjust to thrive in this new realm. (<i>Any</i>)

D6	BONDS
1	In my heart, I will always cherish the years I spent in my homeland.
2	My past life is embodied in my tools, a constant reminder of my roots that I carry with me.
3	I sought this path due to unrequited love for someone beyond my reach.
4	My family members fell victim to merciless soldiers who ravaged our sacred land. I shall exact my vengeance.
5	Back in my homeland, I have a family, and my heart yearns for the day we reunite.
6	In my new party, I have found a family and nothing else is needed to fill my heart.

D6	FLAWS
1	To prevent any interactions, I'd rather avoid them. I pretend not to comprehend the local language.
2	The allure of new alcohols and other pleasures of this land is my weakness.
3	I secretly harbor a conviction of my own culture's superiority.
4	Believing deeply in the significance of my destiny, I sometimes fail to acknowledge my own shortcomings and the possibility of failure.
5	When I feel insecure, I look for validation in the opinions of others.
6	I rarely think before acting, and my instinct-driven actions often backfire.





DUM RAMIL



“Bound by Iron and branded by Steel, our wills are unbreakable.”

A warrior from the Highfort Alliance

The Kartagis Desert located in the western parts of the Herja continent is among the most enigmatic places in Deuslair. Adventurers from all over the land travel there in order to find mysterious artifacts and uncover arcane techniques that

have been long forgotten. A massive Empire once stretched across the land, and while their cities have since fallen into disrepair, their secrets have yet to be fully revealed.



Short History



SHIFTING SANDS

Eons ago, a massive entity known as the Eternal Empire stretched across the continent of Herja, its people achieving a prosperity that would be seemingly unattainable in today's world. They built impressive feats of architecture, mastered arcane fighting techniques, and were masters of art as well as literature. At least, that's what some historians believe, as all that's left of them now are abandoned cities, surrounded by a seemingly infinite desert. One such city was actually adopted by a new set of owners—and has found itself among the prominent powers not just on the continent, but across the entire world.

A new chapter in the history of this land opened a few thousands years after the collapse of the Empire, when someone set their sights on the deserts of Herja. Ragon Stormrider. He was a Lord hailing from the coast of Kallonia and made it his mission to learn more about Herja to expand his influence past the ocean. Bringing a small fleet and plenty of crew, he began his journey. Sailing the seas was something he was used to, but the treacherous journey across the Desert of Kartagis left him like a fish out of water. He met a variety of small tribes on his journey but he and his crew had a couple of close calls—especially when encountering the terrifying, mutated beasts of the desert. Eventually, the group encountered a massive city, its walls reaching out to the sky, almost standing in defiance against the natural order of life and death.

THE FORGOTTEN CITY

Venturing into the city through its dilapidated gate revealed a sprawling complex of houses, buildings, and monuments—but no people. The architecture seemed foreign—equally as impressive as it was strange. Everything seemed to have been abandoned a long time ago, but the walls still stood high and proud. Traveling through the city, the crew found many ancient books and scrolls, written in an indecipherable language. Picking one up, Ragon's mind was suddenly filled with various images and knowledge foreign to him. The insights gained from the scroll allowed Ragon to grasp the fundamentals of a lost fighting technique from the days of the Empire—The Steelfist Arsenal. A subtle desire for power and control also entered his heart at this time, but it went largely unnoticed by the people that surrounded him. Creating a temporary base in the city was a must for him, as the discoveries here were too huge to leave behind.

As the decades passed, rumors of a massive desert far to the South, full of treasures and artifacts had reached the ears of many tavern goers. The only respite from the brutal

conditions from the desert was a lawless city, open to everyone. Many people took the journey to the city, either looking for treasures or searching for a fresh start. At first, growth was stable, but the more people came into the city, the more fearful Ragon became, eventually founding the Steelfist Gathering, an institution created to control the city and everyone in it. Over the years, he became stronger than anyone and mastered the technique that he gained, becoming the sole dominant power in the city.

THE FIRST SECTS

As the city grew in size from its immigrant population, many people found their own technique scrolls and artifacts, looted from the houses or discovered in ancient ruins. Despite this, the Steelfist Gathering strictly forbade others in the city to practice any kind of techniques and required everyone to give up their artifacts. Of course, those who chose to serve would instead gain access to these resources. This led to the creation of many secret societies, today known as Sects, that taught others techniques and shared information on Sacred Artifacts.

The number of conflicts the citizens had with the Steelfist Gathering rose with time, until Ragon himself started purging the Sects whenever he found them. Soon, he became suspicious of even his own followers and it wasn't long before he began executing random people in the city. Nobody is fully sure what happened, but some claim he was possessed by rage and attacked anything or anyone indiscriminately, causing all of the Sects to call a state of emergency. Once rallied, the people fought back, but they were cut down. The battle came down to the wire, and ultimately an artifact was used to seal Ragon's body and soul, freezing him in time and unable to act. Despite this, it could hardly be called a victory—many ended up dead, and Ragon's sealed body spread a red mist which caused anyone that breathed it in to go into a frenzy, making part of the city uninhabitable. The Steelfist Gathering was disbanded and its members either fled or went into hiding, opening the way for the Sects to take the main stage.

DAWN OF A NEW AGE

With such a large power vacuum in the city, the surviving Sect Leaders took the initiative and established an official state. The official name they chose was Dum Ramil which means "Strength above All", taken from the Eternal Empire's tongue and used as a grim reminder of how they got here. A council with 20 seats was created, made available to only the strongest warriors in the city. Thus began the modern history of Dum Ramil, as trade with other countries grew more prevalent and various sects became powerful entities that could rival entire armies in strength.



How It Looks Today

The Dum Ramil of today has many vibrant colors which depend on which area you visit—Sect members often wear long robes covering whole bodies in the colors of their Sect with pride and will judge others for the colors they wear. They bear such a significance that some Sect members will openly attack others if they walk into their territory wearing the wrong colors. For this reason, most foreigners and visitors will wear gray clothing as it was the color of the disbanded Steelfist Gathering, but no one has since dared to claim it as their own.

The Architecture of the City was inherited from the Eternal Empire but over time, the city slowly changed. The methods and materials used in the city are entirely unknown to its



citizens, and repair often results in patching up holes with any material the people have on hand. The color of each Sect is widely displayed within its territory, but a turf war between the Sects can often make it unclear where one territory starts and another one ends.

The city is split into 5 separate regions.

Trade Quarter

At the center of the city lies a massive marketplace filled with goods and services of all kinds and the only place the Sects willingly share a space. Most of this district is run by a Sect known as the Golden Tongue—an alliance of skilled traders, merchants, and diplomats that negotiate contracts between Sects. Apart from them, the richest and most powerful Sects have their headquarters in this district, and they generally regard themselves as “nobility.”

The Shrouded District

More commonly known as the backstreets among the local populace, it's a lawless place of various gangs and minor Sects vying for power. It's the home of many mysterious and rough figures such as assassins and thieves, as growing up as an urchin in the backstreets is sure to teach someone a thing or two about survival.

Streets of Ambition

Adventurers from all across the world travel to Dum Ramil in search of opportunities, and the majority of the Sects are based in this district. By attracting various powerful adventurers with lucrative rewards, the Sects organize expeditions into ancient ruins and abandoned cities.

The Violent Sorrows

A part of the city that was made uninhabitable after Ragon was sealed. A red mist flows through this region, causing anyone that breathes it to fall into a mad rage, blindly attacking anyone close to them. A cult within the walls of the city utilizes this mist in their rituals and during battle, causing mayhem whenever they can.

The Ring

The Warrior culture of Dum Ramil permeates through every aspect of their society, but this is most visible in The Ring, a massive coliseum with multiple compartments in which entire Sects and individuals fight regularly. Arena matches are a common sight, and betting on fights is a pastime enjoyed by everyone, from the dregs of society to the highest elites.

Citizenry, Culture, and Religion

SECTS & THEIR ROLE

Most of the citizens of Dum Ramil are in one of the Sects—they are organizations that people join for safety and to grow stronger. Sects may only allow other family members to join, or may be open to everyone, only demanding a test of skill. The requirements to join are all dependent on the individual Sect. Joining a Sect is the biggest decision one can make—once someone joins, they are most often required to swear an oath that they will never betray or leave the Sect, making their choice a permanent one. These Sects give their members access to resources that would usually be unattainable for them, such as Sacred Artifacts and Technique Scrolls, but also offer basic services such as food and a place to stay in return for doing jobs for the Sect.

Turf wars are common between Sects as they can often have opposing ideologies or philosophies, but they are usually the result of personal disagreements between their members which escalate into full blown conflicts. The area and influence of a Sect controls can often change because of these wars, and some Sects can even end up being wiped out as a result. Internal disputes are not unheard of either, with multiple Sects originating from larger ones that fell apart. Of course, not everyone is part of a Sect. There are many people that are either not strong enough, or do not wish to align themselves with anyone. As adventurers from foreign lands often come to the city, they are also not part of any Sects, but the same is also true for foreign traders...

THE LAND OF WARRIORS

The culture of Dum Ramil is reflective of its past in many ways. Years of harassment from the Steelfist Gathering made the people value strength as a way to protect themselves, but the population ended up overcompensating, creating a warrior culture in which only the strong survive. Open combat within the city happens regularly except for the Trade Quarter (as it is under the private protection of the Golden Tongue) which can make it dangerous for anyone unfamiliar with the city. As a form of entertainment, some will choose to fight in The Ring, where a Sacred Artifact prevents lethal wounds and allows for fights to happen more often. Despite this, there are some that prefer to put everything on the line. An Honor Duel is a fight to the death between two warriors with no outside interference, where the winner takes everything the loser owns, including their life. Betting on these fights is a popular activity, as match fixing is much more difficult if the loser dies and both parties openly swear an oath to uphold honor.

BELIEF IN A CRUEL WORLD

The people of Dum Ramil do not follow any particular religion as most of the people are migrants and the amount of different faiths is almost the same as the amount of people in the city. Some decided to form their own religions, such as was the case with the Rageblood Cultists. They believe that Ragon was an apostle of the Eternal Empire's god of War, and the technique Ragon learnt allowed him to directly channel the power of that god. Whether or not this is true remains to be known, but one thing is for sure—they are definitely dangerous.

CONFLICTS ACROSS THE WAVES

Dum Ramil considers itself to be neutral in the war between Dragsa and the Redoe Alliance, although there are some Sects that are in conflict with the pirates from the Scareguard Archipelago.

Their stance towards the Disciples of Chaos is more neutral than any other kingdom, yet their influence cannot be ignored. Dum Ramil lives thanks to its trade so the destruction of all the kingdoms on the east side of the continent was not something they could brush off. At the present day, they have only two options. First is trade with their western neighbors, who need to cross large expanses of the desert before arriving near their first settlements. Not the fastest trade route. The second option is trade with the kingdoms beyond the sea, but this route goes directly through the Scareguards archipelago—a territory under the control of the Republic of Misty Waters. And that brings us back to the Misty Water's pirates. Their existence makes trade much more difficult. On top of that, frequent heists resulting in the theft of Sacred Artifacts deter a number of traders as they feel less safe while transporting goods across the Sea. To this day, there are many stolen Artifacts that have yet to be found, despite their powerful effects catching the eyes of some really nasty individuals.

Economy and Trade

TELEPORTATION TRADE

Dum Ramil's economy is reliant on the Teleportation arrays that are found all across the Desert of Kartagis. At least after arriving at one of them, as none are located near beaches. Created by the Eternal Empire, there are several ruins that are connected through these arrays. Of course, all of them are under the control of various Sects and using them requires paying a hefty sum. Still, they are a much quicker and safer option than crossing the expanse of the desert. The teleportation arrays also allow them to be a large

exporter of luxury goods—mainly relics from the Eternal Empire or rare materials from desert creatures. Due to a lack of natural resources in the sands of Kartagis, they are reliant on trade for numerous materials—be it ore, textiles or even food. While they don't lack skilled craftsmen, they are forced to use imported goods to turn raw materials into something with more utility. Then these things are sold for a healthy profit to the people of the desert. Thanks to this bustling exchange almost anything can be found in the city, as long as you are willing to pay the right price. It is also worth noting, that the use of these teleportation arrays is restricted by the fact that they only allow a certain amount of goods and people at a time, and need to recharge after each use. Currently, nobody knows how these arrays work, but they never seem to run out of power and seem to fix themselves if some elements are broken. Despite this, nobody is sure what limits are on these repairs, so several Sects call for higher restriction of their usage and better guards.

SACRED ARTIFACTS

A considerable part of Dum Ramil's economy is supported by the various undiscovered Sacred Artifacts and Techniques left in ruins and crypts around the desert. Adventurers from across the world will travel to the city in order to join expeditions organized by the Sects, but their presence alone is beneficial as they pay for their stay. An expedition is an organized dive into an ancient ruin or abandoned city and the Sects pay a lucrative premium for this service, but the adventurers must risk their lives and give up any valuables they find. These artifacts usually go into the Sect's vault, but in times of need, they can even be sold to various powers across the world.

These artifacts can even help to generate income on their own, by providing unique services or products. These can range from a workstation that allows the construction of magically infused equipment to a staff that can pull valuables out of the ground. There is no limit to the strange tools created by the Eternal Empire and some can even be duplicates, but they are all useful to some degree.

MUTATED BEASTS

The Desert has many different beasts that underwent mutation during the fall of the Eternal Empire, and resulted in some creatures being hunted for high quality materials. Most notably, Basilisk Eyes are seen as a very rare commodity, used in brewing and rituals. They are able to turn most living creatures to stone with just a look and are thus very difficult to harvest, but the bounty for one is often quite large. While most adventurers don't make it back, those that do are celebrated as accomplished warriors. Another highly sought after good are the scales of a Sandwyrm. They make for the perfect desert armor being both lightweight and resistant, but only the richest Sects can purchase them.

TRIBAL EXCHANGES

Citizens and Adventurers regularly trade with the various tribes of the desert. Whether its a Lamia Warband or some traveling nomads, they almost always have something valuable to offer. The Lamia often hunt rare beasts for their blood, but don't mind trading the materials they gather. Not everyone is as easy to trade with, though. The Jannah to the east are a group of mages that turned themselves into semi-immortal elementals. They are usually hostile and hunt adventurers in the desert, but some Sects have resorted to kidnapping and selling people to them in return for knowledge and artifacts. In secret, of course.

Government and Politics

BOUND BY IRON

The Council of Dum Ramil was created when the city was officially founded and is responsible for running the city. All members are bound by the Iron Chain, which are rules created and enforced by Trisha's Guidance, a Sacred Artifact named after the Eternal Empire's Goddess of Law and Order. It is able to change the rules of reality within a specific area depending on the number and strength of the people that desire it. All members of the council are physically unable to harm each other inside of the city, unless they request a formal Honor Duel if they feel like their reputation has been unfairly tarnished by another member of the council.

The council members come from a variety of backgrounds and rarely agree on anything, but will still work together in times of great crisis. Not all of the council members are part of a Sect, as they may prefer to practice alone and not share their secrets with anyone, but those that are part of a Sect are often also the leaders of it, allowing them to have much more influence over the decisions of others. Bargaining between members is commonplace, and those with more resources will always have the advantage in a discussion.

Council members lose their seat if they are beaten in an Honor Duel, but if they refuse to fight they will also lose it, in addition to being permanently exiled from the city. In cases where a person loses their seat through not fighting or dying outside of an Honor Duel, a tournament is organized to determine who deserves the seat.

FOUNDING A SECT

Many Sects exist within the city, with the vast majority consisting of small groups that band together in the Shrouded District. Having someone in the Sect with a seat on the council isn't necessary, but is the only path to having any influence within the city. The only thing a person needs



in order to found a Sect is some land within the city as well as a color they want to associate with, but this is often easier said than done. Sects are usually hostile to any newcomers, and many colors are already claimed, forcing things to be settled with a fight.

A Sect will usually have their own unique fighting techniques, taken from the Eternal Empire. Each Sect also has a dedicated Sect Leader, the person responsible for leading everyone. They are most often the strongest person within the Sect, and would have full access to their own treasury, where they would mainly keep any artifacts the Sect finds. There is no shortage of people looking to grow stronger in Dum Ramil, but the easiest way to find new members is to recruit the adventurers that travel to the city for expeditions.

Major Groups and Most Known Places

JANNAH

A tribe of powerful mages that discarded their fleshly bodies to transform into a purely elemental form. Nobody knows what their origin is nor how old they actually are, but their existence is tied to the Book of Soulkeepers which is a Sacred Artifact located in their stronghold, somewhere in the desert of Kartagis. They are unable to leave the desert as leaving the sphere of influence of the artifact would cause them to fade into nothingness. They still require souls in order to exist, and greenhorn adventurers are the perfect target for them.

LAMIA A'SAKIR

A race of sentient snake people that live for the thrill of the hunt. They arrived after the fall of the Eternal Empire but have since become a powerful force on the continent. They are generally neutral and are willing to trade, unless they sense weakness from the other person, in which case they will attack without consideration.

THE NIGHTFALL CLAN

A major Sect within the city of Dum Ramil, they handle anything from assassinations to smuggling, and have a particularly strong influence outside of the city. They openly sell their services in the Trade District including various poisons, weapons, and tools, but mainly reside in the Shrouded District, and are the only large Sect in this region of the city. Sect members often use shadow manipulation techniques, making them the very best at their craft. In addition to this, they clothe themselves in a dark shade of purple. Currently, they hold 3 seats on the council which

allows them to influence things to go in their favor, although the members don't always see eye to eye, as their interests can often conflict depending on their individual employer.

THE SWORD SISTERS

A minor Sect made up entirely of human female knights that don yellow, believing themselves to be righteous and honorable. They practice a sword dancing technique wherein one sword is shared between two knights as they rip their enemies to shreds. The Sword Sisters are among the strongest fighters in the city, but are especially powerful when paired with a partner. They have one seat on the council, held by Cecilia Lionhart. Nobody knows who her dance partner is, and nobody has lived the tale to tell anyone either.

PHANTOM BLADE

World renowned swordsmen gather in the hall of this Sect in order to observe the technique of the Grandmaster—Mosahin—his blade is able to cut through space and time, always landing on the opponent no matter where they are. Whether this claim is true or not remains to be revealed, but the fact stands that not many can match up to him in terms of sword fighting. The only other members of the Sect are Mosahin's 3 disciples, each of which is training to become the next Grandmaster by learning how to kill the current master and take over his seat on the council.

RAGEBLOOD CULTISTS

They are speculated to be leftover members from the Steelfist Gathering. The group got their hands on an abnormal technique—The Book of Seared Madness—which taught them various rituals on summoning demons through sacrificing people. Because of them, some techniques are categorized as “demonic” and are outright banned. It is believed that they are attempting to unseal Ragon, and use the mist he creates in their rituals and when fighting.

LAMASSU

Time-altering beasts with the face of a man and the body of a lion that roam the desert. They are generally peaceful and have a nest built atop a mountain that is protected by a massive sandstorm. Not much is known about them, but they have been around for longer than anyone can remember. Perhaps they even remember the fall of the Eternal Empire...

THE HIGHFORT ALLIANCE

By far the largest Sect in terms of size and power, they have a total of 5 seats on the council. Because of their size, they are split into various groups and factions, and practice a variety of techniques. Their main headquarters are in the

Trade Quarter, but they have multiple branches in the Streets of Ambition, where they recruit many adventurers to go on expeditions.

DARK SECRETS OF THE LAND

The Eternal Empire

An ancient Empire that used to stretch far across the continent of Herja, but was destroyed overnight due to a cataclysmic event of their own creation. The Emperor at the time wanted to spread the gift of eternal youth to everyone and created the Spire of Eternity—a colossal tower that was meant to spread an extract of the Roots of Life across the land. Something went wrong—the lush forests were instead turned into deserts and the people became undead husks. The animals ended up mutating into horrific monstrosities and now roam the desert. Ultimately, only a handful of individuals including the Emperor retained their sanity and retreated underground, never to be heard from again. Undead citizens of the Eternal Empire can still sometimes be found walking around some of the abandoned cities within the Desert of Kartagis.

Sacred Artifacts

Ancient devices that possess immense power, created at the height of the Eternal Empire. There doesn't seem to be a limit to what these artifacts can do, although not all of them are made equal. Attempts at replicating the effects of simpler artifacts have proven to be successful, but more complex artifacts are a hurdle that none of the Sects have overcome yet.

The Black Passing

The effects of the Spire of Eternity could be felt all across the land, but a specific area became entirely uninhabitable. As the earth came apart and was replaced with sand, a massive ravine was created, releasing dangerous black vapors. Those that travel near the Black Passing lose their eyesight to a condition aptly named “White-Eyes” because of the people that completely lose their iris to the vapor, causing their eyes to become entirely white.

Mutated Beasts

Various creatures inhabit the Desert of Kartagis, but they all bear one thing in common—they became mutated when the Spire of Eternity was activated, changing them forever. The changes caused them to become a lot more aggressive, but a variety of creatures also gained new traits that make them significantly more dangerous.

Technique Scrolls

The scrolls from the time of the Eternal Empire contain knowledge on a variety of powerful skills and fighting techniques, and have since become widespread among the Sects of Dum Ramil. Some Sects have their own signature

techniques which are not shared to outsiders under any circumstances. There are still plenty of Technique Scrolls left to discover within the various ruins of the Eternal Empire, but nobody knows how many of these scrolls there actually are, as a significant amount are either never shared with anyone else, or are only shown to the highest Sect members. Despite all of this, not all Techniques are equal—some may be significantly stronger, and others may even have drawbacks depending on their effect. Techniques are actually magical in nature, and are a physical manifestation of the user's will. During the Eternal Empire's age, they were known as Arcane Scrolls.

Heralds of the Underworld

A division of the Disciples of Chaos, they were sent to the Desert of Kartagis as early scouts, looking through the old cities of the Eternal Empire in search of something. Their forces consist of various races taken from other worlds and transported to Deuslair. They are not regarded as a threat by the citizens of Dum Ramil, either because the Sects are too busy infighting or they do not interact with them often enough.



Characters Background

DESERT URCHIN

You were born in the City of Dum Ramil, but ever since you could remember, you were on your own. Despite this, you kept going forward until you could fend for yourself.

After becoming a little older, you joined a small Sect in the backstreets and started on taking a variety of requests, not knowing if today was going to be your last day alive. Despite this, you still managed to make ends meet while finding both friends and enemies within the city, as well as getting your hands on an artifact which you still use to this day. Eventually, you became locally known as a reliable asset within your area of the backstreets.

Skill Proficiencies: Stealth, Athletics

Tool Proficiencies: Disguise kit, thieves' tools

Languages: None

Equipment: A small knife, a set of clothes common for Dum Ramil, an artifact from a ruin (choose from the list below), and a pouch containing 10 gp.

Sacred Artifacts:

- Shadowwalkers' Trinket—Surrounds you in a sinister aura and allows you to quickly move behind an ally or an enemy within 20 ft., without invoking attacks of opportunity.
- Pouch of Blinding Mist—Covers an opponent's eyes with a black mist for 6 seconds, blinding them till the end of their next turn.
- Gloves of Loyal Grip—Return an object you threw up to 6 seconds ago back into your hand.

These artifacts' special effects may only be used once a day, as a "bonus" action.



Leaving the City

Your Sect got caught between the turf war of two much larger Sects, and was destroyed in the crossfire. Thankfully, you still had a very desirable skill set and there would definitely be others that would be willing to work with you. Despite this, you ended up leaving the city. What led you to take such an action?

D6	REASON
1	I feared for my life after I insulted someone important
2	I felt like I couldn't grow any stronger if I stayed.
3	I wanted to become known across the world, not just within the city.
4	I was exiled from the city.
5	There weren't enough opportunities for me.
6	I wanted to see the world outside the Dum Ramil.

Feature: Ancient Knowledge

You've spent years fighting in the city of Dum Ramil, and you possess extensive knowledge on fighting Techniques and Sacred Artifacts from the Eternal Empire, as well as some of the fundamental principles of how they function. You're able to identify whenever something originates from the Eternal Empire or from the city of Dum Ramil.

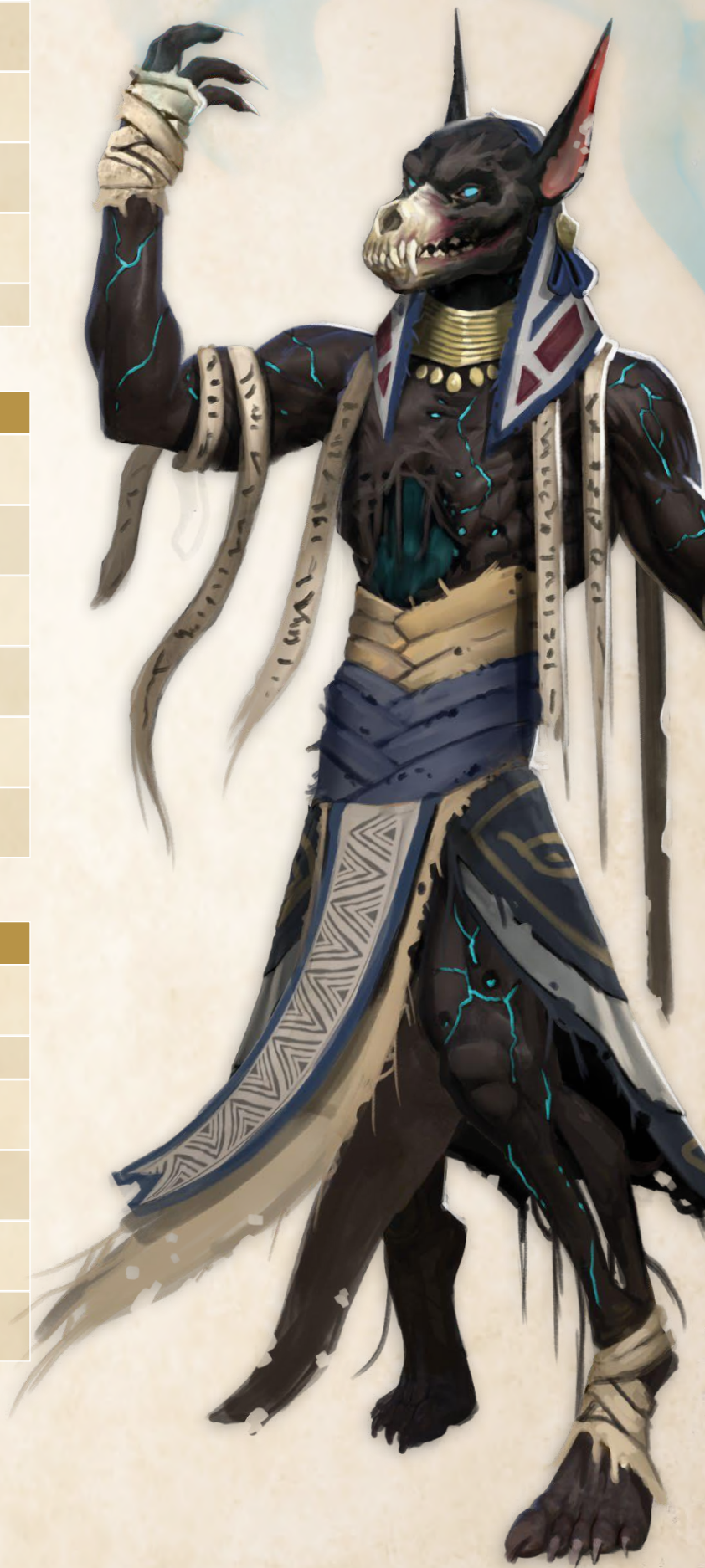
Suggested Characteristics

D6	PERSONALITY TRAITS
1	I always try my hardest, no matter what.
2	I tend to resolve conflicts by force.
3	I do not care about others, as am the only one that matters.
4	I treat fighting strong opponents as a valuable experience.
5	I try to learn from mistakes as it is the quickest path to mastery.
6	I prefer indirect confrontation and careful planning, rather than blindly charging in.

D6	IDEALS
1	Power. I strive to become stronger than anyone else and bend the rules to my will. (<i>Chaotic</i>)
2	Knowledge. Learning more about the world allows us to thrive in it. (<i>Neutral</i>)
3	Passion. Doing something that you love is all that matters in life. (<i>Chaotic</i>)
4	Greedy. I only do what I do to become famous and wealthy. (<i>Evil</i>)
5	Kindness. I know how harsh life can be, so I will try to make it better for others. (<i>Good</i>)
6	Survival. Only the strong deserve to live. (<i>Evil</i>)

D6	BONDS
1	I am friendly with a higher up from one of the Sects.
2	I have a few friends within the backstreets who owe me.
3	The people still remember my name from when I took requests.
4	I saved the life of an adventurer during an expedition.
5	I survived in Dum Ramil because of my friend, who was like my sibling.
6	In my darkest hour someone took pity on me and I still owe them a debt.

D6	FLAWS
1	I am impatient, often charging in without thinking.
2	I spend too much money on things I don't need.
3	I am too cocky, and underestimate my opponent often.
4	I do not help anyone if they do not offer anything in return.
5	When I see someone struggling I tend to wait and see if they really need help.
6	I always feel compelled to prove my worth and skill, especially if someone challenges me.





WURGAR AND THE GODLESS LANDS

“It cannot be called a landscape. Nor a stag at the mating ground. Let's agree that the panorama of Wur'Gar is as beautiful as having one's body burned by fire.”

Van Kler “Journey Diaries”, Chapter XII

Wurgar, the formidable stronghold that now looms over conquered lands. Its foundations are laid upon the ashes of civilizations, once vibrant and independent, now subdued into slavery. This stronghold serves as a chilling reminder of the cruel way the invaders conquer new lands and how they transform thriving territories with their own values into subservient realms of their followers.

Venturing beyond Wurgar's grim walls, the landscape reveals the aftermath of the initial onslaught by the Disciples

of Chaos. The once-prosperous lands now stand as haunting memorials, the charred remnants of what used to be bustling cities and villages. This desolated region has earned the grim moniker of the “Godless Lands,” a place where the touch of Chaos has extinguished the vitality of life.

While not many things are known about this cursed place, a handful of relations of those fortunate enough to escape their grasp have reached the ears of a few individuals.

Short History

HOW THE DISCIPLES OF CHAOS CAME TO HERJA

The history of the Disciples of Chaos on Deuslair is so short and simple that it sounds almost fake whenever it's brought up to others, almost as if there's more to them than meets the eye, although it's impossible to tell if someone falsified the records. The Disciples showed up around 60 years ago, which would make it year 690 of Anara's Reign. In just 60 years, they were able to change the entire continent.

It all started in the Kingdom of Gandoa. Their peace was disturbed when a portal to another realm opened at the heart of the Kingdom. Was it the doing of the Disciples? Or was it due to some experiments done within Gandoa? Perhaps it was just a natural occurrence? The origins of this gateway remain uncertain and it would haunt the minds of many to come. From its depths emerged emissaries covered in strange scars—resembling burns, yet their appearance did not match with those caused by either fire or acid. These envoys identified themselves as prophets of the true god of Chaos, embarking on a divine mission to spread the gospel of their deity.

Initially, the emissaries were given hospitality in the court of King Gandoa. As they bore no hostility, they were welcomed as strange but friendly guests, which makes them the perfect tool to fight off boredom for someone of the upper class. For months, they immersed themselves in the lore of the land, eager to learn about the world that lay beyond their portal. Their fascination focused on the myths of creation, the struggle between Order and Chaos when the world was created as well as the geographical intricacies of Deuslair. Despite the genuine attempts of the kingdom's clerics to heal their malformed bodies, the emissaries staunchly refused. They claimed their disfigurements were sacred manifestations of the blessings bestowed upon them by Chaos.

However, the tranquility of this interlude was abruptly shattered on one fateful day. One of the emissaries began babbling strange things about discovering the world of the first fight, tracing the traitorous gods, and claims of finding a god's bones. He then went together with other emissaries to the king's court and shouts started to echo from the king's chambers. Whatever took place there, they were clearly not reaching agreement. Matters took a darker turn when another emissary ran away with a magical artifact gifted to the king from a far away country. After that, the king issued an oddly grave command—not only to halt the emissaries but to kill them on sight if they got close to the portal. As if he knew something more about the whole situation.

Of course, the emissaries were not planning on surrendering. The ensuing skirmish claimed the lives of many guards and most of the emissaries, yet two managed to escape through the portal with the coveted artifact.

The king, seemingly terrified by the events, hastily ordered the closure of the portal. Unfortunately, the mages were not sure how to seal it shut. After weeks of their relentless work their time ran out—a massive army from the Disciples of Chaos emerged from the portal. And then another. And another. And another. Their march became unstoppable. Despite initial resistance, the invaders overwhelmed the defenders, seizing control of the capital within a mere two weeks. The entire kingdom fell in the next month.

Following their swift victory, the Disciples initiated the construction of Wurgar, a formidable stronghold erected by the hands of captive prisoners. Then, when the construction of said stronghold was underway, their sight shifted toward other kingdoms on Herja, which would be conquered next if they dared to stop their mission.

The rest, as the poets like to say, is just history...

Geography of Eastern Herja

THE GODLESS LANDS

In the simplest terms, the Godless Lands are harsh, unforgiving, and ominous. The air is heavy with magic, creating an atmosphere punctuated by flashes of unpredictable energy and perpetual, unnatural winds. Rain, though sporadic in some areas, does little to alleviate the aridity of the land. The soil, blighted by suffering, struggles to support any semblance of normal life. Wastelands cover half of the landscape, while dark mountains cast shadows over the desolate plains.

Godless Lands are far from welcoming. The very essence of the place seems to repel life, leaving it barren and foreboding. Those who dare to traverse its unforgiving terrain must contend not only with physical challenges but also with the magic that hangs in the air like an oppressive shroud. It is a place where the scars of chaos run deep, etched into the very fabric of the land.

*He who has never visited Wurgar,
let him never do so. And he who has visited
Wurgar, let him return.*

WURGAR

At the center of the land stands the stronghold known as Wurgar, fashioned from the black stones unique to this desolate region. Its construction started soon after the conquest of Gandoa was finished. Initially, the labor force used in creating the stronghold consisted mostly of orcish slaves, brought here along with the armies from realms beyond the mysterious portal. These workers bestowed the name of "Wur'Gar" upon the terrible fortress. With the arrival of captives from the kingdoms of Herja, the pronunciation eventually evolved into the "Wurgar" we know today. Despite its imposing presence, this stronghold is a relatively recent addition to the diverse landscapes of Deuslair.

Dark tower looms over the Wurgar, concentrating the magical energy of Chaos into one spot. From this tower the Disciples of Chaos observe the surroundings and plan their next moves. With a height of nearly 1700 ft., it allows for the observation of almost the entire land. The only blockade are the mountains located to the east of the stronghold. Among the walls covered in black and gray, orange-fiery light pulsates in some places, giving the stronghold an even more ominous character. Elements of fortifications have been carved into the black rock, creating an architectural rarity when comparing to the rest of the continent. Sharp towering structures, and a gloomy atmosphere give birth to an aura of seriousness and respect to the tower of Wurgar.

At the very center of the stronghold lies the central castle, around which alleys of houses, workshops, guilds, and other residential buildings are laid out like tentacles. The castle has two towers and is built in the shape of a rectangle. The ends of the towers are adorned with sharp spikes and create an exceptionally coherent composition with the rest of the city's buildings. The narrow streets of the stronghold are reserved for the passage of carts and other vehicles. Sometimes, creatures can be seen riding on these carts. Humanoid figures sneak along the sides of the streets, hidden in shadows. It is in their own interest to not end up under the wheels or, worse, in the claws of some giant creature. The only real law here is the restriction of movement as nobody is truly concerned if some unfortunate soul gets ran over.

The main function of the stronghold is to protect the numerous buildings and crafting headquarters that make up the supply system of the Disciples. That's the official version. The real reason is shrouded in mystery. Anyone high enough in the ranks of the Disciples knows that in the suburban catacombs, there is a magical portal, through which supplies are transferred to the land of chaos. Everything created in Wurgar ends up there. Only a few thieves and ruffians are able to come into possession of items that are supposed to go through the portal. This requires access to information, and a fair amount of luck. And luck is scarce in this place.

Transfers of goods are kept secret and not systematically planned. Magical and non-magical craftsmen are guarded by patrols of the Disciples. The mined resources, essential to their operations, are always escorted with the status of the highest priority. Despite this, the mining transport line is the weakest link in this chain, is that as it passes through Ashen Deserts. Transported materials often tempt treasure hunters and marauders. The effects of this temptation can be varied, but most often, it ends with dark blades cutting someone's throat.

Materials that managed to reach the stronghold are distributed among the crafting guilds. The lion's share of the material is allocated for the production of weapons. Axes, swords, armor, and other armaments that will be used in a just cause in the future.

The most honorable place is occupied by the Guild of Chaos, located next to the central castle. It is one of the largest clusters of magical blacksmiths in Wurgar, and are involved in imbuing weapons with Souls Ash and providing magical artifacts crafted from alloys made from black rocks. Their work is sealed with strict secrecy. Anyone who tries to break in is expelled from the city by the wind. Wurgar's magicians love to turn uninvited guests into ashes. Sometimes, Chaos Envoys organize demonstrative executions to discourage thieves. Few can bring themselves to describe what is done with the bodies of fools who venture to Wurgar.

Another section within Wurgar is the District of Orders. Members of these orders are part of the elite communities, but are not allowed to contact any of the city's other residents. Everything they need is provided to them by the Disciples. The true nature of the Orders are a secretive, hermetic group responsible for carrying our special tasks, like eliminating anything that would disturb the free flow of the magical energy of Chaos.

The remaining groups inhabiting the stronghold are known as the citizens of the Disciples, a mixture of species from everywhere. Within the city's culture, a custom has emerged whereby residents never ask anyone where they come from. Ethnic diversity arises from the fact that the emissaries brought anyone who could satisfy their spontaneously emerging needs. Almost everyone who comes to the city is addicted to the Souls Ash. However, some Individuals are not susceptible to the addictive nature of these particles. Unlike citizens of most cities that survived the invasion, residents of the capital enjoy certain civil liberties. These bits of freedom are enough for many foreigners to look for a better life there.

TEMPORARY ENCAMPMENT

Nestled at the bottom of Wurgar lies the Temporary Encampment. The encampment sprawls across a desolate landscape, with makeshift structures made from the dark

wood of crow bush trees. Within its confines, captives from every corner of the continent of Herja toil under the watchful eyes of the enforcers.

Each day, new captives are brought into encampment embrace to endlessly toil doing the most mundane jobs needed for the Disciples. It has lasted for so long, that families have formed inside of the camp, with newer generations growing up in the shadow of oppression. The term "Temporary" has become a cruel and ironic reminder of their enslavement, as the camp has evolved into a somber settlement. A microcosm of shattered hopes and dreams that have been extinguished. Despite this, some captives have been granted the dubious privilege of citizenship and life within Wurgar by adhering to the doctrines of the Disciples.

TUNNELS OF DESTINY

One of the most beautiful places... or rather the only beautiful place in Wurgar is the vast network of tunnels under the mountains. Massive, high, and wide underground alleys called the "Tunnels of Destiny" by some stretch down for tens of miles, deeper than anyone has ever gone before. Within the depths and abysses of the black rock, shining green crystals can be found. The Fortress of Dragsa calls them the Roots of Life, and uses in their most powerful technologies. The Disciples of Chaos perceive the veins of crystals as the remains of the ancient god of Chaos. Therefore, they consider these places sacred and guard in every way. The abyss under the mountain is rich in metals and rare elements. Some even joke:

"In the abyss of the black rock, you can find anything that is not on the surface of Wurgar. Which is practically everything..."

Even before the Disciples took over, there were fools that tried to explore the tunnels. They documented their memories in a book known as "Fantastic Crystal Veins and Where to Find Them." Only some of the original group to make it back, but those who did returned a few statuses higher. It is known that they encountered various creatures of darkness, scaly underground fauna, chambers full of "glamor and honor," and fruits of incredible taste, value, and intensity. The whole journey supposedly took around a quarter of a human's life, and they discovered only a fraction of the mysterious tunnels.

"Although I will never return there, I will never regret that I returned from there..."



ASHEN DESERTS

The Godless Lands now make up over half of the surface of Herja, and are covered in the Ashen Deserts. It was created when the ash from the forests, fields, and cities razed by the armies of the Disciples fell onto the ground. Most believe that this ash is somewhat different than regular ash. Nonetheless, one doesn't need to be an adventurer to admit that it is quite easy to move around these areas. Unlike traditional deserts the ground does not sink or rise during strong winds. The terrain is quite irregular—there are hills and certain types of valleys... depending on what was buried beneath them. Still they form a fairly stable ground over which, a loaded cart can be driven. Some of the Disciples are experimenting with the possible uses the ash. So far nothing significant was discovered but there are rumors that it can be burned in a specific way and obtain a brittle but very protective building material.

CLUSTERS

A similarity that connects the Ashen Deserts with their traditional counterparts are the so-called oases, known by some as "Clusters." They are characterized by a fairly rich flora for this region. Drinking water pours out of the ground, which somewhat resemble geysers. Local eruptions of underground waters are the only places where this life-giving liquid can be found, giving a chance for vegetation to grow. It is noteworthy that all oases somehow grew in the places that contain ruins, built with black rock by long-forgotten civilizations.

How and why these oases show up, is not known. However, quite an interesting mix of species native to Herja and invasive ones from realities beyond the portal of Chaos inhabit them. It includes aggressive plants known as corpse drinkers or black mushrooms.

MARSH OF THE UNRESTED

As one journeys westward, escaping the relentless grip of oppressive aridity of the Ashen Deserts, and gets closer to the sea, the atmosphere becomes more humid. Yet, it does not make the land flourish with life like one would expect. In place of meadows and forests, emerging the Marsh of the Unrested, its very essence betraying an unnatural and unsettling aura. The air there hangs heavy with the miasma of toxic gases, and its murky waters keep innumerable half-rotten bodies of the ones who got lost there under its surface. This enigmatic marshland existed long before the Disciples of Chaos arrived in Herja, standing as a natural barrier between the desert of Kartagis and the eastern kingdoms of Herja but now, they border with the territory of the Disciples. But one cannot stop to ask, why are there toxic swamps there? Can something be found below them? As less and less people actually try to cross them, it invites curiosity rather than fear.



Life Under the Grasp of the Disciples

SOCIETY

The social classification in Wurgar is straightforward. At the apex of the social ladder sits the absolutely dominant class called the Pandemonium. They are the generals that command the armies and are seen as the sovereigns of Disciples' realms. Little is known about their exact numbers, as only a select few have traversed into this world.

Below them are the Envoys of Chaos. They are spreading the gospel of God of Chaos.

Following them are the regular citizens and members of the armies. At the bottom there are slaves, with significantly more limitations on their freedoms.

The situation is different in other cities—there are those that have managed to maintain some semblance of sovereignty by succumbing to the Disciples. However, these places are isolated from the rest of the continent so much that a meticulously crafted veil of mystery is starting to surround them...

RELIGION

The societal structure of the Envoys of Chaos is not particularly organized. At its zenith is the Chaos Council, whose headquarters are situated in the highest tower of the stronghold. Shrouded in secrecy, they destroy anyone who dares even think of questioning their will. Orders to lesser priests and worshippers of Chaos are conveyed through telepathy. They tolerate absolutely no forms of insubordination and disobedience. In their leisure time, they take pleasure in tracking down and exterminating remnants of ancient religions, which did not adjust to Chaos' teachings. On the surface they harbor a deep hatred for followers of anything other than the God of Chaos, but quite a lot of them are in echelons of sub-cults which the Disciples of Chaos assimilated in the past. All of this may be done in order to prove that their particular cult isn't rebelling against Chaos and prove their devotion to the cause.

The lower echelons of the Disciples of Chaos are tasked with seeking clues about the god's bones. Their fundamental purpose is servitude and performing exceptionally dirty work, during which casualties are not uncommon. However, this is not a matter open to discussion or contemplation. No one questions themselves deep down about whether they "should" do something or not. Cultists and priests are responsible for conducting all kinds of rituals aimed at worshipping and seeking the favor of the god of Chaos.

A Few Groups Worth Mentioning

HERALDS OF CHAOS

They are the elite armies employed by the Disciples when conquering a new world. Since they are not exactly one group, it is hard to specifically point out anything about them. However, what sets them apart from your regular troops or other distinct groups within the ranks of the Disciples is how their bodies amass the power of Chaos. Its magic fills them to the point that it can no longer be contained within and it starts pouring outside—twisting and morphing the reality around. Each group of Heralds possesses a strange aura that affects surroundings, with the exact way that influence exhibits itself is entirely dependent on the Heralds themselves.

BETRAYERS

It is a collective name given to all those who willingly joined the ranks of the Disciples. While they are frowned upon by all of the captives and the ones who needed to suffer much more before being forced to join the forces of Chaos, they are also granted many privileges. As they are one of the few people within the legions of the Disciples with information about Deuslair, they often lead armies or work as advisers.

KHUURAC DOR

It is an ancient cult that originates from centuries before the invasion of the Disciples of Chaos. Its other name is the Cult of Purple. Their main belief is worshipping the might of blood which binds all living beings together, and the god governing over it. There is only one status group within it—the worshipers. This group includes both individuals who worship the god and the ones that are his priests. The lack of a hierarchy is a characteristic for the religion and the absence of elites quickly attracts new followers. Rituals are conducted by alternating between members of the community. Since the religion is a typical "community religion," its characteristic feature strong symbolism, and while animal sacrifice is practiced, members don't sacrifice humans or themselves. Knowing that you won't be the next offering to a god always makes recruitment of new followers much easier. Everyone in the cult is closely bound to each other, like a family, forming a hermetic community where meddling in each other's affairs plays a crucial role. Gossip, informant activities, and mutual condemnation of



Rituals take place on the streets of cities, at cult sites, and shrines. The Chaos Council does not participate in these activities. They have their own ritual stage, inaccessible to the lower classes.

LIVING OUTSIDE OF WURGAR

To the northwest, remnants of the cities that were invaded and partially destroyed by the Disciples are still inhabited by their original owners, and it's generally considered to be the livelier part of the continent. The only reason they were not completely dominated is because the invaders do not have sufficient forces to occupy and colonize these places according to their own vision. These centers serve as a kind of bridge between the world without Chaos. To the north, and on the coast, there are secret ports hidden between the rocks, allowing the residents of these cities to trade with overseas lands. Going down the map to the southeast, we can find the cities of Darcasuz, Ahar-Ban, and Kaarhozk. The population of these cities in ancient times formed a kind of trade and cultural conglomerate that, in its heyday, led in this region. All the wealth of the cities, developed over hundreds of years was plundered, destroyed, and deformed. Only in the last few years, thanks to gaining partial freedom from the Disciples, have the descendants of these great city builders begun to rebuild the legacy of their ancestors.

About their ancestors, not much is known. There were three culturally diverse communities that spoke a common language. This ensured excellent communication between the Triumvirate and resulted in countless diplomatic possibilities, which, combined with access to the sea and mighty forests, allowed the development of three great city states. However, very little of these cities remain today. The Chaos Envoys wiped out 80% of the population inhabiting these cities. The survivors became suppliers of resources that cannot be found in the deeper parts of the land. The Envoys return from time to time to collect tribute, in honor of the God of Chaos. Worshiping any religion not assimilated into the teaching of Chaos is strictly forbidden. Nevertheless, the cities have underground spaces where chosen elites can hide, away from the prying eyes of the Disciples. Mages and descendants of legendary warriors are a part of these unions. Some even say that the cities are somehow connected... and there are underground governments, consisting of heirs to the crowns of the city.

SLAVERY

The clinking of chains, interwoven with the strikes of picks, hammers, and the whistling wind, is the music to the ears for nobles. Each city has been vassalized, and people living there have harnessed to slave labor to hasten the release of the ancient God of Chaos. The mining colonies in these areas constitute one-fifth of Wurgar's overall income, which is precisely why the Disciples so eagerly seeks these lands. The abilities of the descendants of legendary craftsmen far surpass the inhabitants of the stronghold in the center of the land. The Chaos envoys, aware of this fact, and somewhat allow for the partial preservation of freedom for the citizens of these regions. They understand that if they were to use leather whips, they would expose their mission to serious danger. In this world, there are civilizations so unique that even the Disciples can only bow before their art and creations. None of the parties in this arrangement is considering severing their ties. The residents of the cities prefer to be slaves rather than completely lose hope in restoring their cities to their former glory, while the envoys value the productivity and creativity demonstrated by the population.



PARTISAN MOVEMENT

However, the greatest freedom lies to the far east, in Kaarhozk. Dubbed by some as the “Forest Bridge,” its name is derived from the fact that it has always been nestled between the plains and one of the largest forests in the region. A forest so impenetrable that not even the Chaos envoys venture into it. It is not precisely known how many inhabitants lead their lives in the forested areas. What is known is that these areas are exceptionally dangerous. On the outskirts, one can often find the so-called “Crimson Hedgehogs,” the corpses of slain creatures pierced by dozens of arrows. Some consider it a secret resistance movement, while others believe it to be the only civilization in the land untouched by Chaos. One thing is certain—they are not willing to leave their forest just yet. Tales circulate about magnificent ports supposedly located on the eastern edge of the woods. About cliffs housing mighty shipyards that produce the finest vessels on the entire continent. How much truth lies in these stories? As much as the dark forest, so dark that even evil fears to enter, can conceal.

The remaining cities, Darcasuz and Ahar-Ban, possess powerful canal networks. It is there that the headquarters and temporary homes of the resistance movement are located. The canal networks are so extensive that they are virtually impossible to infiltrate. Squads of assassins provide some residents with a form of protection. Any abuse committed by the Chaos Envoys, the use of whips, the mistreatment of slaves, and torture, end with a wrongdoer being dragged into the canals and vanishing. Sometimes, however, assassins use poison-tipped arrows—alchemically crafted extracts from rare flowers found in the damp tunnels beneath the cities. This is another reason why the Chaos Envoys opted for their particular solution. Supposedly, in the underground of Ahar-Ban, there is a brewery whose beer is distributed throughout all the other cities. This is one of the more significant social aspects, ensuring the community a certain happiness and respite from the murderous labor for the Disciples of Chaos.

Civilizations That No Longer Exist

In the beginning, there was chaos. And before chaos? Alchemists and wizards immersed themselves for decades in contemplations about how beautiful the flowers that might have grown in the Godless Lands before the Disciples arrived. The subjugated territories once pulsed with life, intellect, and multiple different cultures or religions—all either razed to the ground or forcibly assimilated into the Disciples of Chaos. However, the ability of the Disciples to destroy

inappropriate behavior are quite common within its members, although this probably has nothing to do with the mentality of its main followers. Probably.

Everyone wishing to join the cult do not have a particularly difficult task ahead of them. The ceremonial “initiation” of new brothers and sisters is straightforward and not very time-consuming. The initiate kills a small pest, recites a sequence, and voila—they are already a worshiper. This custom has made rats one of the holiest icons of this magnificent religion.

THE CULT OF ELISHU

It is one of the many cults assimilated into the Disciples of Chaos. At its prime, it stood as a bastion of wisdom and enlightenment, with the Hands of Elishu, the shamans atop this religion, serving as negotiators between countries and even as counselors to their leaders. It was widespread in a few of the most prominent kingdoms on the Herja continent, such as the peaceful Gnomish country of Weruid or the forest-covered Eldana, where it held the status of the official state religion. When these countries fell, the cult leaders faced a choice: either join the followers of Chaos to protect their believers or perish among the ashes of the burning kingdoms. Those who revered Elishu, the god of knowledge and foresight, could foresee what the future holds in both of these choices, as his devout worshippers were bestowed with the gift of divination. Now, their bodies and minds are bound to Chaos, corrupting them a bit more each day as they lead the armies of the Disciples and support them with magic, all in the hopes of keeping Elishu's followers safe.

IMPALERS

They are a cadre of winged demons devout to the god of Chaos. Notorious for their malevolent and sadistic tendencies they rarely associate with other Disciples. Rather, they just take control of some old ruins and sporadically join their allies in fights. They are said to be one of the first creatures who started to walk the path of Chaos, but their nature makes it impossible to ascertain if this is the case. Any attempts to converse with them end with almost no results—each Impaler provides a different answer, often responding with unintelligible riddles, as if they were mocking the question rather than offering a genuine response. Their battle tactics involve aerial assaults, seldom granting their adversaries the dignity of a fair confrontation.

is exceptional. It took merely 57 years for the inhabitants of these lands to be deprived of most of their identity, memory, and heritage. Nevertheless, this does not mean that they have erased this legacy to zero.

There are manuscripts describing vibrant green cities that once formed the foundations of this land. There were many different Kingdoms with diverse views on this world. From the peaceful Eldania, relying for generations on diplomacy to preserve peace, to the exceptionally bloody warmongers that existed on the territories now occupied by the gray desert. Even today, beneath the thick layers of clay, fragments of archaic weapons, furnaces, and forges can be found. Strangely enough, there are expeditions made by nobles of other countries, that hired wizards who specialize in transforming these weapons into splendid artifacts. Objects from the forgotten world command the highest value in the black markets. Often, they embody powers allowing control over water, fire, air, or underground creatures.

Underground ruins remind the people of the time that rocks in this part of Herja still had a bright color. Round and flat stone tables with perfectly geometric rectangular recesses arranged in a circle, they, along with the surface, form a pattern resembling a radiating star. The abundance of weapons and everyday items around the altars suggests that they might have been sacrificial altars for an ancient cult. The preserved vertical stone spikes emerging from the center of these rectangles seem to confirm this theory. If each rectangular recess represented a sacrificial chamber, it implies that the members of this civilization were of extraordinary stature. The spikes suggest that they sacrificed themselves, and there is no indication that anyone other than the victims participated in the ceremonies. Could we be dealing with a cult that had no priests or any other form of hierarchy? An extraordinary self-guiding civilization that did not require any religious authority.

The quantity of intricate armor and weaponry by the altars indicates that it was a martial civilization, undoubtedly strongly inclined toward bloodshed. The vastness of the areas where its remnants were found, however, suggests that it was a grand and all-powerful civilization. The technological complexity and mechanics of the items suggest that it was the people were very advanced. The beautiful yet macabre findings, however, cannot provide anyone with complete certainty about who they were.

Apart from the “bloody” civilization, remains of another civilization were also found. The lack of preserved buildings or cult centers suggests that it was a powerful group of nomads. However, the quality of the preserved items indicates that it appeared around the same time as the first civilizations. The most intriguing and well-preserved spoils of this civilization are the mysterious black and gold bows and their larger counterparts, ballistae made from the same

kind of metal. The biggest mystery remains the recipe for the flexible, ductile alloy from which they were made. To this day, the most eminent magical blacksmiths have not discovered how to recreate it. The secrets of this ore might be hidden between the cracks of the black rock.

A considerable amount of fairly well-preserved pieces of armor, items, and weapons of this group were found in rather unusual circumstances. They are often discovered in the company of mummified and desiccated abdomens of gigantic insects. However, these insects differ in their physiology from those found on the surface of Wurgar today. Moreover, an adventurer described creatures as “powerful, with black-gold armor, resembling mobile homes” in his journals.

The name “Godless Lands” is something that was created by the captives from the Kingdoms of Herja. As the lands were forsaken by the gods.

The size of the weaponry implies that representatives of this race were of unusually average height and slender build. The quality of the preserved elements of this culture indicates an excellent understanding of the structure of matter and energy behaviors. Despite being a nomadic culture, they appear to have been exceptionally developed. The coexistence of this civilization in the same period as the aforementioned one suggests that these civilizations must have somehow diplomatically managed their differences. No serious evidence has been found that would confirm military conflicts between them. Perhaps they lived in an alliance or some other form of symbiosis, enabling both civilizations to thrive? How these civilizations ceased to exist also remains a mystery. Or maybe they did not cease to exist?

The greatest mystery on the surface however, still lies in the northeastern forests. Where did their inhabitants come from, and how did they manage to evade Chaos? Some utopian theorists suggest a connection with the civilizations that once lived in the Wurgar deserts and their mysterious disappearance. However, this seems unlikely in any way. This civilization has been concentrating its efforts for decades on staying hidden and isolated from the outside world. A basic understanding of the history of the region suggests that they would not be interested in destroying two advanced civilizations just to hide in the forest later and exclude anyone else from reaching them. The behavior of this mysterious nation rather indicates signs of a guardian culture. Cultures of this kind do not usually boast expansionist-aggressive behaviors. What matters to them is maintaining peace and order around what they already possess, which is why they are not interested in conquests. Unfortunately, the true wealth of this culture is unknown. It is known that they love

to use arrows. One thing is certain—this culture survived as the only one (although in a sense it remains absent and invisible), in its entirety, and may hold the key to the memory of the world before the arrival of the envoys of Chaos.

The northeastern shores of Wurgar, south of Trout Island, are one of the more economically interesting areas. Numerous rocky ports have been carved into the mighty cliffs. Arriving at these ports involves significant danger; however, the local population has mastered the art of navigation to such an extent that their ships always reach ports safely. In practice, this means that uninvited guests usually crash into the rocks or end up at the bottom of the sea (with a little help from the coastal guard). The primary armament of these ships is naval rams, which prove to be incredibly effective weapons in the straits. The inhabitants of these cliffside ports dwell in underground areas, mostly keeping to themselves. Do they live in symbiosis with the inhabitants of the forests? It is quite plausible. But they certainly constitute another civilization.

Economy and Trade

The foundation of the economy and trade in this relatively impoverished region lies in the black, shiny rock and what can be crafted from it. This includes quite a variety of things, from houses to exceptionally effective weapons and everyday items. Of course, there are also other products that are made within this region. Shells, extracts from bodies, and vegetation are also extracted and processed, although they do not constitute a significant share on the market.

The second resource that can be obtained is the wood harvested from the crow bushes. It is used to craft weapon shafts, which are highly valued by soldiers and guards. In better taverns and houses, tables and furniture are made from this wood, but most of public and poorer places use bones—a resource abundant in the region. Sometimes it is also used for building houses and finishing what could not be constructed from other materials. Interestingly though, while within the Godless Lands this wood is often undervalued, but whenever it finds its way to the Black Market, it can bring quite exorbitant prices for the lucky trader as a rare and exotic ware. Quite a number of it can be found on the bazaars of Misty Waters.

As for the envoys of Chaos they usually do not engage in trade with the other realms of this world. What they manage to produce, usually with the hands of slaves, is immediately delivered to the portal and sent to another world. In exchange, the other worlds under the reign of the Disciples of Chaos provide them with food and other necessities. And if they desire something within their reach in the city, then they might try to get it by means other than trade.

Similar to the law of the jungle, they will plainly demand the items they want from lower ranking people in the hierarchy of the Disciples or other cunning practices. Sometimes even relying on theft.

Finding a traditional merchant at the main stronghold in Wurgar is a very rare sight, as it is very sealed off from outsiders. The most economically profitable places to go are the rocky ports in the northeast and the cities in the central part of the region. The local population in these areas is quite distrustful, but there are ways to acquire what you want through trade. Regarding the northeastern ports hidden between the rocks, the local population is very open to trade—on one condition. You must be crystal clear morally and have peaceful intentions.

There is one more fact worth noting—the city at the foot of the northeast forest. The inhabitants of this city are known for potentially having some trade connections and access to trade with the people inhabiting the forests and maybe even trade routes to either Kallonia or Redoe. This is why you can come across unique items here, such as magical items from contemporary times. And most importantly—large quantities of wood. The forests are the only place in the entire region where the typical species of trees from other continents have survived. Therefore, the basis of the economy of this city is the supply, processing, and utilization of wood. You won't find better arborists anywhere in the world.



Secrets and Dangers of the Godless Lands

SOULS ASH

One of the cruelest aspects of the land of Wurgar is its atmosphere. The Souls Ash has an ambiguous meaning. The most dangerous aspect of it is that the air in the Godless Lands seems normal. It allows for easy breathing despite the ominous aura of the whole place. Unfortunately for those traveling to Wurgar, this is an illusion. The air of this land is contaminated with the Souls Ash—small particles infused with Chaos energy that both erodes the lungs and acts addictively. These effects work a bit differently on its inhabitants and the reckless explorers daring enough to set foot there. The latter are affected by both effects, but the erosion takes their life quicker. Meanwhile, the inhabitants are protected by the power of the Disciples, which convert the magic of Chaos into a less harmful form to negate its corroding effects. Subsequently, they gain resistance to it, though full immunity usually takes a few generations. These effects also vary on the density of these particles—air that is less dense is still as addictive, but the effect of erosion drastically drops. The closer one is to Wurgar, the more particles there are in the air. Spending just a few weeks on the land is enough to become addicted to the Souls Ash. Breathing this deceptively dangerous air for a short time leaves living beings seemingly unchanged, except for one thing—the irresistible desire to return to the land. Many claim that this is precisely how the Disciples of Chaos utilize the atmosphere to lure their victims. Others wonder if the Souls Ash is not just a direct result of the presence of Chaos magic in the region, arising by coincidence. The truth remains unresolved.



BONE HURRICANES

“...and they create air funnels, devoid of feelings, consciousness, and everything related to life, traversing the vast fields of Wurgar.”

Anonymous Geographer from Eldania

Another danger and consequence of the presence of the Souls Ash are the horrifying bone hurricanes. Wurgar is the only place in the Deuslair where this phenomenon occurs. When the energy present in the land combines with the Souls Ash, powerful blasts of winds are created, which results

in immensely strong winds. They produce deadly winds that sweep away everything that lives or used to live. The remnants of creatures, monsters, plants. This results in phenomenon known as bone hurricanes.

The rapid swirling causes any living organisms caught by the wind to meet their end, leaving nothing but their bones, which is how a “bone hurricane” grows stronger. They are incredibly rare but can also last for several days. Sometimes, two or three hurricanes pass through the land simultaneously. For all living beings in their way, this means death. Fortunately or unfortunately, some areas of the land are free from these phenomena.

The Envoys of Chaos tend to adorn themselves with found crystals, which are modeled to seem like the broken bones of their deity. These crystals are their most cherished relics, and they never part with them. Stealing them is considered a heavy crime punished by death on spot... right after a sequence of the most elaborate tortures conclude.

BLACK ROCK

“The rock has sharp edges. It remains rocky in its rockiness, and its beauty hides its wealth.”

A proverb from miners of the black rock mines

If Wur'Gar were not famous for the Souls Ash, the orcs would undoubtedly name the Stronghold they were building after the black rocks. The tall, sharply pointed and shadowy rocks which invoke a sense of reverence even in the new inhabitants of these lands. The highest range of mountains, known as Morny's Hor with high volcanic activity covers around one tenth of the entire land's surface. In the southern wall of these dark mountain peaks, a single circle of pure blue unnaturally calls one's attention. This lake was recently renamed to the “Eye of Emissaries” as it resembles a single eye cast on a vast, black mask of the rocky peaks, which never change their color. They have always been and will remain in the hue of radiant, albeit somber, black. Surely, their incredible color and steadfastness owe themselves to some complex alchemical reaction, but what exactly that is has not been found yet.

“How beautiful the black pearl of your majesty is...” Famous quote of one of the Bards serving the Disciples of Chaos during a banquet.



This material is widely known to be used to make weapons and arrowheads. There are many mountain ranges, but at the moment only one functioning mine. No one except the Disciples of Chaos have explored the interiors of these mountains yet. Interestingly, the same ore reaches astronomical values on the black markets of other continents. How it reaches these markets is something that nobody is really sure of, but a lot of it circulates in the Misty Waters.

The black rock is the basic building material for the monuments of the Disciples of Chaos as well as for the houses for citizens and the slaves. Building these monuments attracts even more cultists to the Disciples, and the emissaries are not afraid to use the workforce of slaves to expand their cult. The reasoning behind building homes out of the valuable black rock isn't for the comfort of the slaves, but rather out of necessity and efficiency. The bone hurricanes almost killed an entire generation of slaves, and that was when the Disciples realized that a sturdier shelter would minimize their losses. Such things may seem obvious to the average inhabitant of Deuslair, but the common sense of the Disciples vastly differs from what the slaves consider to be common sense.

The black rock and the Souls Ash cause a phenomenon that has gone unexplained even by the greatest minds. It seems that the Souls Ash's effect starts to vanish in the vicinity of the

black rock when it's in its purest form. The bone hurricanes start to simply disintegrate whenever they reach higher deposits of black rocks, losing their form and releasing all their energy. Consequently, this creates the majestic sight of exploding flashes of violet energy. That is why there is a pit consisting of bones of all kinds of beings at the foot of every mountain. A pit that provides food for the slaves in dire need of nutrition.

As the addictive effects of Souls Ash diminish, it causes flashes of higher awareness in slaves. Unfortunately, any attempts to escape end with the slave going outside and inhaling Souls Ash again in higher amounts. As a result, every escape attempt ends up back in the black rock mining settlement. Strangely enough, these flashes of awareness also happen sporadically during the breaking of bone hurricanes. No one knows why this happens. In their spikes of awareness, the slaves are sure of one thing. Watching the explosion of a bone hurricane. Many of them recall that it is one of the most beautiful sights they had seen in their lives, giving some of them the deceptive hope in a concept they once knew as Freedom.



Flora and Fauna of the Land “Devoid of Life”

AZATH’S PITS

They are pits, carved into the terrain by the claws of adult Azaths—an insect-like race of flying creatures who came from another world. While the adults barely eat anything, their younglings feast on carrions gathered from the surroundings.

They begin by gathering deceased beings into carved holes. The adults then lay their eggs amidst the decaying flesh. When the eggs hatch, birthing Azath larvae they start feeding on the corpses to sate their hunger. The adults tend to cover their entrances which often results in natural pit-traps—careless wanderers sometimes fall into. And these younglings, while normally just scavenging for sustenance amidst the rotting flesh, are not very fussy about their meals. They just eat till nothing is left.

CORPSE DRINKERS

Apart from Azaths another species feeding on carrions from beyond the portal was discovered to appear in clusters—a unique type of plant. They have long stems that are strongly anchored into the ground. Meanwhile, their roots reach so deep, that removing the plant is practically impossible. Of course, the part that resides above ground may sometimes be trimmed by a roaming bone hurricane, but their fast growth rate allows them to regenerate after just a couple of days. They grow above the ground to a height of 4 to 12 feet. Adult specimens can live for up to 200–500 years.

These plants are not only exceptionally long-lived but also like to occasionally consume a gigantic amount of meat. Similar to snakes, they can endure without food for a very long time. Like snakes, they absorb “food,” and digest it for weeks. The essence from these plants, called “Desert Blood,” has healing properties. However, it requires basic knowledge of medicine. Travelers often look out for whether the bone hurricane does not pass by the oasis. After it calms down, travelers will look to see if they can find the severed upper part of the plant, so they won't have to fight in order to get the “Desert Blood.”

BLACK MUSHROOMS

Mushrooms. Mushrooms. Mushrooms! When you arrive at the Godless Lands, that's exactly what you'll be looking for to survive. Undoubtedly, the harmful air of Godless Lands does not affect them. Or maybe it does? Undoubtedly, their occurrence is sporadic. However, travelers report that when

there's one Mushroom, there's likely thousands more next to them, so when you find a cluster, it's better to stock up on a large supply. Unfortunately, there are not too many types of mushrooms here. Poor vegetation and limited availability of fresh corpses do not favor the development of a new species. However, sporadic moisture and the shelter from the gray desert... makes them grow abundantly if they do grow at all. You can find them in deep dug holes and sometimes even on your body! Mushrooms never occur in oases or near flowers that feed on carrion, but it is known that their roots take the form of an underground network and stretch for hundreds of miles in the Godless Lands.

CROW BUSHES

They are trees that are only present in the Godless Lands, and existed before the Disciples arrived, but were much rarer and smaller. It seems to have adapted better than the other vegetation. The name “bushes” comes from the incredible structure of this species. They have a thick, hard trunk, from which hundreds of individual, much thinner branches grow, along which an undefined dark substance (from which the word “crow” comes) flows. As a result, this tree looks as if a piece of a mighty oak were cut off, and then a large crown, cut from a willow, was placed on it. Crow bushes can mainly be found at oases and when accompanied by water, which is essential for their survival. Rumors has it that they also occur in the abysses of black rock and in select caves across the land. Sometimes, by some unexplained twist of fate, their individual specimens appear in the vicinity of rocks, making them useful for building primitive camps and weapon arbors. Hunters particularly appreciate all kinds of bows and crossbows made from this material. It has incredible flexibility and durability, allowing the creation of weapons with an amazing range. The only place where there is a larger number of these trees is found in the nameless forest on the northwestern side of Herja. And seeing how eagerly the prisoners from the Temporary Encampment are cutting them down, the woods might not exist long enough for someone to name them. It is not known why the inhospitable atmosphere of the Godless Lands allowed these woods to exist.

The very name of the stronghold Wur'Gar means “Dust of Souls”—it refers to the key component of this enslaving atmosphere. This old pronunciation of Wurgar is still widely used by orcs, goblins and a few of the older beings.

PURPLE WISPS

“Knowledge of Purple Wisps is possessed only by those who have spoken with them. And about that, I have never heard...”

A humble recorder of History, Van Kler

As for the remaining lands, it's hard to say that anything lives there, although there are some creatures that are still able to inhabit those areas. Nonetheless, life always finds a way.

Purple Wisps are ethereal creatures which can be characterized by their almost complete non-existence. From the tales of wanderers, we know that they appear in the form of purple streaks, piercing bodies and rocky matter in search of something not entirely known to anyone. It's unclear what they feed on, why they exist, and where they come from. What is known is that they sporadically appear in dense clusters. For what purpose? The answer to this question is another secret of the Godless Lands. Sometimes, you can buy them in other lands, sealed in magical bottles from which they cannot escape. Their properties are also one of their many mysteries.

Some old sources claim that travelers saw a connection between these creatures and the ubiquitous Souls Ash.

SCORPENIDA

**“Blessing for the creatures themselves,
a curse for those who may encounter them
in other lands.”**

Anonymous Traveler

The uninhabited areas still possess some more tangible dangers, such as the insects that adapted to the ever-present magic of Chaos and used it to grow to gigantic sizes. We know the most about them because they are impossible to miss. Brave explorers who ventured into these regions describe them as massive creatures with nearly chitinous torsos reaching up to 65 feet. Of course, their size varies so while some may be small, others may be much more... imposing.

Attached to the base of the torso are 23 pairs of agile legs, making them incredibly fast and mobile. However, setting such a massive body in motion requires a significant amount of energy, which they extract from plants. Surprisingly, these insects do not consume meat, although they can still pose a dangerous threat in case of an emergency.

The safety of these creatures lies in their abdomen, covered with red hair. Nature has developed this color to resemble other insects as a warning signal. In case of danger, these creatures start shaking their abdomen, which causes their venomous hair to stick to the skin of anyone attacking them.

While the size and natural defense mechanisms of these creatures is stunning, they are not their main asset. Among all the creatures of Godless Lands, they are distinguished by something entirely different. An innate resistance to the addictive influence of the Souls Ash is both a curse and a blessing.

Some believe that these creatures owe this trait to their gigantic abdomens, through which they breathe. Magicians who delved into the nature of these creatures claim that they serve as a filter. This ability allows them to travel to distant continents. Protection against addiction to the Souls Ash quickly caught the interest of many alchemists and magicians. However, those who have explored the secrets of taming these creatures know that the price of using them as a mount is very high...

MURDEROUS CUBES

Extremes are undoubtedly the word that should be associated with the Godless Lands. Tall, towering, black rocks, emptiness, and ubiquitous grotesqueness are the indispensable elements which paint the horizon of this land. A prominent example of grotesqueness is shown by the beings living in the flesh-like slurry closer to an undefined phlegm. While in other areas they tend to stay in the dark tunnels and caves, waiting for their victim to pass by, their dependence on the treacherous air of the land makes them actively be driven to places with the highest concentration. They excrete an unpleasant dark-green substance that floats on the surface of the ground, fatally slowing down passerby's, while allowing this creature to absorb them easier.

Although these creatures are not among the most pleasant beings, they are actively sought after by many alchemists. Their essence allows creations of extraordinary concoctions connected with abilities such as reproduction and transformation.

GUARDIANS

There is only one type of natural residents within the Tunnels of Destiny—crawlers. The Disciples call them the Guardians as beings who live next to their most sacred places. To touch their gods' Bones or Roots of Life as the Dragsans would call it, is an honor which only a handful of the Disciples were given. They are representatives of the largest, most dominant species. They have guarded and acted as the caretakers of the exceptionally rare crystal, and while some believe that they benefit from being near the crystal, they certainly don't have to exploit it for this purpose. On the contrary, in a sense, their presence is servile. That's precisely why the messengers of Chaos haven't exterminated these creatures. They consider them the sacred guardians of the bones of the chaos god.

These guardians unfortunately can't be used as mounts. Their bodies are covered in slime, allowing them to move quickly. Additionally, their skin is protected by a type of unknown magic that cannot be overcome. These creatures are resistant to all magical forms of interference. They have powerful jaws and dozens of hidden claws on their abdomen, which can extend depending on their needs. On the top of their heads, they have long whiskers that allow them to detect approaching dangers. Sometimes they glow with a dark-green light. This is directly related to being near the crystals of the Roots of Life.

OSSEOUS

Although the airspace of the Godless Land is mainly filled with air and atmospheric phenomena, you can sporadically notice shapes resembling rather large birds. The wingspan of these creatures ranges from 8 to 12 feet. These creatures hunt in small flocks of 5 to 11 individuals. Their face-skull

with a sharp beak is composed of nothing but bones, left uncovered by skin. The skin of this creature begins to cover the bone only at the level of the eye sockets and extends roughly to the middle of the tail, the end of which also features a bare, bony, thin "whip." Osseous are known for their exceptional brutality. They fight mainly using their tail, which can cut through skin and muscles with a single blow. The spiky end makes it function as a catcher, allowing the creatures to carry loads. Sometimes during a fight, they stand on their tail and use their wings, the edges of which can cut through solid armor. Their skin is dark green. In places, it can have a splash of grayishness. Travelers must be weary of these creatures, as they delight in savoring the flesh of victims that are still breathing. The cries of pain sometimes bring them more pleasure than consuming the meal itself, so their consumption is exceptionally slow.



Characters Background

EX-CULTIST

You were once a wholeheartedly committed and fervent cultist. However, certain events opened your eyes, revealing the true nature of your beliefs. Now, you despise your previous life and everything associated with it, striving to sever as many ties as possible. Yet, some bridges are not that easy to burn.

Skill Proficiencies: Religion, Arcane

Tool Proficiencies: Poisoner's kit, one type of artisan's tools or musical instrument

Languages: Choose two between Goblin, Sylvan, Infernal or Primordial

Equipment: Any one musical instrument or artisan's tools you are proficient or poisoner's kit exhuding an ominous aura, a copy of the cults teachings or religious symbol with in form of amulet or other trinket, a set of fine clothes, and a pouch containing 15 gp.

A crack in your Faith

As strong as your faith was, the event that changed the course of your fate was no small trifle either. What happened to make you who you are today?

D6	A CRACK IN YOUR FAITH
1	They designated me to be a sacrifice, despite my deep faith in their cause.
2	I witnessed the cult unjustly condemning or punishing someone close to me, which led me to question the cult's supposed infallibility.
3	I saw evidence that the cult leaders have been manipulating or deceiving their followers for personal gain.
4	I met a former member of the cult who is leading a happier or morally better life showing me that there are alternatives to my old ways.
5	They forced me to do one too many acts which were clear violation of what they taught.
6	After thoroughly studying their sacred texts, I discovered the flaws in their understanding, but my attempts to share these issues fell on deaf ears.

Feature: Dark Knowledge

Your past deeds and actions continue to haunt you, but they also provide you with wisdom and knowledge that not everyone possesses. Your extensive expertise in the inner workings of cults and dark rituals makes you more adept in recognizing their involvement—be it strange happenings around you or checking traces left in the past.

Suggested Characteristics

D8	PERSONALITY TRAITS
1	I am always logical, while detesting everything illogical and hating people driven by emotions.
2	The echo of my past convictions haunts me, making me unable to enjoy life unless I am actively doing something to better the world.
3	As I asked not enough questions in the past, now I question everything.
4	After meddling so much with the darkness, my moral compass is way more forgiving than others.
5	I listen keenly to others and try to not dismiss their words without understanding their viewpoint.
6	Earning my trust is hard and I never give second chances after losing it.
7	I try to learn as much about the world as possible, to relearn the correct way of living.
8	Even if it might be a foolish goal, I try to sever all bonds I have with my past.

D6	IDEALS
1	Redemption: I'm driven by a desire correct my past deeds and make others not fall for the same mistakes as I did. (<i>Good</i>)
2	Darkness: Even the most noble will turn to evil if put in a dire situation. (<i>Chaotic</i>)
3	Forgiveness: Anyone can make mistakes and anyone should be given opportunity to correct them. (<i>Good</i>)
4	Knowledge: I believe that the pursuit of knowledge is more important than anything else, as it can lead to finding the truth. (<i>Any</i>)
5	Renunciation: Material possessions and worldly pleasures lead people astray, the path of enlightenment is found in a minimalist existence. (<i>Lawful</i>)
6	Cruel: Having a deep understanding of the mindset of fanatics, I know all too well that forgiveness should not be extended to those who succumb to it. (<i>Evil</i>)

D6	BONDS
1	No matter if it is a curse or blessing, I will always hold the memories made in the years I spent in the cult in my heart.
2	I severed all bonds I had with my past, only new bonds matter.
3	My family is part of the cult and while they walk the wrong path, I still cherish them.
4	I am indebted to someone who helped me walk new path after leaving the cult.
5	Everyone I know from my cult has already died.
6	Someone important to me was separated from me because of the cult.

D6	FLAWS
1	I have a tendency to preach to others and correct them.
2	I always assume others are lying and try to mislead me.
3	I cannot bring myself to harm people I cherished in the past, even if I know they are walking the wrong path.
4	After being misled in past, I don't trust my own judgment and belittle what I know.
5	I have a tendency to depend on others and follow them without doubting.
6	I have problems with understanding the morality of normal people.



TAINED ONE

You were born and grew up in the lands taken by Chaos. The air was full of tainted magic and all you ever ate and drank was full of that vile miasma. Whatever your history might have been, life in this kind of place changed you. In your eyes it has toughened you. But in the eyes of others... it is not that simple. While many around you grew sick and weak, you never understood why. For you this was natural. You just adapted. And so did your body.

Skill Proficiencies: Athletic, Arcane

Tool Proficiencies: Poisoner's kit, one type of artisan's tools or musical instrument

Languages: Choose one from Goblin, Infernal or Primordial

Equipment: Any one musical instrument or artisan's tools you are proficient or poisoner's kit exuding an ominous aura, a copy of the god of Chaos teachings, a set of common clothes, and a pouch containing 10 gp.

The Tainted mark

You were transformed in some small way by absorbing the tainted energy around you.

D10	THE TAINED MARK
1	Your skin is sickly pale and you feel uneasy under the full sun.
2	The color of your eyes constantly changes, shifting like the chaotic swirls of an otherworldly vortex.
3	Your hair resembles thorny vines and regenerates to its full length within a mere hour of being cut.
4	You have more or less fingers than normally.
5	The veins beneath your thin skin are slightly moving as if alive.
6	The shadows cast by your body seem to not fully fit your shape and it's movement is slightly out of sync.
7	Your hands have a web of deep scars that look like cracks.
8	Your face has weeping, crimson sores that never seem to heal.
9	You possess a tail, with a jagged, sharp ending.
10	Your nails are very long and hard, resembling claws.

Feature: In tune with Chaos

Your body grew accustomed to the taint. Because of that you can always feel any malevolent and dark energies around you. Additionally, curses affecting you seem to have a delayed effect on you.

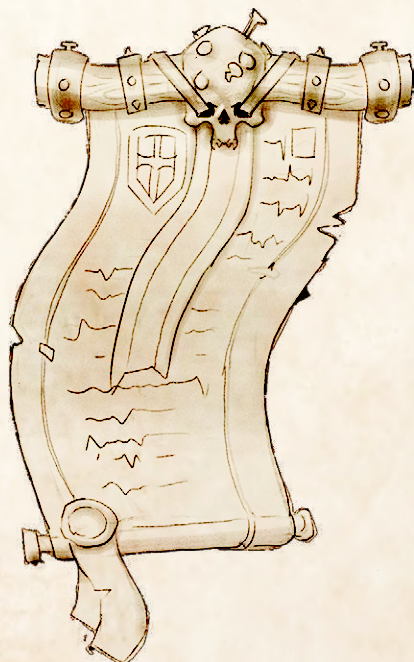
Suggested Characteristics

D8	PERSONALITY TRAITS
1	I sleep with my back against a wall or tree, keeping all my possessions close to me.
2	My life made me see despair as a luxury I cannot afford.
3	I live in the present, not worrying about the future.
4	I always find the silver lining in the most dire situations.
5	I always connect with those who suffer.
6	It brings my soul solace when others express understanding for the horrors I've endured.
7	I trust my instinct as that is what kept me alive.
8	I am cold and logical, and do not rely on emotions for my judgment.

D10	IDEALS
1	Survival. People who can't take care of themselves get what they deserve. (<i>Neutral</i>)
2	Strictness. Nobody likes to be chained by anything, but only because of rules we can live in harmony. (<i>Lawful</i>)
3	Humanity. What makes us human is not shown on the outside, but the values we hold on the inside. (<i>Good</i>)
4	Incorruptibility. Souls decay from inside, so beware of what evils you accept. (<i>Neutral</i>)
5	Curiosity. This wondrous world is a place worth knowing and I must learn all about it! (<i>Chaotic</i>)
6	Unity. We need to look out for one another because there won't be anyone else to do it. (<i>Any</i>)
7	Empathetic. One needs to understand the suffering of others to truly understand their point of view. (<i>Neutral</i>)
8	Doubtful. Everyone lies and deceives, mostly to make themselves feel better. (<i>Evil</i>)
9	Helpful. Helping others makes you a human and is the only thing separating us from animals. (<i>Good</i>)
10	Devious. Only the weak seek injustice in the actions of others as there is nothing forbidden when trying to survive. (<i>Chaotic</i>)

D6	BONDS
1	I have a family for which I try to find a better life.
2	Something important was stolen from me, and I want to reclaim it.
3	I met a person who changed the course of my life, but we lost touch.
4	Every action I take is dedicated to those who were unjustly taken away from me.
5	My family members died because of the harshness of place we lived in, so now I am alone.
6	I've discovered family and friends I found on the way, and nothing else is needed to fill my heart.

D8	FLAWS
1	I actually like seeing others fail as it makes me feel better about myself.
2	I have trouble understanding the emotions of others.
3	I never offer anything without expecting something in return and also think that others do the same.
4	I lack a sense of humor, making anyone's laughter awkward to me.
5	Morality is a concept I struggle to comprehend, and understanding people who act on it is a challenge.
6	I yearn for a normal life and feel envy toward those who possess it.
7	I am scared of everything new.
8	I am negative about any plans and never believe in its success.





THE KINGDOM OF HYTE TALMA

“It is not nature that made these halls so cold, but the lack of love.”

Hangred, The Head Registrar of Inner Circle

Once, there was a dwarf who fell in love with an elf. Their passion burned so bright that they did not fear the cold of Herenyakal. They stood side by side and braved the biting winds and frost to settle in what you, dear adventurer, now know as Hyste Talma—the Kingdom of the uncharted northeast.

Surrounded by high mountains, hidden deep within the land of eternal snow, the city remains a self-sufficient powerhouse. Independent, unbroken by the reign of Queen Anara, they

are the heart of the Redoe Alliance. A political organization set to oppose the Fortress of Dragsa Ambitions.

If you are desperate enough to travel through the frozen wilderness to reach the city, you must first learn its history and culture. Sit comfortably in front of a fireplace, drink your mulled wine, and try to chase away the cold that my words might bring. The story of Hyste Talma is a sad tale, one to be told on the coldest night of the year.



STORY OF PRINCE GERMUND AND TALMANI

Before the world bent its knee to Queen Anara, before the Fortress of Dragsa spewed out the first of beastkin, dwarves and elves roamed the lands of Kallonia. They named the mountains and plains, and they ventured from the north to the south and from the east to the west. They braved the Murknen Sea and settled in the Sunset Plains. They were both travelers and settlers, explorers, and inventors—but quickly, their wit and talent were surpassed by the tenacity of humans.

As years passed, elves and dwarves found themselves left behind, always catching up to the ever-changing, chaotic nature of the short-lived and ever-present humans. Before either King Ebbe of the Mountains or Queen Alma of the Sunset Plains could comprehend what humans were doing on their borders, another kingdom was already there. They were showing up everywhere.

To forge an alliance and persevere through the sudden influx of humans, Ebbe and Alma decided to offer their children in an arranged marriage, the first union of such kind to take place between the two races. The first union to signify a new era.

Talmani of the Elves was the fairest woman of the land. With long hair of spun gold, milky skin, and bright, green eyes, she was the epitome of beauty and grace. The rumors of her angelic voice and healing talents spread throughout Kallonia and garnered her the title of the “Realm’s Sweetheart.” Her husband-to-be was a match of equal fame and splendor. Prince Germund, though his ax had never seen a true battle, was a mighty warrior capable of trouncing any dwarf in a fair tournament. His skill with the bow and arrow oftentimes surpassed that of the finest of elven archers, and he had an uncanny talent for masonry.

On the day of their first meeting, the whole realm seemed to have held its breath in anticipation. The alliance between dwarves and elves was, after all, brokered on the backbone of their relationship. Unbeknownst to their children, King Ebbe and Queen Alma decided to help them out and sought the aid of an infamous witch—a human sorceress named Berea. Soon, the first love potion in the world was concocted, potent and dangerous. The King didn’t waste time and doused his son just before the Prince and Princess’ first meeting. Queen Alma, though, did not have the heart to deceive her child so wickedly. She didn’t use the potion on her daughter and hoped for the best.

Prince Germund fell in love instantly, and though Talmani was charmed by his affections, deep in her heart, she did not

reciprocate his feelings. Nonetheless, their marriage was a successful one, even if childless. For years they were the most famous couple of Kallonia, working to bring their peoples together and face the ever-changing nature of humans.

In the wake of their successful alliance, Talmani and Prince Germund, bound by duty and goodwill, faced an arduous decision. The changing tides of Kallonia prompted them to seek refuge in a new realm, far from the encroaching dominion and the tumultuous affairs of the ever-expanding human kingdoms. United in purpose, they led their people to the uncharted northeast, where they laid the foundations of an underground city hewn from the very heart of the mountains.

The dwarven architects and elven artisans combined their talents, creating a subterranean masterpiece that echoed the harmonious union between their races. The City, concealed beneath layers of frost and stone, became a sanctuary where elves and dwarves coexisted, forging a new identity which in the future would be known as the Redoe Alliance. They found a stronghold for their people. Prince Germund insisted on naming it in honor of his beloved. Hence the name Hyste Talma was given to it. Yet, Talmani was unmoved by it—her heart remained as cold as the surrounding lands. Beneath the surface of unity, the strains of unrequited love lingered in Germund’s heart. In the hidden corridors of The Black Castle, whispers of betrayal took root. Unbeknownst to the royal couple, a clandestine plot unfurled in the shadows. A treacherous advisor, envious of the city’s prosperity and fueled by ambition, sought to exploit the fragile emotional terrain within the royal court. The seeds of discord sprouted, and the alliance between elves and dwarves began to fray... but this is a story for another time.

HERENYAKAL

Dwarves often say that the true beauty of the world can only exist in the most inhabitable corners of our it. One would be hard-pressed to argue when faced with the snowy peaks of the Herenyakal Mountain Range. The rugged peaks, threatening all life with the unforgiving harshness of the environment, scrape the heavens and dress in its clouds. The frigid winds howl through the valleys, cutting through the air like a blade, and giving a painful reminder that here, nature brooks no compromises.

Yet, even in this seemingly desolate place, life thrives. Hidden from the untrained eye, small animals traverse the snowy terrain and learn how to survive in extreme conditions and alongside the apex predator of Herenyakal—Yeti. Those who are reckless enough to brave the mountains and try to find their way to Hyste Talma, need to prepare themselves not only to face the frost and the wind, but also to be on the constant lookout for the nocturnal predators eager to sink their claws into fresh flesh.



Dangerous Travel Conditions

AVALANCHE

A roar of a Yeti or the sound of a Fire Ball's explosion can easily trigger an avalanche. Characters who wish to survive need to succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw, otherwise the avalanche deals 3d10+2 bludgeoning damage, or half of that on a successful save. All creatures within the range of the avalanche are swept up by the snow 1d100 ft. down. The avalanche can have a small range of 30 ft. cone, a medium range of 60 ft. cone, or a big range of 100 ft.

FROSTBITE

Insidious, the frost creeps up on unsuspecting travelers. It lulls them into inattention and then bites. Each creature that fails a DC 14 Constitution saving throw takes 1d4+1 every short rest, or 3d4+1 every long rest. Resting next to a campfire or sheltered from the biting wind, grants an advantage on the saving throw.

HAILSTORM

- hailstones pelt the area, causing unsheltered creatures to take 1d4 bludgeoning damage at the start of their turn
- open flames are extinguished
- ranged attacks rolls at disadvantage
- perfect conditions for basilisk to attack

SNOWSTORM, BLIZZARD

- vicious winds and snowfall obscure vision; disadvantage on Perception checks that rely on sight and hearing
- movement speed is halved
- creatures not adequately protected must make a DC 13 Constitution ST or suffer 1d6 cold damage every hour
- perfect conditions for Yeti to attack

TRICKY TERRAIN

One wrong step might turn deadly and reveal a hidden crevice, or unexpected stream of icy water. Successful DC 14 Perception check allows characters to remain cautious. A fall deals 1d6 bludgeoning damage for each 10 ft.; the icy water deals 1d12+4 cold damage per round unless an adventurer rolls a successful DC 16 Constitution saving throw.

The Three Frosty Bards

Among the frigid peaks of Herenyakal, there are three that hold a special place in the hearts of the people of Hyste Talma. As the legend goes, there once were three dwarven bards of questionable skill and overgrown egos. Red Haired Arsi, who thought himself a master of the mandolin; a blonde bloke called Daguun, who proclaimed himself to be the best with a trumpet; and the most obnoxious of them all, Bardam, who never stopped playing drums.

Separately, the citizens of Hyste Talma could stand the bards, but anytime the three of them butted heads over the proper definition of art, music, or beauty, most prayed to the Gods for swift mercy. No tavern wanted to host the three of them together, and no guard wanted to sort out their quarrels. No amount of jail time, monetary fines, or threats of broken bones ever managed to dampen their enthusiasm. That is until one day, when the three bards set their eyes on a dwarven beauty—Altani. With a beard of rose gold and a temperament of the harshest blizzard, she didn't entertain their advances nor pay attention to their rivalry. When they finally managed to annoy the poor girl enough, she said: "I will marry the one who can make the mountain peaks sing to their tune."

Of course, convinced of their superiority and the magic in their music, the bards took up the challenge and ventured deep into the mountains. They searched for weeks before they found the three peaks worthy of their performance. And though they weren't the highest, they were the most unique in shape. Redheaded Arsi chose the peak in the shape of a bear, roaring at the crystal clear sky. Draguun picked a mountain in the shape of a woman with an hourglass figure and a face of beauty. Bardam climbed a peak that resembled his favorite food—shashlik. Though, perhaps, it might have been his empty stomach that had made that particular decision.

The bards waited for the sun to set, and then when the moon rose to greet them, started their "unholy" yammering. It is said that the noise was so terrible the echo carried all through the mountains and could be heard from Hyste Talma itself. For a whole night, no one in the city could find any sleep and in the wee hours of the morning, three lightning bolts struck the mountain peaks, silencing their howling.

No one has ever heard about the bards again. Whether they were struck by the gods themselves, or simply frozen to death—no one knows. No one cares to check, either, though the legend says that a bard who climbs the peaks to reclaim their instruments will gain unprecedented infamy. To this day, though, when traveling through Herenyakal, one can hear the ungodly kyoodle carried by the wind. Sometimes, adventurers claim that they've heard heartbreaking sobs, other times, that a fast paced tune reverberated through the mountain passages.

Climbing Peaks

Climbing these peaks is a challenge even for seasoned adventurers. The chances of being swept up by an avalanche or accosted by Yeti is especially high there. However, those who are determined enough to make it to the top, could find treasure buried there, under a heavy layer of snow.

THE PEAK OF THE BEAR

Treasure: a beautifully crafted mandoline, which grants its master a +2 to strength modifier any time they use it to hit someone or something. It deals 1d8+2 bludgeoning damage. The targeted creature must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or be deafened for the next round.

THE PEAK OF THE BEAUTY

Treasure: a golden trumpet, which grants its master a +2 to charisma any time they use it to seduce or deceive someone. The trumpet, when attuned, allows its master to cast Charm Person on the 3rd level.

THE PEAK OF THE HUNGRY

Treasure: a drum made out of elk skin and bones, which when attuned, grants its master a Lucky feat. Every time they use it, however, they feel an insatiable hunger for grilled meat.

Temple of Ten Thousand Sins

Another testament to the tenacity and hotheadedness of dwarves is the Temple of Ten Thousand Sins. Its story, as many others, has become a legend amongst the people of Hyste Talma. It is not known who built them or why, but the steep stairs leading to the top of the highest peak of Herenyakal have been there when dwarves first reached the continent. According to the dwarvish clerics and scholars, it was the Order itself who chiseled them out of raw stone, as a challenge to any mortals. Yet it is not the narrative that I present to you today, because amongst the common people, the story goes a bit differently.

“Once upon a time, when the mountains were younger and the dwarves supposedly hatched from golden eggs, there was a couple who shared love beyond comparison. Falgier Golden-locks, whose skills in a smithy could forge wonders, and Snjólaug Örvarsdóttir, whose beautiful voice could charm even the coldest of hearts. For many, many years, their love shone as bright as the first rays of the sun, as the Heavenly Lights themselves, bringing light

to even the darkest of nights. Everyone aspired to be even a fraction as true as them.

Everyone, except Silfrún The Loveless—Snjólaug’s younger sister. Silfrun was the seventh daughter of a wealthy merchant and life had never been harsh on her. Yet, even as she never lacked food or safety, she never had love. Her older sisters took all potential suitors from her, never giving her a chance at true romance. Her heart grew colder and colder each day. As she watched Snjólaug’s happiness and bliss, her thoughts, inevitably, turned dark.

Silfrún, spurred on by sin and greed, turned to dark magic. A love potion, of the same quality as the one used to bind King Germund to Queen Talmani, soon found its way into her hands. She planned her crime carefully and waited for two decades before taking a chance. She spiked Falgier’s drink and made sure that she would be the first person he’d see upon swallowing it. Fate, however, had a different plan, for at the same time, Silfrún’s youngest sister, barely of age, tripped and fell on Falgier. Their eyes met and their fate was sealed.

No matter how hard Falgier’s heart fought against the vile potion’s power, he could not control himself. After several months, his mind was close to breaking and he sneaked into Elínóra’s chamber... The next day, the maids found her body, hanging from the ceiling. Falgier was near the entrance, sitting with an empty stare and no recollection of what happened the night before.

Snjólaug raged and mourned and banished her husband from Hyste Talma, never to return to her home. Falgier, with a broken mind and broken spirit, left. Years passed, turned into decades, and then a full century. It is said that in that time, Falgier chiseled ten thousand steps leading to the highest peak of Herenyakal, in hopes that he’d reach Order itself and beg it to grant him one wish. Each step he carved, repenting for the sin he had committed; each step he wet with his tears.

When he reached the peak, as an old man, an empty shell of a dwarf, Order had allowed him to ask for one thing and one thing only. So, he wished “to see Snjólaug one more time, before my death, and for her to see me as I am.”

Order had witnessed the tragic story of his life, and had watched as he dedicated the rest of his years to reach her at the peak of the mountain. So, in her infinite wisdom and generosity, Order granted him his wish—and justice. The moment Snjólaug looked up at the mountains of Herenyakal, she saw Falgier; the moment Silfrún looked, she saw only death.

Snjólaug joined her husband at the top of the mountain, where they’d built their new home. Close to the gods, away from the sins of others. It is now a Temple of Order,

a Temple of Ten Thousand Sins. Anyone who reaches it can make their wish, and if the Goddess deems it worthy, it shall be granted.

If you wish to extrapolate on this idea, an arduous journey to the top of the mountain could be a good way for a character to regain their faith (for a cleric) or to bargain with their deity (for a warlock). It might also be a good arc for PCs that need to leave the table for a few sessions due to real-life scheduling conflicts. Whatever they find at the Temple, or a connection to the spiritual world, should be left to the GM's discretion. If you are using a system based on SRD 5.1, you might give them an actual Wish spell in the form of a scroll.

NANIRAE

The south of Redoe is as wild and unforgiving as the north. Nanirae, the Forest-Sea, stands as one of the last parts of the continent untouched by civilization. Only the most resilient creatures call it their home, most notable amongst them—Vindu, the snow elves. They migrate from the Land of the Giants each year to spend the winter in a more moderate climate. Even to them, the forest is dangerous. Children and elderly Vindu are left at Hyste Talma, where they can count on the hospitality of dwarves. Some of them settle there for longer periods of time, but they, too, eventually follow the call of the trail and venture into the world again.

Nanirae is a venerable forest cherished by the elves. It is home to deciduous giants such as venerable oaks, maples, beeches, and elms. These trees reach so high that their branches extend towards the sky, creating a cathedral-like canopy beneath the greenery. Further north, pockets of coniferous trees stand tall and stoic—pines, firs, and spruces punctuate the landscape. In the spring, the forest floor comes alive with a carpet of wildflowers, each bloom contributing to the kaleidoscope of colors that adorn the ground. Elves whisper that this forest has existed since time immemorial and claim that its roots are intertwined with the very essence of the land.

Vindu's Camps

Within the rich crowns of the emergent trees or amid the upper canopy, around 100 ft. above the ground, Vindu, the snow elves, crafts their camps. Made of plants and ropes, they're quick in construction and not meant to last for more than a season. A sophisticated network of interconnected treehouses, platforms, and bridges, can be built within a span of a few days. Only a perceptive eye can spot their hideouts, and only an athlete could ever dream of reaching them.

During the winter season in the Land of the Giants, when the temperatures drop so low only magic can ensure one's survival, Vindu hibernate. Yet, after the schism of the Gods, after Order and Chaos left the world, the magic that allowed the elves to survive started to fade. Vindu moved to the south then, to Kallonia, joining the Winter Tribes and Redoe, where dwarves welcomed them in Hyste Talma. Nowadays, Vindu spend their winters in Nanirae, eating fruits, nuts, and edible plants found in the canopies. They stock up on meat and herbs, rest, and hone their skills to adapt them to the changing environment.

The Land of the Giants

To the north of Hyste Talma lies the Land of the Giants, a realm blanketed in perpetual frost and veiled in an otherworldly mystique. Here, colossal peaks, their crowns adorned with the glistening jewels of eternal ice, pierce the heavens, casting long shadows upon the desolate valleys. Whispers of ancient tales echo through the icy wind, carrying with them the lore of colossal figures, whose presence remains concealed within the biting chill. The air, so crisp it crackles with the resonance of centuries, seems to guard these untold stories whispered in the silent dance of the snowflakes. Rare footprints tell tales of giants that once tread upon the frozen land. The Land of the Giants stands as an untouched tableau of a time long past, inviting only the most intrepid souls to unravel the veiled enigma that lies within its frozen heart.

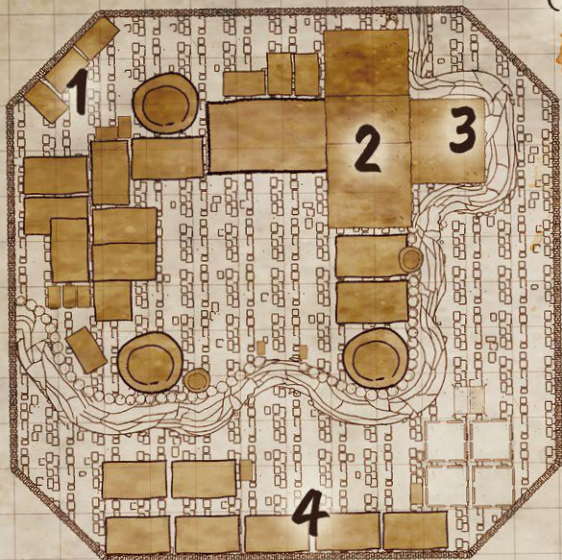
HYTE TALMA

The City

Designed to be self-sufficient and sustainable, Hyste Talma is a fortress no one has dared to conquer. Situated in the mountains of Herenyakal, it's ridiculously hard to get into. No army should risk losing most of its troops to the biting frost and treacherous terrain.

The city consists of three circles-alike layers, with a hexagonal perimeter and an empty center. They are built one on top of the other. Yet, instead of growing up, like so many of its counterparts across the continents, it burrows itself deeper into the ground. King Germund, aided by many capable dwarves and elves, designed his city to be easy to get into, but impossible to get out of. Therefore, the first—outer circle—is commonly called “the Dome” and the only way to enter it is through the opening in the ceiling made out of magically reinforced glass. There are plenty of hidden exits, evacuation tunnels, and secret passages, though the knowledge of their whereabouts is strictly controlled.

Throughout the ages, the style of architecture and the trends in masonry varied greatly. King Germund favored a sleek, modern style of geometrical shapes and clean lines. His designs were meant to represent luxury and prosperity



*Inner
Circle*



*Middle
Layer*



*Outer
Layer*

Hyste Talma

*Handmade map
by Husis the Wise*

- 1 — The Hot Springs
- 2 — The Black Castle
- 3 — The Treasury
- 4 — The Barracks
- 5 — The Crystal Pools
- 6 — The Narrow Nook

- 7 — The Grand Library
- 8 — The Mines
- 9 — The Matchmaker's Market
- 10 — The Forge District
- 11 — The Wall of the Dead
- 12 — The Guild Association's Office

- 13 — The Hall of Legends
- 14 — The Rosarium
- 15 — The Residential District
- 16 — The Great Bazaar
- 17 — Emerald Canopy Cabaret
- 18 — Pick & Pint Pub

in the new land he had led his people to. Over the decades, new generations of artists took it upon themselves to improve their designs—adding more decorative and frivolous elements. It is easy, therefore, to recognize how old the building one enters truly is. If the construction is made of expensive materials, including jade, silver, ivory, chrome, and even obsidian, it was built under the late King Germund. However, if one can spot floral designs incorporated into geometrical shapes, this indicates a style found in the later centuries when elves and dwarves reconnected and reforged their alliance under the common goal of fighting Dragsa.

Whereas symmetry and repetition of elements are typical in all circles of the city, the themes differ depending on the level. In the outer circle, ornaments, sculptures, mosaics, and frescoes tend to represent nature—both animals and plants. The colors lean toward warm yellows and reds, soft purples, and deep burgundy. The architecture and the materials used in buildings are chosen carefully to catch as much of the sunshine as possible and to reflect it to light the houses and the streets. Mirrors can often be found, placed at even intervals on the streets, to ensure that even the darkest alley has at least some light during the day.

The middle circle is characterized by more liberal architecture, vying for vertical proportions, pointed arches, and—in most forward and controversial cases—asymmetry. High ceilings allow for better air circulation and a vast network of vents functions as a filtering system, allowing fresh air access to the city. The main themes found in this layer focus on the dwarves themselves. Each street sprouts at least a couple of sculptures or commemorative frescoes. Dwarven heroes are immortalized, and it's a common sight to spot parents, teaching their children about their stories.

Finally, in the most defensible, most guardable part of Hyste Talma, the style is simple and traditional. Without ornaments and decorations, the buildings, though big and grand, remain plain in comparison to the architectural feats from the upper layers. However, what they lack in beauty, they more than make up for in efficiency. Most of the buildings of the Inner Layer could be defensible outposts, with thick walls and build built-in. The streets, easily converted into deadly traps, were designed to stop enemies within seconds.

Outer Layer

The Outer Layer is the largest of the hexagonal areas that constitute Hyste Talma. Despite its somewhat visible location, it is a crucial element of the city's self-sustainability. Most of the Outer Layer is occupied by fields, gardens, and greenhouses. With direct exposure to sunlight, it is the best place to cultivate plants and support the dietary needs of dwarves and elves.

The population of the Outer Layer consists of 60% elves, who cannot live underground for long periods of time.

Places to Visit in the Outer Layer

EMERALD CANOPY CABARET

Owned by an easy-going half-orc, this establishment is a hub for the minorities of Hyste Talma. No matter your race, you'd be welcome to drink there, and if you have any talent for stand-up comedy, you are encouraged to go on stage during an open night.

PICK & PINT PUB

A pub run by an older dwarven woman hell-bent on persuading elves that her homebrewed ale is, in fact, better than their sweet wines and meads. If you're looking for a rowdy bunch to spend your evening with, playing cards, darts, and dice—this is your place. Don't expect to leave sober, though.

THE GREAT BAZAAR

Set in the central part of the hexagon, the bazaar is a hub of trade between all races. Most of the produce is fresh food and imported goods. This is the only market accessible to newcomers.

THE ROSARIUM

Elitheia, a half-elf woman, started a rose garden when she was just a little girl. Now, almost a century later, it's a park open to all who want to appreciate the beauty of the roses and quietly rest.

THE RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT

The housing in the Outer Layer is, for the most part, inexpensive and easy to find. The accommodations, though small in size, are of good quality. If you're looking to spend a night at an inn, you'll find that there are several such establishments offering rooms. Permanent residents live in gated communities and are usually grouped according to their profession.

Their need to be close to nature, to feel the sunshine on their faces, or to sleep under the moon, is too great to remain underground. The elves take care of the food supply, tending to the gardens and the fields. Glasshouses are filled to the brim with those eager to experiment and bring forward new types of fruits and vegetables. The population of dwarves is mostly limited to the guards—of which there are plenty and more botanically inclined individuals.

It's not uncommon to meet gnomes, halflings, and even half-orcs here, living peacefully amongst the farmers and

gardeners. If you know where to look, you can also find a scarce pack of humans, keeping to themselves and avoiding attracting too much unwanted attention.

Middle Layer

The Middle Layer is smaller than the outer one and placed directly underneath it. What little natural light reaches it comes from the sophisticated network of tunnels and mirrors, sending beams of sunshine deep underground. That isn't, however, much of an issue due to the everpresent glowing crystals. Fluorescent citrines, garnets, and amethysts, charged with the ambient magic of the city, provide a constant hue of shining yellows, greens, and blues.

This layer is the home to middle-class citizens, schools, offices, healer practices, and guilds. Most of the northern part of the hexagon is taken by the residential areas, whereas the rest is a fair mixture of factories, workplaces, and shops. It is mainly inhabited by dwarves, and thus if you're not one it is likely that the nearest guard will ask you for your identification papers.

The Middle Layer is the most densely populated part of Hyste Talma. Due to this fact, the residential buildings tend to be tall and narrow, reaching as far as seven stories. The alleys between them are wide enough to allow one person comfortable passage, but not much more than that. The dwarves, therefore, usually carry their belongings in backpacks rather than carriages. Navigating the Middle Layer is made doubly difficult due to its ever-changing structure. Old buildings are demolished, and new ones sprout at the whims of crafty dwarves. Closes and wynds are very rarely accurately marked on any available maps, and only locals can swiftly use shortcuts without risking becoming hopelessly lost.

One solution for this, however, is Roof Hopping. Most of the elves who live in the Middle Layer, few as they are, prefer to climb on the nearest building and avoid the crowds and complicated turns and twists of the streets below. If you're proficient enough in elven sign language, you might even spot conveniently placed plaques with directions and names of the buildings.

Inner Circle

The Inner Circle is the deepest and most protected part of Hyste Talma. Very little sunlight reaches the depths of the innermost layer of the city, and the faint traces of it are reserved for the nobles and the mightiest of warriors. Every tunnel leading from the Middle Layer down is heavily guarded, and the ones not currently in use are trapped and set to collapse should an enemy make itself known.

For years, only dwarves were allowed to dwell in the Inner Circle, though recently due to the Redoe Alliance spreading its influence, more and more politicians and nobles from around the world can reluctantly call it their home. There's

still much scrutiny directed at any non-dwarf traversing the Inner Circle, yet it's not uncommon to see other races—all, except for humans. The prejudice against the Fortress of Dragsa is the strongest here, at the political center of Hyste Talma. No one trusts humans, no one wants them near their royalty or their treasury. If there are any humans present within the Inner Circle they are not allowed to move freely and are required to accept bodyguards.

For you or me, though, politics are not be-all and end-all. If you ever have a chance to visit the Inner Circle, I've heard othat there are salt caves and healing minerals that grow on the walls of the rich buildings. The Hot Springs are, at this point, legendary as well! Of course, if you are invited, you should definitely visit The Black Castle. For your convenience, I've prepared a short list of places to see should you ever find yourself in the Inner Circle. Please note that all my observations are based largely on third-hand experience.



Places to Visit in the Middle Layer

THE CRYSTAL POOLS

The Crystal Pools are the largest park in the Middle Layer. Instead of trees and shrubbery, though, it hosts a beautiful arrangement of mosses, algae, and calcite crystals. It is a perfect place for meditation, or to take your loved one on a date.

THE HALL OF LEGENDS

In the central district of the Middle Layer is a museum of Hyste Talma. If you're looking to gain more historical knowledge or see how technology has changed over the years, this is the best place to go. The Hall of Legends is the biggest hall in the museum and houses almost two hundred sculptures and paintings of the most deserving of dwarves. If you look closely enough, you might also spot effigies of elves and individuals of other races. They are, however, built to have the same height as the dwarves.

THE FORGE DISTRICT

Any self-respecting adventurer needs to go to the Forge District. It is simply a sin to miss out on the wares of craft masters. Whether you're looking for armor, weapons, tools, or trinkets, this is the place to go. Be aware, though, that dwarves hardly ever engage in haggling. The prices are fair and it is offensive to suggest otherwise. Prepare your purse though, for the finest of items made there can cost an arm and a leg.

THE GRAND LIBRARY

The Grand Library in the central district is open to everyone with citizenship. If you're—like me—just a tourist, you'd need to apply for special permission and your browsing time will be limited to a few hours under the supervision of the archivists. That being said, the Grand Library holds the biggest collection of books, scrolls, and information on this side of the world. It is also not censored, so you might find copies of Dragsan propaganda as well as legends of the Kutauri.



THE MINES

The Mines surround the Middle Layer and stretch out like a spider's legs in every direction. Most of the shafts are still in use, but there's a fair share of abandoned tunnels. If you take your time to talk with the dwarves, you can hear urban legends about the blocked shafts and monsters lurking within them. Miners, after all, love a good horror story.

THE WALL OF THE DEAD

Hyste Talma cannot allow for the dead to be buried, so they burn them instead. Then, the ashes of the dearly departed are turned into diamonds and carefully placed on The Wall of the Dead. It is, dear adventurer, the most beautiful cemetery I've ever visited. Every time a light reaches the wall, all the diamonds shimmer.

THE GUILD ASSOCIATION'S OFFICE

Should you require a job to support your lifestyle in Hyste Talma, the Guild Association's Office is usually the first step to take if you're looking for a chance at a quick buck. Though it caters mostly to craftsmen, it has a smaller subdivision dedicated to those seeking the thrill of adventure. I'll warn you, though, the most common quest is to rid the sewers of rats and other odorous monstrosities.

THE MATCHMAKER'S MARKET

Next to the residential district, there's a small square infamous for its red tents and the smell of flowers. There, at the heart of Hyste Talma, love is in the air. Matchmakers are older dwarves who are dead set on divining your future—especially in regards of your heart's desires. Most of the matchmakers are simply earning a living feeding the masses a fabled dream. However, hidden amongst them are true practitioners capable of glimpsing the future.

THE NARROW NOOK

The Narrow Nook is the home of the wizards, warlocks, and sorcerers of Hyste Talma. Though the building itself looks as if it could house only a modest family, it is bigger on the inside. The magically inclined dwarves tend to flock there and treat the place as their club, a meeting place, and a research facility. Gaining entry requires a membership, which can be gained only by demonstrating your magical prowess in front of a very judgemental committee.

Places to Visit in the Inner Layer

THE BLACK CASTLE

Hewn from the heart of the earth itself, the castle's imposing structure is crafted entirely from obsidian, its dark, reflective surface gleaming with an almost mystical luster. Towering spires and intricate buttresses jut into the ceiling, forming a silhouette that strikes awe into any who approach. The castle's architects skillfully integrated the natural contours of the cavern into the design, creating a seamless fusion between stone and obsidian. Deep within the heart of the Black Castle, obscured from casual observers and safeguarded by layers of enchanted wards and intricate traps, lies a secret chamber known only to the most trusted dwarven lords and scholars. Who might uncover its secrets?

THE BARRACKS

The barracks are a series of interconnected chambers carved into the heart of the mountain. Each chamber is meticulously designed to maximize space while maintaining a sense of camaraderie among the dwarven warriors who call it home. Thick stone pillars support the ceiling, adorned with dimly glowing crystals that provide a subtle, constant light.

THE TREASURY

The treasury chamber is accessed through a grand, arched doorway adorned with intricately carved runes that both ward off unauthorized entry and resonate with ancient protective spells. It is behind the colossal vault door, a masterpiece of dwarven engineering, that the gold of Hyste Talma remains safe.

THE HOT SPRINGS

The dwarven hot springs near the Black Castle offer a haven of warmth and tranquility amidst the cold. The dwarves have carefully channeled the geothermal heat from the heart of the mountain into a series of cascading pools. The main pool, with its smooth obsidian edges, is the largest and deepest, accommodating groups of dwarves who gather for moments of relaxation and camaraderie. The water, infused with minerals from the earth, is said to possess healing properties, soothing weary muscles and rejuvenating the spirits of those who immerse themselves in its warmth. The hot springs serve not only as a place of relaxation but also as a social hub for the dwarven community. It is here that dwarves gather to share stories, discuss matters of importance, and forge bonds that extend beyond the battlefield.

THE SUN MIRRORS

These are valued crown jewels of dwarven architecture. There are only three Sun Mirrors in the Inner Circle. Carefully placed to provide concentrated sunlight to the Black Castle, they serve as a reminder of the ingenuity of the ancestors. To this day, no one can find a way to recreate them. The Mirrors reflect the daylight and send its beams of light through a series of strategically placed surfaces to the Main Hall of the Castle, where it is cast upon a diamond chandelier and dispersed. To destroy a Sun Mirror is to sign your death warrant.



Culture and Traditions

THE MEANING OF STONES

Dwarves might prefer straightforward communication when it comes to interacting with other races, and might have little to no patience for the nuances of elvish gestures and facial expressions, but they do love to send messages through stone arrangements. In a much similar fashion to the flower language of human nobility, dwarves have a separate system of gift-giving. If one is reckless enough—or perhaps simply unaware—presenting your dwarvish friend with a colorful gem can easily turn into a social disaster. Thankfully, throughout my life, I've managed to compile a short list of the most common stones and their meanings.

For example, if you are looking for a simple gift for your friend, a calcite would be the safest option. Dwarves, especially those settled down, love to grow their own crystal gardens. How can one grow a stone, you'd ask? Well, that part I haven't yet been privy to. To the best of my understanding, it has something to do with the inherent propensity of dwarves toward stone and earth, in general. Much as tieflings can speak their hellish language and dragonborn spit fire, dwarves can love crystals and gems into growth. Of course, when procuring a calcite, it's nice to pick uncommon combinations of colors!

However, if your dwarvish friend happened to save your life during a dangerous expedition, you might consider gifting him with bismuth instead, or perhaps with an Amazonite, if there were any injuries. A few Verdites would nicely emphasize your gratitude.

Whereas handing dwarves gems and crystals for appraisal and consultation is a common enough practice, offering them as payment for services is frowned upon. Precious stones hold meaning, and therefore shouldn't be considered of equal value to simple coins. That being said, dwarves of course, are perfectly aware that the rest of the world does not share their beliefs. If there are no other options of reimbursement available, they'd take the gems just as easily.

CUISINE

Due to their kingdom's location, many dwarves' and elves' diets lean towards a unique type of vegetarianism for most of the year. It's not as much a lifestyle or philosophy as much as a necessity in the harsh environment of the Herenyakal mountains. Not many animals survive such low temperatures and biting winds all year round. Moreover, after the Fortress of Dragsa cut out most of their trade routes, importing meat from other places became harder. Therefore, what little meat the people of Hyste Talma can scrounge up usually goes to the Healing Halls, the Knights of Ruth, or its richest inhabitants.

But not even the councilors or nobility eat snow rabbits or white foxes, much less Yeti, all the time.

Eliminating meat from their diets doesn't mean that there's no variety. Necessity the mother of countless inventions, and cuisine is not an exception. Where dwarvish cuisine could not use meat, other ingredients soon took their place. And the results are quite spectacular in terms of flavor. I assure you, dear adventurer, that there's no other race in the whole world more open to experimentation and reinventing even the simplest of dishes. However, dwarvish culinary escapades can end in fabulous disasters as often as in almost holistic experiences.

The most favored food item in the caves of Hyste Talma is, of course, mushrooms. Dwarves cultivate them at home and in empty mine shafts. It's common to find porcini and morel in your breakfasts and suppers, and black trumpets and chanterelles are a staple for any proper dinner. Yellow feet and blewits taste delicious when deep fried or grilled, while shaggy mane spice can turn any dish into a delicacy. However, dwarves have mastered turning even the traditionally poisonous mushrooms into delicious snacks. You might be wary at first, but I assure you that caramelized fly agaric is simply divine, even though it has a bit of a sour aftertaste. Death cap vodka is as biting as the frost outside, while dried conocybe filaris are perfect snacks when you're drinking the night away.

Whereas dwarvish cuisine tends to experiment with flavors, the elvish one follows much simpler rules. While their cousins refrain from most spices, the snow elves know only two types of dishes—mild or as hot and spicy as possible. Many will assure you that this is for very practical reasons, as they do spend most of their time outside and need to fight the cold by every means possible.

The Vindu say that a meal is not considered good unless you don't try to hold your tears back at least once.

If you ever find yourself sharing a table with both dwarves and elves, you'll be a part of an unforgettable experience. Do not worry too much about the competitiveness and arguments—both dwarves and elves love to discuss their cuisine. Of course, it usually ends with ridiculous dares and even more shenanigans, as dwarves often like to test their elvish companions' limits. And, of course, in a true elvish fashion, one should never laugh at anything as vulgar as a fart joke. Keeping your face through the deadpan delivery of even the best joke is the norm and proof of strength.

After a hard day of work, there's nothing better than a pint of cold ale or a glass of wine. Dwarves love their Honey

Crystals and Stones Found in Hyste Talma and Their Popular Usages

AMAZONITE

These light green stones help soothe the nervous system, enhance healing, and find balance in life. They're a great "get well soon" gift, but can also signify that the other person is worried about your health and wishes you a swift recovery.

AMBER

Though rare, imported amber is usually used in expensive jewelry or in toys for toddlers. Teething babies from rich families will often chew on amber-embedded figurines. Giving someone an amber means offering them protection.

AMETHYST

This purple and black quartz is associated with deep spirituality. Soulmates will engrave their names on these stones and keep them close to their hearts. Most potent amethysts are used to help with lucid dreaming and astral projections.

BISMUTH

This stone is revered for its geometrical structure and iridescent coloring. Bismuths are a common gift amongst colleagues and coworkers, and having a good amount of them means you're a well-liked individual.

BLOODSTONE

These dark green and burgundy stones are a synonym of rejection. Often given to those who dare break their promises or those who act without honor. It is the greatest humiliation to be publicly given a bloodstone.

CALCITE

These stones come in all colors and various sizes and if tended to properly, grow into beautiful, fluorescent structures. Dwarves tend to keep them as part of their crystal gardens. It is a common hobby to try growing mixed colors by joining calcites together.

DANBURITE

These white, delicate stones are a metaphor for enlightenment. Parents give them to their children to signify a rite of passage—graduation or reaching a mastery.

EUDIALIT

A mixture of grey and claret, these stones are associated with grief and sorrow. Mourning dwarves will carve beautiful designs on them, to commemorate the lost ones.

EMERALD

This is known as the stone of love. It's a common courtship gift, and there's plenty of jewelry incorporating it in its design. On the other hand, "to throw someone's emerald" means to reject their feelings completely.

RUBY

Red rubies attract wealth. They're the luxurious gems found on the necks and wrists of the most noble of dwarves. Hair clips and beads made out of ruby signify a high position in Hyste Talma.

SAPPHIRE

Sapphires are known as the stones of wisdom. They're given to students and apprentices, but also to those who need to make difficult decisions. Jewelry made out of sapphires tends to be a proper gift to people older than you, as a sign of respect for their life experiences.

SNAKESKIN

These light and green stones are the epitome of betrayal. They're usually given when a couple breaks up, but on a political scale, they are a declaration of hostility and a sign of hatred.

SUNSTONE

These orange-red stones are relatively inexpensive and common. Dwarves engrave their most cherished memories on them and keep them as precious treasures throughout their lives. A dwarf without at least a dozen sunstones is considered to have led a sad and lonely life.

VERDITE

Small and black, with green and yellow lines cutting through it in fantastical shapes, Verdite is universally known as an enhancer. It's used to help power rituals, but added to any combination of stones, increases their potency.

Mushroom Brew, sweet and earthy in taste. Elves, on the other hand, prefer bitter wines and are especially fond of their local wine—Flaming Red. As you've probably guessed, it's both bitter and could burn through your throat. Yet, it wouldn't be a proper tavern, without a wide array of fanciful drinks. For your pleasure, I prepared a list of my personal favorites.

SIGN LANGUAGE OF ELVES

As I've mentioned before, Vindu are very particular about their communication. Like all other elves, they are quite secretive by nature and do not share their secrets and private life as willingly as other races. But because of the constant need to live among brutish and often gossipy dwarves, they developed special sign languages. Some even forgo normal communication, so it is not rare to see whole reports given by scouts without any use of words. Elves, of course, are perfectly capable of speaking if the need arises. However, due to their lifestyle, especially outside of the safe walls of Hyste Talma, they prefer to keep their silence and instead use only signs or whistles. Their sign language is a complicated system of hand gestures, curated expressions, eye contact, and short sounds.

It is said that only elves can truly understand each other, for any outsider will forever wonder about the nuances of their communication. And, of course, none of the elves want to teach it to anyone.

Yet, as political alliances needed to be established, book after book on Vindu was published. I managed to get my hands on a few of them and intend to share with you the most important and useful parts. According to Doctor Bakur Arveladze, an accomplished scholar and philologist, elven sign language has a basic alphabet that can be used to simply spell words as needed. It's a simple method of communication taught to children and outsiders. From there, the language only grows more and more complex and individualized.

Names, not only for people but for objects, places, and situations, for example, can change depending on the elves who speak. For one snow elf, the nearest tavern might be, indeed, Brawny Barrel, but another can address it as something entirely different, like "the place where ale stinks of piss." For one elf a "knife" might mean a utensil, for another, a sharp dagger. An elf might be addressed by a different name by different individuals. It might sound natural, for we, too,

Drinks Popular in the Frigid Taverns of Hyste Talma

FALSE MORCHELLA

This purple drink is usually served with ice in large glasses, with a sugar-coated rim. The drink is extremely sour at first, but the aftertaste is sweet and delicious. If you drink more than two, though, your lips will prune for the rest of the night!

CHICKEN DRINK

In the absence of meat, the dwarves came up with a wonderful, if slightly surprising, alternative. This drink is distilled from Sulphur Shelf and tastes like roasted chicken—in liquid form! Chicken Drink is truly a unique experience. It's often served with a sweet side dish, to balance the flavours.

DRUNK PUFFBALLS

Another ingenious invention is Drunk Puffballs. These enormous mushrooms are grown filled to the brim with an alcohol of choice, usually strong vodka with dried fruits. After they're about the size of a dwarf's head, they're harvested and ready to be drunk and eaten!

REAPER'S CALL

Black as tar and close to molasses in consistency, this amazing drink can get you drunk just by its fumes!

It comes in a small bowl, and is then lit on fire. First, one must breathe in and then drink it all in one gulp! It's better not to hold it in your mouth, for the taste is truly horrible. Only the most hardened individuals do not immediately begin to shiver nor try to throw up. It does, however, get you drunk instantly.

CRAZY MAGE

This is the best party drink you could find in the whole city! Crazy Mage is a mix of vodka and juice—of your choice—with an added surprise of exploding crystals. These small "stones" are in truth distilled flavors of different alcohols, first frozen and then coated with caramel. As you put them in your mouth and bite, the melted liquor bursts with flavor! Of course, there's no knowing if you've gotten mead, honey mead, or Reaper's Call!

BLOOD RUBIES

This drink consists of or strawberry vodka frozen into circular ice placed put into your favorite juice. It's the softest drink you might encounter in Hyste Talma, but I like it for its simplicity. If you're looking for safe options, without unexpected flavors, Blood Rubies are for you.

List of Dwarves Idioms and Saying

“To throw someone’s emerald away”

In the most basic sense, it means rejecting someone’s romantic advances. However, most people use it to say that someone’s idea is useless.

“To love each other like dwarves and elves”

To get along just fine, despite all the differences and quarrels.

“To have the heart of a snow elf”

To do one’s duty, despite contrary emotions or to keep your emotions in check during difficult situations.

“Grace of a dwarf”

Used to describe clumsy and boisterous behavior.

“To listen to the stones”

To follow the path that’s destined to you; to not fight against your own nature.

“As deep as the dwarvish mines”

Indicates that something is endless, without boundaries. It can be used as a positive eg. love or wisdom; or negative eg. stupidity or greed.

“Set in stone”

Something is already decided and is not going to change, no matter what.

“Once upon a time, when the mountains were younger and the dwarves hatched from golden eggs”

This strange phrase is often found at the beginning of children’s tales and fables. It indicates that the story took place in times so far away from ours, when impossible things could happen.

communicate in a similar way. However, in the case of snow elves, it is a rather frustrating issue, for usually none of them are willing to elaborate or explain their signs. With elves, apparently, one can only hope to decipher the meaning of their words.

Another layer of complexity added to their communication is their facial expression. Snow elves’ character is often described as “glacial.” It’s truly magnificent to look at their serious faces, unmoved even by the strongest of emotions. They take pride in never betraying what they think or feel unless they want to. That is to say, when an elf signs “home” and his left eyebrow twitches, it might mean something completely different to “home” with a frown or a smile. Doctor Arveladze tried to study the intricacies of these types of intuitive, non-verbal communication, but sadly he ran out of time to do so—as as would probably most mortal humans treading the same path. He did, however, publish a rather practical dictionary and is said to have been editing it even on his deathbed.

Leporis the Young, a dragonborn wizard who resided in Hyste Talma many years ago, attempted to understand elves from a more practical angle. He had married an elf and dedicated many entries of his personal diary to explaining their culture and language. Leporis claimed that snow elves have an excellent sense of humor and will often resort to mischievous pranks if they know that they can get away with them. “Elves take pleasure in flummoxing us, mere mortals, at every turn,” he wrote in one of the entries, “to such an extent that I am certain some of their traditions evolved from pranks taken too far. Eye-staring contests, for example, are nothing but a childish game adorned with pompous

purpose.” Not many people agree with Leporis on that matter, as they firmly believe that snow elves solve their quarrels not by brawls or duels, but instead by staring at each other. The first elf to blink, of course, loses the argument entirely.

LANGUAGE OF DWARVES

On the other hand, the language of dwarves is simple and full of charming idioms and stone-related turns of phrase. If you wish to blend in with the locals, it might be wise to brush up on these. For your browsing convenience, I’ve prepared a nice chart of the most commonly used greetings, idioms, and colloquialisms.

ELVES AND DWARVES

Elves and dwarves, distinct in their cultures and outlooks, harbor a certain level of healthy competition. At times it might be pushed to rather ridiculous lengths, but there isn’t an elf in Hyste Talma who hasn’t embarrassed themselves in trying to prove their point to a hotheaded dwarf, and there isn’t a dwarf who hasn’t had to swallow their pride when an elf beat them at their own game.

Though most of the time harmless and constructive, their competitiveness can at times turn ugly. Over the years, there have been a couple famous feuds between the races that started with a simple challenge over a pint of beer. Most notable among them is the Stinking War. Nowadays, though, both elves and dwarves enjoy keeping up the façade of rivalry for the sake of tradition while secretly appreciating the companionship.



Politics and Trade

Amid the towering mountains and ancient forests, Hyste Talma stands as a bastion against Dragsa's tyranny. Born in an era when dwarves and elves sought unity, the alliance has since evolved, taking in various races and factions with a shared purpose—the defiant stance against the menacing Fortress of Dragsa. The first to join Hyste Talma were free and proud Dryads and the primitive bird race called “Krill.” Then, as Dragsa's oppression grew more severe, the alliance expanded with free Beastkin—centaurs from Banewood and a nation of merfolk that the beastkin had liberated from Dragsa's grip, the Encura.

Yet, the political landscape of Hyste Talma remains harsh like the frigid mountains around them. To the west lies Kallonia, conquered by the Dragsa nation, locked in an enduring war with Hyste Talma, where neither side gains a decisive advantage. The strategic position of Dragsa's Fortress on the western trade routes further complicates matters, discouraging traders to sail all the way to Redoe if they have similar and more accessible trading partners closer to them. Only those seeking the unique weapons and artifacts crafted by elves and dwarves dare venture there. But the ever-progressing magical research of Dragsa is starting to introduce more tempting alternatives.

To the east, stretches an endless sea, veiling unknown lands beyond reach. In the south, the once-trading partners, the Herja kingdoms, perished after an assault by the Disciples, putting even more strain on Hyste Talma's already precarious situation.

In the current scenario, Hyste Talma is able to trade predominately with its Alliance members, relying on the modest resources of Banewood Kutauri and Encura merfolk. However, these allies are quite new and quite poor kingdoms. Additionally, they are fully focused on rebellion to keep the flame of the Beastkin Revolution alive. This means that they can offer little to Hyste Talma in return while the support they provide is crucial for them. This all makes dwarves and elves shift focus toward self-sustainment. Consequently, the kingdom inches toward isolation with each passing decade.

Even as Hyste Talma proudly stands atop its mountain, a symbol of the fight for freedom and justice, considering their position, getting rid of Dragsa from Kallonia would benefit them the most. Also, rumors of betrayal and corruption swirl within the ranks of their officials, leading many to question if they are truly fighting for the greater good.

KNIGHTS OF TIDOR

Amongst the dwarven clans of Hyste Talma, there is one that deserves special recognition. Perhaps you've heard of the charismatic Tidor, a dwarf of unmatched strength and determination? Though to you, he might be simply known as the “Mountain Lord.” There are many legends about Tidor and his questionable behavior, but no sane soul in Hyste Talma would deny his importance to the current political upheaval. Tidor and his clansmen are the main unifying force behind the movement to help free beastkin. His faction, insane enough to brave the northern winds, travels through the frozen land to reach the Winter Tribes and, at times, even Frontloch Lake.

The Clan of Thousand Skills embraces members with varied professions and backgrounds, fostering a network of connections, spies, and allies across the world. Champions, the most formidable warriors, lead the clan in perilous missions against slavery.

Blood of the Clan

Traditionally, a dwarven Clan is a family, connected by blood and ancestors. Yet, that's not what the Knights of Tidor consider a valid requirement. When their leader was but a small child, his own family died in the frozen tundra outside of Hyste Talma—and he stumbled upon slavers from Dragsa. He had spent years in chains, being paraded around courts where his pain and humiliation were considered the highest form of entertainment. It was Harrat Wing's raid during the summer festivities in Woodhaven that set him free. As a young dwarf, he made a vow to treat every Kutauri as his blood brother or sister, and to do everything in his power to help them end slavery for good. Upon his return to Hyste Talma, Tidor reclaimed his inheritance and began his journey as a warrior. In time, he gained both incredible skill and connections, but what made him different was his approach to one of the most important dwarven concepts: clans.

Due to Tidor's past, it is his wish to allow anyone in need of a home, a place amongst his family. Although skilled warriors are the most valued, and the only ones to actually carry the title of a knight, everyone is welcome. Thus, Tidor's Clan is full of outcasts and lone warriors, grasping to find a new purpose in life. This has earned them both the name of the Clan of Thousand Skills and the scorn of the Knights of Ruth.

The Corruption

Over the years the sinister influence of Chaos started to corrupt Tidor and the mightiest warriors of his clan. Although the Mountain Lord is in deep denial, those around him can't help but notice the changes in his behavior. The contrast between the goofy dreamer with a good head

on his shoulders, a good leader willing to risk everything for justice, and the grumpy, ruthless mercenary that stands at the helm of the family now, is stark and disconcerting. Some claim to have seen purple and red hues lingering in Tidor's eyes after a fight. Some speculate that it's the memories of his own enslavement that are finally catching up to him and pushing him down a dangerous path. Yet, there are voices that blame Harrat Wing for the turn toward brutal force and mercilessness. Once revered by everyone, Tidor and his Knights face increasingly more opposition in Hyste Talma. At the same time, the Mountain Lord grows impatient in his old age. He feels the change in the world and can't wait to see the Fortress of Dragsa's Fall. During especially vicious battles or assignments that are positively soul-crushing—such as freeing children from slavery—Tidor and his Knights are prone to bouts of uncontrollable rage, much like their Kutura equivalents. Slowly, with one thought after another, it sneaks in and takes over their dreams, their personalities, and their lives. Eventually, there will be nothing left but wrath and pain.



THE KNIGHTS OF RUTH (DWARVEN WARRIORS)

The Knights of Ruth stand in direct opposition to Tidor's Clan. As a traditional organization, their history is as long and rich as Hyste Talma's. Ruth the Terrible was the first dwarf to serve the ruler of the city and the first to establish a structure of guards and fighters able to defend it. Only dwarves of good pedigree are considered worthy of joining their ranks, and the recruitment process is tedious and scrupulous.

The Knights of Ruth adhere to a strict code of virtues and vices that govern their conduct within the sacred walls of Hyste Talma as well as outside of it. Honor, loyalty, and courage form the bedrock of their virtues, fostering a sense of unwavering commitment to the city and its inhabitants. Conversely, violence, hazard, and deception are condemned as vices and seen as threats to the very fabric of the order. The Knights pride themselves on embodying the noble ideals of protecting the innocent, upholding their sworn duty with a virtuous spirit that rejects any deviation into dishonorable practices.

Legend of Ruth

In the heart of Hyste Talma, Ruth the Terrible's legacy unfolded with the weight of both honor and tragedy. His name, far from a reflection of personal ineptness, whispered a tale of selflessness and silent suffering, an indomitable spirit eternally entwined with the flames that claimed him. As the founder of the order that bears his name, Ruth's life bore witness to the complexities of duty and the inexorable pull of the dwarven code of honor. Far from a reflection of his character, the moniker "the Terrible" finds its roots in the tragic circumstances of his noble demise. Ruth's life was a paragon of the dwarven code of honor, his every action a testament to the principles he held dear.

One fateful day, as the clangs of the forges echoed through the cavernous halls, Ruth found himself faced with an unspeakable choice. A dwarven child, innocent and unaware of the cruel fate that loomed, stood on the precipice of a fiery demise. A murderous thief that had escaped justice and planned to rob the crown of its treasures, took a hostage. The poor excuse of a dwarf dangled the child over an open forge, threatening to drop it if the ruler didn't bestow riches upon him. Ruth had only had one choice. Pretending to agree to the thief's demands, he approached, stripped of his protective armor and with no weapons. He knew he would face his death that day but he was determined to save the child. In a show of unimaginable skill and power, he had thrown himself at the culprit, grabbed the child, and tossed it to safety while he and the thief plunged into the inferno below.

As the flames engulfed him, the child's wide eyes met Ruth's stoic gaze. "Why?" the child managed to stammer through the

crackling of the flames. Ruth offered a pained yet determined smile. “Because, my child, there are fates more terrible than any fire. I bear this so you may know a world where protecting innocence is worth more than the life of a knight.”

While the somber tale of Ruth the Terrible lingers in the echoes of dwarven history, there are those, like the irreverent Tibor, who find humor in the irony of a name that belies the true nobility of its bearer. Ruth’s legacy lives on, not only in the Order that he founded, but in the hearts of dwarves who continue to draw inspiration from the silent, dignified sacrifice of a knight who embraced the terrible so that others might know a future free from its grasp.

Major Holidays in Hyste Talma

Starlight Revelry: *Held under the light of the full moon during the longest night of the year, elves gather for a night of joyous celebration on the fields of the Outer Circle. Songs, dances, and feasts mark this occasion as elves express their appreciation for the celestial forces that guide and protect them. It is expected of you to drink and eat more than your fill in order to push away the coldness of the night.*

Forge Sweeping: *During the summer solstice, dwarves celebrate the craftsmanship and resilience of their people by having a day off. During this time, the halls do not echo with the clang of hammers. Instead, dwarven artisans clean their forges and take stock. This is the only day of the year when you can buy their marvelous merchandise at a tantalizing discount—that is if the item has been deemed “last year’s gem.”*

DIN HUINE

You have probably heard the stories of Din Huine and how beautiful they look bathed in the blood of their enemies. As they lack any formal hierarchy, nor hold any significant power within the walls of Hyste Talma, it’s hard to define their place in the Radoe Alliance.

Din Huine, the elites of Vindu warriors who fearlessly hunt down monsters—and make it a point of honor to wear Yeti’s fur!—have no leader, hold no rank. Yet, they are as essential for the Alliance to function as air is for breathing.

Hope

For centuries, Din Huine remained detached from the political structure of Hyste Talma. Over the course of history, many assassinations have been ascribed to their swift blades, but no one has ever connected an ideology or even a strong opinion to them. As far as the general populace was concerned, Din Huine followed the money and the thrill of a challenge. Killing a particularly vicious Yeti is as important as quietly slipping poison to the King’s supper.

It stands to reason then, that when the Redoe Alliance made itself known in Hyste Talma, Din Huine would ignore the political upheaval and continue to serve as they please and whom they please. Not this time, however. No one knows what exactly pushed these lethal elves to unify behind the Alliance—was it a child of their own, captured by Dragsa? Or did they see the laboratories? Or perhaps it was a faint trace of Order, pushing them towards seeking justice? Whatever reasons they have for joining in, Din Huine’s presence in the Inner Circle of Hyste Talma grows each decade. The members of the Redoe Alliance know how to call for them and what to expect from their service.

As for the rest of the world, there’s but a simple question to ask: if even the most bloodthirsty assassins decide your actions immoral and unite to kill you, what crimes must you have committed?

Din Huine’s involvement in the Redoe Alliance is perhaps the strongest proof of how deprived Queen Anara’s heart has become.

Half-feral bad omens

There are many legends about Din Huine. Most of their members are women—daughters, sisters and wives. There is, of course, no gender preference and if you meet enough of them, you will eventually encounter a male Din Huine. However, there’s no denying the imbalance. Many Vindu scholars have wondered why women tend to be more brutal, more violent of their species. Some think it has to do with protecting their children, some think it’s the societal pressure that builds over centuries and pushes them into the role of extraordinary huntresses.

None of the scientific theories are as popular or believable as the legends told at the inns. It is said that the first Din Huine was a Vindu woman blessed by the spirit of a wolf, and that the animal’s instincts and skills were a gift. It is said that a Vindu can become a Din Huine only after they discover, within themselves, their feral, wild side, when they let go of their inhibitions and allow their emotions and heart to lead them. Whether that path ends up following a Yeti or a Bear from the Deep, or a crafty merchant, seems irrelevant.



THE DECAYING ROOTS





They say war leaves no true victors. Only survivors. Ones who just lost less. Yet, history is brim full of conflicts. For territories. For survival. And for what some may call justice. Yet, it is the last of these reasons that oftentimes births the bloodiest of battles. In a world where battles is a currency as common as the tides, and where the clash of swords echoes through the annals of history, we find ourselves in the land of Deuslair.

Our tale unfurls within the formidable Fortress of Dragsa, a dominion that waged war for centuries against a coalition of nations united under the banner of the Redoe Alliance. In the beginning, the Fortress found itself on the losing side, outnumbered by far. But fortune is a fickle mistress, and fate took a turn when Dragsa unearthed the enigmatic Roots of Life—a magical ore hidden deep beneath the world's surface. And with it, a power that could tip the scales of war in their favor. Armed with this newfound might, Dragsa created armies of Beastkin to wage their wars. Meanwhile, the Redoe Alliance amassed power through pacts, trade, and even some more nefarious means. In war all's fair, they say. Even if it is a cutthroat affair.

In the middle of this ceaseless war, kingdoms on the southern continent, untouched by the conflict so far, found themselves under siege by forces from realms unknown. Bringing chaos and destruction in their wake they razed to the ground most of the lands in the span of merely 27 years. They spared only one—a nation stranded amidst treacherous stretches of arid dunes. A desolation that became both their blessing and their prison. These invaders, the “Disciples of Chaos,” as they call themselves, claim to seek the remnants of a “traitorous god,” a deity whose description bears eerie resemblance to the revered figure known across Deuslair. As the one who once abandoned these lands. But is there some other, hidden truth to be found here?

Amidst this maelstrom of chaos and conflict, destiny brought together a disparate group of souls. Their story is one full of hard moral decisions, fights and unexpected turns of events. And while they might have been nothing more than a speck on a thread of fate, they put their mark on the history. One which altered the course of Deuslair's world. Be it for the better or for the worse...



OVERVIEW OF THE STORY

Chapter 1 sets the stage for a tale of darkness and despair. The characters find themselves in a dire predicament, waking up in cages after being taken captive by ruthless pirates. But these are no ordinary seafarers—they serve the twisted and malevolent Disciples of Chaos, whose influence stretches far and wide. The players will soon realize the true power of money, a force that can corrupt even the most noble of souls. Which pirates were far from even before that deal.

As the players are forced to endure this nightmarish journey, they will bear witness to the unspeakable horrors that await all who fall under the Disciples' grasp. And the size of their armies. The sheer magnitude of the troops amassed by them is hair-raising. Characters are taken to the Wurgar—stronghold, built on the ashes of conquered lands. A chilling reminder of the Disciples' merciless reign. The players can sense the impending doom that looms over the land, as the Disciples of Chaos are clearly preparing for a battle—a battle of epic proportions, one that could bring about the end of all that they know.

Surrounded by their captors, characters find themselves forced to plot their escape with other hapless prisoners. But a flicker of hope emerges when they discover an imprisoned shaman, an Elder of the Kril race, whose powerful illusions could shield their escape. However, the Elder's aid comes with a huge condition—the characters must agree to protect his kin and let them escape too. The characters are entrusted with the task of planning the details of escape themselves, and it will require them to exhibit their ingenuity and unwavering courage to ensure the success for all involved.

After escaping the Elder Kril suggests that they traverse the treacherous swamps in the north-west, in order to cross over to the part of Herja that remains untouched by the clutches of the Disciples of Chaos. As they make their treacherous escape, the characters face grave dangers, including toxic swamps and lurking beneath water surface monsters. As the swamp ends, they are welcomed by an endless desert filled with stinging salt. The journey is long and arduous, and the group is pushed to the brink of exhaustion. But just when they think all is lost, a convoy appears on the horizon. It is led by Princess Ker'ubo, an emissary from a kingdom allied to Dragsa.

She is on her way to a port city and then she intends to proceed to the Fortress of Dragsa and speak directly with Queen Anara, the ruler of Dragsa. Upon hearing the characters' story and engaging in brief negotiations, she agrees to help. However, she also reveals that the Fortress of Dragsa have basically tied hands at this moment. Their troops are

preoccupied with internal issues concerning beastkin, who are instigated by the Hyste Talma Kingdom. They cannot retreat forces from the east due to occasional direct attacks from the Redoe Alliance. Their forces are further stretched thin by constant guerilla warfare in Banewood to the west. If the party's claims are correct, they must also be cautious of their fragile alliance with pirates from the Scareguard islands. Furthermore, they must assume that Queen Anara is willing to hear them out and believe their story, something that she doubts. According to her, words alone are not enough for “that monstrous hag”.

She proposes an alternative solution. The Princess Ker'ubo will make a brief stop and establish contact with royalty in Dum Ramil, from the Kartagis desert. If the odds are in their favor, these people may lend more credibility to the information regarding the forces of the Disciples that are gathering near Wurgar. Meanwhile, she proposes to send the party on one of her ships, either to Turtle Island to investigate whether the pirates' allegiance still lies with Dragsa or if they have joined the Disciples of Chaos, or to the Fortress of Dragsa to attempt to sway the Queen's opinion. The Princess also gives characters her letter to the Queen, which should help you get an audience with her. Additionally, Elder Kril suggests that he may be able to help negotiate a truce with the Banewood centaurs and the Yv'anda tribe of dryads, or provide them with safe passage to the Hyste Talma Kingdom, should they desire it.

The players' choices will determine the path their characters take, leading to a significant change in how this story will play out, both in terms of the order of events and the chosen solutions.



CHAPTER 1

Good Candles Burn from Both Sides

The characters find themselves in a dire predicament, waking up in cages after being taken captive. Then they are transported to the Disciples of Chaos stronghold—Wurgar. There characters learn about Disciples upcoming plans to attack and decide to escape to warn other nations.

CHAPTER 2

Treading Murky Waters

Party decides to check whether pirates from Scareguards are still loyal to the Dragsa. But as soon as they arrive, they are put to work by a ruthless pirate unwilling to share his secrets. To get them, characters will need to change their approach.

CHAPTER 3

Beneath the Calm Water Surface

The Banewood inhabitants are unwilling to cooperate with characters. To earn their trust they ask the party to prove that they are allies of the beastkin and resolve one strange case plaguing the merfolk capital—Encura. A series of mysterious deaths.

CHAPTER 4

Putting the Humans on Ice

In Hyste Talma they find out that one of the leaders of the place has been corrupted by Chaos and slowly loses his mind. They will need to stop him fighting against time, Chaos Disciples, and secrets buried in the ruins of ancient temple.

CHAPTER 5

Fortress Brewing Troubles

Party checks the suspicious instigation of beastkin in the Fortress of Dragsa, while trying to get an audience with the Queen Anara.

CHAPTER 6

Dragsa Will Never Fall

During the audience with Queen Anara, a messenger informs the beastkin revolution. To make matters worse, a dark smoke rises from the far end of the sea to the south...

Characters are faced with a final battle, which will challenge both their abilities and choices they made along their journey.

Chapter 2 opens with an abrupt attack by the tribal habitants from nearby islands on the characters' ship as they sail towards the Republic of Misty Waters—a collection of unstable pirate kingdoms where rulers change constantly with duels or plain murders. Meaning that, politics is more open and sincere. Still, the sudden attack while approaching the Scareguards archipelago takes the characters by surprise, plunging them into an unexpected battle for survival.

After that they find themselves stranded on one of the islands which was in lower altitude before rising above water again. If they investigate the leftover fragments of the ship, they can find suspicious traces of gunpowder. Though that information does not help them with their current predicament. To reach Turtle Island, which serves as a capital for the Republic, they will need all of their resourcefulness or a little bit of help from the locals.

No matter what route they choose to follow, after arriving at the Turtle Islands, they are quickly welcomed to the mansion of its ruler. Blackeye Drex, ruler of the Turtle Islands, welcomes the party with open arms, but his intimidating appearance raises suspicions. As they explain the situation, he tells them that gathering information will take some time and in the meantime he just wants them to deal with a few

of the problems on his island. If the characters accept, he starts tasking them with more and more dangerous missions. If they refuse, he tells them to be guests in his mansion. But it turns out to be confinement to his mansion, with mysterious accidents occurring each day. It becomes clear that Drex is a ruthless pirate, unwilling to share his secrets. To get them, characters will need to change their approach. They must resort to stealing from him, planning a heist to obtain incriminating documents. However, the truth they uncover may not be what they expect, and their actions could drastically shift the balance of power in the Republic of Misty Waters.

Chapter 3 is the most investigation-oriented story in this campaign. It starts with a party arriving at the Banewood forest. After introduction by the Elder Kril, he leaves the party to their own saying that Yv'anda dryads and centaurs only judge the worth of people talking to them directly so being the intermediary would do them more harm than good. After a brief explanation the Yv'anda stop the characters and tell them that further discussion is meaningless without mutual trust. They are unable to believe even one word if the person saying them is not trustworthy. To earn their trust they ask the party to prove that they are allies of the beastkin.

To do so, they propose to resolve one strange case plaguing the merfolk capital—Encura. A series of mysterious deaths. If players refuse, the centaurs won't continue the negotiations.

After arriving in Encura, characters begin their investigation. During it, they might uncover the truth behind the series of deaths, or come up with a valid explanation which would convince the locals. The options in this part are pretty varied. No matter what they choose, if the results are satisfactory they can come back to the centaurs which will agree on stopping the attacks.

Chapter 4 is the ice-cold heart of our journey. To get into Hyste Talma, the party needs to use Astral Crystals—a gift given to them by Elder Kril, to cast their consciousness to temporary bodies in Hyste Talma. But when they use them, the situation they are confronted with is far from easy.

They are thrown into the political chaos of the Redoe Alliance, where our determined heroes will have to face not only the politics but also the consequences of Chaos' influence. Tidor the Mountain Chieftain and the leader of the Knights of Tidor has been infected and over time, started to lose his mind. Now, he's determined to reclaim an ancient relic hidden in a temple buried underneath Hyste Talma. Stopping him will be a challenge not only to the strength of our heroes, but to their wit and tactical thinking. Without the aid from Redoe Alliance and fighting against time and Chaos Disciples, the characters delve deep into the Underdome. The tragic history of the city's first Queen, Talmani, will soon emerge, forcing our characters to choose between what's necessary and what's right. Will they manage to protect their own lives in the chambers full of monsters? Or will they perish, led to defeat by their own rash decisions? Fors sure the characters will need to use all their wits and courage to uncover the secrets buried deep within the ruins.

Chapter 5 tells a story about embarking on a perilous mission to uncover the beastkin instigation within the Fortress of Dragsa and seeking an audience with Queen Anara. But as they say, fate can be cruel. Upon their arrival at the Fortress gates, they are suspected of being spies from the Redoe Alliance, causing a delay in their progress. To make matters worse, some of their belongings, including a crucial letter from Princess Ker'ubo, have gone missing. With their plans in disarray, the party must find another way to reach the Queen. However, as they delve deeper into the Fortress, they discover some ominous truths about the city and the abominable treatment of the beastkin, rendering them as subpar citizens living in extremely poor conditions. The troubles within the Fortress run much deeper than they had anticipated, and an ominous aura lingers over their every move.

To get to the inner parts of the Fortress of Dragsa the characters find themselves with limited but not totally

hopeless options. They may disguise themselves as part of a merchant group, accompany a group of thieves on a dangerous heist, or help some nobles with their problems. In the inner parts of Fortress, they also happen to see one of the instigators from the slums, who now tries to do something suspicious in the city. If they choose to investigate, they will unveil a twisted cult of Chaos growing within the walls of Dragsa. This cult is responsible for the riots, all while blaming it on the Redoe Alliance. Confronting them and presenting evidence to the authorities will allow the party to gain an audience with the Queen.

Depending on how they manage to get an audience with the Queen, she may or may not be willing to listen to their story. If this chapter was done as the last one before going to chapter six, the audience proceeds normally. If not, Queen Anara belittles the problem with the Disciples of Chaos and tells the party to come back with more solid proof of their claims.

Chapter 6 tells the shortest story of all in the book. But maybe the grimmest. After gathering all the evidence and negotiating truces with other major powers in the Deuslair, the characters finally reach Queen Anara for final talk. During the audience, Queen Anara scrutinizes their every move with a calculating gaze, and the characters can feel her judging their every word. If they pass her test, she may agree to send a proposition of truce to other nations to deal with Disciples of Chaos. But their victory is short-lived. Just as she is about to make a decision, a messenger brings grave news: the city is under attack. The Beastkin have revolted, and chaos has erupted. The characters are left with a harrowing choice: to side with the rebels in their righteous fight or crush their uprising in the name of order. The timing could not be worse. Either way, they are doomed to a future full of violence and despair. To make matters worse, a dark smoke rises from the far end of the sea to the south, signaling an ominous threat approaching. The characters can only hope to survive what comes next.

Will the characters' efforts made a difference or was it all for nothing? Multiple possible endings await the party and their impact on history of Deuslair will be determined by the choices they made along their arduous journey.



CHARACTERS HOOKS AND RELATIONSHIPS

As with any well-crafted characters with backstories, your players' characters in this campaign are unlikely to be blank pages devoid of a past. Meaning that to truly hook them into this narrative, they'll require more than just a grand and lofty mission. They'll need something personal.

Below, you'll find a list of ideas that can be employed to add depth to "why" each character is driven to oppose the Disciples of Chaos. These can be woven into their backstories before the campaign's start or introduced later to enhance their narratives. Feel free to use them as you see fit, dear Game Masters.

1. IT'S THEIR NOBLE MISSION

To kick off this list, let's get the most basic one out of the way. While being entwined in events that lead to a greater good doesn't automatically make one a hero (they might just as well be an anti-hero, a mere observer, or a coincidental cog in the grand machinery of fate), they might indeed be of noble nature. However, it's often more engaging to provide them with a broader quest of which the entire campaign is but a part off.

For instance, they could serve as a representative of a government—a special agent or investigator hailing from places like Hyste Talma, the Fortress of Dragsa, one of the kingdoms within the Republic of Misty Waters, or even a land much farther away. Entrusted as a loyal agent of their homeland, their mission involves checking suspicious activities. Or they may belong to a noble order and the mission to combat the Disciples of Chaos might fit their personal oath or duty to the deity. Though the latter motive works much better if it's combined with any other motivations on this list.

2. THEY WANT TO RESCUE SOMEONE

Perhaps they are trying to liberate someone ensnared by the clutches of the Disciples. This individual might have been seized by marauders during a perilous sea voyage, taken captive in the brutal skirmish, or even callously sold into slavery by their own kin. Not every family shares in the bonds of joyous unity. A variation of this concept could involve "rescuing" an individual who has become a member of the Disciples of Chaos. This could entail efforts to undo their indoctrination, persuading them to see reason, or even resorting to a more grim interpretation of "liberation."

Introducing an additional non-player character (NPC) with a direct connection to one of the players' personal backstories is an excellent means of infusing emotional depth into the narrative. Whether they opt to strive for the NPC's freedom alongside their comrades or choose to secure their release through wages earned is entirely at the discretion of the player and will depend on the course of the sessions. My advice is that at the beginning of the campaign it is better to keep their exact location a mystery. Thanks to that the character is forced into looking for clues alongside the journey. Knowing their exact location from the start usually goes against the main story as the logical outcome to that, is that they will just opt for a rescue mission right away.

3. THEY SEEK REVENGE

Sometimes, noble missions become entwined with less honorable desires. The line between seeking justice and succumbing to the thirst for vengeance against those who have inflicted pain is frightfully thin. Justice has the power to guide people toward the metaphorical light or plunge them into the darkest abyss. And the actions of the Disciples of Chaos have undoubtedly left behind a trail of individuals seeking retribution. A character might aspire to mete out justice to the entire faction, a prominent group within it, or focus their vengeance on a single target. Regardless of their choice, it's essential to think about not only the atrocities that kindled this fiery resolve but also the emotional chasm it has carved within their soul. Seeking revenge for a lost child is a very different quest from avenging a razed monastery. It's equally important to consider how the focus of this desire shapes the character's actions—a single-target vendetta entails cold, calculated plans aimed at an ultimate goal, while vengeance against a group leads down an endless, blood-soaked path culminating in tragedy. Though, in the end, all these paths lead to personal torment for the character.

4. THEY NEED MONEY

Motive as simple as it gets. Yet one which brings forth an interesting array of options. Because even if this particular character simply needs more money, the money itself is rarely the end goal. And the reason for wanting it can be quite diverse. Maybe they are in dire need because of a debt and bounty hunters looking for their head? Or to buy back something extremely precious to them? Maybe even a person from slavery? Perhaps they need it for family business, which is getting close to bankrupting every second they are away? Or maybe a run down orphanage which was the only home

they ever knew? It can be even as simple as just wanting to be filthy rich just for the sake of it. While it is surely lackluster in some regards, it is still the most realistic one. Though even that last one can have a hidden, double meaning if one digs deep enough...

5. THEY ARE SEEKING A MIRACLE

While it might sound ridiculous, the pursuit of solutions to unsolvable problems is a surprisingly common motivation. This could encompass seeking a cure for an incurable disease, altering one's past or destiny, breaking a curse resistant to conventional magic, or even the audacious endeavor to resurrect the deceased. The list of such ambitions knows no bounds.

For this reason, any person might embark on journeys to the farthest corners of the world, unearthing every elusive secret they can grasp. Alternatively, they might set their sights on the Fortress of Dragsa, petitioning Queen Anara for a favor. Whether they genuinely perceive her as a deity or not, her powers appear to transcend mortal comprehension.



6. THEY WANT TO PROTECT THEIR HOME

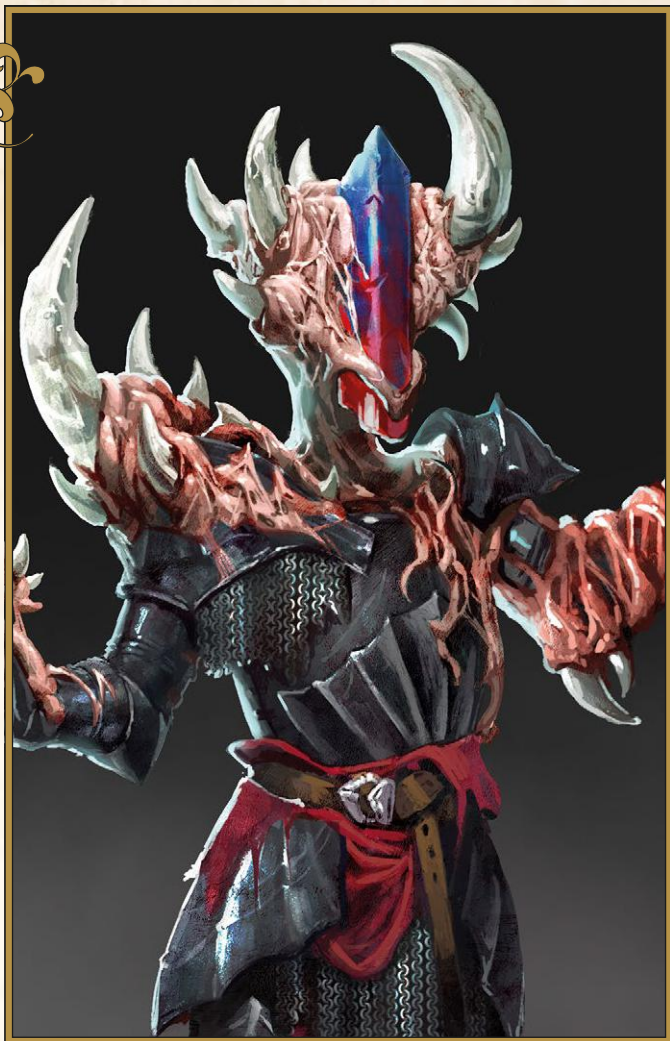
While saving the world is a grand and noble mission, it can feel somewhat abstract and distant for most. Therefore, incorporating something more tangible, even if smaller in scale, can actually enhance its significance. What the characters seek to safeguard may be something intimately connected to their hearts: a beloved family, a cherished hometown, or a revered clan. The profound awareness of the horrors that would befall them if the forces of the Disciples of Chaos prevail provides a very rational motivation to embark on this perilous journey. Nevertheless, willingly choosing to partake in this seemingly insurmountable battle is a testament to their heroic spirits.

7. THEY LOOK FOR THE EVIDENCE

These potential evidence could take various forms, such as documents proving lineage, ownership of lands, or proof of innocence for the character or their clan. Many intricate political webs can be woven around such items. This motivation provides a strong driving force for character actions in the campaign, however from the GM's perspective, they are also a double-edged sword. Depending on the nature of what they seek, these characters might be reluctant to leave a particular location. To ensure this motivation remains relevant in the campaign, the GM will need to craft some "bread crumbs" to entice the character to move from one place to another. There are multiple ways how it can be done, but I would like to offer two suggestions here: either place this evidence within the grasp of the Disciples or in the possession of someone who wouldn't readily share it under normal circumstances.

While the Disciples of Chaos were laying waste to the kingdoms of the continent of Herja, not all the treasures were necessarily lost. Some might still be in their possession. The character could begin their search in the encampment, believing the evidence is there. However, they might discover that it has been taken by one of the Disciples' executives who is now traveling in the world. This twist is essential because otherwise, the character might not be willing to leave the encampment from the first chapter, as this is where they would want to search.

An alternative is to put the evidence in the possession of someone with very limited access. For instance, Queen Anara serves as an excellent example. She could possess a vast number of documents in her personal archive and have lived long enough to witness several historical events personally. However, gaining her favor and convincing her to share this information would not be an easy task.



8. THEY WANT REDEMPTION

Another way to immerse your characters in the grand machinations of powers beyond them is to introduce the elusive goal of finding 'forgiveness.' These characters might have once been members of the Disciples of Chaos, witnessing the madness that surrounds them. Alternatively, they could still believe in the Disciples' mission, but their guilt stems from countless past atrocities, pushing them to question the righteousness of the path. Their source of guilt might not be directly linked to the Disciples but something more profound. Their fight against this malevolent force becomes a means to balance the scales of judgment at the end of their lives. Another way to immerse your characters in the grand machinations of powers beyond them is to introduce the elusive goal of finding 'forgiveness.' These characters might have once been members of the Disciples of Chaos, witnessing the madness that surrounds them. Alternatively, they could still believe in the Disciples' mission, but their guilt stems from countless past atrocities, pushing them to question the righteousness of their path. Their source of guilt might not be directly linked to the Disciples but something more profound. Their fight against this malevolent force becomes a means to balance the scales of judgment at the end of their lives.

9. THEY ARE DOUBLE AGENT

One of the more risky but still plausible ways of integrating character into a plot is making them a double agent. For this motive to work some hints for other players need to be spread through the campaign so that discovering their true identity won't feel too unnatural. It is good to put this revelation somewhere in the middle of the campaign so that people will have time to remake their relationships after knowing the full truth... or deal with the consequences. They can join the rest of the players, now truthfully, on their quest and jump into a redemption arc of their own in the second half of the campaign. Or if they are given a solid justification, they could stay on the Disciples side and fight with other players. Though the latter option would most likely lead to that player needing a new character for the campaign...

As the player characters venture onto this path, it's essential to forge connections not only with the story but also among the individual players. Just like the motives mentioned earlier, which firmly anchor them in the narrative, any bonds between characters add depth to the overarching story within the campaign.

Are they complete strangers to each other, or do they share a close connection? Were they captured together, or is this their first encounter? Have they heard of each other's past deeds, or do they hail from the same place?

The list of possibilities is pretty much endless, but here are the most common links between players worth adding:

- Siblings, cousins, or childhood friends.
- A shared origin or religion.
- Former rivals who have become unlikely allies.
- One character rescued the other's life.
- They've seen each other in dreams or visions.
- Members of a secretive society with a shared mission.
- Fellow apprentices under the same master's tutelage.
- Comrades from a past military campaign or battle.
- They both sought refuge in the same safe haven during a disaster.
- A common debt or favor that ties them together.
- Drawn together by a shared adversary seeking revenge.

It is important to bear in mind that while linking a player's character to the story can be a powerful tool for engagement, making it always more interesting to them, it should be done in a way that respects the player's preferences. And the connections between the players themselves can also serve as strong narrative links to the main story.



EXPLANATION OF USED SYSTEM TERMINOLOGY

Throughout this campaign, the difficulty level of tests will be referenced repeatedly. Each time, it will either use SRD 5.1 specific terminology or will specify whether the test is 'easy,' 'hard,' and so on. If you are using a system based on the SRD 5.1., consult the table below to check the needed results for each test. If you are using a different system, adapt this information to your system's mechanics.

TEST DIFFICULTY	DC
Very easy	5
Easy	10
Medium	15
Hard	20
Very hard	25
Nearly impossible	30

If some actions done alongside the tests are supposed to give the one doing it an edge or make it harder, there will be also information about doing it with the 'advantage' or 'disadvantage.' For systems based on the SRD 5.1. it means doing it with additional die and choosing better or worse result from two used dice. Adjust this accordingly if you use other mechanic.

Sometimes, when the party encounters enemies in a group, you will be provided with information about the enemy composition presented in a table. For such a encounter, GM need to choose creatures listed in specific column. These tables offers guidance on which enemies to choose based on the party's level using the SRD 5.1 system. Each creature's name refers to a specific monster from the Deuslair Bestiary, which was provided with this book.

These tables are designed to balance encounters for a standard 4-person party of the specified levels. If your group playing this campaign has a different number of players, for each extra character, use the column for a party two levels higher than your actual player characters, and for each missing character, use the column for a party two levels lower.

Additionally, if during the encounter you feel that the threat of enemies is lacking, you can use information from the "Reinforcement" section to increase the difficulty of the battle. Unpredictable actions and clever strategies of players are part of any RPG session, so in any fight, GMs need to be flexible with how the battle proceeds. "Reinforcements" contain extra enemies or information about possible events that can help adjust the battles to these actions.

Given that not every situation in this campaign will be resolved through combat, especially for characters leveling in systems based on SRD 5.1 mechanics, we recommend employing milestones instead of traditional experience points. At each significant juncture in the story's progression, reward players with partial levels. The completion of a major story arc should warrant a full level, while accomplishing 2-4 side missions could be considered deserving of one level as well. Adjust these milestones according to the expected length of your campaign.

While all of the used creatures are described in the Deuslair Bestiary, provided along with this book, if you are using this campaign along with miniatures it is worth checking the names of creatures list in each fight. While the main story always allows options using only miniatures present in the core set Core along with Stretch Goals and Super Stretch Goals from the fifth edition of Dungeon and Lasers campaign, some of the additional quests or alternative story parts will require miniatures from other sets. If you are choosing one of them, be sure to have these specific models or their counterparts ready.



Name of the Creature from the Bestiary

Recommended level for the party for which this enemy composition is designed.

NAME OF CREATURE	LEVEL 6-7	LEVEL 8-9	LEVEL 10-11	LEVEL 12-14
Rasher Wards	× 2	× 2	× 2	× 2
Minor Rasher Golem	× 1	× 1	× 2	× 2
Rasher Golem	× 0	× 1	× 1	× 1
REINFORCEMENT				
Surge of Power	After the HP of a Minor Rasher Golem reaches to zero and at least one Rasher Ward is still alive, the Rasher Ward focuses all of their energy to bring the Minor Rasher Golem to full HP. The Rasher Ward takes over as the new “pilots” of the golem, and disappear the moment they use this ability.			

Name of the creatures or event

Description containing how the reinforcements arrive and what they do. These can be a group of creatures, a volley of attacks from enemies stationed outside of the battle, or perhaps a natural event—depending on the nature of these “Reinforcements,” they will have different effects on the fight.





CHAPTER 1: GOOD CANDLES BURN FROM BOTH SIDES

Bound by a wicked fate, our characters awaken in cages, as they are heading to the Stronghold of Wurgar. Of course, they aren't arriving as guests, as they come dressed in chains. During their nightmarish journey through the Godless Lands, they will witness unspeakable horrors due to the influence of the Disciples. The sheer size of their armies is chilling and they are full of immensely strong monsters and terrifying casters. Soon, it becomes evident that a shadow of impending doom blankets the entirety of Deuslair, as the Disciples prepare for war. A war that has the potential to reshape the world as the characters have come to know. Forced to plan an escape with their fellow prisoners, hope flickers with the discovery of an imprisoned Kril shaman. To earn his trust, the characters must promise to protect his kin and retrieve an artifact. After dealing with his issues, the Kril shaman guides the party in a treacherous journey through swamps and an endless desert. Exhausted and on the brink of despair, they encounter Princess Ker'ubo in the middle of the desert, an ally of Dragsa. After hearing their story she agrees to help them, but reveals that Dragsa is already going through a difficult situation. It seems that this is just the beginning of their troubles...

New Places, New Friends

This chapter is the prologue of our story. It begins with the fateful encounter of our characters, though perhaps not one they would wish to be part of. And what's worse, they're all nestled just beneath the foreboding stronghold of Wurgar, created by the hands of all the prisoners captured by the Disciples of Chaos.

During the character creation process for this campaign, provide the characters with their starting items as usual. For the majority of the first chapter, these items will be temporarily unavailable. However, at one point in the story, the characters will have the opportunity to regain them, so there's no need to remove these items from their character sheets. Instead, create a separate list for the items gained during this chapter.

During this chapter, the party will gain positive or negative reputation points with the slaves throughout the territory of the Disciples of Chaos. This represents both the fame and respect they invoke in others. Please keep track of these points, as they will be relevant for several events in the story.

While this is their first meeting, each character might have arrived here trodding different paths. Some were sold into abject servitude following the machinations of their family within the upper class. Others were abducted from the seas by the nefarious sky pirates during an otherwise uneventful journey or seized by the Disciples of Chaos following a violent skirmish on the continent of Herja—either as soldiers or as unfortunate souls caught up in the conflict. There are even some who ended up here due to deserting their high-ranking position within Disciples of Chaos, or they were born amid the squalor of Wurgar's accursed slums, as the offspring of poor, incarcerated souls. The possibilities for how they got there are almost endless. If their backstories and narratives allow for it, the characters may be introduced at different moments throughout our campaign. Dear Game Masters (GMs), please modify these events as you see fit and do not treat them as something that must happen.

From the outset, the characters find themselves in a dire predicament—they're confined within one of the many huge cages that are teeming with prisoners. All of them have had their hands cuffed and are connected to a single chain. Their handcuffs are magical, blocking usage of any spells or magical abilities, and everyone has been stripped of all of their possessions. The origins of the captives vary: some were brought here by merciless pirates, others were captured during skirmishes on the continent of Herja, and a few were even traded as slaves, hailing from distant and far-flung kingdoms. Within the confines of the cage, visibility is limited, so characters are unable to see anything below, in front, or behind*.

As the characters are herded into the cage, each player has an occasion to describe their character's appearance and their reactions to the grim situation. In the cage, they find themselves in the company of three other individuals: Nathan, Turien, and Jabbertooth. Nathan and Turien, both human soldiers hailing from Dragsa, are still adorned in remnants of their armors and official attire. However, their once-proud uniforms have

*It is a good moment to describe to them how their surroundings look. Check subchapters "Geography of Eastern Herja" on page 109 and "Flora and Fauna of the Land 'Devoid of Life'" on page 121, in the "Wurgar and the Godless lands."

been reduced to tattered rags, giving them the appearance of street beggars. Their youthful features hint that they might have only been teenagers a few years ago.

Jabbertooth, on the other hand, is an older half-orc—tall and muscular, but the signs of malnourishment are evident by looking at his body. Despite his imposing physique, he appears gaunt. All three of them gaze beyond the bars of the cage in silence. When asked about themselves, Nathan and Turien briefly mention that they were part of a scouting regiment sent to assess the situation in Herja but provide no further details. Jabbertooth, however, remains tight-lipped.

If the characters bring up the topic of escape, Nathan and Turien become noticeably more interested and eagerly join the conversation. Nathan tells the characters that they are all cuffed with magical chains that drain their magical abilities, rendering them unable to cast any spells. Turien adds that if not for these magical restraints, he could easily melt the cage's bars and escape.

As the cages of the characters are transported, they notice that they pass by the battalions of the Disciples of Chaos several times. If any of the characters wish to estimate the number of troops they have seen, they can attempt a skill check determined to be appropriate by the Game Master, such as investigation or perception. If they succeed, they can gather information indicating that, based on the logical composition of the troops, they have already passed over two thousand soldiers in the ranks of the Disciples. If the Disciples actually follow any logic.



Whether or not the characters start talking about escaping, their cage suddenly falls to the ground after a few hours of ceaseless travel, rocking everyone inside. Painful screams can be heard from below. A group of deformed Orcs quickly approach the cage and start unloading the prisoners, dragging them outside using the chains. Once they are out, the characters can see how the cages were transported—on the backs of the less lucky captives. And also what caused the problem—one of them slipped and the whole cage fell on him. Right now, his leg is being crushed under the weight of the cage. His leg is clearly broken and there's blood gushing from the open wound. The three other prisoners who carried the cage with him are just sitting nearby the edges of the cage, with blank stares and ragged breaths. Nobody is trying to help. Orcs with half-broken common discuss whether to kill him and toss the body to Azath's nest or leave him to rot here. Irritated by the entire discussion, one Orc takes a swift action. Before anyone can react, he kills the injured captive, slashing his throat, and then unceremoniously kicks the lifeless body into a nearby trench. Following this grisly act, he commands the rest of the Orcs to hasten and move the captives to another cage. He also summons a few other Orcs to deal with the three captives who were unable to continue carrying the cage, declaring that they “shared this punishment with that one.” It becomes chillingly evident that due to the incapacitation of one, all of them will meet their end on the spot.

At this moment, one of the characters can propose to resolve this situation differently.

If they propose to carry the cage with the other three for the rest of the day, they will be spared for the time being. However, the guards will only agree to allow one person to help. The Orc guards then place special handcuffs on the character, linking them with the other three carriers, and rush the rest of the prisoners back to the cage.

The character tasked with carrying the cage will need to perform three consecutive skill checks using the appropriate skill, such as strength. The test difficulty is easy and they can reroll one of the tests. Each successful check represents two and a half hours of undisturbed travel with the cage.

If...

- ... all the skill checks are successful, they will travel for almost 8 hours, and the group arrives at the encampment without any further delays. The character who performed the tests is exhausted, but nothing more happens to them (at the discretion of the GM, they might receive one level of exhaustion or something similar for the next day). The three prisoners they helped are spared, and your party earns 3 positive reputation points from the other slaves in the encampment.
- ... one of the skill checks failed, the travel slows down during the last part of the journey, and the group arrives late at night. The Orcs spare the other three carriers, but the entire group is subjected to 10 minutes of lashes as punishment for the delay. Other characters can attempt to use persuasion to convince the guard to spare the character who helped with the carrying. The difficulty of this persuasion test varies based on the rhetoric used. Regardless of the result of the persuasion, the party earns 2 positive reputation point.
- ... two or more skill checks fail, the character becomes exhausted within the first 3 hours of travel. The guards simply laugh at the situation, treating the exhausted character like a sack of vegetables as they move them to another cage. Subsequently, they kill the remaining three carriers and transfer the entire party to another cage. The party earns 1 positive reputation point.

If they attempt to persuade the guards with words, one of them shows some interest and is willing to listen. However, he doesn't respond to arguments that appeal to morality or mercy; he can only be swayed by a bribe. If the party decides to bribe him, they should perform the relevant skill check—set the test difficulty between medium and hard, depending on the character's arguments. Since the characters don't have any possessions at the moment, they should propose a future reward, such as future work or services, and persuade him about their connections.

If the character succeeds on the test, the party earns 1 positive and 1 negative reputation points, and the three captives are moved to another cage. Exhausted but alive. However, if they fail, the party earns 1 negative reputation point, and the captives are executed on the spot.

If the party chooses to work off their punishment differently, one of the Orcs introduces himself as Dukva and proposes a deal. He offers to free the last three prisoners in exchange for the party doing something for him, regardless of what it is. The specific nature of the task is left intentionally vague, as it could be anything he desires. The key condition is that the characters must agree to perform the task. If the party agrees, the Orc calls for a shaman and initiates a blood pact. All members of the party must provide a bit of their blood to seal the pact. With the blood pact complete, the Orc fulfills his side of the deal. He approaches the three remaining prisoners, removes their chains and handcuffs, and orders them to run. At first, the prisoners are understandably confused but quickly grasp the opportunity and sprint away from the caravan, seeking freedom. However, their newfound freedom is short-lived. As they attempt to flee, they are pursued and attacked by strange, flying creatures. These flying beasts tear them apart, leaving small chunks of their bodies scattered around the area. The party is left to witness this gruesome spectacle.

Dukva

One of the guards responsible for overseeing the party's transportation to Wurgar, as well as the organizer of illegal fights in the "nameless" forest near the encampment of the prisoners.

APPEARANCE

A deformed Orc from a long line of ex-slaves subservient to the Disciples. His eyes are not fully aligned with each other, and an unnatural, purple swelling has consumed most of the left side of his face. Despite these disfigurements, he doesn't stand out significantly from the rest of the Orcs. He smiles quite often, however, if one were to scrutinize his face during those times, they might be unnerved by his hollowness and the lack of any visible emotions in his eyes.

PERSONALITY AND CORE VALUES

Loyalty to the Disciples is the only path to survival. However, the desire for a better life in the present outweighs all else. This collective yearning for a better life is what we all share—our line of understanding. Any other values we hold are merely superficial facades we employ as shields.

ROLEPLAYING TIPS

His voice is rough and low. He often jokes around, but there is hardly any joy in his words. They are dark and devoid of hope. He always allows others to say what they want, and he often seems to agree, even if he twists their words to his convenience. He will always look for a way to earn something or better his life, no matter what the cost may be.

The Orc guard, having upheld his end of the bargain, approaches the characters once more, whispering, "Welcome to Wurgar." As a result of this interaction, the party earns 1 positive reputation point, but the consequences of their actions will come back to haunt them later.

The party can also help the guards finish off the remaining three prisoners. If they do, one of the Orc guards starts laughing and tosses a rusted dagger at their feet. Under the watchful gaze of all the guards, the character who picked up the dagger needs to kill one of the three prisoners. If they succeed, the Orcs start laughing. But the moment this character approaches the other two prisoners or tries to pass the dagger, the guards stop them. The other two members of the party are then required to kill one prisoner each, and they must do so without any weapons.

For characters with an alignment other than evil or a rough equivalent (depending on the system being used), attempting this act requires a relevant check, such as a Wisdom saving throw, to determine if they can steel their resolve and control their bodies. This test's difficulty is set to medium. If they fail the test, they are unable to kill the prisoner in cold blood, and someone else in the party needs to do it.

For helping the guards, they are given two days' worth of rations each and continue the journey chained, but outside the cages. The party earns 2 negative reputation points, and an additional point if they manage to kill all the prisoners. If at least one of the characters refuses to perform the act in the middle of this sequence, the entire party earns an additional 1 positive reputation point.

Attacking the guards results in the party not earning anything except a severe beating, which reduces their health points to half.

On the last day of their journey, the characters finally lay their eyes on their destination—Wurgar. It's a formidable stronghold built upon the ashes of conquered lands, a chilling reminder of the merciless reign of the Disciples. But what's even more unsettling is the sheer number of troops amassed outside its imposing walls. Around it are soldiers that move with purpose, and the sprawling expanse of their tents seems to stretch endlessly over the horizon. As the characters observe this massive military presence, they notice a seamless transition from the camp into a sprawling encampment of wooden buildings. The prisoners can be seen within this enclosure and while their conditions are visibly grim, the wooden buildings represent a somewhat more stable option than the flimsy tents hastily erected for the troops. There is a constant movement of people and goods between these places and the stronghold.

Any character interested in delving further into this situation can perform a relevant skill check, such as an investigation—set the test difficulty to easy. If they succeed, they notice a peculiar detail: more troops are exiting Wurgar than are entering. And if that wasn't perplexing enough, on closer inspection, it becomes evident that carts loaded with materials are heading into the stronghold, while carts with food supplies are leaving. However one looks at it, this situation doesn't make much sense.

If the character achieves a critical success on their skill check, they not only notice the strange movement of troops and supplies but also can gather valuable information from the “rumors table” in the next subchapter. This information could shed light on the situation or provide intriguing tidbits about the Disciples of Chaos and the encampment. If the information is something they could only get to know by talking with other people, share it as a fragment of conversation they overhear from the cage.

As the group approaches the encampment, they can see the countless jobs done by the people inside. They're cutting wood from nearby forests, mining rocks, and constructing roads that stretch from the stronghold. It's apparent that labor in this place is never-ending, and the scale of the operation is intimidating to say the least. However, amidst this backdrop, there are unexpected sights as well, such as children running between buildings and people playing cards on cut-out tree trunks. It becomes apparent that some individuals have been here for a very long time. Maybe even their entire lives.

Survival of the Fittest

During this part, the characters will need to decide on how they'll survive in their new environment. As all the prisoners are being unloaded from the cages, they are lined up, and some orc shamans are casting spells on their handcuffs while cutting the chains linking them. This makes them resemble steel bracelets, with the remnants of chains hanging from them. As the characters look around, they notice that every prisoner in the camp has these on their hands.

If the party asks the guards about the modified handcuffs, they are met with laughter and a dismissive suggestion to check the camp's edge and find out for themselves. However, when the characters ask the people in the encampment, they receive honest answers. These restraints are enchanted with a few spells that serve the interests of the Disciples of Chaos. They allow the Disciples to locate every prisoner and, if anyone attempts to escape the encampment, the curse slowly drains their life force. Additionally, the restraints block the use of spells and magical abilities, as the party had already noticed during their journey. Despite the presence of some guards patrolling the area, their numbers are clearly insufficient to prevent the escape of the entire camp.

If any character wishes to examine the bracelets themselves, they can perform a relevant skill check, such as an Arcana check. The test difficulty should be set between Medium and Hard, depending on the character's background. If they succeed, they can discover all of the information previously mentioned, along with one misconception that the inhabitants of this place assumed.

The bracelets do not drain the wearer's life force after attempting to escape. Instead, they convert the energy permeating this place into a harmless form. In other words, without the bracelets, they would be exposed to something that slowly kills them. The characters can also deduce that these spells are bound to a caster, and being too far from that caster would cause the spells to lose all power. This discovery explains the real mechanism behind the "curse killing you if you leave the encampment."

As they are leaving, the guards also provide each character with three food tickets. Each ticket grants one meal, distributed during the morning and evening. After that, they can ask people around about this place. According to the people in the encampment, prisoners have the freedom to choose their work tasks. Some better positions are restricted by the guards. As the fellow prisoners explain, only those who work have the privilege of eating, so they do not have the luxury of waiting idly for rescue or time for planning either.

The whole place is divided into sectors:

- At the center, there are several long barracks, housing all the prisoners and slaves the Disciples have captured. The characters are assigned to a newly built one, and just next to it, another one is being built.
- To the north stretch several unfinished roads. It seems they are being constructed to make travel to the rest of the continent easier. Some of the troops are already starting to use them.
- To the west stretches a clearing where trees have been cut down, and beyond that a large forest of black trees that extends over the horizon until it disappears among the tall and sharp peaks of the rocky mountains to the west and the murky swamps to the north. The trees have a sickly looking bark and bizarre appearance*, as if they are already dead inside, but cutting them reveals that they are still very much alive.
- To the east, there is a wide area filled with tents, surrounded by improvised beds where injured and dying people lie. One could call it a field hospital, though it would sound like a joke to anyone that has ever seen a real one. Numerous carts are being filled with bodies there, which are then transported somewhere deeper north or into the embrace of Wurgar's walls. Beyond the encampment even further to the east, open lava pits stretch across the horizon.
- To the south, there are several buildings used as warehouses or simple workshops. Among them is a large area designated for providing meals, with a field of tables and stools made from the trunks of black trees from the west. Further to the south, past the encampment, you'll find the garrison tents, and beyond them, the imposing stronghold of Wurgar itself.

Beyond everything that is described above, the desolate expanse of the Godless Lands stretches out.

No greenery or animals can be seen.

The first six weeks of their stay in the encampment will be divided into two parts: first, choosing the job they will perform for that week which includes rolling the relevant skill checks; and second, roleplaying one of the more significant events of that week or an additional party activity, such as attempting to do one of the side missions. During this time, no short or long rests are allowed except the moments laid out in this chapter.

One meal ticket grants the character one meal. If you are using the SRD 5.1 system, consider one meal as equivalent to a half ration. Therefore, each day, characters would require 2 meals, resulting in a total of 14 meal tickets per week, per person. Falling below this threshold triggers the starving mechanic.

Smaller characters (smaller than medium size) need only one meal per day.

*Check "Crow Bushes", page 121.

In the jobs table below, you can find jobs which the characters can do during their time in the encampment. The performed tests represent their results from a whole week of work. For each option, there is a proposition for what kind of skill test should be given for this activity, but depending on the system used or the GM's view on this job, it may be changed. The next column tells us the rewards and punishments for finishing each job. Instead of just providing a set test difficulty and resources for succeeding in the test, the rewards vary depending on the degree of success**. No more than two characters can choose the same job in the same week.

**See "Explanation of used system terminology", page 154.



JOBS TABLE

JOB	REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS
Cutting the wood	For passing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy threshold to gain two meal tickets. • Medium threshold to gain four meal tickets. • Hard threshold to gain six meal tickets.
SKILL TESTS	
Three athletic skill checks. Then one survival skill check for bonus action.	For not passing any of the above: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suffer 1d10 slashing damage. <p>If they scout the area or hear about an easier way to cut the trees from rumors, they gain one reroll to tests in this job.</p> <p>Venture deeper into woods: If they roll a medium success they can either choose to check the woods and scout the area or gather extra food in the form of 3 rations from the wild plants and berries. Every time they perform this activity again, they roll for this test with advantage.</p>

JOB	REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS
Building and fixing the buildings	For passing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy threshold to gain two meal tickets. • Medium threshold to gain four meal tickets. • Hard threshold to gain five meal tickets.
SKILL TESTS	
Three athletic skill checks. Then one investigation or history skill check for bonus action.	For not passing any of the above: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gain one meal ticket. <p>Checking the construction of the barracks: If they roll a medium success they gain advantage for any test connected with attempts to escape buildings in this chapter. They can also declare the creation of secret passage or trap which can be used in the future. Every time they perform this activity again, they roll for this test with advantage.</p>

JOB	REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS
Mining the black rocks	For passing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy threshold to gain two meal tickets. • Medium threshold to gain four meal tickets. • Hard threshold to gain six meal tickets.
SKILL TESTS	
Four athletic skill checks.	No matter the results, character suffer 1 additional level of exhaustion after choosing this job.

JOB	REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS
Transporting goods	For passing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy threshold to gain two meal tickets. • Medium threshold to gain four meal tickets. • Hard threshold to gain five meal tickets.
SKILL TESTS	
Three animal handling skill checks. Then one Insight skill check for bonus action.	Looking around: If any character passes the Hard threshold of the test, they witness transport of the contraband by one of the prisoners. They can report it, earning the party extra 15 rations and earning the party 1 negative reputation point, or they can keep it themselves and earn 1 positive reputation point for the party. If they roll medium success they can find out that the patrols of the West side of the encampment are weaker. They can also remember the terrain better giving them advantage on any future test involved in attempting to escape.

JOB	REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS
Building roads	For passing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy threshold to gain two meal tickets. • Medium threshold to gain four meal tickets. • Hard threshold to gain six meal tickets.
SKILL TESTS	
Three athletic skill checks. Then one survival or investigation skill check for bonus action.	For not passing any of the above: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gain zero meal tickets and suffer 1d10 slashing damage. <p>Scout the area: If they roll a medium success they can scout the terrain around the encampment giving them the advantage on any future test involved in attempting to escape. Additionally they gain access to some additional missions.</p>

JOB	REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS
Sewing the cloths	For passing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy threshold to gain three meal tickets. • Medium threshold to gain four meal tickets. • Hard threshold to gain five meal tickets.
SKILL TESTS	
Three sleight of hand skill checks. Then one history or arcana skill check for bonus action.	For not passing any of the above: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gain one meal ticket. <p>Checking what cloths you are fixing: If the character rolls a medium success the party can find information from the rumors table about a Kril Shaman that had just been captured (and they are fixing his cloths), or some information about the strengths and origins of a future enemy in this chapter.</p>

JOB	REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS
Tending to the injured in the Graveyard Pit (and stacking the dead onto the carts)	For passing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy threshold to gain four meal tickets and suffer 1d8 necrotic damage. • Medium threshold to gain four meal tickets. • Hard threshold to gain six meal tickets and the party earns 1 positive reputation point. After the 3rd point earned that way, they do not gain reputation points but may instead choose one option from the “looting the dead” section below.
SKILL TESTS	
Three medicine skill checks. Then one sleight of hand check for bonus action.	The character can choose to not roll and stuff the carts with bodies without checking who is alive or not. If they do, they will gain 14 meal tickets for that week. The first time this option is chosen, the party also earns 2 negative reputation points. <p>Looting the dead: If they roll an easy success they loot one of the following things from the dead bodies, while the medium success allows choosing two different options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 full rations of stale food. • Small knife. • 1 Elixir of Health (potion which cures diseases and abnormal conditions).

JOB	REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS
Cooking	For passing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy threshold to gain two meal tickets. • Medium threshold to gain four meal tickets. • Hard threshold to gain five meal tickets.
SKILL TESTS	
Three survival skill checks. Then one sleight of hand skill check for bonus action.	For not passing any of the above: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gain one meal ticket. <p>Stealing the food: If the character rolls a medium success they can gather extra food in the form of 4 full rations or steal a small knife.</p>



*They can be found at the end of this chapter, on page 180.

**If you use a system without a death saving mechanic, make a series of D20 rolls. If the roll is 10 or higher, your character succeeds in making a Death Saving Throw. If the roll is 9 or lower, your character fails the saving throw. The character needs to succeed 3 of them to regain 1 Hit point and regain consciousness. Failing 3 of them, makes the death of a character permanent.

At the end of each week, perform one long rest then resolve the effects from the jobs. The party can then attempt one of the side missions*. These missions can earn them positive or negative reputation points or help them progress toward their plan of escape. They're also free to engage in other activities such as gathering information, scouting the area, or attempting to bribe others, as long as the GM approves and it makes sense within the roleplay. If possible, try to integrate these activities into your session not as something that happened at the end of the week, but rather as "flashbacks" from events during that week. Players can be rewarded with information from the rumors table and earn one positive or negative reputation point based on their results. While each character can do something else each week, it is advised to not split the group too much, especially for longer story parts (like whole missions).

If at any point the Hit Points (HP) of a character in the party drops to zero due to injuries or starvation, they are transported to one of the beds on the eastern part of the encampment. For the next week they do not need meals and rations but they are forced to perform death saving throws**. If anyone from the party is "Tending to the injured" during that week, they give the character staying there one reroll to their saving throw. After surviving that week, their exhaustion level resets to 1.

Continue with their weekly routine, including the side missions, until they accumulate more than 6 reputation points cumulatively. At this point, the next part of the story, "Unexpected Guests," is triggered.

D100	RUMORS TABLE
1-5	The Orc serving food in the morning meals has poor eyesight during the day. People sometimes trick him by giving the incorrect number of meal tickets.
6-10	The Kril are strangely "uplifted" recently. Rather than despair or grim acceptance, they seem to be full of hope.
11-15	Guards on the West side of the encampment are often either absent or busy playing with dices and cards.
16-20	The Disciples found something in a recent raid. They are keeping it in the garrison and waiting for someone from higher-ups to check it.
21-25	The woods on the edge of the forest are from species which has a very hard bark. Going further into woods might cost you some time, but the trees there are easier to cut down.
26-30	People who are barely scraping by tend not to have many meal tickets, while those who possess a surplus typically do not carry them with them. If you find someone carrying more of them than normal during meal time, they are either a broker or someone who goes to one.
31-35	The Impalers made their base in the ruins of an old castle to the north. They sometimes kidnap people who get too close to that side of the encampment.
36-40	The troops coming from Wurgar are not from this world.
41-45	People hold someone who can save the life of those who is dying from overworking in high regard. They might even give you something in return.
46-50	No matter if people see you in a good or bad light, the stronger impression you give, the more options you have around here. When one door closes, another one opens, as they say.
51-55	Some new guards are stationed directly on the North-West side of the encampment. They are still patrolling the area more vigilantly than the rest of the guards.

56–60	Bone hurricanes leave piles of bones at the foot of the Mountain Range. The marrow from them is a great way to survive if you are struggling with food.
61–65	Some of the Disciples are unable to maintain their physical form in this world. They are doing something to keep themselves here but it is just temporary solution.
66–70	During the evening meal you cannot do any illegal deals—guards see better at night than during the day. If you see one though, the guards are likely involved.
71–75	Outside of Herja, the black rocks are supposedly worth quite a lot money on black markets.
76–80	Pandemonium is interested in items made using the Roots of Life.
81–85	The troops known as the “Heralds” are so saturated with Chaos’s power that they distort the world around them simply by being present.
86–90	The food stored in the southern warehouse is disappearing faster than it should.
91–95	The army that has currently gathered around Wurgar is only meant to be a measly 10% of what the Disciples plan to bring. After everyone has gathered, they will proceed to the next phase of their plan.
96–00	In the “Trunks Arena,” many fights are rigged by the guards. They use two known signs to communicate with the fighters: twisting their fist into their other hand signifies that they should finish the enemy, while pretending to cut something means they should lose on purpose.

Unexpected Guests



After fulfilling this week’s jobs, during the evening meal, the characters are contacted by one of the other prisoners who wants to meet up.

This scenario resolves differently depending on the reputation that the party gathered.

If the party possesses at least 3 positive reputation points, the prisoner will introduce themselves and explain that they were sent by the Husis the Wise—The Elder from the Krill race. During their talk they can learn that Husis was observing them and after seeing their actions he decided that they are the best people in the encampment for his plans and wants to meet with the party.

If the party agrees, they wait until it’s night and they are brought to a small camp at the edge of the forest, where Husis the Wise along with a few of his people sit and cook some of the animals that they’ve caught. He is planning to escape the encampment with his people. His people were captured when they were scouting in Herja and while he managed to escape at first, he was recently captured. Fortunately, his people started to prepare for the escape almost immediately after being brought here, so they are already ready to escape. Nonetheless, they need help. Husis’s staff was taken from him and it is crucial for their plan—it augments his magic and if he has it, he should easily be able to break break the suppression on the chains, which would be enough to allow him to cast some illusion magic and shield their escape. As a blessing in disguise, it seems that they are keeping the staff in the middle of one of the garrisons of the Disciples, near the encampment—they are waiting for some officials to examine it before deciding what to do with it.



If the party brings it back to him, they can escape along with them, but they need to act quickly since the official should show up in the next three days.

Any character interested in checking the Kril's reactions during the talk can perform the relevant skill check such as insight, at the test difficulty of Hard. If the test is a success, the Kril admits that he's not saying everything, but he will say more after you return his staff. The character that succeeded in the initial test can see that he's not lying about this.

*Check side missions for more information.

**For both Republic of Misty Waters and Dum Ramil, check the pages 36 and 98.

If they possess at least 3 negative reputation points, the situation plays out similarly but they are contacted by one of the people working for Dukva. It seems that he wants to talk with them and ask to meet him after the fights in the Trunks Arena.*

There, they see him along with a few other orcs and bulky looking prisoners. They are counting money and checking some maps. When the party arrives, Dukva takes them a bit to the side and starts explaining. He is planning to leave the Disciples and live in luxury somewhere with more interesting things to do than this kennel they call Wurgar. He gathered a few trusted guards and captured pirates from the Republic of Misty Waters**. Together they want to steal a few things and then cross the swamps. On the other side they can find a port under Dum Ramil's** control—ships frequent that place so they can purchase their passage there.

Tomorrow, they will steal a few things they need and flee. He wants the party to sneak into one of the garrisons and steal the staff taken from the recently captured Kril Shaman. One of the people working for Dukva said he overheard that the staff is a powerful artifact that enhances the Shaman's power. With the powerful illusions from the staff, they should easily be able to escape—not to mention the fact that it could be sold for a hefty price later on!

If the party meets both conditions, both events trigger and the players can choose which path they prefer.

If the party tries to threaten him by revealing what they've heard to the Disciples, he will just laugh it off, and will tell them: "Go on, try it. Let's see if anyone believes you... and whether you won't wake up next morning with a knife between your ribs."

The party can try to prepare and make plans for their mission. To get out of the encampment and get into the garrison, they need to perform a group skill test of relevant skill checks, such as a stealth test with a medium difficulty. If anyone fails the roll, they can use the information gathered during their stay in the encampment to reroll the test and if they use two pieces of information, they can pass automatically. Moreover, if the party decided to previously prepare a tunnel for leaving the encampment, they can use it now.

Additionally, depending on whose proposition they accepted, they are given a set of different items and instructions for their mission.

***If using SRD 5.1 mechanics, give players access to the 1st-level spells. It can be also ones which they would normally be able to use, if they had access to their own spells.

If the party accepts Husis's proposition, he insists on giving each character some magical protection by inscribing a tattoo with ancient runes on their body. He wants to put them on the back of each character, but if someone wants it on a different part of their body, he can make adjustments. After that, he also gives each of them: a protective talisman made from his feathers and two magical scrolls, with each allowing the user to cast one beginner spell,*** one time. Husis can change the inscription on the scrolls to change what spell it will cast, but they do not have the time and materials to create more scrolls. Then on top of all these items, he also gives them a replica of the staff. He proposes to sneak into the garrison and replace it before anyone from higher command of Disciples arrives.

If the party accepts Dukva's proposition, he gives each of them a magical ring he asked one of the one of the orc shamans to imbued with invisibility spell. After activating the user is invisible for 5 to 10 minutes. After that, the ring breaks. On top of that, he mentions that his men, the pirates from Misty Waters, prepared more gunpowder

Husis the Wise, The Elder Kril

The leader of the Kril tribe gathered in the encampment. A powerful Shaman able to create wonderful illusions and deadly curses. While the party can cooperate with him to escape the grasp of Disciples, he will not share anything with the party unless you escape to the swamps with him first.

APPEARANCE

A member of the bird race, hailing from Kallonia. He looks like older man with very frail arms and pale skin. His beak is discolored and seems to be falling apart on sides. He is always hunched back, making him appear shorter than the rest of the Krils. Under his neck, there are several different talismans and his body is covered with thick clothes. On his back he has a huge garb with several animal bones sticking out that almost look like fangs.

PERSONALITY AND CORE VALUES

He appears calm and honest, but adamantly keeps his position and does not share more than he needs to. One of his secrets is that he can use magic as he analyzed and broke down how the spells cast on the bracelets work. The safety of the Kril tribe appears to be his sole mission, but in reality he knows more about the Disciples than he's willing to share. As his staff is one of the items possessing the essence of the Roots of Life, he wants to take it away from Wurgar to slow their invasion. Later in the campaign he also tries everything to stop their progress.

ROLEPLAYING TIPS

While he looks frail, you cannot hear it in his voice. In contrast to many other Krils, he is fluent in common and many other languages. He speaks in a similar manner to merchants and nobles—it is quite likely that he learned this way of speaking directly from them.

than they initially needed, and they can share any combination 3 of them with you:

- Smoke bombs that create smoke in a 60 foot-radius area for 5 minutes.
- Stun bombs, making anyone in a 60 foot-radius are defeated while creatures in 15 foot-radius will lose consciousness for 10 minutes.
- Delayed explosive bombs, that destroy the walls that destroy the walls in 15 foot-radius. They can be set off to explode up to 10 minutes after lighting the fuse.

Dukva proposes to use some of them for distraction and others to cover up disappearance of the staff.

After arriving at the garrison, the party needs to find their way to the staff, take it, and run to one of the entrances. While traveling to the location with the Kril shaman's Staff, the party overhears the fact that the nearby warehouse contains tools and weapons taken from the slaves over the past couple of months. The party may choose to go there in order to retrieve their belongings. It is better to give these extra items only if they success relevant skill test while searching warehouse****.

After the party takes the staff, and leaves the vicinity of the garrison, they hear two screams, which sounded oddly familiar. They belong to two prisoners the party had a chance to meet before arriving here—Nathan and Turien. After following the source of the screams the party encounters two officials from Disciples of Chaos's higher

****Check Additional Materials for the list of potential items or use ones from used system according to your judgment.

*If none of the players decide that their characters are not interested in checking this scene, you can play it as a flashback of something that one of the Krils witnessed and share it during their later travels. But personally I advise GMs to just take control of characters here for a moment to play this scene in a more cinematic way.

command. Seeing their immense aura and the few guards around them, the party is forced to hide. They are overseeing an execution*.

Read or paraphrase the following boxed text to the players:

The commanders were standing in front of two prisoners, lifted into the air by ethereal chains which were stretching out from the arms and legs, breaking various joints as their dark blood fell on the muddy earth of the garrison. The atmosphere was a mixture of awe and fear, and the gaze of the stationed troops was strongly felt. The commanders seemed unamused, almost bored. It was just two people. First was a very old, balding pale mage clad in gold and black armor, whose whole body was flickering in and out of existence. He was moving with an air of calculated purpose. His lifted hand suggested it was his spell at action here. The second person was a sorceress, whose face was hidden in the hood of her robe, exuding a very bold and full of confidence aura. The latter commander seemed more eerie as a serpent-like, draconic creature was sitting on one of her shoulders while she was constantly petting it with her free hand.

“Vashara” said the man with a tired voice while coughing. “Why are you so skeptical about our people? The scouts have been trained well. If they say that an intriguing item was found in one of the captive’s possessions I believe them. A staff of peculiar design, etched with symbols that resonate with latent power. I sense the possibility of a relic. Maybe even a conduit of divine essence.”

The woman called Vashara moved her covered by hood face as if she was eyeing the troops around. Her response bore a tint of indifference “A relic, Kaoz? Do you truly believe that some lowly 'birdperson,' could possess a fragment of the divine? I find it hard to fathom that the Roots of Life, in their pure state, would be within their grasp. They could not touch it without being driven mad... or worse.”

“These creatures may surprise you. The Roots of Life have been scattered across this realm, hidden in the most unexpected places. If this staff bears even a sliver of that essence, it could amplify my power and allow me to truly exist in this plane! Me and others like me will be able to manifest and maintain our true self and not just these superficial figments!”

The man lifted his hand a bit more, and the agonizing screams of Nathan echoed in the air once more. It was followed by Ashara’s melodious laughter. She crouched to grab something.

“You always were an optimist. The likelihood of a mere staff holding the fragment of the god is slim. The divine rarely stoops to such mundane vessels. We should focus on more tangible gains, not chase after myths and legends. After we march to the Fortress of Dragsa, all the fragments they have usurped will be in our grasp.”

“We must seize every opportunity!” Started Kaoz with a preaching tone, as if he was proclaiming a sermon. “If there’s even a chance that this staff holds the essence I seek, we cannot afford to dismiss it.”

Vashara sighed, her gaze lingering on prisoners with a mix of amusement and resignation. “I have always admired your ambition, Kaoz, but do not let it blind you. The divine is capricious, and what you seek may be nothing more than a fanciful hope. Besides, why do you need more of it? Don't the caves under this place already have plenty?”

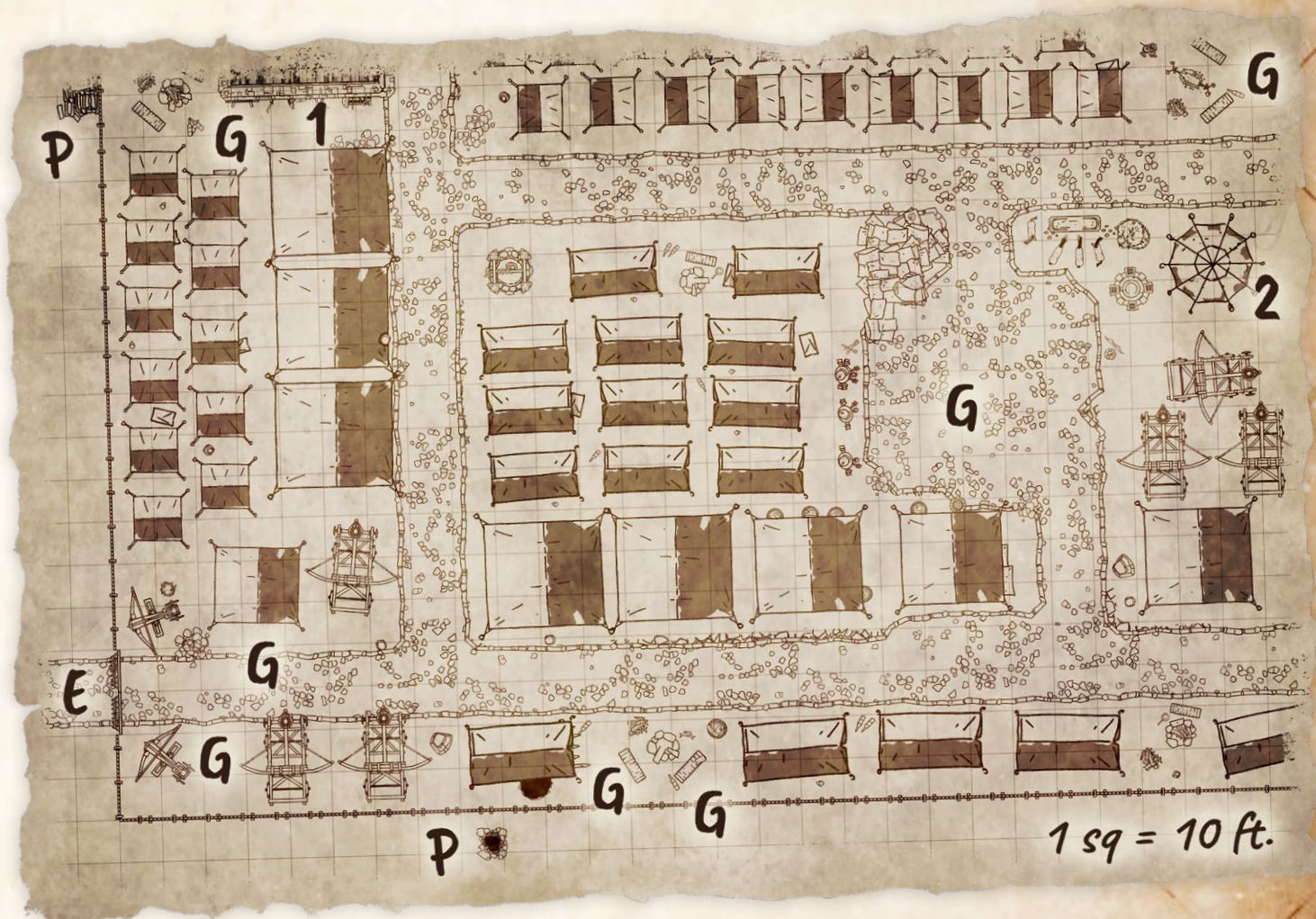
“The part of the body is also important. Yes, there are plenty. But plenty of the same parts, with the same essences! He must be put together. He must become whole! I shall not let this opportunist slip through our fingers,” he finished while clenching his fist. The prisoners voices immediately stopped and they started to spasm

uncontrollably. A white mist emerged from their mouths and started to flow into Kaoz body. For a brief moment it seemed as if several faces contorted in agony and showed on his skin. Then, just as suddenly as it all started, the mist disappeared and the prisoners' lifeless bodies hung in the air.

"...as you wish, Kaoz. We shall investigate this. But mark my words, if it turns out to be another dud, you owe me a bottle of that rare elixir you keep hidden from me." she finished while feeding her pet the lizard from the ground.

Kaoz nodded solemnly. "May the Chaos guide our path."

After this scene, the party can leave Disciples garrison. Note down how many traces and leads they left behind.



Disciples' Garrison

P — Secret passages, requiring an extra skill test to pass (like unlocking doors).

G — Guards outposts. Each with one Chaos Orc Slave.

E — Entrance to the Disciples' garrison.

1 — Warehouse with slaves' equipment.

2 — Location of Huis staff.

Divided We All Die

This subchapter plays a bit differently depending on the route chosen by the players and amassed reputation points.

If the party joined forces with the Husis the Wise, the Shaman will ask the party to follow him to a hideout hidden by the rotten trunk of a fallen tree near one of the old barracks.

As they are lead through the dark underground passage, read or paraphrase the following boxed text to the players:

Following the only source of light, a lone Kril with a torch and the staff you gave him, you delve deeper into the dark tunnel. From every side you are surrounded by the damp underground passage, which seems like it could collapse at any moment. Among the rich smell of the soil and stale air you would expect underground, you smell something acrid mixed in. Disturbing. It seems like even the earth below this place is tainted. As you wonder about it, from afar you hear the the voice of Husis the Wise:

"...and because of that, we can't stay here," a raspy voice reverberated underground in the silent passages. "The food is bad, and it's ruining our bodies. The air is vile, tainting our souls. There is no safe place to stay; they'll find us eventually. Our best chance is to disappear," he declared, stopping as he saw the arrival of the party and Kril with his staff. Your guide stays near the entrance, holding the torch, which barely helps with the weak light created by the primitive lamps placed in the corners of the chamber.

"We must go," continued Husis, pointing to the large map held by two tall Krils behind him. As your eyes adjusted to the dim light, you could see the map was made from the skin of some large animal and depicted the vast, sprawling terrain around Wurgar. Your encampment looked minuscule in comparison to the ominous Stronghold, which loomed not far beyond the chamber's entrance.

"Here, into the heart of the treacherous swamps to the northwest of the Encampment," said the Elder Kril. He wove intricate patterns in the air with his hands, which, in turn, made the described path through the swamps glow with a eerie blue light..

An uneasy murmur spread among the other Kril. The air was thick with tension as he outlined his plan for them, the lamplight in the corners flickering as if affected by the whole atmosphere.

Any character interested in delving further into this situation can perform a relevant skill check, such as a history or nature, with the difficulty set to easy. If they succeed, they remember the following information. The swamps are infamous because of their toxic vapors. The effects of traveling inside them include severe hallucinations and losing your sense of direction. Add to that the tales of horrifying creatures lurking beneath the water's surface and there is only one answer to why nobody guards that side. In normal circumstances, it would be a suicide mission.

Regardless of whether or not the players were already given this information, continue to read or paraphrase the following text.

"But," Husis continued, his eyes gleaming with a strange determination, "I've studied these swamps for years. I know their secrets. With my magic, I can guide us through, avoiding the dangers and staying hidden from the Disciples. The journey will be long. More than a month..."

“A month?!” shouted one other Kril in the crowd. “We don’t have enough to feed... Everyone” finished the Kril while making a gesture pointing to the rest of the crowd.

“We will only take the women, the weak and the children. The strong will stay. They can wait.”

At this point, the players can choose to seek answers from Husis by asking him questions. They can also attempt to persuade him into considering a different route, an alternative escape plan, or express their concerns regarding who they wish to take.

After inquiring about the food they've gathered, they learn that there's enough supplies to prepare around 1000 rations. According to Husis, an estimated 40–45 rations are required per person for the upcoming journey. He plans on taking 19 people: the elderly, the women, and the children, and also the party itself. If they took everyone it would be a total of 35 people. If they choose to bring only the healthy people, leaving the weak behind, it would be 24 people. If a character wishes to calculate how long they can sustain the group with the current rations, they can perform a relevant skill check, such as survival or investigation, with a test difficulty of easy. On a success, the party can estimate that with their current rations there should not be much of an issue with 24 people—this would also allow them to travel faster. If they bring everyone, they will run out of food in 25 days, leaving them without provisions for the last 15 days. Surviving that long without food is impossible*, so they would need an extra 15 rations for each person still alive by that day. If all of them are still alive by that time they would require 500 more rations by the last day of travel. This could be achieved if every person procured 12–14 rations every day to ensure their survival.

Persuading the Elder Kril to take everyone on the journey or change their route does not require any tests if they provide him with solid facts and are truthful about why they want to make that change. If they try to convince him to leave the weak behind or change the route without a valid reason, they need to succeed in a relevant test, with a test difficulty between easy to medium, depending on the quality of narration and the facts that the party presents. If the party lies to the Elder Kril about something, set the difficulty from medium to hard. When it comes to changing the escape plan, Husis is open to suggestions, but the feasibility of these suggestions depends on what they propose. The GM must judge the propositions themselves.

More perceptive players can also ask why he was able to use magic before getting his staff, because the Kril who guided them here with the torch is still holding onto the staff. He never came to the Elder and Husis still has the iron bracelets on his hands. After succeeding the relevant skill check such as an Arcana with medium difficulty, they can get information that the bracelets are still functioning but they can also feel magic coming from Husis as if nothing was blocking it. If they ask him directly, he just brushes it aside, saying that this level of magic isn't an issue for him, even with the bracelets. They can check his reaction with a relevant skill check, such as an Insight check with medium difficulty. If they succeed, they can see through his bluff, but even after pointing it out, it does not change his answer nor his attitude.

Taking everyone from the Kril tribe earns the party a positive respect point, while convincing the Elder Kril to leave the weak behind earns one negative respect point.

If the party joined forces with Dukva, they will go back to the encampment and see that he has captured the Elder Krill and has him tied up. He also plans on taking along 20 healthy Kril to carry their bags—most are filled with black rock shards or weapons. Of course, this isn't done out of their own will as the Elder Kril is kept hostage. The Kril are hesitant to follow Dukva and start to look at their Elder questioningly, but he just nods calmly showing them to proceed. Only the party seems to notice this detail.

Together with Dukva's companions and the party, the whole group consists of 30 people. It seems each person is supposed to carry one bag. They prepared less than 1000 rations,

*While using real-world knowledge, players can argue that people should survive for 15 days without food. However, using the rules from SRD 5.1, people die without food in 6 days plus their Constitution modifier. It's also worth noting that after earning the second level of exhaustion, a character's speed is halved. This means it's not really just 15 days. In real life, starving people will also not travel at their full speed, especially in challenging terrains like swamps.

stuffed in two of the bags. Dukva did not plan the journey well, so with the current number of rations, they will run out of food in the last week of travel, and will need an extra 7 rations for everyone still alive at the end... or maybe he never planned to keep everyone alive.

Still, characters have no way of calculating this without the help of Husis.

After that they need to decide how to leave the encampment. Husis can cast several bigger and smaller illusions which can help with escaping but the exact plan depends on the characters.

If the party is traveling with Dukva, he proposes to make everyone look like they're part of an army platoon and just carry out as if they were traveling to the next post. If the party is following the Elder Kril, he proposes to completely make their presence invisible from afar and just sneak away, but the final decision is up to the players. They can use the information that they have gathered to perform the relevant skill checks before deciding on the route.

The GM then needs to judge how likely they are to escape with the proposed usage of illusions. If the GM deems this plan feasible, they can escape the first parts of the encampment without any tests. If there are holes in their plans, perform relevant skill checks for convincing guards to let them pass, whether it be by bribing or something else. Set the difficulty of the test between medium and hard.

When the party gets further away from the camp, they may be caught by one of the patrols. If the group uses the North-West, North or North-East escape route, use the upcoming battle description for the patrol group. If they use the West side, skip this battle. Additionally, if they try to sneak out using an escape route other than the ones to the West, North-West, or North, they will need to circle around to get back on the correct path, which adds two days to their travel time, which will increase the number of days that they will go without food by the end of the journey.

If the party uses the North-West or North side to escape, they encounter a patrol with one mage who has very good detection skills. He sees through Husis's illusion and dispells it. In return, Husis casts a powerful spell to make the mage lose consciousness, and then casts a barrier to allow the characters to make full use of their abilities. For the rest of the fight, he shields his people with his spells while they run away. If Dukva's group is with them, they also do not participate in the fight, as they are too focused on collecting the loot that was dropped by the Kril during the fight.

Enemy composition for random patrol after the initial scene

NAME OF CREATURE	LEVEL 3-4	LEVEL 5-6	LEVEL 7-8
Chaos Trooper	× 4	× 1	× 3
Corrupted Mage	× 0	× 1	× 1
REINFORCEMENT			
One of Chaos Troopers can drink a strange elixir as a bonus action and change into an Augmented Demon. The demon spends his first action to materialize.			

After this, the group begins to travel. It takes them 6 weeks to cross the swamp. For each week, roll two times for the event table. If you get the same result on one die, reroll it. Then, roll for the hunting table for each person trying to hunt this week. If in any week, more than two characters try to hunt, add two extra days to their travel time at the end, since the whole group needs to slow down for them.

D20	EVENT TABLE
1–3	Pursuit. If the characters made a big scene and left quite a few traces pointing to them being in ownership of the staff, resolve the effects of the “Disciple Patrol” event. If the party didn’t leave any traces, this event does nothing.
4	Disciple Patrol. The group encounters a random patrol. Since everyone is exhausted, the old Elder Kril is unable to shield them with illusions. The party needs to fight. Choose one option, using the humanoid monsters from “Areas tainted by Chaos” section in the Bestiary: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 monsters with CR 4. • 3 monsters with CR 3. • 4 monsters with CR 2. • 4 monsters with CR 1 and 2 with CR 2.
5	Azath Pit. Two Kril fall into a pit covered by a thin layer of dry leaves. Inside, there are rotting bodies and 4 Azath Nymphs. The characters need to decide how to deal with the situation. If they deal with the enemies by the end of the 3 rd round, both Kril survive and they gain 1 positive reputation point. Leaving them to die, makes the group have 2 people less but the party also gains 1 negative reputation point.
6–8	Quicksand. One of the Kril carrying a bag of food stepped into quicksand and is quickly being dragged under the surface. The bag he was carrying got stuck on some root and now both of them barely stick over the surface—trying to lift either of them will make the other fall. The party needs to decide. They can roll for relevant skill checks athletics at a medium test difficulty to get either the bag or the Kril out. The bag contains 4 days worth of food for the whole group. Alternatively they can do this action with magic. If they try to do both, each test is rolled with a disadvantage. If they rescue the Kril, the party gains 1 positive reputation point, while not attempting to do it earns them 1 negative point.
9–10	Dead Walker. Ask everyone to roll a D20. The party member with the lowest score is ambushed by the “Cordyceps Mind Taker.” They need to immobilize it or kill it to move forward.
11–12	Tasty looking mushrooms. The party finds a plot of mushrooms. Each party member can perform a survival test with easy difficulty. On each success, the party gains 10 rations, while failing the test causes them to find poisonous mushrooms that cause them to be sick and waste 5 rations.
13–14	Shortcut. Someone spotted an old road in the middle of the swamp, causing the whole group to travel faster which subtracts 2 days from the travel time.
15–16	Lost the path. While traveling the group loses the path. At least one party member needs to succeed in a survival test with hard difficulty. If everyone fails, they lose time looking for the correct path which adds 2 days to the travel time.
17–18	Difficult terrain. While traveling the group loses the path. Party members need to succeed in a group survival test with medium difficulty. If they fail it adds 2 days to the travel time.
19–20	Bone Hurricane. During their journey, the weather starts getting very windy, while the rain makes it extremely hard to see. When they feel it cannot get any worse, bone fragments start piercing the ground, as if they were shot out from a cannon. This is not your normal bad weather—a bone hurricane has arrived. To shield everyone, the Elder Kril is making a small underground shelter. While everyone waits to get inside, each party member needs to perform two Dexterity saving throws with a difficulty of easy. Each failure makes them take 9 (2d8) piercing damage and causes them to be unable to hunt this week. After that, they hide in the ground and wait for the hurricane to pass. After that each party member can perform a perception skill test at medium difficulty to find scattered bones—some of them don’t have a rotten marrow, and each successful test gives them an extra 10 rations.

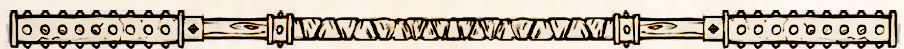
For each week a character is hunting, first roll for random prey (D6), then make two relevant skill checks and reference the table below for the results of this week's hunting. If a character feat or ability gives them a bonus to finding food or certain amount by default, change one die to the highest possible score after rolling.

RANDOM PREY (D6)	HUNTING TABLE: REWARDS THIS WEEK'S HUNTING PER DIE. FOR PASSING...
1–2: Swamp berries and insects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Below the easy threshold to gain 10 rations. • Easy threshold to gain 10 rations. • Medium threshold to gain 15 rations. • Hard threshold to gain 15 rations.
3–4: Rabbits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Below the easy threshold to gain 5 rations. • Easy threshold to gain 10 rations. • Medium threshold to gain 15 rations. • Hard threshold to gain 20 rations.
5: Lizards and Birds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Below the easy threshold to gain 10 rations. • Easy threshold to gain 15 rations. • Medium threshold to gain 15 rations. • Hard threshold to gain 25 rations.
6: Deers and bigger animals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Below the easy threshold to gain 0 rations. • Easy threshold to gain 10 rations. • Medium threshold to gain 20 rations. • Hard threshold to gain 30 rations.

Additionally, if the party travels with Dukva, he and his men start to hallucinate after the second week due to the toxic vapors of the Swamps. Strangely enough, the rest of the group seems to not be affected.

On the third week, his men start to see monsters which are chasing them and D4 number of the men escape into swamps before anyone can stop them.

On the fourth week, Dukva men become feverish as if they were very sick and start screaming that they need to go back. Dukva is scared of what is going on, and releases the Elder Kril hoping that he can help them... and help him before he will also turn to madness. The Elder Kril tells the rest of the group to tie them and he puts them into a semi-conscious state with his magic.



On the fifth week, Dukva becomes paranoid and tries to take all the bags with the black rocks to himself. He accuses everyone else of stealing from him. Since he is a big and muscular orc, it seems like he might be able to take all of the bags with him... but when he grabs 5th bag, the ground starts to collapse under his feet and the swamp starts to swallow him. The rest of the Kril, seeing what's going on, happily give him all the remaining bags with the rocks while saying stuff like "take it all", "sure, take more", and "It all yours!"

The party can stop this, and show Dukva mercy, which will cause the Elder Krill to put him into a semi-conscious state which will earn the group one positive reputation point, or they can just observe with the rest of the group.

If the party proposes to dispose of the Kril in order to preserve the food instead of just hunting more, they will gain 1 negative reputation point. If Dukva is still in control, he can be persuaded, but the Elder Krill won't even listen the party members out.

Check the page 118 for information on how Souls Ash affect people living in Wurgar.

Whenever a battle starts during the journey, Husis cast a barrier that lets the characters to make full use of their abilities. After two weeks of travel, the magic on the chains loses its power and the barrier is no longer needed.

In the last week of travel, the toxic swamps and the monsters lurking just beneath the thin water surface are replaced by an endless desert filled with stinging salt. The journey is long and arduous, and the group is pushed to the brink of exhaustion. Just when they think it cannot get any worse, they are attacked in the desert by monsters.

Enemy composition for the monster attack

NAME OF CREATURE	LEVEL 3-4	LEVEL 5-6	LEVEL 7-8
Jannah	× 2	× 2	× 3
<i>or alternatively</i>			
Lamia	× 2	× 2	× 3
REINFORCEMENT			
Under the sand, there are hidden traps. They are of the basic kind, similar to bear traps, so party members can be lured during the fight to step on them. Make an active Perception skill test with the difficulty set to hard. On failure, they take 2d6 damage and become immobilized until they spend one action to release the trap with an easy Athletics test.			

The player's goal in this fight is not to win but to survive. At the end of the third round, just when they think all is lost, the enemy seems to be frightened by something and quickly scatters. It appears that a few armed warriors have appeared on the horizon. Then, a sedan chair, carried by a few servants, emerges, accompanied by a huge, muscular woman with skin as dark as ebony. It is a convoy on a diplomatic mission, led by Princess Ker'ubo—an emissary from a kingdom allied to Dragsa.



Princess Ker'ubo

An ally of Dragsa, on her way to Queen Anara's palace on a diplomatic mission, hailing from a remote kingdom. She earned Anara's respect through strength and wit. It's possible that their kindred personalities also played a role in this bond. She ascended to the throne through a harrowing ordeal, possibly involving the overthrow of her own siblings—potentially with a good measure of bloodshed if rumors are correct.

APPEARANCE

She cuts a commanding figure, stern and robust, exuding an aura of a predator biding its time for the opportune strike. Her physique is remarkably muscular, far from the delicate impression one might expect of royalty. However, her authority is undeniable, as she is invariably encircled by warriors and attendants who leave no doubt as to who holds dominion here. Around her wrist, she habitually wears bandages, and her attire is adorned with tribal-style jewelry, adding to her distinctive presence.

PERSONALITY AND CORE VALUES

She embodies the essence of a female warrior—tough, self-assured, and uncompromisingly forthright. As a princess, she possesses an acute understanding of political intricacies, yet she chooses to carve her own way through the labyrinth of schemes with unyielding strength. She stands ready to extend aid to anyone she deems worthy, but only does so if she is also sure they are strong enough to actually use her help. There is nothing worse for her than wasting one's good will.

ROLEPLAYING TIPS

Her voice carries a rugged edge, and she often employs grandiloquent language to describe even the most mundane of matters. Her vocabulary, at times, veers into complex words, only to seamlessly transition to language more befitting of a common soldier. Overall, her manner of speaking seems hardly seems to fit her royal standing, revealing that her upbringing was more akin to that of a warrior than a princess.



After treating the wounded and giving everyone food and water, she starts asking who they are, where they come from and so on, all while sharing with them her own name and mission—she is honest, if not even blunt about everything. She is on her way to a port city and she intends to proceed to the Fortress of Dragsa to speak directly with Queen Anara, the ruler of Dragsa. It is all about a disturbance in one of the trading routes of her country—the pirates from the Misty Waters are once again raising their taxes to allow the passage of ships through their territory.

Upon hearing the characters' story from their perspective or from the Elder Kril, Ker'ubo shows a mix of anger and disgust about Disciples' actions. Then, Husis the Wise starts to talk about all the atrocities they are doing there and slowly changes topic to talk about how the massive armies of the Disciples are amassing near Wurgar for some kind of attack. He says that the size of the army is too big for just dealing with Dum Ramil and from what he gathered, their aim is to take down the Fortress of Dragsa. Without them in the picture, the Disciples of Chaos will freely spread to all other places and destroy the world as everyone knows it. He finishes the whole talk with the words: "They must be stopped! Our meeting here is not a coincidence. Fate has bigger plans for us. It is up to us to do something!" After that, the Princess engages in brief negotiations with Elder Kril and then agrees to help.*

Read or paraphrase the following boxed text to the players:

I get the gist. But I ain't seein' the Fortress being able to do much now. The situation is way complicated. Their armies near the capital are embroiled in beastkin disputes. Stirred up by the Hyste Talma Kingdom I would say. From the east all you see are relentless attacks from the Redoe Alliance. We cannot withdraw troops from there either. To the west there's the endless guerilla warfare in Banewood. It is a tangled web of troubles. And all that stretches their forces thin. Way too thin.

If yer words hold true 'bout pirate involvement, then the Republic of Misty Waters may be in cahoots too. Let's hope it be just one rogue king actin' on his own, but if it be a grander scheme, things could get messy. Anara'll need to tread carefully with her Scareguard pirate allies. But that might be good. If the Disciples have collaborators, they might hold evidence of their plans. We gotta use that.

But the thorniest part be that ye'll need to reckon Anara willin' to lend an ear. I've known that ruthless old hag longer than most rulers, and she's no friend to idle chatter. Time is a precious thing to her, despite her age. So when ye go to her, ye best bring solid proof and solutions. At present, believin' your tale ain't somethin' I'd wager on. Words alone be worth nothin', mere dog's-meat.

No, we needs a different approach. I'll change my course and make a brief stop in Dum Ramil. Them damn royals there might have some news. They're nestled in the Kartagis desert, close to Wurgar and the Godless lands. If goddesses hum in yer favor, their words could lend weight to the information 'bout the Disciples gatherin' near Wurgar. Meanwhile, I'll loan ye one o' me faster airships from the Misty Waters engineers. Head to Turtle Island and see if the pirates still stand with Dragsa or if they've thrown in their lot with the Disciples of Chaos. Then follow any other leads ye got. What the Elder Kril has to say might be worth explorin'. If ye can secure a truce with Hyste Talma or the centaurs in Banewood, it'd be a boon. Where ye start be up to ye. Only then make yer way to the Fortress of Dragsa and attempt to sway the Queen's opinion.

She pauses and beckons a servant for quill and parchment. When he is back, with a swift gesture she signals him to bend and then begins writing on the servant's back. After a while she tosses the quill to the ground, grabs wax brough by a different servant and seals the letter with her sigil. She gives the letter to the characters while continuing:

*At this point, for some players it might be logical to not agree with this and flatly refuse to help. Not everyone should be willing to partake in such a risky mission. But RPGs are games played together. They knew before starting what kind of campaign it is and it is up to the players and Game Master to think together about the reasons for agreeing here. Check the subchapter "Characters hooks and relationships" for inspiration.

Here is a missive to Old Anara. It should aid ye in securin' an audience with her. But remember, the rest be in your hands.

On top of what the Princess is saying, the Elder Kril suggests that he may be able to help negotiate a truce with the Banewood centaurs and the Yv'anda dryad tribe which would greatly help with making the Fortress be willing to help. He can also provide them with safe passage to the Hyste Talma, should they desire it—getting there is pretty tricky but he has a certain way of transportation to get there. “Though it is not one which moves one’s body” he vague adds after explaining while putting something wrapped in animal skin along with a letter of instruction in the hands of one of the party members. “Use it wisely and only when you are sure you want to—it is not something which can be used often.”

After that, if Husis the Wise did not give them a protective tattoo already, he will insist on giving each character a protective tattoo, imbuing it with ancient, protective magic. He did not explain this previously, but his magic is not designed to protect them from regular spells, but from the maddening influence of Chaos. Whenever they would be affected by the power of Chaos or something similar to it, the tattoo will start to glow. Nullifying its effects completely is beyond him, but thanks to this, their body and soul will be able to expel all traces of his magic and not be affected by all long term effects of it, which is crucial for them now, since they ingested large amounts of Souls Ash in the Godless Lands.

If a character refuses to get the tattoo, note it down. It will be important for some of the future events. Note down the final number of positive and negative reputation points obtained in the Godless Lands, as it will affect some parts of the final chapter.

After this exchange, they travel together with Princess Ker'ubo to a small port city. There, she provides the party with their own Airship and a sky engineer to operate it, who calls herself Raumper Van Kler. The airship has enough fuel for 15 days of travel. They will need to refuel it in the future but they can also equip it with new weapons or tools during their journey*.

It is now time for the party to decide how they want to deal with the situation in Deuslair.

*Check Additional Materials for tables with optional mechanics for airship travel and combat.

**If the characters agreed to the blood pact with Dukva during their journey to Wurgar, they are compelled to undertake this quest within the first week of their stay. Dukva's demand is simple: they must win two times in a row, after which the pact will be considered fulfilled. However, there's a catch. They will not receive any meal tickets for participating in these two fights. Until they accomplish this task, they will also not gain the benefits of a short or long rest and will accrue one level of exhaustion after each night. Once they achieve two consecutive victories, Dukva is content with their performance (he was betting his own salary) and they are free to either continue fighting or conclude their involvement in this endeavor.

Side Missions

TRUNKS ARENA**

A semi-illegal fighting arena. The party can both participate or observe and bet their meager possessions to win or lose it all.

Requirements:

Wander deep into woods during the wood cutting job, hear about the place from another prisoner or make a blood pact with Dukva during the journey to Wurgar.

Rewards:

Characters earn 1 meal ticket for each fight they win, and if they manage to become the champion, they receive an additional 5 meal tickets. Additionally, for every 3 won fights, the party earns 1 negative reputation point.

Furthermore, meal tickets and other items can be wagered in these fights, although participants are prohibited from betting on themselves or their opponents. This restriction can be circumvented if someone else places bets on their behalf, but it may require additional skill checks, especially related to deception, depending on the complexity of the plan.

Punishment:

Loss of health, loss of 1 negative reputation point for every 2 lost fights.

Before each fight, write down the initial HP of the character. After each fight, the characters regain half of the health lost during the fight. These fights are not to the death, so dropping to 0 HP only makes them fall uncouncious.

In the middle of the woods, there is a small clearing with a wooden cabin on one side and a circle made of tree stumps. Every Friday, both prisoners, guards, and the locals from Wurgar gather for fights organized by one of the guards, Dukva. The party can either participate or join in on the betting as a member of the audience. If at least one person from the party participates they cannot bet—people from the same barracks are forbidden from betting on themselves or on their opponents. This can be bypassed if someone else bets on their behalf—depending on how the whole plan plays out, additional deception skill checks might be needed, but the party is also not given any guarantee that they won't be tricked by the other side. What is bet depends on the players, but most people just bet their meal tickets.

The event consists of three fights held every Friday. For the first event, select six opponents from the table below (subtract by the number of player characters participating in the fights) or select any ones you see fit from your personal collection***. In subsequent fights, retain the winners from the previous event and add new opponents. You can use the same creature multiple times but provide them with different titles. Determine the pairings randomly and roll a D4; if the result is anything from a 1 to 3, the indicated fight is rigged. If the result is 4, no fights are rigged. If a rigged fight involves a player character, the opponent will lose on purpose during the fight. To determine the winner in the NPC fights without playing out the entire fight, roll a die for each opponent and select the one with the higher result as the winner. Adjust the die size according to their strength to make it more comparable****.

Opponents start on opposite sides of the arena, without any weapons****. The first side which drops below one third of their HP, if they are concious at the beginning of their next turn, are given a random weapon by one of the guards or locals from the crowd—a stick, a rusted dagger, a basic spear and so on. The GM can skip this part if the character that triggered the event is somehow disliked by majority of audience in this story. These weapons are taken away from the characters after the fights are over—the guards attending the fights will make sure of it.

If at any point, the player characters win 4 fights in a row without losing even one, they trigger a fight with the defending champion. If they win that fight, they are granted the title of champion and this side mission ends.

The characters who are not currently fighting can influence the fight by taking one of the actions from the list below (once per round of the fight):

- Distract an enemy with their actions, giving them disadvantage to their next attack.
- Try to find the enemy's weakness and pass this information to your party member to give them advantage on their next attack.
- Encourage your party member to fight harder using giving them an extra inspiration die.
- Remove the stun or blinded condition on your party member by shouting or throwing something at them.

...or any other action which seems fitting for situation. For each action assign a relevant skill check—set the test difficulty between easy and medium, depending on their actions.

***If using SRD 5.1 mechanics, use only monsters with CR between ¼ to 3.

****If using SRD 5.1 mechanics, use the die according to the creature's CR: ¼ = D4, ½ = D6, 1 = D8, 2 = D10, 3 = D12.

*****If using SRD 5.1 mechanics, each creature can also use their bonus action to try to blind the enemy by throwing sand at their eyes or stun them after an attack—in both cases make a opposing athletic skill check. If the creature chosen for the fight doesn't have any information about attacks without weapons, replace their melee attack with these statistics for hits: Strength or Dexterity modifier + 2. Damage: 1d6 + Strength or Dexterity modifier bludgeoning damage; or 1d8 + Strength or Dexterity modifier bludgeoning damage if it has CR 3 or greater.



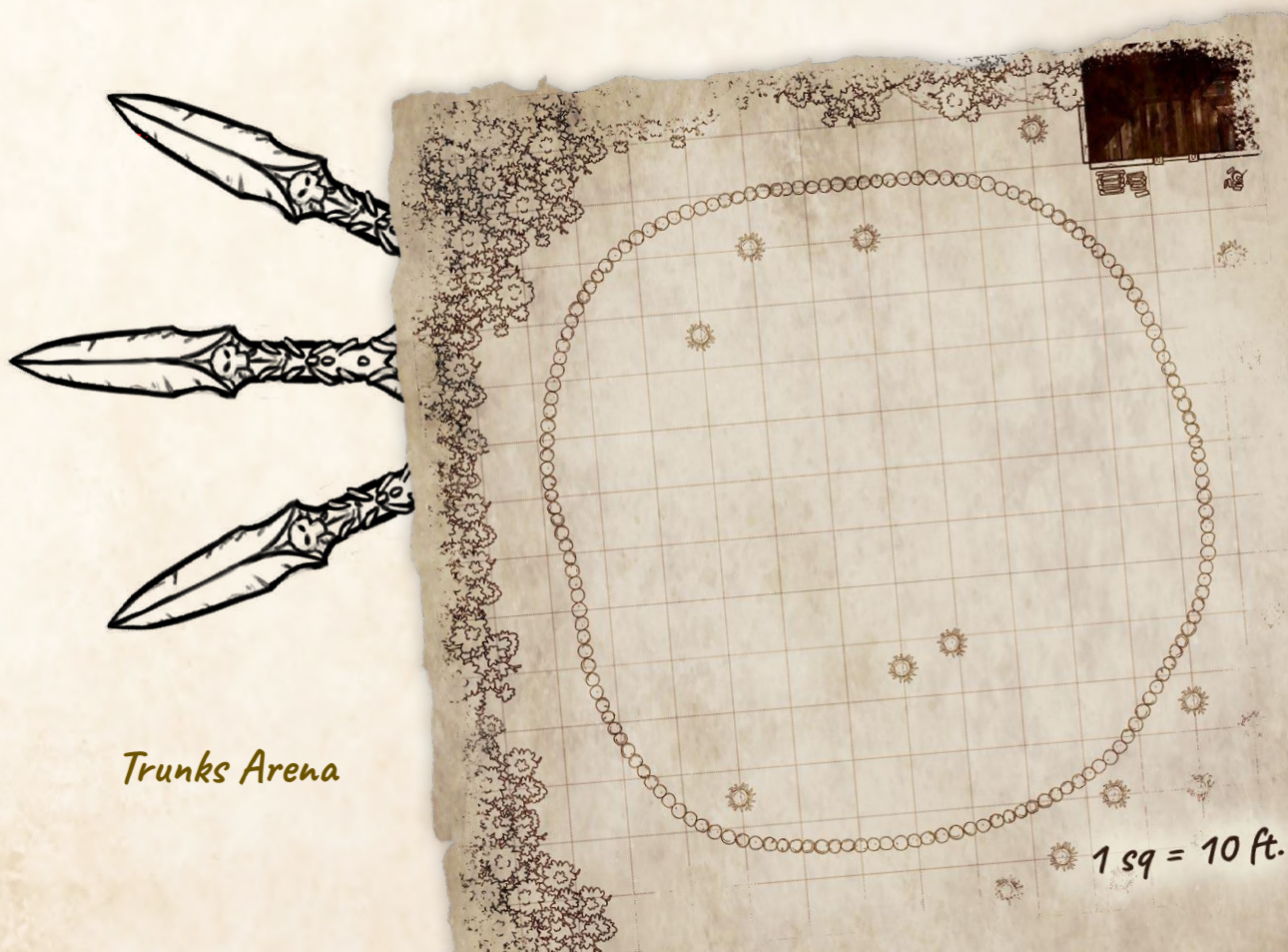
TRUNKS ARENA FIGHERS

NAME OF THE PARTICIPANT (Creature from the Bestiary)	TITLE	TACTIC
Kril (Kril)	the Swift / the Lightfooted / the Shaman / the Pecker / the Last from Tribe	Circles around the player and never attacks first. If dropped below one third of their life, they will surrender.
Yv'anda (Yv'anda Member)	the Rebel / the Crazy / the Blood-drinker / the Wild	Attacks fiercely without any regard to their life.
Harpy (The Sea Harpy)	the Breath-Taker / the Slicer / the Ugly / the Sharpy	A captive sea harpy. Her intelligence is barely at the level of a newborn so she acts only on instinct.
Dragsan (Royal Guard)	the Scum / the Stupid / the Naive / the Discarded	Tries to fight with honor.
Agent (Court Agent)	the Shamed / the Shameless / the Dirty / the Double-faced	If given the chance, they will try to use any dirty move possible.
Dragsan Officer (Court Forerunner)	the Choker / the Betrayer / the Mud-Eater / The Witch	If given the chance, they will try to use any dirty move possible.
Rat (Vesht the Merchant)	the Sewer-Crawler / the Bloody Fur / The Stinky	Uses any dirty tactic possible but will surrender if he's clearly in a losing position.
Lad (Sky Pirate Rookie)	the Fair-Skinned / the Fallen / the Abandoned	Acts rash and makes many mistakes. Loves the cheer of the crowd.

CURRENT CHAMPION

Forest Gigante, the Red Fist (Yv'anda Armored Warrior)

All magic is blocked by the Disciples of Chaos and she cannot use it, but she can normally use her sword attack and vines since they are part of her body.



Trunks Arena

ENEMY IN THE SKY

While building roads for the Disciples, the party notices a group of prisoners get kidnapped by flying demons. The party can sneak out of the encampment and try to save them.

Requirements:

Roll a success on the bonus action during the Building roads job.

Rewards:

The party can earn 1 positive reputation point and 4 food rations per week or 10 food rations immediately.

Punishment:

Loss of health and time.

To finish this mission the characters need to successfully do three things: find the nest, leave the encampment, and rescue the kidnapped prisoners.

The first objective can be accomplished by either asking around and performing the relevant skill checks such as persuasion to ask people what they know about the flying demons—set the test difficulty to medium. Alternatively, the party will be able to perform two relevant skill checks later on (such as with a survival check) to track the flying demons from where they were last seen. The difficulty of the test should be between easy to medium, depending on the information gathered prior to the skill check.

To get out of the encampment, they need to perform a group skill test of a relevant skill check, such as a stealth check with a test difficulty of medium. If anyone fails the roll, they can use the information they gathered during their stay at the encampment to reroll the test, but they can also use two pieces of relevant information to pass the test automatically. Moreover, if they decided previously to prepare a tunnel for leaving the encampment, they can use it now, but doing so will make that passage unusable in the future, unless they prepare a new one.

The Impalers nest, where they keep kidnaped prisoners, is an old ruin of a castle. After arriving at this location, the characters will need to sneak past the enemies and safeguard the kidnapped prisoners. The party can either try to take the prisoners and sneak away unnoticed or attack the Impalers by surprise. The Impalers are playing with one of the kidnapped people that they killed. If the Impalers spot the party first, they will grab the kidnaped prisoners and threaten to kill them. At that point, the party may either try to prevent the Impalers from killing the prisoners or trick them into believing that they do not care about the kidnapped prisoners. If the party fails, the kidnapped prisoners are killed on the spot and the battle begins.

Enemy composition for the final battle

NAME OF CREATURE	LEVEL 3-4	LEVEL 5-6	LEVEL 7-8
Impalers	× 2	× 3	× 4
REINFORCEMENT			
If the enemies feel like they cannot win, they will kick one support column and make the ceiling fall on the party while they flee.			

After the rescue, the people who were saved will share their food with the party.



Impalers Nest

- P** — Passages, requiring an extra skill test to pass with medium difficulty (like unlocking doors).
- T** — Bear traps or pits with spikes. When triggered, they immobilize characters (escape difficulty is easy) and deal 1d8 piercing damage.
- B** — Locations of leftovers from tormenting people—mainly bones or mangled bodies.

- 1** — Entrance where people start the mission.
- 2** — Location of the kidnaped people.
- 3** — Location with the enemies.





CHAPTER 2: TREADING MURKY WATERS

The tale begins with a sudden attack on the party's ship as they fly towards the Republic of Misty Waters—a collection of unstable pirate kingdoms. The dynamic politics in Misty Waters involve duels, thefts and murders, and their welcoming is befitting of their reputation—a surprise attack when the party approaches the first islands, with no clear suspects in sight. The damage to the ship is so severe that they need to land on the beach of a lower-altitude island that just rose above the surface of the water. The characters are now stranded and will need to show a bit of resourcefulness and maybe some local assistance to fix their ship. Moreover, they discover strange traces in the ship's damaged parts. While this information doesn't aid their predicament, it makes them go to the Republic's unofficial capital—Turtle Island. Upon arriving, they are invited to talk with by the temporary ruler of the island, Blackeye Drex. While his greeting is quite warm, the intimidating demeanor around him raises suspicions. After explaining their situation, Drex agrees to help but will need time to gather information. In the meantime he asks the party to handle a few problems on the island, which gradually escalate into more and more dangerous missions, all while there are mysterious accidents that keep happening to them on a daily basis. To uncover what is really going on, the characters plan a heist, but the truth they find might be a bit more than they expected.

A Fiery Welcome

During this chapter, the party will gain reputation points. Pirates care more about accomplishments rather than how you got there, so the points are not divided into positive or negative ones. It's all just about fame and respect. Please keep track of these points, as they will be relevant for several events in the story.

The story kicks in when our party's trip to the Republic of Misty Waters is abruptly interrupted by a surprise attack. A loud noise and sudden turbulence alert the party while Raumper Van Kler, their pilot and engineer of the sky, informs them that they are losing altitude—the reason is unknown but the left engine is not functioning and the main balloon is losing air*. She suggests making an emergency landing and chooses a nearby low-altitude island, one which hovers barely over the sea floor.

They land on the edge of the island, and the whole party gets out to check the airship. The left side of the ship has wooden spears sticking out of it and one of them seems to be stuck in the engine. Raumper comments that the spears look like they belong to the rashers and starts taking apart the engine to check how it looks inside. After some time she shouts to the party and starts talking while showing the parts of the engine. Read or paraphrase the following boxed text to the players:

"Damn it all to the gears of oblivion! Look here, mates!" shouted Raumper Van Kler with her rough and tomboyish voice. "I'll cut straight through the confusing parts for ya. Our bleeding left engine is on the blink. The Mist Essence filter's gone kaput, clogged tighter than a rusted gear in a steam factory. Aerothium Crystals? You might as well shove rocks in a steam boiler. Clogging the whole system, they are. And the main balloon, oh, splendid news! Spears from those blasted island dwellers turned it into a pincushion. Now, I can mend the balloon, no worries. Got me tools and a keen eye for patching. But that filter and those pumps, they're as knackered as a rusty bolt on an abandoned airship.

But hold onto your cogs, mates, 'cause I spotted a silver lining on the way down. A wreckage from some other poor soul's sky cruiser. Bless be his awful flying skills. Perhaps a bit of salvageable stuff lies amidst the debris. A functional filter, maybe a decent pump, who knows? We're in a race against the tumbling pressure, but with a bit of luck and a lot of elbow grease, we might just cobble together what we need from that wreckage."

After that explanation she proposes that the party checks the wreckage while she does what she can here.

Any character interested in checking the spears can perform a relevant skill check, such as an investigation or survival test, with the difficulty set between easy to medium, depending on the character's background. If they succeed, tell them that while the wooden spears are primitive and put together with a feathered decoration, it reminds them of some kind of tribal weapon... all of the spears were made so recently that there's still some tree sap coming from it. To the character's knowledge, weapons are always made from dried and sometimes specially processed wood. There are also strange traces of some gray powder which after being shown to Raumper reminds her of something.

After that, the players can venture into a jungle which covers the island. To reach their destination they need to cut out their own path and find proper footing. To do so, they need to succeed in a group skill test of a relevant skill such as a survival test, with the test difficulty set to medium. If the players fail the test as a group, the person with the lowest score gets stuck in the fallen wood. They can either leave that person behind and get them on the way back, or spend some time getting them out, but since it is already

While this chapter uses creatures described in the Deuslair Bestiary, some of the miniatures of these creatures are only present in the fifth edition of the Dungeon and Lasers campaign add-on "Of Sea and Thunder." Be sure to have these specific models or their counterparts ready.

*Check Additional Materials for tables with optional mechanics for airship travel and combat.

pretty late, they will need to check the wreckage the next day or go in the night, when they will barely be able to see.

No matter the decision, if they continue going, they arrive at the site in around one hour. The ship's lower deck is missing and the balloons are completely wrecked, but the engines seem to be in good condition. The characters that are looking for the needed parts must succeed in a relevant skill check, such as an investigation test with the difficulty set to easy, with characters of an academic background having an advantage on their roll. All characters can perform this test and if they fail, they can perform it again the next day. When they succeed, the necessary parts are taken from the ship.

But just as the party are on their way to their airship, their path is blocked by the local inhabitants—a group of goblin-like creatures called Rashers.

Enemy composition for fight with the Rashers

NAME OF CREATURE	LEVEL 6-7	LEVEL 8-9	LEVEL 10-11	LEVEL 12-14
Rasher Wards	× 2	× 2	× 2	× 2
Minor Rasher Golem	× 1	× 1	× 2	× 2
Rasher Golem	× 0	× 1	× 1	× 1
REINFORCEMENT				
Surge of Power	After the HP of a Minor Rasher Golem reaches to zero and at least one Rasher Ward is still alive, the Rasher Ward focuses all of their energy to bring the Minor Rasher Golem to full HP. The Rasher Ward takes over as the new “pilots” of the golem, and disappear the moment they use this ability.			



Rashers Ambush

If they are fighting in the night, everyone without darkvision or a source of light, is considered to have the blind condition. If all of their golems are down and the HP of both of the Rasher Wards is below half, the fight ends with them escaping.

After that, the group can get back to the ship, where they find Raumper patching up the balloon. When they give her the parts she says that the repairs will take a while—the ship should be ready at noon the next day, so for now they should set up camp.

If any of the characters ask about the mysterious powder that got on their ship, she tells them that she checked it and it turns out to be gunpowder. The spears were definitely not thrown but rather shot with some kind of cannon. There were also traces of wax so it might be part of the mechanism or maybe a way of shielding them during the shot. If nobody asks about the powder, she tells them about the gunpowder the next day. Though she cannot be sure who exactly it was, one thing is certain—it could not be the Rashers. They do not use gunpowder at all. Inspecting the gunpowder is beyond her abilities... but it can be done. Some workshops and laboratories on the Archipelago should have equipment for that. It can definitely be found in the laboratories of Academy of the Sky in Sidonia, the second largest city on Turtle Island. The ship also needs some checking so they can kill two birds with one stone by going to the capital.

A Series of Unfortunate Events

After these events the party needs to fly to Turtle Island. Because of the damage, the ship cannot fly too long and they have to stop on bigger islands each night, giving their engineer some time to fix the ship again. In the meantime, the characters can check every place they visit* and look for jobs to do**. Try to mix in information about side missions, some stories about history of the land and its customs, and rumors from the table at the end of this subchapter to create an interesting few sessions.

In every place they visit they can look for an alchemical laboratory to analyze the gunpowder. In every place the party visits, one character from the party can try to perform a relevant test to look for the laboratory. For example, they can use persuasion if they are asking around, but they can also use investigation if they are looking around themselves. These tests should have a difficulty of medium. If they succeed, the party finds a proper laboratory and can check the sample of gunpowder. If they do not, they must check it in the laboratories of Academy of the Sky in Sidonia.

In the laboratory they find out that the gunpowder used in the attack is an experimental composition, which so far should not be available in normal distribution. It was created by one of the King's personal workshops and was only tested by his ships. Guzmán Martínez. The ruler of Turtle Island.

On the Island itself they find out that Martínez is currently absent from Sidonia. The governorship is now donned by Legrand Drex, known far and wide as Blackeye Drex, the right hand man of Martínez back when he was more active as a pirate.

His mansion is a pretty unique place. Perched defiantly on a rugged coastline, it is called the "Serpent Haven" and is both a testament to Captain Blackeye Drex's audacity and resourcefulness. This grand abode was meticulously crafted from the skeletal remains of his once-mighty ship, the notorious "Shadow Serpent," which was taken down quite a few years ago. The weather-beaten timbers of the old deck now form the mansion's walls. The sails that once billowed in the wind now serve as canopies over the sprawling balconies, casting dappled shadows on the pirate haven beneath. Anchors, worn with the scars of battles long past, were repurposed as decorative motifs. The main hall unfolded beneath the remnants of the ship's hull, now a soaring arch that stretched across the

*Check the page 40, the subchapter "Main Regions of the Republic."

**Check the page 196 for a side missions for this chapter.

*The whole place is always full of people, mainly famous skyfarers and pirates. Blackeye Drex organizes parties on a daily basis.

central courtyard. The original mast, stripped of its rigging and repurposed as a grand chandelier, hung overhead, casting a warm glow upon a room adorned with plundered treasures and pirate regalia. Cabins that once housed the rowdy crew were transformed into suites, each uniquely adorned with salvaged nautical artifacts and adorned with rich, weathered wood. The captain's quarters, nestled at the highest point of the mansion, overlooked the rolling waves, its windows offering a panoramic view of the expansive sea. All the while the creaking sounds of the Scareguards' howling winds, once the ship's constant companion, whispered through the open windows, carrying tales of distant lands and buried treasures*.

Upon reaching this place the party is warmly welcomed by Blackeye Drex. The man is imposing and quite scary at first glance, but has the attitude of a big, fatty bear rather than someone truly scary. If the characters reveal that they were either attacked by a weird attack on the outskirts of the archipelago or that they came here to investigate pirates' connection to the Disciples of Chaos, he becomes very interested and asks them about more details. After hearing everything the party wishes to share, he agrees to help, but says that gathering all the necessary intel will take time, so in the meantime he wants to enlist them to tackle the myriad issues plaguing his island. As he says it himself "If one wants to gain something, they should give something in return. Treat it as my payment for helping you out."

Should they accept, the task escalates into progressively more perilous missions, pushing the boundaries of their capabilities:

- On the first day, he asks the party to carry additional tables and chairs from the town for the upcoming welcoming party.
- On the second day he asks the party to safeguard a fishery attacked by the Sea Harpies. They will need to deal with four Sea Harpies—they will attack in groups of two.
- On the third day he asks the party to safeguard one of his transports which takes half a day and they are attacked by three gobliders during the last hour of the trip.
- On the fourth day he asks the party to take care of the Rock Bees attacking houses on the outskirts of Sidonia—they need to kill six Bees in total to chase them away. The Rock Bees will come in groups of two.

During these missions, mysterious accidents happen to them daily—some planks of the ship they're staying at has rotten floors through which the party almost falls (a relevant skill test can reveal traces of magic), rope bridges suddenly collapsing on one side while someone from the party is on it (but a skill test can reveal traces of the bridge being cut with a knife), feeling a weird drowsiness in the middle of their mission (and a skill test can show faint leftovers of poison in their food or symptoms that would indicate that they were poisoned) and so on. They also feel that someone is tailing them but they cannot find who it is.

Refusal to help Drex, on the other hand, leads to him asking the guests to be his guests while he gathers all the intel he needs... which soon reveals itself as nothing more than a gilded cage.

It seems that Drex is actually trying to kill the party and so, the characters are put at a crossroads. They can either try to just escape Drex's grasp or go deeper and try to unravel his secrets, guarded like a dragon's hoard. To do so, the party needs to change their approach.

If the tries to eavesdrop on him, be it with magic or sneaking in, they can learn that he is planning something—both he and his men are talking about killing someone important. The same information can be found after interrogating one of his people. What's more, it seems that he is not the mastermind here, but is doing the job on someone's behalf, making him a puppet of someone more important. Their orders arrive via letters,

which are mentioned several times by his people. Either way, the details are incomplete. The next puzzle piece clicks for the party the moment they learn that in the next couple of days Guzmán Martínez will be getting back. Drex is preparing a welcome party for him and his companions in the mansion. A quite fiery welcome from what you can suspect.

A daring plan emerged before the party's eyes. Just informing Martínez of what is going on won't enough, they will need to pilfer incriminating documents from the heart of Drex's mansion. At the same time, they are not sure when Drex will strike so they will need to protect Martínez. To do so they will need to devise a plan to accomplish both objectives. Luckily, it seems that the moment that Martínez will be landing near the mansion, everyone important is supposed to gather outside, making it the perfect moment to search for the documents.

D10 RUMORS TABLE

1	Legrand is one of the oldest lineage of pirates, which seems to have show up at the same time as the Sky Conqueror.
2	The people of Misty Waters whisper that if an heir to Francisco Perez's lineage showed up, they might unite all the seafarers.
3	Some skyfarers are openly saying that selling slaves to the Disciples makes for good business, but it is not the official stance of the Republic.
4	Guzmán Martínez's wife died a few years ago in an accident involving a Rasher attack.
5	Guzmán Martínez often said his wife was "from a way better apple tree than he could wish for."
6	Refugees from the underisland of Barrogris have been taking refuge in the taverns and other lodgings. The island's populace, including its Governor, have inexplicably abandoned their homes.
7	There are whispers that the renowned collector Felipe Lepanto has the famed weapon once wielded by Francisco Perez, and will be holding an auction on it soon.
8	Guzmán Frederico, the son of Martínez, is the spitting image of his mother.
9	Governor Juan Irajusta is looking for some to deal with some issues.
10	In the Misty Waters there is always work if you are looking for wanted men—just visit the Local Judge's Office.





Heist is Such a Negative Word

Use the map below for whoever is going to sneak into the mansion and get the letters.

Serpent Haven

- G** — Location of the guards. Use Pirate Rookies for them.
- H** — Location of the Hand of the Steel.
- T** — Traps.
- L** — Passages with locks, requiring usage of spells or medium difficulty skill tests.
- D** — Hidden shelf with the documents.



When everyone gathers outside, the plan can commence. Inside the mansion there are a few rookies which were left to guard the place. Whoever is attempting to sneak in, needs to pass them or eliminate them without alerting the others, then unlock the doors to the private chambers of Drex. Inside the room, there are two more obstacles—a mechanical golem and an illusion, hiding the shelf with the documents. The golem* reacts to movement of anything 15 feet in front of him. Characters can disable it with a successful test of a relevant skill, like sleight of hand or arcana, with the difficulty set between medium to hard, depending on character's background. Failing to disarm it makes the golem reactivate and it needs to be destroyed or restricted. If a character fails to notice it, the Golem will also activate when they approach the documents.

The shelf with the documents is protected with illusion magic. It needs to be found using relevant skill checks or a spell. For skill checks use things which make sense in this situation—arcana, investigation or perception, all of them work for this task. Set the test difficulty to medium. After finding the letter the players find out that the plot is much deeper than it originally seemed.

The documents are his correspondence with Vashara—one of the Apostles of Fire and highest command of the Disciples of Chaos. There is some information about his contacts, several transactions with slave trafficking and also a list of the other captains cooperating with the Disciples. But along with them, there is something strange—a series of documents confirming people's lineages, birth certificates and so on. After analyzing them with a relevant skill check such as an investigation check with a medium difficulty, the character can grasp another piece of the puzzle. The documents show the lineage of Francisco Perez, the Sky Conqueror. It seems that Drex had an obsession over this. And maybe he had a reason. He tracked Perez's relatives, which had remained a mystery to the inhabitants of the Misty Waters. According to the documents, among them is the late wife of Guzmán Martínez and Drex himself. There is also a notebook with crossed out names. On the list, there is only one uncrossed name. Guzmán Frederico—the son of Martínez**.

With this new revelation the characters have only a couple of minutes to inform the rest of the party that they are protecting the wrong target.

Meanwhile on the gathering outside the mansion, Guzmán Martínez's airship just landed on the moonlit edge of the cliff near the mansion. As he and his son are taking first steps on the land, several dozen feet from them, a Rasher with a blowgun is adjusting his aim, and waiting for the perfect shot. If the characters outside the mansion are informed about the target with magical communication or the one that knows the truth rushes with something faster than normal running (such as enhancing themselves with magic or performing a relevant skill, like acrobatics, athletics or something deemed fitting by GM) they barely make it in time, and protects the child.

If they fail, the child is hit by the poison dart and falls to the ground.

Drex is trying to make it all seem like an accident or revenge from the Rashers, but using magic or relevant checks like arcana at an easy test difficulty shows that the attacker was under the effect of mind control magic. Even without it, the documents clearly show his plans. Cornered, all eyes turn to Drex. But then something strange happens.

Read or paraphrase the following boxed text to the players:

Suddenly a voice echoed inside everyone's head—as if someone was talking to them from the backs of their skulls. But that was not the worst part of all of this. A hushed silence fell over the scene as everyone stood motionless. They were unable to even blink.

“Drex, you poor little man. You fancy yourself a fearsome pirate, yet you cannot deal with one small child.” She circled him, mocking his helplessness. “A captain who relies on others to do his bidding is nothing more than a puppet.”

*While disabling or after defeating the golem, they can find a short information about his creators. “Made in the Ironsmith Laboratories.”

**If they fail the skill check now, share this information after the final battle.

As the pirates, still frozen, listened in tense silence, Vashara turned her attention to Martinez's son, a young man nervously standing at the edge of the gathering. "And you," she sneered, "the apple doesn't fall far from the tree, does it? Let's see that precious trinket you're carrying."

With a deliberate slowness, Vashara approached the young man and, with a swift motion, ripped a necklace from his neck. Suspended from the chain was a ring, glinting with an eerie gleam. The room remained captive to Vashara's power, the pirates unable to intervene as she claimed her prize. A soft chuckle escaped her lips as she admired the stolen treasure. "Here lies the true power," she proclaimed, holding the ring aloft. "Not in titles or boasts, but in the ability to seize what you desire. Perhaps, Captain Drex, you could learn a thing or two about true strength."

"Consider this a lesson, Drex," Vashara whispered with her own voice, full of dark satisfaction.

When she finished her monologue, another airship arrived and drifted near the cliff's edge. Vashara casually walks over to its deck.

After finishing this scene, the tattoos on the characters start to slightly glow with blue light and they feel that the mind control over their bodies stops. Now they can chase after her if they wish to do so. The ones who do not have the tattoo have to make a Wisdom saving throw—set the difficulty to medium. If they fail, they can be carried by the others to snap out of it later, during the fight.

If they jump onto the ship, Vashara is initially baffled but immediately calls her "pets" who roar and charges at the party while the ship starts flying in the air.*

*Vashara is not interested in characters death and just want to get them off the ship's deck. You can also modify this scene with additional chase sequence with airship, before boarding her ship. Check Additional Materials for tables with optional mechanics for airship travel and combat.

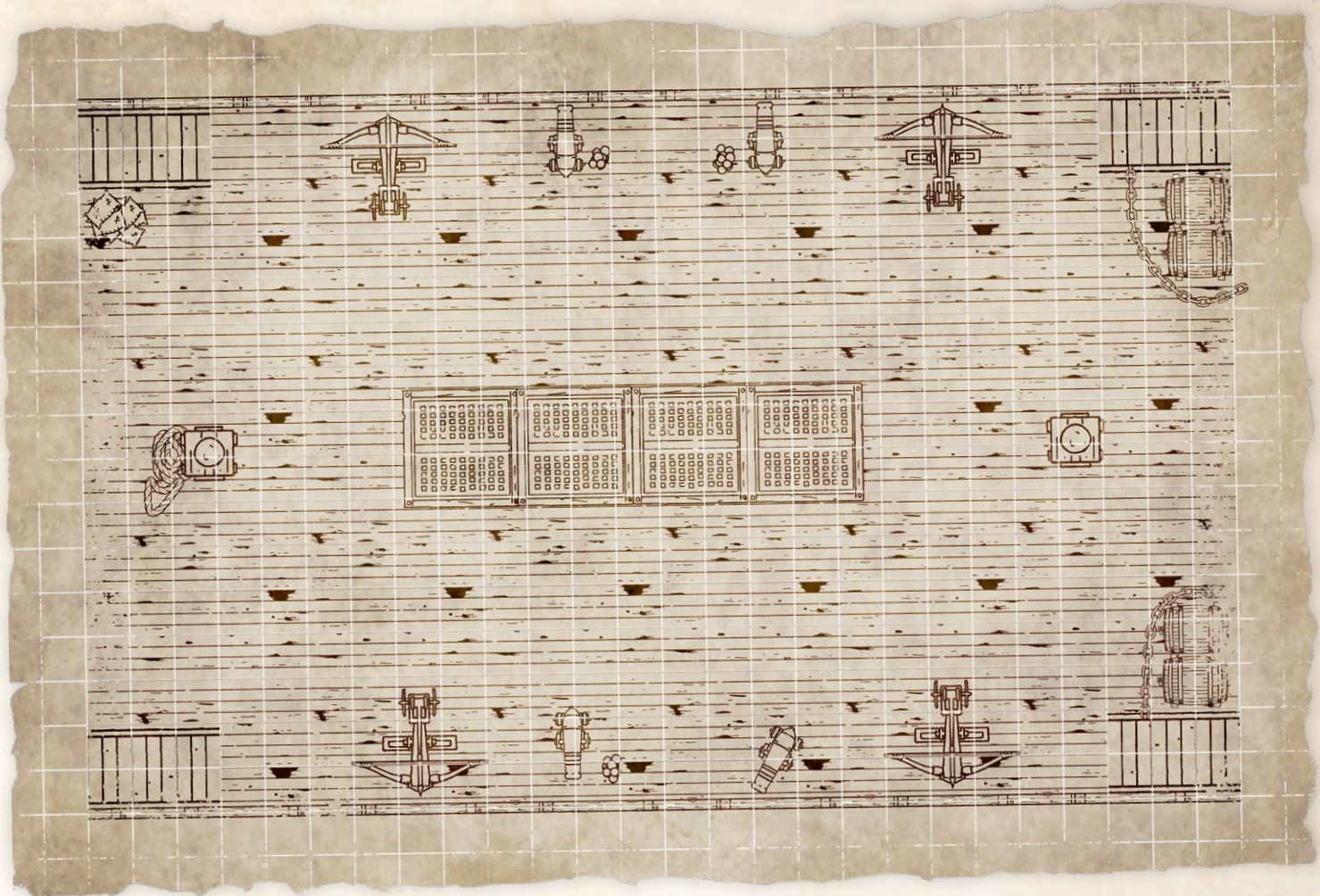
Enemy composition for the fight with Vashara

NAME OF CREATURE	LEVEL 6-7	LEVEL 8-9	LEVEL 10-11	LEVEL 12-13
Young Fire Wyrm	× 4	× 2	× 0	× 2
Fire Wyrm	× 0	× 0	× 1	× 1
Apostle of Fire	× 0	× 1	× 1	× 1
REINFORCEMENT				
Deadly Mind Control	<p>The Apostle of Fire takes control of the mind of one of the pilots from a nearby Airship—with it, she changes their course to ram into the party.</p> <p>All creatures hostile to the Apostle of Fire must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw (Medium difficulty), taking 21 (6d6) bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone, unless they succeed the Dexterity test, in which case they take half the damage and are not knocked down.</p>			

After finishing the fight, the party stands over Vashara's dead body. It starts to age unnaturally fast and turns into ash. From it, they can grab the ring*.

After their return, Martinez is grateful for their help and asks them who they are. It seems that a lot of explaining awaits you... but after what you just did, he is more than willing to listen and help.

Take note of the final reputation points for the party, whether they gave the ring back or not and whether the kid survived.



Vashara Fight



Side Missions

*Check Additional Materials for the list of Legendary Artifacts.

Completing any of the side missions awards the party with one reputation point unless stated otherwise.

Apart from that, the GM can assign an additional gp reward according to their judgment. Alternatively, if they are actively seeking for items with the essence of the Roots of Life, swap the monetary reward for one of the items from the list at the end of this book*.

THERE IS SOMETHING UNDER THAT ISLAND

A mysterious presence looms over Barrogris, a small island floating beneath the veil of mist. In this quest, the party delves into the enigmatic isle, unraveling the fate of its inhabitants and investigating any potential connection to the nearby mining operation.

Requirements:

This side quest can be initiated by one of the following methods:

- While exploring the docks of one of the primary islands in the floating archipelago, the characters may catch rumors surrounding an airship that has docked in the port. This vessel belongs to the Governor of a small underisland, who has forsaken his post, facing the imminent loss of his title and wealth.
- When attempting to secure lodging in the local tavern, the party will discover that all rooms are occupied by refugees from the underisland of Barrogris. The island's populace, including its Governor, has inexplicably abandoned their homes, leaving behind a perplexing mystery.
- If the party is looking for work, they might be pointed toward Governor Juan Irajusta. He has recently deserted his island and resides on the deck of his luxurious airship.

The mission:

The characters ask the locals about the Barrogris, they will hear a common narrative: the island is a seemingly inconsequential landmass floating far beneath the shroud of the mists. Its landscape boasts little more than an iron mine, a handful of huts ambitiously posing as a town, and a tavern infamous for serving the most subpar beer across the entire floating archipelago.

However, probing further into the recent events on Barrogris proves unfruitful. The locals, instead of providing valuable insights, merely echo a chorus of hearsay and fantastical tales unrelated to the actual circumstances unfolding on the island.

Statements of the Refugees:

Upon questioning the Barrogris refugees, the characters will hear the reasons behind the island's abandonment. Several weeks ago, residents began witnessing enigmatic lights hovering over the forest, initially dismissing them as misdirected airships using light to navigate the mists. However, the phenomenon persisted night after night. Disturbing reports from the miners, who routinely visited the local tavern after their shifts, intensified their feeling of unease. They recounted sightings of a tall humanoid figure skulking around their camp. This unsettling development foreshadowed a more ominous event: a loud explosion from the mines one night. The citizens of Barrogris were left in the dark about the incident, as all the miners vanished without a trace, and the mine entrance appeared to have collapsed.

As the iron mine was the lifeblood of the island's economy, closure was not an option. Governor Juan Irajusta rallied local men to clear the cave entrance. However, a few

nights later, one of the workers involved in the removal of the debris was gruesomely murdered in his sleep. The most chilling thing about it was the absence of any signs of forced entry, suggesting the intruder materialized within the confines of the house. Nightly occurrences of similar incidents heightened the terror, leading the islanders to believe an evil spirit had cursed their home. In a desperate bid to escape the perceived menace, one by one, the populace retreated to the capital. Despite Governor Irajusta's efforts to stem the exodus, even his coin purse lacked the persuasive power to change the minds of those gripped by fear for their lives.

Meeting the Governor

Should the characters opt to meet with the governor, they will find his account echoing the narrative shared by the refugees. However, the governor dismisses the notion of an evil spirit haunting the island, instead attributing the unsettling events to a clandestine group of marauders intent on destabilizing the republic.

While the governor does not subscribe to supernatural explanations, he expresses a pragmatic concern for the welfare of his people. Recognizing the situation's urgency, he is prepared to enlist the party's services and is willing to offer compensation for their efforts in resolving this mysterious threat.

Journey to Barrogris

If the party lacks access to their airship, there are several methods available for reaching Barrogris:

- **Convince Governor Juan Irajusta:** Characters can attempt to persuade Governor Juan Irajusta to transport them to the island aboard his airship. Initially hesitant, the governor can be swayed, but only if one of the characters successfully performs a relevant skill check with the difficulty set to hard. Even if the party convinces the governor, he insists on a swift return within two days, expecting the issue to be resolved by then. Failure to meet this deadline makes him presume the worst, assuming the party is lost, and he won't organize any further rescue efforts.
- **Purchase an Airship:** Attempting to buy an airship reveals that the last available vessel was sold weeks ago, leaving no current options for purchase.
- **Rent an Airship:** Characters can rent an airship from a local port at a significant cost. Negotiation attempts or disruptions to the captain during the journey may result in the airship departing without the party once the main part of the quest concludes.
- **Rent Gliders:** A more economical alternative is to rent gliders from a local port. While cost-effective, each character must pass a medium difficulty skill test during the gliding experience. Failure results in the separation of the unsuccessful character from the rest of the team.

Exploration of Barrogris

The party has the opportunity to investigate various key locations on the island:

- **Tavern:** Initially unremarkable, a closer inspection reveals a conspicuous absence of alcohol and food in the kitchen. The door to the basement, locked from within, conceals an entrance to a tunnel interconnected with the iron mines.
- **Random Houses:** The houses scattered across the island hold little interest, except for those with basement doors locked from the inside. Beyond these doors lies a tunnel like the one discovered in the tavern.
- **Miners Camp:** The miners' camp exhibits no signs of combat. An easy difficulty test allows the characters to discern that the evacuation was orderly, with the miners departing with all their belongings, including sleeping bags and cooking tools.

- **Forest:** Navigating the mist-shrouded forest proves challenging. The party may encounter a dog, and if fed, it becomes a loyal companion throughout their stay on the island. In the settlement, the dog guides the party to the tavern's basement door. Characters venturing into the forest at night may witness mysterious lights above the trees but will be unable to identify their source.
- **Governor's Manor:** All doors leading to the manor are securely locked. If the characters opt to forcefully enter, they will discover the premises are thoroughly looted. However, the party is not alone; two thugs are still in the building. The thugs may attempt a silent retreat into the basement if they alerted by noise. If the thugs spot the party, they will try to run away. The thugs will engage in combat only if cornered or confronted by an isolated party member. The basement door opens to a tunnel resembling the one beneath the tavern.

Venturing into the Mines

The party can explore the tunnels beneath the settlement, connecting various buildings with mine shafts. As they traverse these passages, evidence of recent excavation becomes apparent, though the extracted material isn't iron—it's gold.

If any bandits escaped to the basement from the manor, the party moves through the tunnels without encountering anyone. Otherwise, two miners are working here; if alerted to the party's presence, they hastily retreat to the main chamber.

In the expansive main chamber, the party confronts the leader of the mining operation and up to four of their associates, depending on the outcome of prior encounters. This cavern has been transformed into a living space, with all of the mining camp equipment relocated. Explosive materials are stored within. Beyond the adversaries lies a sizable opening leading out of the mines towards the cliffs, fashioned into an improvised platform with a small airship docked.

If the leader is unaccompanied, they will attempt to flee to the airship; otherwise, they engage the party in combat. While negotiation is an option, convincing the leader to surrender without a fight requires passing a hard skill test.

Interrogation

If, at any point in the story, the party successfully captures a miner, they may learn what really happened by passing a relevant skill check with an easy difficulty.

The miners working in the iron mines stumbled upon substantial gold veins, promising a life-changing windfall. Fearing the governor's monopolization of the riches, leaving them with meager compensation, they opted for secrecy. Gradually extracting small amounts of gold, they devised a clandestine operation, constructing a discreet platform at the cave's rear entrance and purchasing a small airship to transport larger gold quantities at night.

Their plan went awry. The island's inhabitants noticed the ship's lights navigating the mist, triggering swift and pervasive rumors. Aware that their covert activities were on the brink of exposure, the miners attempted to scare residents away with tales of menacing creatures near the mines. It proved ineffective. Consequently, the miners abandoned their camp for the cave, detonating the main entrance to prompt the inhabitants to abandon the island. However, the governor was undeterred and resolved to clear the rubble.

Faced with the prospect of their operation unraveling and the governor discovering the truth, the miners resorted to a drastic solution. Utilizing their knowledge of the island's natural cave systems and mining expertise, they infiltrated the homes of the island's occupants, intending to resolve the problem once and for all.

Departing Barrogris

Without a secured form of transport off the island, the characters may attempt a moderate difficulty skill test to acquire the knowledge needed to operate the airship discovered in the main chamber of the mine. If all attempts prove futile, a day after that, a rescue party dispatched by the regional pirate king arrives on the island, spurred by the incredible tales circulating about the mysterious happenings on Barrogris.



AN AIRSHIP WITH NO NAME

While on their adventures, the party stumbles upon a weathered and battered airship. Laden with various resources that could significantly aid their journey, the question lingers—has this vessel truly been abandoned, or is this discovery in the middle of nowhere too good to be true?

Requirements:

This side quest unfolds as the party traverses any island within the floating archipelago, provided they are several hours on foot from the nearest major city.

The mission:

At one point in the journey, the party finds an extraordinary scene—an impaired airship soaring directly overhead, casting a trail of smoke in its wake. Despite the machine's desperate attempts at stabilization, all efforts prove futile, culminating in a crash landing a few miles away.

Investigation of the shipwreck

Should the party choose to track the trail and reach the shipwreck, they find the airship displaying signs of damage that, while extensive, appear salvageable with the expertise of a skilled craftsman. There are a few possible tasks they can attempt:

- **Search for Survivors:** Despite a thorough inspection, the party finds no one near the ship. The crew hastily evacuated after the crash, abandoning the beautiful airship. By successfully completing a relevant skill check of medium difficulty, the party can uncover tracks leading into the wilderness. Following this trail, they encounter a group of survivors from the recent crash. These individuals are not particularly amiable and have no intention of revisiting or reclaiming the shipwreck, convinced that the vessel is cursed. Before their final departure, the captain neglected to toss a coin from the starboard side, a superstition that they believed cursed the entire mission. The captain perished two days ago, struck by lightning under an almost clear sky. Subsequently, they discovered their water supply had mysteriously dwindled despite being full before the journey. When attempting to return, they lost control of the airship, leading to the crash.
- **Scavenging for Resources:** While the party may not stumble upon substantial valuables, the airship yields numerous salvageable components. If the party is urgently in need of specific ship parts, they can uncover them within the wreckage. However, employing these salvaged components to repair their own ship comes at a cost. Utilizing these parts introduces a disadvantage in any test related to maneuvering or navigating their own vessel until they dispose of these components. Furthermore, the party can repurpose these ship parts to inflict curses upon other airships.
- **Repairing a ship:** The party won't be able to repair the ship without the help of a skilled craftsman. If the party manages to repair the ship and use it as their vessel, it should cause them all sorts of problems, starting with bad weather and ending with random malfunctions.

The Clock Runs Out!

Should the party depart from the wreck with intentions to return later, upon their return, they find the machine thoroughly stripped of all valuable parts and materials during their absence. Retrieving any useful components or attempting repairs becomes an impossibility.

However, this outcome can be averted if they leave a vigilant guardian behind to watch over the wreck.

Time is up!

If the party leaves the wreck and tries to return to it later, they discover that during their absence, the machine was picked clean of all its valuable parts and materials. They will no longer be able to reclaim any useful parts from it or repair it.

This won't occur if they leave someone behind to guard the wreck.

THE MOST MAGNIFICENT WEAPON

In this mission, the party is entangled in an auction, trying to acquire a priceless weapon once owned by the legendary Francisco Perez. Alternatively, they may attempt to secure the gun through less conventional means that don't require payment*.

Requirements:

This side quest can be initiated through various means:

- **City Exploration:** While navigating the cityscape, the characters might chance upon an opulent establishment adorned with a sign announcing the upcoming auction of 'The Most Magnificent Weapon,' once the prized possession of Francisco Perez.
- **Inquiry Among Locals:** If the party seeks information about acquiring new weapons, they may hear whispers about the renowned collector Felipe Lepanto, who is open to parting with his most treasured possession—the famed weapon once wielded by Francisco Perez.

The mission:

Upon learning about the legendary weapon, the party will likely pursue its acquisition. This can be achieved through active participation in the auction or by attempting a daring theft.

Auction Scene: The event unfolds late afternoon and lasts a few hours. Open to all willing participants upon the payment of a modest entry fee, the auction transpires on the ground floor of a two-story building. Access to the second floor is restricted and guarded by a sentinel stationed at the stairs. The ground floor encompasses a spacious hall for participants, a petite kitchen, and a room designated for servants. Adorning the walls are an array of exquisite weapons from Felipe Lepanto's collection—the proprietor himself circulates among the bidders, extolling the merits of his prized possessions. A central table hosts a notebook, inviting participants to inscribe their names and submit bids for the coveted weapon.

One individual is particularly keen on securing the weapon—Captain Marco Levantines. Unless the party opts for an exorbitant bid (far exceeding their current resources), Captain Levantines is poised to outbid them. Winning the auction requires persuading Captain Levantines to withdraw, achievable through a relevant skill test of hard difficulty. The captain, though arrogant, is not very courageous, making intimidation an effective tactic. Alternatively, temporarily preventing him from bidding, such as luring him out of the building, is a more strategic solution.

Surroundings of the Building: Two guards stand watch outside the structure. While one diligently patrols the perimeter, the other takes respite in a modest guardhouse, only mobilizing if an alarm is raised. Adjacent to the guardhouse, a towering tree grows at the rear of the building, offering a strategic vantage point.

Uncovering Clues: Should the players opt for a stealthier approach, they can uncover valuable hints from the following sources:

- **Inquiring with Servants:** Conversations with the kitchen staff reveal that Lord Lepanto has been grappling with financial difficulties, an odd circumstance

*Check Additional Materials for the list of potential items or use ones from used system according to your judgment.

given his recent acquisition of the precious firearm. While the mentioned gun is supposedly stored on a rack in his workshop, the servants are prohibited from clearing anything on it.

- **Questioning the Guards:** Approaching the guards outside the shop provides insight into Lord Lepanto's financial dealings. Recent pay discrepancies have left them less motivated to carry out their duties diligently. Surprisingly, until very recently, they were unaware of the valuable weapon in their employer's possession and expressed dissatisfaction with their remuneration, suggesting Lord Lepanto should have compensated them better.
- **Direct Inquiry with Felipe Lepanto:** Engaging in conversation with Felipe Lepanto yields information about the weapon's appearance and that it cannot be found on that floor. By successfully executing a skill check of medium difficulty, players can persuade Felipe to exhibit the firearm to one designated party member. In this case, Felipe, the chosen party member, and a guard will go to the workshop on the upper floor.
- **Checking Felipe's Notes:** A thorough examination of Felipe's notes reveals a keen interest in the ornamentation and engravings of ancient weapons, lacking any technical details. A skill check of moderate difficulty may unveil the amateurish nature of these documents, casting doubt on Felipe's expertise.

Second Floor Layout: Ascending to the second floor reveals three distinct rooms: Felipe's office, the workshop, and the storage area.

- **Felipe's Office:** An opulent workspace featuring a lavish desk adorned with Felipe's notes, four art pieces embellishing the walls, and a discreet floor safe beside the desk. Unlocking the safe requires a highly challenging skill check, and multiple attempts are possible, albeit time-consuming. Inside, a nominal sum of money is discovered. An attempt to move any paintings triggers an alarm, which can be neutralized with an easy skill check. No hidden compartments lie behind the artwork.
- **Workshop:** Functioning as a gunsmith's haven, this room appears ordinary, except for a lengthy weapon rack showcasing numerous handguns—presumed remnants of Felipe's collection. Two windows offer a view, with one overlooking a substantial tree. For those daring or desperate, a leap from the window to the tree is a potential escape route.
- **Storage:** A confined space housing shelves stacked with weapon parts, aged muskets, and a crate of grenades. Devoid of windows, the sole entrance and exit point is through the main door.

If the party creates excessive noise while exploring the second floor, the guard stationed at the bottom of the stairs becomes alert and moves to investigate.

Weapon Rack Caution: Attempting to manipulate any handgun triggers an alarm mechanism. Disarming this alarm necessitates a skill check of moderate difficulty, a procedure that must be repeated for each individual gun. Prolonged exploration risks an interruption by Felipe Lepanto, Marco Levantines, and the guardsman, who arrive to inspect the renowned weapon.

If the characters have checked Felipe's notes or obtained information from him about the distinctive features of the 'The Most Magnificent Weapon,' they can identify it amidst the ordinary firearms. Additionally, among the assortment of common pistols and replicas, one more item stands out—a master-crafted revolver featuring a rotating barrel.

The Illusory Masterpiece: The purported 'Most Magnificent Weapon' obtainable in this substory never truly belonged to Francisco Perez. It is a non-functional prop fabricated by Felipe Lepanto to pay his debts. Any attempt to wield it in combat results in a catastrophic explosion, rendering it more a perilous ornament than a practical weapon.

DEAD OR ALIVE

This quest empowers the party to perform the role of bounty hunters, pursuing and apprehending several lawbreakers that afflict the floating archipelago.

If you plan to use ships directly in the fights, you can check the Additional Materials for tables with optional mechanics for airship travel and combat. It contains details on additional equipment for the ships you can use to create custom ones. Based on them you can create few variations of the ships for lawbreakers for even more interesting and diverse fights.

Requirements:

The party can begin this side mission by visiting the Local Judge's Office. If none in the party possesses prior experience in bounty hunting, the judge initially assigns simpler tasks until they accumulate more recognition. Only one bounty can be pursued at a time. The party can't accept a new one until the ongoing assignment is completed.

Rewards:

After completing a bounty, players will increase their reputation as bounty hunters, gaining one point for each successful capture. It also grants them access to more challenging jobs. Furthermore, each completed task results in a gold reward, with the payment scaling according to the level of renown required by the job—start with 50 gp per character, then add 25 gp per each reputation point above 1.

The mission:

The judge, Miguel Farnese, is an elderly individual deeply committed to upholding justice on the Isle. Contrary to the party's expectations for someone in his position, attempting to bribe him is ill-advised. Beneath his office lies a basement housing several cells where prisoners await their impending punishment.

The judge can offer the party one of the following tasks:

- **Juan Bautista (Requires 1 reputation):** A former officer who betrayed his captain and fled. Additional compensation is offered if the party successfully captures the target alive. Juan is often found in a local tavern, squandering his ill-gotten gains on the cheapest beer and equally inexpensive company. When confronted, he may attempt to resist, but after indulging in hours of drinking, he's in no condition to put up a fight. Adventurers can subdue him with little difficulty. If Juan remains conscious after capture, he may resort to threatening the party, insisting that his brother won't allow him to languish in a prison cell.
- **Esteban (Requires 1 reputation):** A young engineer who breached his contract with the benefactor. Additional compensation is offered if the party successfully captures the target alive. Esteban has found refuge in a friend's residence. Upon confrontation, he may attempt to flee. When cornered, he admits to breaking his contract, asserting that he did so only because the captain he served failed to uphold his end of the agreement. Unfortunately, the renowned captain's testimony contradicted Esteban's claims, leading to disbelief in the young engineer's words. To avoid legal repercussions, Esteban proposes a deal: instead of being turned over to the judge, he offers to serve the party as an engineer for one year without payment. Should the party accept this arrangement, Esteban consistently fails in completing assigned tasks, always providing plausible excuses for his poor performance. The party may investigate Esteban's previous employer and discover the captain withheld payment due to the engineer's alleged incompetence.

- **Major Santiago (Requires 2 reputation):** The captain of a modest airship, self-styled as Major Santiago, deliberately downplayed the number of cannons on his vessel to minimize tax obligations. The party is tasked with collecting the outstanding dues that Santiago owes to the king before his ship departs from the port. The party has the option to confront Major Santiago aboard his ship directly. To avoid conflict, Santiago proposes a substantial sum to convince the party to feign ignorance, asserting that they arrived too late and he has already set sail. Emphasizing the imminence of his departure, he discloses his intention to join the marauders of Sleepless Atoll within a few hours. If the party declines the offer, he will provide a second one: In exchange for allowing his crewmate to assume control of the ship and head towards Sleepless Atoll without interference, Santiago will agree to surrender himself to a judge peacefully. If negotiation fails, the party must fight Santiago and his crew.
- **Maria Manuela (Requires 2 reputation):** A local merchant sold barrels of tainted meat as provisions, leading to the failure of Simion the Slim's expedition. Although the merchant has already paid a fee for this oversight, Justice demands that his supplier, Maria Manuela, be held accountable as well. The party's mission takes them to a nearby village, where Maria Manuela owns the farm that supplied the tainted meat. Unwilling to escape from her hometown, Maria faces the party without resistance. However, if the party chooses aggression, the villagers rally to her defense. Maria, seeking a peaceful resolution, asserts that the meat from her farm was processed correctly, and the merchant attempts to shift blame onto her. Should the party confront the merchant, he denies any wrongdoing. Upon inspecting his accounting books, the party discovers discrepancies in the delivery dates from Maria's farm, indicating that the merchant held onto the barrels for an extended period. Now faced with evidence, the party can deliver the merchant to the judge or negotiate a deal with him, potentially shifting the blame onto Maria.
- **The Butcher (Requires 2 reputation):** A captain who violated the Law of Skycall by employing crew members without earning the title of skyfarer. The elusive Butcher remains well hidden, making it nearly impossible to track him down. However, as the party inquires about his whereabouts, a mysterious individual claiming to be one of the Butcher's crew members contacts them. The captain, learning of the pursuit, wishes to resolve the matter diplomatically. Should the party accept the offer, the stranger guides them to Butcher's ship, tucked away in a private makeshift dock beneath the city. The Butcher proposes a unique arrangement: he possesses a severed head that bears a striking resemblance to himself, suggesting the party use it to convince a judge that they've fulfilled the bounty. While the Butcher refuses payment, he promises the party a favor if they agree to this unconventional deal.
- **Julia the Skyblossom (Requires 3 reputation):** A retired captain who defied the king's call to war several years ago and has since embraced a life of a marauder. Julia tends to steer clear of most ports, but the party may cross paths with her ship—The Sleeping Beauty—during their travels, particularly near the Sleepless Atoll. Notably, Julia's ship boasts superior speed compared to the party's vessel, and the characters cannot catch up with this vessel.
The party can reach Sleeping Beauty through various means:
 - a) If the party has earned a favorable reputation among the marauders, Julia's ship will no longer evade the player's airship.
 - b) Investing in custom improvements to enhance their ship's speed allows the party to catch up to Julia's vessel.
 - c) Should Butcher owe the party a favor, he can assist in trapping the Sleeping Beauty.

Julia remains steadfast and unwilling to negotiate; she would rather face death in combat than surrender. Her crew includes two harpies who disrupt the party by hurling grenades from above. If, during the battle, Julia is defeated, the harpies will disengage.

- **Miguel Farnese's Killer (Requires 4 reputation, only available if Juan Bautista is alive and held in the judge's prison):** Upon successfully completing at least three bounties, including the case of Juan Bautista, the party learns of the murder of Miguel Farnese—the judge who assigned their tasks. An intruder broke into Farnese's office to free Juan. The judge attempted to thwart the perpetrator, but he was defeated. Consequently, all future bounties will now be issued by a new judge. Miguel was killed by a blunderbuss shot from a very close range. One of the prisoners (it could be someone from the previous bounties) saw the attackers and heard their conversation. The party may convince them to speak up and learn that the perpetrators were planning to go “back to the ship.” In the port, a warship named the Deathwalker, owned by Bartolomé Bautista (Juan's brother) is docked. Both of the Bautista brothers are aboard the ship. The party can confront them, but if they delay, the Deathwalker will set sail. Bartolomé Bautista, a veteran pirate, poses a formidable challenge. His crew comprises four novice pirates and two more experienced ones. The Deathwalker, larger than the party's vessel, makes it highly unlikely for the party to defeat it if they meet under the open sky.

The party's chances may improve based on prior actions:

- a) If the Butcher owes the party a favor, they can enlist his help tracking and confronting Bartolomé's ship. If the favor has been exhausted, convincing the Butcher to assist will likely require a substantial payment.
 - b) If the party aided the merchant in Maria Manuela's case, he may reciprocate by ensuring that Bartolomé's crew receives tainted meat as provisions, reducing the number of his crew by half in the final battle.
- **Party Member (Requires 0 reputation, available only if a party member has been observed breaking the law in the town):** Should any party member gain notoriety as a lawbreaker, they must successfully complete a hard skill check each time they visit the Judge's office. Failure in this test results in immediate recognition, presenting the offender with two choices: surrender or engage against the judge. The party, as a tactical move, can potentially collect a bounty on one of its own members, assuming the judge remains unaware of the target's affiliation with the group. Should a party member willingly surrender, they find themselves confined in the cell beneath the judge's office. Severe offenses such as murder may incur the penalty of death, administered by being pushed from the cliff. Lesser transgressions, however, necessitate the payment of a fee. This fee must be, at a minimum, double the value of the relevant bounty reward.





CHAPTER 3: BENEATH THE CALM WATER SURFACE

This part of the campaign starts when the party arrives at Banewood Forest. There they are introduced by Elder Kril to Yv'anda dryads and Kutauri. The Banewood centaurs, emphasizing the importance of trust, challenge the characters to prove their allegiance by solving some of the problems plaguing the forest. Then after gaining some of their trust, they put the final challenge in front of the adventures—a series of mysterious deaths in the merfolk capital, Encura. Refusal halts negotiations. After arriving in Encura, characters begin their investigation. During it, they might uncover the truth behind the series of deaths, or come up with a valid explanation which would convince the locals. No matter what they choose, if the results are satisfactory they can come back to the centaurs to negotiate the truce with Dragsa.

Banewood Negotiations



The story starts the moment their airship tries to fly to the Banewood Forest. As it turns out it is impossible. A magical barrier prevents the ship from going further in, so they are forced to land on the forest edge.*

If they decide to go to this place right after the first chapter, Husis the Wise goes along with them on the airship. Then after landing asks the party to wait till next morning since he needs to warn denizens of the forest about their arrival.

The moment characters enter the forest, the moment the entrance to the forest disappears, the woods around them start to darken as if something was sucking out the sunlight around them. They also feel an eerie presence. Eyes of someone observing them. Or something.

Then an arrow hits the ground on their path and a low, female voice starts echoing around them, seemingly coming from every direction.

“Who transpases on the sacred land of Bane? Who dares to challenge us?”

If the party tries to explain themselves, they are shortly silenced by the same voice.

“There is no need for words. Show us your spirit”

Then without any future addo, the fighting starts.

Enemy composition for the fight with Yv’anda

NAME OF CREATURE	LEVEL 6-7	LEVEL 8-9	LEVEL 10-11	LEVEL 12-13
Yv’anda member	× 6	× 4	× 4	× 8
Yv’anda Armored Warrior	× 1	× 0	× 1	× 1
Ancient Dryad	× 0	× 1	× 1	× 1

Whenever someone is injured on their side, mysterious vines grow around them and drag them deeper into the forest.

At the end of the third round of battle, the Elder Kril shows up and stops the fights.

Read or paraphrase following text:

Husis the Wise comes in between dryads and your party, then creates a wall of thorny vines with his magic between you and Yv’anda. All the while shouting “Stop! This is not what we agreed on!”

At this sight, most of the dryads stop fighting and while sneering at Kril, starts to take away their injured. Only one stays—one looking as if her whole body was made of twisted vines with an aura of a very old being. She moves her face in the direction of the Kril and then starts talking. Though her lips are not moving and the voice is once again, coming from all directions.

“You told us that someone worthy of our trial is coming. So we challenged them. They passed the first trial. The spirits of warriors reside within their hearts. But...” she paused while moving her head slowly to face characters. “...their hearts are still a mystery to us. Words are cheap. Mortals do not value their promises. Not anymore... We talked with Kutauri leaders. They do not trust you either. But we shall give you a chance—walk in this forest. Walk with others and show us

*Check the page 58, the chapter “Banewood Asylum” for more information about the forest and places you can find in it.



your ways. If you truly want to walk with others, you can start with young Kutauri. Find Morua. Witness his story. We shall judge your deeds. We shall see what values you hold dear. These shall be your trials.” She ended her monologue and turned again to Husis. “Do not interfere.”

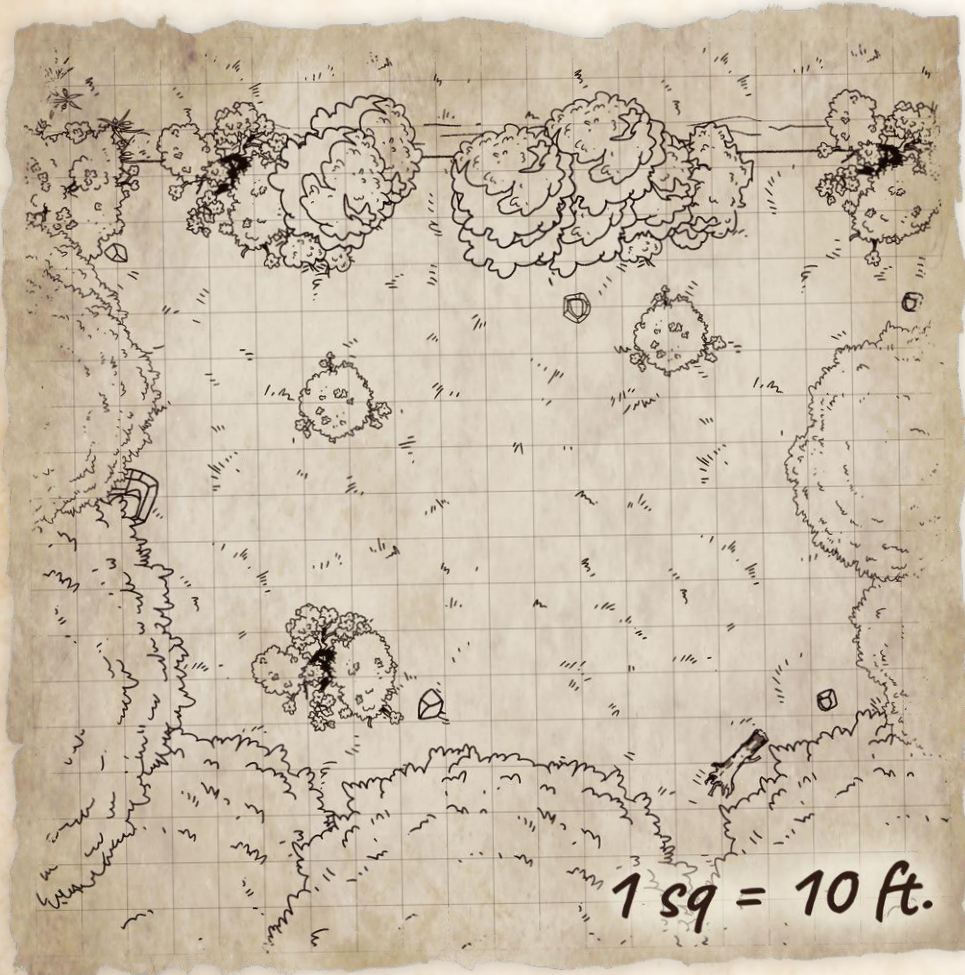
After that, the vines and branches which were making her, started to shrink and hide in the ground. The players are left in the middle of the forest knowing that their every action is watched.

During this chapter, the party will be gaining positive and negative reputation points. The inhabitants of the forest care less about the results of one’s actions, but more keenly watch one’s approach to doing it. Sometimes even saving the life of someone might be treated as disrespectful if it’s done while disregarding the spirits of their ancestors.

Each finished mission or resolved situation earns the party one reputation point. Having the above in mind, depending on the GM judgment they will be positive or negative ones.

If the characters amass 2 positive points, thanks to doing missions and helping forest inhabitants, they heard around them the voice of the Ancient Dryad. “It seems your roots are not as rotten as others. We have one more trial for you. Resolve the problem plaguing our neighboring sea people—as the Kutauri for details. Then we will think about your worth.” Her words echo in the forest, without any clear direction. After these words, the party can immediately go to the Encura or continue doing their deeds in the forest.

If at any point in the story of this chapter they amass 3 negative points, the moment they step into Banewood Forest, the Ancient Dryad voice echoes around them. Her words are calm but cold: “we do not want the likes of you in our home.” Then she uses her power to engulf the whole group in the vines and put them into a deep sleep. They wake up a few days later, at the edge of the forest—the same place where they left their airship.



*Yv'anda
First Trial*

Red Eyed Soldiers

This quest concerns the grim reality of the ongoing conflict between the Fortress of Dragsa and Harrat Wing. As Queen Anara has not given up on conquering the whole of Kallonia, her soldiers still try to find a way through the trees and into the heart of the forest. Harrat Wing, the military branch of Kutauri, stands between them and the protective border of the woods. Bloodthirsty and determined centaurs do not shy away from confrontations and consider themselves full fledged warriors only after their first kill in battle.

It follows a young Kutauri at the cusp of adulthood, as he tries to prove himself worthy of the title of a warrior and in the tradition of Harrat Wing—a Name. Morua has run away from his home at Bane's Glade and is trying to join the military group. He has found out the whereabouts of one of their outposts and intends to sneak in and join them in a skirmish against Dragsa's forces.

Adventurers might find themselves stumbling into this side-quest organically, during their journey to or through Banewood Asylum. If they decide to approach the forest from the southern border, be it on foot or in a flying ship, they should have a chance to spot relevant NPCs or take part in the events described below. This side-quest should also be available to take as a request from the Wishing Tree at Bane's Glade. The PCs might want to fulfill it to gain trust of Kutauri.

Quest Hooks

Choose one of the best fitting hooks for the story, which will also serve as the opening scene. Depending on the nature of your group, you can go through this quest peacefully, playing into the soft skills of your PCs, or engage in a mini-scale battle. After playing through the first scene, you might choose which major events the party will be a part of.

Soldier-boy

Adventurers encounter Morua at the southern border of the Banewood Asylum. The boy might find them as they camp for the night or he might be spotted by the PCs as they traverse the land. Either way, Morua is willing to trust them if there's no humans in their party. If one or more of the adventurers are human, persuading Morua to cooperate would either require trickery ("You should bring us to Harrat Wing as your prisoners!") or a DC 15 Persuasion check. If attacked, Morua would fight and then, upon realizing he's outclassed, try to flee.

If befriended, Morua:

- points the characters towards Bane's Glade, but warns them about the Ghosts that protect the woods and won't take kindly to unaccompanied intruders
- encourages the characters to join Harrat Wing with him and help put an end to the slavery
- shares stories of his warrior father, Wakamau Wrath of the Gods
- explains the custom of Name Giving

CAPTIVE

Adventurers spot a group of Dragsan soldiers, who have taken over an abandoned Kutauri outpost. From the encampment, they can hear shrill, desperate cries of a tortured young centaur. Morua has been captured by the enemy during his foolish quest to join the Harrat Wing. As the youth donned pieces of his father's armor and painted himself in the fashion of the winged warriors, the Dragsan soldiers took him as a member of Harrat Wing. He's being held captive and tortured for information.

Name Giving is one of the oldest customs of Kutauri—a rite of passage that both excites and scares all kids. Harrat Wing has put a dreadful spin on the tradition. Whereas at Bane's Glade a centaur has to have a passion, a mastery of a skill and a strong spirit, in the rigid structure of the militia, the rules differ. To earn a name a Kutauri has to kill a slaver. The more blood shed during the first battle, the mightier the name and prestige in Harrat Wing.

Example names: Devourer of Hearts, Widowmaker, Death's Scythe, Mighty Thunder, Swift Blade, Ironside, Red Hooves etc.

There are six soldiers in the camp. A successful DC 15 Perception check will allow the players to discern that it's just a smaller fraction of an usual unit, holed up and battered. Some of the soldiers are nursing rather gruesome injuries, but all are preparing for another altercation. There are two barrels of magically enchanted explosives in the camp.

Morua is tied to a wooden post, half-dead already. One of the soldiers is pressing hot iron into his sides, branding him with words such as: "beast", "slave" and "property of Dragsa". The young centaur does not have a high pain tolerance and has resolved to crying and begging for death. He doesn't know anything about Harrat Wing's plans.

If approached peacefully:

- the soldiers require a proof of trust or allegiance to the Queen; they're not initially hostile towards anyone who's not beastkin. Having a human in a party will help smooth things over.
- the soldiers are tired and their rations are running low; if the PCs decide to share their supplies they're allowed to stay until the leader of the Dragsan soldiers reaches them with the majority of their forces.
- the soldiers take turns torturing Morua; after enough mead and wine is shared, they'll offer the PCs a chance to "take their frustrations out" or "join the fun."
- the soldiers will attack if they get too suspicious of the PCs agenda.

If the players want to sneak in or otherwise deceive the soldiers, they might find out that:

- they're a part of a bigger unit that has been tasked with testing new batch of explosives, to see if the barrier protecting Baneswood would crumble.
- three nights ago they were in a skirmish with Harrat Wing, and this old outpost serves now as a infirmary and supply camp, when Captain Selvig with the majority of their forces hunts down the outnumbered Kutauri military.

If attacked, the soldiers will stubbornly fight till death. When they realize that they're losing, they will choose to detonate the explosives, to take out their enemies along with them.

Tactical Advantages and Disadvantages

The campsite is smartly hidden at the foot of a valley. Shrouded by trees and undergrowth on higher levels, it's hard to spot from above. There's only one wooden hut, built years ago and now in a rather poor state, that serves as a storage for goods more fragile to the exposure. Around it, soldiers have set up tents.

There are always at least two soldiers posted on the higher cliff ledges, watchful for any danger. They have an advantage when fighting long range. Anyone sneaking to the camp would have to either deal with them silently, or fall prey to their sharp eyes.

On this side of the valley, going up and down the cliff is extremely difficult and dangerous. Small landslides threaten the safety of the camp, yet at the same time keep it unreachable from three sides.

NOT ENOUGH HATE

Adventurers are either caught unaware by, or if their Perception is exceptional, notice a unit of warrior Kutauri stealthily moving through the area. If there's a human amongst the party, Harrat Wing will turn hostile—if there's not, they'll be ignored or when engaged, offhandedly brushed off. It's easy to notice that one of the Harrat Wing is injured and incapable of keeping up with the cohort. The young centaur lags behind, bleeding and having difficulties in catching his breath. None of his brethren seem to care.

Morua has already joined with the Harrat Wing unit and has been in his first skirmish. However, during the fighting he hesitated to kill a young Dragsan soldier. Overwhelmed with warring emotions, he didn't notice the danger he was in and an older Kutauri warrior sacrificed his own life to save him from a killing blow. The rest of the unit have seen how much of a coward Morua has proved to be and at best ignore him. At worst, wish him death.

If approached, Morua will:

- have a long-coming breakdown and tell the adventurers about his shattered dreams of following his father footsteps and living up to his legacy
- ask the adventurers to kill him or help him regain his honor of a warrior by killing the Dragsan soldiers
- promises to help the adventurers with whatever it is they wish to do, in return

Cold blooded revenge

Due to Morua's hesitation, an older Harrat Wing warrior Redd of the Swift Blade died. His lover, An-hei the Deadly is out for blood. She has dedicated her life to exterminating Dragsan soldiers and Redd was "the only good thing in her life". During her long years of service she has proven herself as an exceptional rogue.

An-hei will follow the party waiting for an opportunity to strike Morua. She's near impossible to reason with, but if the players manage to keep her at bay long enough for the young Kutauri to find and kill Dragsan soldiers, she might be persuaded to relent.

Events in the Story

The world around you is alive and doesn't stop for anyone. After playing through the initial scenes from the plot hook of your choosing, you might decide to move to another event in the story you're telling. The events described below might happen one after another, or you might simply pick one that feels right to push the narrative forward.

STORM OF THE DECADE

In this part of the story, a battle is soon to begin. There's very little time to prepare, but nonetheless, both sides of the conflict want to enhance their chances of winning. Adventurers are asked to set traps and kill as many of the enemies as they can, before the forces of Harrat Wing and Dragsa meet in battle. The weather turns for the worst.

The dark clouds seem to have blocked all the light from the world; hanging heavily in the sky like a malevolent shroud. The air grows thick with an oppressive stillness, as if the world itself was holding a breath in—waiting for the inevitable catastrophe. Tension grows in everyone, birds fall silent, animals seek shelter.

Then, a distant rumble, like a growl of some ancient titan waking up from its slumber.

The wind whips through the land in erratic gusts, sending shivers down your spine. Sand and grass and pebbles dance in frenzied spirals. The harshest storm of a century will mark this day, and will shape this battle.

The weather turns for the worst but both sides of the conflict want to use it to their advantage. Captain Selvig's troops strive to outmaneuver the Harrat Wing's unit, trying to cut them off from the forest. The Kutauri want to catch the soldiers unaware, run through their camp deadly and silently, turning the disadvantage of their smaller numbers into their biggest strength.

Guerrilla warfare

If the PCs want to earn either side's trust, they'll need to prove their worth. Both Harrat Wing and Dragsa's unit know that soon they'll meet in battle. Their forces have been dancing around each other for long enough. Though all the warriors are busy with preparations, outsiders might as well be sent to wreak havoc on the enemy's side. Who knows, perhaps a well placed trap changes the outcome of the battle?

If the players choose to help Harrat Wing:

- they'll be given: a set of 10 poisonous darts (1d4+2 damage), a poison kit, two hunting traps, a potion of healing and old pair of worn Gloves of Precision*
- Morua, if possible, will insist on coming along and helping to execute the plan

If the players choose to help Dragsa:

- they'll be given: two sets of three dynamite sticks (3d6 bludgeoning damage on failed DC 12 constitution saving throw; half on a successful one), a pair of Goggles of Owl, one potion of healing per person and a promise to be paid 50 gp per dead Kutauri

How many enemies are killed or injured will directly affect the result of the battle. If your players choose to participate in this part of the quest, make sure to write down the numbers of slain enemies or the damages to their infrastructure.

TILL YOUR LAST BREATH

In this part of the quest, the inevitable battle between Kutauri and Dragsa begins. The centaurs are outnumbered, two to one, by Dragsan soldiers, though they have the advantage of knowing the land and its capricious weather. Adventurers might partake in the skirmish or just observe.

And then, as if the very heavens wept in foreboding sorrow, the first drops of rain begin to fall. A bright light pierced the dark clouds, illuminating the world—caressing determined faces of Dragsans and Kutauri, death calmly waiting at their sides. The sound of rain intensified, changing from quiet sorrow to heart-stopping war drums. A thunder. A shout. It began.

There are 30 Dragsan soldiers, 25 of which were the reinforcements led by Captain Selvig. The remaining five are the soldiers from their hidden camp. If those were eliminated earlier by the adventurers or by the Kutauri from the "Not enough hate" scenario, subtract that number from the total of Dragsan's soldiers.

There are 16 Harrat Wing warriors, plus Morua (if relevant). If you choose to follow the 'Not enough hate' scenario, subtract 2 of Kutauri from the total number of their warriors. Those are the fallen or injured centaurs, who will not participate in the oncoming battle.

If the adventurers decided to partake in 'Storm of the decade' scenario and have set up traps, eliminated or injured a number of soldiers from either side, subtract that number from the relevant party.

*Look for these items in Additional Materials in the list of potential items.

Running a battle

Since making a fight with more than 40 characters is unrealistic in an RPG session the whole fight will happen in the background, while characters focus only on the troops directly in contact with them. Still, since both sides have an equal chance of winning here (Dragsans have the advantage of numbers while Harrat Wing are fighting on their own terrain) it will be the players' fight which determines the outcomes of the battle. Every damage they deal will mean enemies falling, while damage they take will translate into their side warriors falling down. Reference the table below to see how it works. Damage is rounded down.

Note down the damage on each side, then after each round of combat inform players about the current number on each side of the fight. Fight lasts till one of the side numbers drops to zero.

Battle outcome reference table

FOR EVERY	IF THEY TAKE HARRAT WING SIDE	IF THEY TAKE DRAGSANS SIDE
8 damage party takes	...dies one Harrat Wing warrior	...die two Dragsan soldiers
8 damage party deals	...die two Dragsan soldiers	...dies one Harrat Wing warrior

Enemy composition if party decide to fight with Harrat Wing

NAME OF CREATURE	LEVEL 6-7	LEVEL 8-9	LEVEL 10-11	LEVEL 12-13
Royal Guard	× 1	× 3	× 4	× 4
Royal Commander	× 1	× 1	× 1	× 1
Paladin of Order	× 0	× 1	× 2	× 4

Enemy composition if party decide to fight with Dragsa

NAME OF CREATURE	LEVEL 6-7	LEVEL 8-9	LEVEL 10-11	LEVEL 12-13
Harrat Hunter Warrior	× 1	× 2	× 1	× 2
Harrat Sharpshooter	× 1	× 1	× 1	× 2
Harrat Commander	× 0	× 0	× 1	× 1

Tips

When running the battle, take into consideration that Kutauri and Dragsan soldiers will not focus solely on our adventurers. Whereas PCs are definitely a considerable threat, they're not the main enemies of either side. Depict the battle in cinematic style. Every time a PC misses, you might describe it as a result of the distraction during battle. For example:

“Your blade almost reaches him, but at the last moment, someone pushes him out of your way. The rain obscures your vision, but soon you find your enemy snarling at you from the left.”

“As the arrow reaches you, you feel yourself slipping on the muddy ground. A Dragsan soldier, panting and bloodied, forces you to crawl back into yet another strike. You feel someone’s hand on your back, grabbing you and hauling you to your feet. “GET A GRIP!” a centaur shouts in your face and the world speeds up. You’re not dead yet.”

Instead of attacking as soldiers of either side individually, focus only on the warriors that are targeting your PCs. You can shift that number during the battle. Make it feel chaotic, flexible and alive. Describing the rest of the battle can wait for the end of the turn, when you determine who died.

THE HUNT

In this part of the story, our adventurers are offered items or coins in exchange for hunting down the leader of the enemies right after the battle takes place. There should be no long or short rest available to the players, should they decide to accept the offer. If the adventurers didn’t participate in battle and are fresh and ready to go, you might want to add more enemies to this encounter.

The air, one heavy with ozone and stifling, now smells only of petrichor and blood. As the battle dies down, so does the storm. The land glistens with droplets of water clinging to grass and leaves. Cold bodies sink in the mud, red mixing with brown and green. Sunlight falls on the battlefield, birds take flight. And yet, you feel hollow.

If the players choose to follow Captain Selvig:

- they don’t need to be good at tracking, but a Perception check of DC 15 will save them from running into two explosive traps (dynamite, d6 bludgeoning damage on failed DC 12 constitution saving throw; half on a successful one)
- Captain Selvig demands to die fighting, holding a sword in his hand
- if left to live, Captain Selvig might prove to be a good ally in Dragsa, as he’ll consider himself indebted to the players

If the players choose to follow Nohare, the Bloodied Hand:

- they’ll have to be fast, smart and good at tracking. Nohare knows the land as he knows himself, and is capable of hiding in plain sight. A successful Perception check of DC 17 can reveal his true hiding spot
- Nohare will try to lead the party into a trap by leaving a fake trail; a place where he knows Shambling Mounds nest. If players don’t realize what’s happening, they’ll have to face 1d4 of the monsters
- when caught, Nohare tries to bargain and buy himself as much time as possible; he tries to lead the players towards the border of Banewood Asylum to trigger a response from the Ghosts
- if spared, Nohare offers players passage through Banewood Asylum to Lake Froth or to Bane’s Glade

MOTHER’S LOVE

In this part of the side quest, Awinita, the Gentle Soul, comes looking for her son, Morua. She is desperate to find him—or what remains of him, and will welcome any help, even from humans. She is the first Kutauri that does not, inherently, hate humans.

At this juncture, the adventurers will need to decide whether they want to proceed to Lake Froth, where the leadership of Harrat Wing resides, or Bane’s Glade—Harass and Yv’anda’s, much more peaceful, domain.

If Morua is alive:

- she'll try to persuade him to return to Bane's Glade, something he doesn't want to do, either because of shame at his failure as a warrior, or because he still dreams of reaching his father's glory
- she'll argue with Nohare or any other Harrat Wing, that her son belongs to the Glade, not to their barbaric ways
- she'll try to offer the adventurers a reward for bringing her wayward child back with her

If Morua is dead or gravely injured:

- she'll offer the adventurers a reward for helping her bring her son back to the Glade
- she'll tell the adventurers where her late husband's blades have been hidden and share a story about his descend into cruelty

Wakamau's Story

“When he was Morua's age, Wakamau was such a charismatic and chivalrous young man. I didn't know if I wanted to be in a relationship with him, but he said that it's okay. We can just be friends. And for seven years we were. He trained to be a warrior, I trained to be a healer. We spent our free time walking the Glade and sharing quiet moments together. Then, one day when I was foraging in the forest, I heard screaming. Shambling Mounds sneaked too close to the Glade and attacked children playing in the forest. Wakamau was there to save them. Almost lost an arm to keep the kids safe. I tended to his wounds, and realized how much I loved him. (...)”

“He joined Harrat Wing to save beastkin. He never wanted to kill other people, just to save them. That all started to change, though. He was given a pair of blades—magical, he said. To make him quicker and stronger. And when he used them, he seemed almost like a god, as Medi himself. Fierce and unafraid and so sure of his might...”



“I told him I was with child but he didn't care about me anymore. Or the Glade, or the beastkin. He had only hatred and violence in his heart—no room for me or our son. He died with blades in his hands, but was not slain by a Dragsan soldier. I learned, later, that Harrat was ransacking a merchant caravan, looking for information. A girl, perhaps fifteen, stabbed him through the heart as my husband's blades were still slicing her father.”

“I found the girl's body. Her name was Mahogany. I never told my son the truth when I should have.”



Red Eyed Soldiers NPCs

MORUA

Morua is a young Kutauri at the cusp of adulthood. He was born at the Bane's Glade and has never known true slavery, only heard about it from the stories told by his elders and saw the repercussions of it in the dead eyes of the saved centaurs that settled at the glade. Morua's father—Wakamau, Wrath of the Gods—was a mighty warrior who had served in Harrat Wing and died shortly before Morua's birth. Now, his son wants to prove that he can follow in his footsteps and earn his own Name.

He's awfully young to be dressed in warrior's armor, to have war-paint smeared across his face and a weapon at his side. His eyes aren't hardened by death, yet. They're blue and wide, and they look at the world with fear concealed by foolish determination. His black fur isn't marred by dirt and blood; his legs tremble slightly, unused to such hardships. For a moment, you think of yourself, before the world fell apart. Were you ever this young? Who gave you your first weapon and took away the remnants of your innocence?

Roleplaying Morua

At his core, Morua is still an innocent youth, in the process of making the biggest mistake of his life. His heart is yet pure, unmarred by killing and he tends to have a very naive outlook on what being a warrior entails. He talks about justice and saving his fellow beastkin, but doesn't realize the dangers and hardships involved in becoming a part of Harrat Wing.

"I will save them all! One day there'll be no queen and no slaves and I'll help make it happen!"

"My father was one of the mightiest warriors of Harrat Wing and mother always says that he was the most chivalrous and generous Kutauri to ever exist! I'll be just like him!"

"Don't try to stop me! I know who I want to be and I'm not afraid of anything!"

CAPTAIN SELVIG

A man in his late forties, an experienced yet never overly ambitious in his career, Captain. He has a good rapport with his soldiers and takes good care of them. He'll eat and sleep alongside them. He is, however, deeply distrustful of outsiders. He would rather die a warrior's death than betray his Queen.

AN-HEI THE DEADLY

An-hei is a barely controlled ball of rage and hatred. Her life wasn't easy and her scarred, broken body is a testimony to her resilience. She was a slave freed by Harrat Wing and never set foot at the Glade. She has thrown herself into the whirlwind of revenge and only recently found solace in the arms of Redd. She's ferocious, impulsive and always angry.

REDD THE SWIFT BLADE

Quick as a lightning, Redd is a young Harrat Wing warrior, with quite a few accomplishments. He is head over hooves in love with An-hei, and acts as a besotted puppy around her. He is loyal and self-sacrificing, always caring for others first.

NOHARE, THE BLOODIED HAND

One of the leaders of Harrat Wing, he is emotionless and pragmatic. Always logical, calculated and cold, he inspires respect amongst his subordinates. He doesn't tolerate incompetence and oftentimes harshly punishes recklessness.

AWINITA, THE GENTLE SOUL

Calm as a winter's night, Awinita is a beautiful woman, with gentle disposition and innate grace. She is soft spoken, but passionate about peace and kindness. She's desperate to be reunited with her son and will do whatever it takes to get him back.

DRAGSAN SOLDIERS

Gledgif	Cheeky bastard, will always cheat you out of your coin in card games. Will take any bet he knows he can win.
Foh Tai	Quiet and thoughtful, a bit depressed. Misses his family and wants to finish his assignment and get back home.
Bert	Might have been hit on the head one time too many. As explosive in temperament as the dynamite he works with. Opinionated dunce.
Estee	Healer who doesn't give a shit anymore. He'll heal what needs to be healed, but his professional advice boils down to: don't waste my time.
Deverell	Simple, cheerful fella. Loves cooking and fusses about everyone like a mother-hen. Dreams of having his own farm and a herd of goats.
Tabal	Proper soldier, always doing everything by the book. Terrified of letting his supervisors down and not being able to climb the career ladder.

Encura Mysterious Deaths

The final trial of the party is a test of their wits and skill.

After hearing the Ancient Dryad words, the characters need to go meet with the Kutauri leaders—either Harass or Harrat Wing. There, they'll be given a chance to, once and for all, prove their loyalty and gain the support of Banewood Asylum inhabitants in the oncoming war with Chaos' Disciples.

They're informed that recently, Encura has stopped sending Harrat Wing information. Instead, after a few weeks of complete silence and no trade, the merfolk living there have sent a human messenger. The man, though he was not welcomed with respect, has managed to tell Red Lye, Harrat Wing's leader, that unless the murders are stopped and the murderer found and punished, they'll not reopen their trade and borders. Due to the tensions between Kutauri and merfolk, it was then requested that a third party should mediate and investigate, in order to keep objectivity.

The players will have to travel to the underwater city of Encura and solve the mysterious murders of Medusas. As a reward, they're promised:

- Kutauri's and Yv'andas will consider a truce with Dragsa due to the oncoming conflict with Disciples of Chaos.
- Magical Amulets.
- An opportunity to ask the Oldest Tree one question and have no knowledge kept from them.

Political Landscape

Due to Banewood Asylum's isolation, gathering information about merchant routes and movements of Dragsan soldiers is extremely difficult. With southern and eastern borders under harsh scrutiny, what knowledge the Kril can gain is very rarely enough to support Harrat Wing's operations. Therefore, Harrat Wing, out of necessity, started reaching out and bringing more beastkin into the fold. Encura has the easiest access to humans, and consequently, can gather more essential information.

UNDERWATER TROUBLE

Their arrival is foreshadowed by quiet, simmering rage. Usually, the Kutauri have a smile or good word to spare for the newcomers. But this morning, when the crisp, fresh air still lingers, it is as if all the kindness and hope were frozen in time. The eyes of the elderly are cold and even the plants Yv'anda cultivate with such dedication seem to be less green than usual. There's no children running underfoot, no mothers scolding them. Warriors gather in smaller groups, whispering words of doom. A human messenger from Encura arrived in the night.

When the PCs share a quiet moment, getting accustomed to the culture of beastkin, interrupt them with the untimely and hurried arrival of the Harrat Wing messenger. Read out:

A young Kutauri rushes to you, his cheeks red with cold and exertion. There's still a bit of childishness clinging to him, but it's easy to see his future as a skilled warrior. He doesn't waste your time and yells out, all bravado hiding barest tints of fear. "Newcomers! Red Lye has a task for you! Do not disappoint. Do not dawdle. Return victorious and you'll get what you're looking for." The young warrior drops a scroll at your feet and runs off.

"Travellers

A human messenger has been sent from Encura. They claim something is killing their kinsmen and are quick to point their fingers at us. The messenger is on his way back, track him down and resolve the issue in our favor. If questioned, present my seal to the merfolk. They will respect my word.

Return successful and you'll have secured our allegiance in your conflict.

Red Lye"

The human messenger Red Lye mentioned is One-Legged Banazir, a former pirate—now retired merchant and, when the situation calls for it, blazoner. If one of your players has an interesting backstory, this is a perfect moment to change Banazir to someone fitting from their past. Or, perhaps Banazir is simply another identity of a party member's family?

TRACKING BANAZIR

To successfully track Banazir's path back to Encura, the PCs need to succeed on a DC 14 Survival Check or enlist an amiable Hunter Kutauri to help. If the PCs decide to venture into the forest, yet fail the Survival check, as a consequence they might stumble upon Shambling Mounds or Owlbears. Don't be afraid to force the players to seek alternative options for this part of the adventure.

Banazir's Request

Once the adventurers find Banazir, read:

You stand face to face with a stout man, long past his prime. His wooden leg stands firmly on the ground as he braces for attack. You take a quick look at the scimitar in his hand and notice the small vibrations of the blade—it must be enchanted, then. Banazir expects a confrontation, that's for sure, and with a deep, husky voice asks: "Are we fighting or standing around like a virgin in a brothel?!"

Banazir doesn't really want to fight and if push comes to shove, will use a Scroll of Misty Step to run away from the party. He can, however be easily convinced that the PCs mean him no harm. He doesn't divulge any details of his current mission until the adventurers show him the message they've received from Red Lye or otherwise convince him of their legitimacy.

If the players question Banazir about the situation between Encura and Harrat Wing, they'll find out that:

- Officially Encura suspended all contact with Harrat Wing, until the issue of murdered Medusas is sufficiently dealt with.
- Unofficially, a young Medusa has claimed to have found a link between the murders and Harrat Wing. No one believed them until their body was found two days ago. It's too suspicious to ignore.
- Personally, Banazir doesn't trust Harrat Wing. If prompted to elaborate, he says: "I know what hatred does to us, people. If you dedicate your whole life to it, at some point... you lose everything else. Morality. Mercy. Your very own soul. And I think, at the end of the day, beastkin came from humans, didn't they?"
- If the party asks for help and are willing to pay for it, Banazir can get them safely to Encura and introduce them to his friend. Banazir deals with information and secrets only, the truthfulness of which he has means to verify.

TRAVELING TO ENCURA

If the PCs are traveling with Banazir's the journey is safe and relatively quick. Despite his wooden leg, the messenger doesn't fall behind—on the contrary, even in his advanced age, he's energetic and spry.

If the PCs decide not to confront Banazir and instead try to secretly follow in his footsteps, they need to succeed on a DC 14 Survival Check every day or risk losing the tracks.

Embracing the Water

If the PCs are traveling with Banazir, upon reaching the shore they're introduced to 'Little M', a young Medusa with a bit of a rebellious streak in them. They seem to have adopted Banazir as their new parental figure and prioritize his health and well-being in a feat of truly passive-aggressive care.

Read or paraphrase the following text:

"Old man!" You hear a shrill voice coming from between the harsh waves. "I see that you've managed not to die. What did you drag in here, though? Are they harassing you? How dare they! You're almost a centenarian, isn't it a crime against the gods to bother the dying?"

A young Medusa reveals his presence, his keen eyes sweeping over your group and swiftly returning to One-Legged Banazir. The youth seem to be looking for injuries or signs of distress. When he finds none, he scoffs and ruefully offers: "Suppose you want them to go underwater?"

Little M, though he had never told anyone his true name, is more than just a boy. Over the years he had learned to imitate the Water Embrace Ritual. If the PCs have something to trade—trinkets, coins or stories—M is willing to bend the Encurian law and hold the bacterized version of the ritual. It would allow the PCs to infiltrate the city and stay underwater for 1d20+3 hours. For additional fee, M offers to be the adventurers unofficial guide.

If the PCs are not traveling with Benazir, they can try and intercept the man at the meeting point with Little M. They can also look for an alternative way in, which with a successful DC 20 Investigation Check while diving, will allow them to spot a tunnel in the coral reef that Banazir used to get to Encura. A successful DC 12 Nature Check will allow the characters to spot a rare alga that, if consumed, grants people the ability to breathe underwater for 1d4+1 hours.

If the PCs fail at getting into Encura, the next day they are found by a squad of Medusa warriors sent to protect the shore and defend it against Harrat Wing—if necessary. When presented with Red Ly'e's signature, they take the adventurers to a nearby temple, where they can undergo a true Water Embracing Ritual and begin their work in a more official manner. Two warriors will be assigned to watch over them at all times*.

*Check the page 81, the subchapter “The Water Embrace Ritual” in the chapter “Encura”.

MURDER INVESTIGATION

The PCs can get the official records of the murdered Medusas in different ways. They can attempt to steal it, figure it out by talking to the locals or approach a warrior and introduce themselves as ambassadors of Harrat Wing, though with the last option they will need to have solid proof of that or deal with a particularly hard persuasion check.

Victim details: Balame

A middle-aged devoted follower of Selene O Nen, a mother and passionate traveler. While joyous fulfillment of her desires saw her visit every corner of Encura, she has never returned from her latest trip.

Her mangled corpse was found near the Dragontooth Memorial.

What people know:

- Balame loved to collect shells and turn them into jewelry, she was always wearing handmade earrings, necklaces and bracelets.
- Balame was curious and her dream was to write a comprehensive guide of Encura
- some uncharitable folk snipe about foolish beastkin traveling the seas alone in these turbulent times—her death was unavoidable.

Examining the body (Medicine DC 15 Check) or looking through official records:

- her body has numerous deep claw wounds, her throat was slashed open and some parts of her flesh eaten, with teeth marks indicating a beastkin rather than a creature.
- there's no jewelry on her body.
- no bag was found near her.

Clues:

- while investigating the Dragontooth Memorial a successful DC 13 Investigation Check allows to find a bag, hidden by the reef and decorative algae. Inside there's only old notebook that Balame used to write about her travels**.

**Check Additional Materials for the handout “Balame notebook last page.”

False lead:

- a jealous mistress of a lonely husband decided to take care of the problem and murdered Balame; the husband really has an affair, though the woman he sees is innocent of the alleged crime.

Victim details: Ahki

A Provider (Sholas), elderly and hard-working citizen of Encura. He had his own seaweed farm, which he tended to daily. His family noticed his absence after a missed gathering

His body was found near the Caverns of the Tainted Souls.

What people know:

- Ahki was a widower who was ready to mingle and supposedly found a new love .
- Ahki lived in relative isolation on his farm due to a rather unfortunate case of Marble Fingers; some more brave or drunk folk will spin a tale of a monster doing the farming for him.
- A ridiculous gossip spread by his sister-in-law, that his dearly departed wife took offence at his love life and returned to the world as a vengeful ghost to have her revenge.

Investigation or Medicine DC 15 Check:

- His body has numerous deep claw wounds, his throat was slashed through, but there is no missing flesh indicating cannibalism.
- Ahki indeed suffered from Marble Fingers, the white patches reaching his forearms, though they are overed by a curious mixture of rare algae and fungal paste—as if a homemade remedy was applied.
- there was a single shell placed on his chest.

Clues:

- if the adventurers investigate the algae farm and Ahki household, they'll find love letters between him and a lady called Nahima.
- there's evidence of someone tidying the interior of the house up after a fight; a good look reveals scratches in the walls, missing items and hastily repaired furniture.

False lead:

- a rumor has it that Ahki's sister-in-law wanted to get rid of him to inherit his farm.

Victim details: Urren

A young boy who claimed to see a Harrat Wing member dragging someone into underwater tunnels near the isle of Urmuz. A much-loved brother and son.

His crushed body was found drifting in the sea.

What people know:

- Urren was a lively, curious boy who often got into trouble and had a nasty habit of lying and exaggerating.
- He told his friends that one day he'll be the strongest warrior in the sea.
- He was an orphan, living with distant relatives and therefore not cared for properly. In fact, if they had taken more interest in the boy, such a tragedy would have never happened.
- His best friend is in hiding, afraid of being next on the kill list.

Investigation or Medicine DC 15 Check:

- His body was crushed between the waves and the rocks, indicating that he was killed somewhere near the shore and probably during a storm.
- it's hard to define his injuries, as his mangled body barely resembles a humanoid one.
- there was a shell pushed into his mouth, broken.

Clues:

- if the adventurers investigate the area near the isle of Urmuz, they could stumble upon Harrat Wing members watching the place or gathering algae if the weather permits it
- a plea for help from Urren's best friend—he seeks protection from nightmarish Kutauri who will surely want to hunt him down
- Urren's friend tells the adventurers about Urren discovering a secret tunnel; all one needs to do is follow the trace of blood in the water

False lead:

- The boy must have also been a victim of the same culprit; it's easy to lump him in with Ahki and Balame

How to run the investigation

Time is essential to solving the case. Behind the scenes, the Disciples of Chaos are raiding an ancient temple in search of magical artifact and Harrat Wing is cleaning out its prison deep under the isle of Urmuz; all the while the Voice Council considers completely cutting off Kutauri. If the characters decide to follow the wrong clue and arrive at a dead end, they might not be able to finish their task before its too late.

To make the investigation more dynamic, introduce false leads. The adventurers can find information in various ways, either through official or unofficial channels. Sometimes, though, what they find might not be advantageous. If a PC fails a roll, they might still find a lead—a false one. If the false lead is followed, make sure to introduce additional complications. Perhaps the sister-in-law has recently departed to visit a distant cousin, or the mistress and the husband absconded, god knows where, to elope? When enough time is spent investigating a dead end, introduce consequences, such as the Disciples of Chaos finding what they came from or another dead body being found.

The party shouldn't have enough time to investigate all leads. The time pressure set by the Voice Council or by the limitations to the adventurer's underwater breathing, should allow them to investigate thoroughly only one victim and simply glimpse at the information about the other two.*

The Widow and the Monster

During their investigation the party might decide to follow the clues to Nahima, an older Medusa who lives alone in a small, dilapidated abode, far away from the hustle and bustle. When the adventurers approach, read:

The skeletal remains of wooden ship, weathered and worn, form the foundation of this pitiful hut. Once vibrant and teeming with life, the dying coral reef paints a bittersweet picture around it. The light is on, fluorescent algae illuminating a small, hunched figure of a woman.

Nahima is wounded and afraid. Her son, Tahī, known to the others as the Creature, has gone mad with a disease unknown to her. She had tried to reason with him after she had learned of the murders and bodies found around Encura. To her utter dismay, Tahī truly turned into a monster and attacked her. Any party members that would like to interact with Nahima, need to approach her calmly and gently. She is in shock and will collapse due to stress if handled roughly.

Nahima:

- Knows where her son lives in the Cavern of Tainted Souls.
- Her son started changing a couple of weeks ago. Each day he grew more and more agitated until one day she couldn't find him in his usual spots. The next morning the first body was discovered.

*Check the page 76, the chapter "Encura" for more information about this place.

- Describes signs of Corruption when talking about Tahi.
- Will be thankful enough to the characters who offer her aid and healing to gift them with a necklace made of mermaid tears (beach glass)—the first and most precious present Tahi gave her. With it, the party will have a chance to avoid confrontation with the Creature.

The Cavern—Ruins of Old World

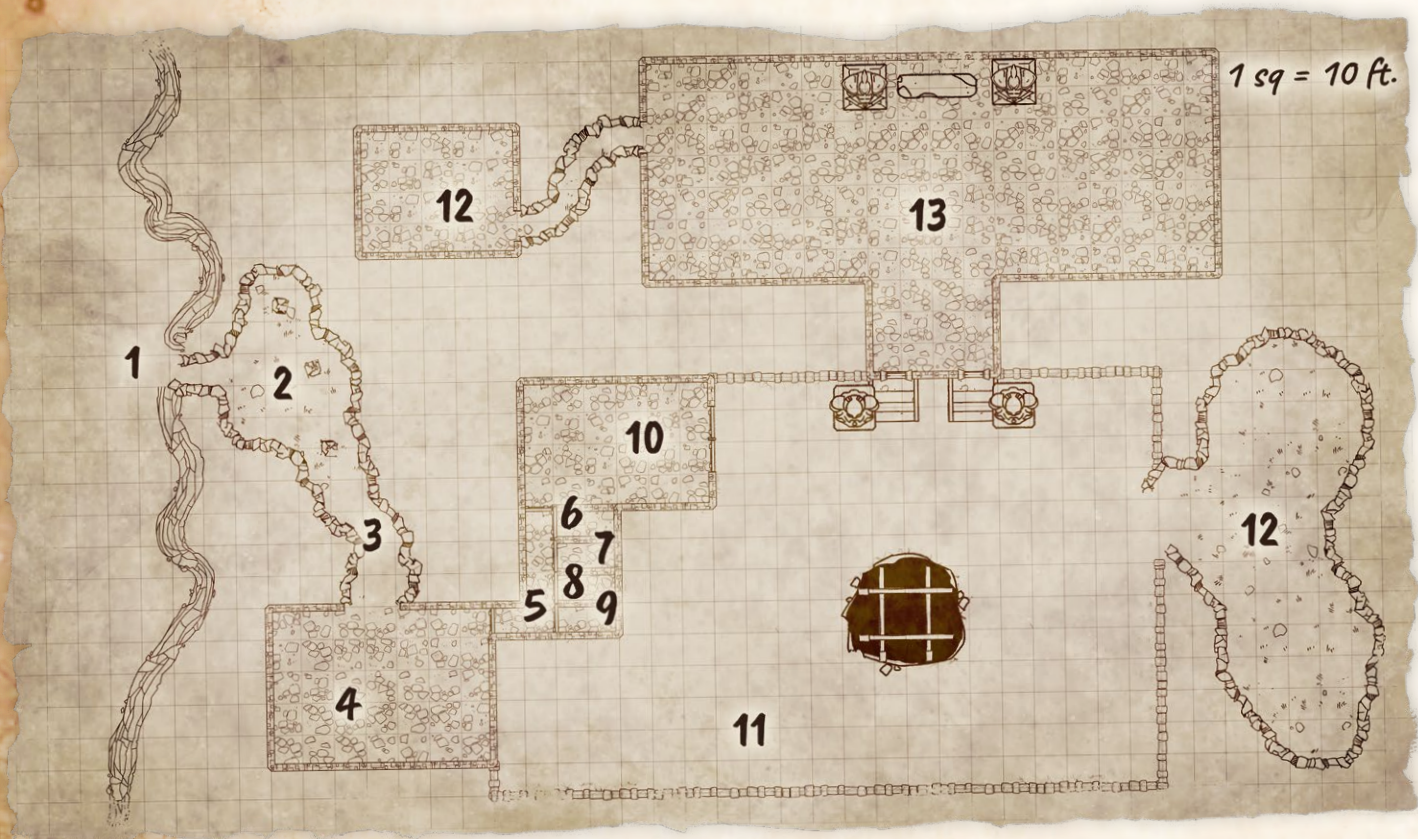
If the PCs choose to hunt for the Creature, they might track it to its lair in the Caverns of Tainted Souls. Doing so will require ingenuity and patience, for the monster lurks in the deep waters and will only emerge when lured out.

If one party members decides to act as bait, a successful DC 12 Deception check will provoke the Creature to engage.

If one party member is wearing the necklace from Nahima and approaches the Caverns of Tainted Souls, the Creature will reveal itself and beg for quick death in a rare show of clarity.

The Creature:

- Has been infected by the Corruption and is slowly dying in terrible pain.
- Acts out when scared or hurt, yet in it exhaustion, can't do much against any assailant.
- In choked out words and gestures explains what the Disciples of Chaos (though it doesn't know the name for them) are trying to do to its home.



Caverns of Tainted Souls

1. Hidden Entrance

One of the stones next to the cliff acts as a hidden entrance. Character searching for a way in or trying to spot something unusual can notice the marks left on the seabed by moving the rock. They ought to succeed on a DC 14 Perception Check. By lashing ropes around the top of the rock, the characters can try to topple it with a successful DC 19 Strength Check. A knock spell also causes the stone to topple over. The opening beneath the rock reveals a narrow entrance to the cave.

2. Humble Abode

After entering read or paraphrase following text:

At the first glance, the dim cavern has been turned to the best of someone's abilities, into a home. Amongst blankets and pillows you can see trinkets and toys as if this desolated place was inhabited by a child.

If characters wish to look through the belongings of the Creature.

D4	BELONGING OF THE CREATURE:
1	Pearl-Encrusted Bottle: A small, sealed bottle filled with seawater and adorned with precious pearls
2	Driftwood Dreamcatcher: Crafted from pieces of driftwood entwined with seaweed, this dreamcatcher is said to capture and dispel haunting dreams that trouble sailors' slumber.
3	Mermaid's Scale: A shimmering scale from a mythical mermaid, said to bring luck and protection to those who carry it.
4	Conch Shell Horn: A weathered conch shell that, when blown, produces a haunting melody that resonates through the depths, calling to creatures of the sea.

3. Secret Tunnel

To spot the secret tunnel, covered by algae and rocks, a character needs a successful DC 14 Perception check. If the party gets stuck at this point, when the drill breaches the door leading to area 13 the tremors would be enough to reveal it. However, by that time, the Disciples of Chaos would have made a lot of progress towards obtaining their goal.

4. Inner Hall

An empty, abandoned room once used as storage room. Now, full of memories devoured by time. It bears marks of the Creatures agony. Whatever was done to it—was done here. The foul smell of the Corruption stings the nostrils of more susceptible people.

5. Corridor

6. Dormitory

7. Dormitory

8. Dormitory

9. Dormitory

All dormitories look the same. A slab of rock that once served as a bed still remains there, but any furniture or personal belongings are long gone, lost to time.

10. Living space of acolytes

When this place was still in use, this was the space meant for the acolytes—to cook, to eat, to socialize. Now, it's occupied by two resting Disciples of Chaos. If the party members are stealthy, they might get away with quick assassination. The sounds of the drill and the rumble of upset Kraken will surely aid them in their mission. A failure, however, will alert the Disciples working in the Garden.

11. The Garden

- a) **The Well of the Kraken:** Trapped within the bowels of the well is a Kraken. Though it cannot escape its prison, his tentacles might prove deadly. The Disciples of Chaos are keeping it in check with their spells, but once released it will kill anything in reach.
- b) **Disciples of Chaos:** There are six Disciples of Chaos in the Garden, working on drilling through the door to the temple and dispelling the enchantments that strengthen them. It's a slow and tedious job, but nonetheless, they are focused on getting it done.
- c) **Temple Doors:** Massive double doors chiseled in stone. Two ancient mermaid warriors have been engraved on them; a woman wielding a flaming sword on the right wing; a blindfolded man holding a spear on the left wing. The doors are warded with glyphs of protection. The Disciples of Chaos do their best to weaken them and force the door to collapse.

12. Collapsed Outer Hall

A collapsed room that was the first chamber the Disciples of Chaos managed to dig through. It serves as their point of entry to Encura and also as a swift exit should they get what they came here to steal. Any reinforcements will also appear there.

13. The Temple

14. Hidden Treasury

Enemy composition for fight with Kraken

NAME OF CREATURE	LEVEL 6-7	LEVEL 8-9	LEVEL 10-11	LEVEL 12-13
Kraken's Tentacle	× 2	× 3	× 4	× 2
Young Kraken	× 1	× 1	× 1	× 0
Kraken	× 0	× 0	× 0	× 1
REINFORCEMENT				
Tentacle Regrowing	The Disciples of Chaos magic forcibly make it regrow one of the lost Kraken's Tentacle. It can be used only after one of the tentacles is destroyed.			

After finishing the last trial given by the Kutauri and Dryads, the party can enter the Banewood Forest once again. A Kutauri messenger greets them and says that he will lead them to the Oldest Tree but they need to first close their eyes. If they comply, they feel that their bodies are engulfed by the vines and plants around them and then lose consciousness.

When they regain it, they are in front of the Oldest Tree while around them, dryads are lurking behind trees, curiously observing them. On the nearby tree trunk there is a selection of magical items, as per their agreement*. Each character can ask one question and take one item.

Then the forest echoes with the voice of the Ancient Dryad for the last time. "We had seen enough. Your deeds speak loud. Your proposition will be given our attention. Now go your way." After these words vines start to engulf the party once again, repeating the earlier situation. They wake up a few days later, at the edge of the forest—the same place where they left their airship.

Note down the final score of their reputation points and whether or not they managed to resolve the situation with the ongoing murders in Encura.

*Check Additional Materials for the list of potential items or use ones from used system according to your judgment. Give them a selection of few different magical amulets.

Side Missions

FEY TROUBLE

There is ongoing tree felling in the south-east side of Banewood. Feys living there are not happy about it and started attacking humans.

Rewards:

The party can earn 1 positive or negative reputation point and earn a bit of money.

Siding with either of the sides is not automatically awarding either of the points—it all depends on how much party' actions line up with good morality.

When the party arrives they see a small hamlet with just a couple of wooden houses, and a nearby clearing where a group of lumberjacks are hacking down trees.

If they go to the lumberjacks, the party sees that they are unnaturally tense and constantly look around. They have a small hut, where they store the wood, but after checking it, the amount of wood is strangely small. After relevant skill check on easy difficulty, they can judge that this is something that would be expected to see after one day of cutting. When they ask the lumberjacks after initial suspicion and checking who they are, they open up a bit and say that it is because of the Fey. The party can learn from them that:

- They settled here almost a year ago.
- After the first winter, the Fey started to show up. While not hostile, they demanded a few times to leave this place.
- After constant refusals they stopped. But then wood started to disappear. Everyday their hut was empty.
- They tried to put guards on but they were found asleep the next morning no matter what they did.

Meanwhile in the hamlet they see that the houses are pretty new and villagers seem to be quite wealthy for their status. It looks like they settled here after earning enough money and pooling it together. A perfect place to start a new life outside of nobles' influence. The party can learn from the hamlet headman that:

- They want to live in peace and just sell wood for a living.
- Situation with the Fey had already escalated—they left them a note that if they do not leave, the next things which will be disappearing will be their kids.
- To deal with it, they sent for help from the capital, Fortress of Dragsa. Someone should arrive in two days.

The party can look for the Fey with magic detection or after succeeding a hard test of relevant skill, like survival, to track their presence. The Fey they find hide whenever they approach them, and at some point they arrive at a sunny glade surrounded by forest. In the middle there are two womens. One of them is a seemingly young lady sitting on a trunk and combing her white hair and leaning against a tree guard. She's clad in armor, from which the wings are sticking out. Without giving the party a chance to speak, she asks if the humans send them. In the talk, the party can learn from them:

They do not want to kill them, but if nothing else works, they will do it.

Humans' presence is endangering their existence. While one village is not a problem, they will serve as an example for others. They need a message for other humans to stop this flood.

Asked who they are, one of them says that if they need a name, in the past some called her “Queen of Fey”, though that title bears no meaning. Second lady in response says “if you call her a Queen then I would be a Knight.”

They do not agree with Dryad's stance toward humans. They are too soft and lack vision for the future.

The party can attack them now if they do not agree with their vision for the future, which is one of the ways to resolve this situation. Or they can get back to the hamlet and think of another solution. If they try to find this glade after leaving, they only find forest in place where it should be. But calling forth the Fey with non-hostile intentions will bring them the Knight out of hiding to negotiate with the party.

After trying to reach the hamlet, they arrive in the evening, but the inhabitants tell them that they were absent for two days. The help from the city arrived and are staying with the hamlet headman—they are a small army squad composed of humans and beastkin. They are led by a mage Gregori Bloodoak who came here to test his newest experimental concoction. Mixed with the water, it should make it poisonous to any Fey creatures but harmless to animals and people. He proposes that the party helps them with poisoning the water sources around this area.

At this point the party can resolve this situation in a several ways:

- Agree to help with poisoning. If they do, the weakened Fey will be enraged and attack the party in the middle of the forest.
- Disagree with this method. The mage is not understanding why they would do that as he perceives Fey as one would a regular vermin. It leads him to suspect the party to be either under influence of Fey or their spies so after trying to let their guard down, he launches a surprise attack on them. The fight between the party and them is pretty hectic as they do not bother with damage to the hamlet. This leads to most of the houses being destroyed due to started fires or ongoing spells and they leave this place.
- Trick the mage with medium difficulty relevant skill test, then persuade hamlet headman to seek coexistence with the Fey. If they agree to fake hamlet destruction and sever contact with the rest of the humans, the party is sure the forest inhabitants will help them survive. This solution will require heavy use of illusion spell, some persuasion of villagers and negotiation with the Fey (they can also help with illusions and tricking the mage). If at any point the mage starts suspecting something, they will attack the party with his squad.
- Present the Fey situation and raid the hamlet together. The mage will stand in the party way.
- Present the Fey situation and propose a duel between them and their representatives. If the party wins, they make Fey swear to leave this area.

Enemy composition for the fight with the Fey

NAME OF CREATURE	LEVEL 6-7	LEVEL 8-9	LEVEL 10-11	LEVEL 12-13
Stone Ward	× 2	× 1	× 0	× 2
Knight of Fey	× 0	× 1	× 1	× 0
Queen of Fey	× 0	× 0	× 1	× 1
REINFORCEMENT				
Stone Ambush	Just after one party member finishes their turn, from the ground below them a Stone Ward jumps out, splashing mud everywhere. They immediately start their turn.			

Enemy composition for the fight with the villagers

NAME OF CREATURE	LEVEL 6-7	LEVEL 8-9	LEVEL 10-11	LEVEL 12-13
Royal Guard	× 2	× 2	× 1	× 3
Magic Smith	× 1	× 1	× 1	× 1
Morgu	× 0	× 1	× 1	× 1
Tu'ur	× 0	× 0	× 1	× 1
REINFORCEMENT				
Calling backup	If the situation seems dire, and at least one Royal Guard was killed in action, they are calling the back up in the form of two more Royal Guards.			



BEACH PROBLEM

Kutauri and Encurans going to the seaside to catch some fish have recently been attacked by Husk Hermits. Deal with them.

Rewards:

The party can earn 1 positive reputation point and some items.

Mission is pretty simple. Characters need to walk around the sea side of either Banewood or Encura, find the Husk Hermits and execute them. They need to fight two groups of them. To find one group they need to walk for around an hour and then successfully pass a relevant skill test, like survival on medium difficulty. If the character attempting it fails, they need to walk another two hours then attempt another test.

Each Husk Hermit is carrying armor and weapons on their shells. While they are in pretty poor condition, each Hermit is carrying stuff worth between 50 to 100 sp.

Enemy composition for one group of Husk Hermits

NAME OF CREATURE	LEVEL 6-7	LEVEL 8-9	LEVEL 10-11	LEVEL 12-13
Husk Hermit	× 2	× 3	× 4	× 4
REINFORCEMENT				
Attracting the birds	All the noises and smell of fresh blood attracts four Sea Harpies. They fly to the characters and start to attack them during the fights.			



WANDERING INN

Find the truth and approach the problem of one of the rare humans willing to live in this place in a peaceful manner.

Requirements:

Wander into the woods on the side of Banewood closer to the Woodhaven, where some human activity fights its right for the forest with Kutauri.

Rewards:

If the characters deal with this situation without the death of the innkeeper, they gain one positive reputation point.

As the moonlight filters through the dense canopy overhead, your party weaves through the ancient trees of the forest. The air grows cooler, and the subtle rustling of leaves is occasionally interrupted by the distant howls of nocturnal creatures. Just when it seems the journey through the woods will stretch on indefinitely, you spot a dim glow in the distance.

As you draw closer, a quaint inn emerges from the shadows. The flickering light from within spills out into the surrounding darkness, promising warmth and respite. It's the perfect opportunity for a brief respite or perhaps an overnight stay.

Upon entering the inn, you find it eerily quiet. The only occupants seem to be the innkeeper, a burly figure with a graying beard, and three individuals who look like weary travelers. One of them sprawls across a table, snoring loudly, while the other two sit hunched over almost-empty tankards.

Should any of your heroes approach the trio, they abruptly stand, casting wary glances at your party. Without uttering a word, they lift the snoring companion and shuffle toward the creaking staircase leading to the upper rooms.

The innkeeper, wiping a glass with a rag, eyes your group. "Late hour, but I've got beer, bread, and cheese if you're interested," he offers, his voice low and gruff.

Should your party decide to engage in conversation, the innkeeper leans in, a mysterious glint in his eye. "Let me share a tale that's been buzzing in these parts lately. A traveler stumbled into this very tavern not long ago. Breathless and pale, he spun a yarn about being attacked by creatures that looked human, but were covered in fur, had claw-like nails, and could rival those of the dragon."

His gaze darts around the emptying room, as if expecting eavesdroppers. "He lost his horse in the fray and sought refuge here for the night. I provided him a room, but come morning, he was gone—vanished through a wide-open window, leaving behind his bag. Might be these damn tree people. But rumors of some creatures have been spreading. No one has laid eyes on them or the missing traveler since. I hope you don't find any dangerous creatures on the way. But be aware."

As the night wears on, the innkeeper announces the closing of the inn. The party faces a choice—with limited rooms available, at least one hero must spend the night in the cramped stables. If possible, the group should split into two parts to make do with the available space.

The innkeeper eyes your party once more, a silent expectation hanging in the air. It's time to decide who will brave the night in the stables, surrounded by the mysterious sounds of the forest and the unsettling tale of the traveler who disappeared without a trace.

Room:

As the night deepens, the flickering light of a lone candle casts dancing shadows on the walls, and the creaks and groans of the old building echo through the halls.

Suddenly, a faint click resounds through the quietude as the innkeeper methodically locks the doors to the rooms. In the stillness of the night, a character who has yet to succumb to sleep or possesses particularly acute hearing may discern the soft click of a key being turned in their door lock. The party, now confined to their room, begins to feel a sense of unease.

If they react swiftly and attempt to confront the intruder, they'll hear the innkeeper's calm voice resonate through the wooden door, "It is for your own safety," before he withdraws, leaving no room for further explanation.

As the night progresses, those who try to leave their rooms, or stay awake will witness through the window.

The moonlight bathes the scene in an eerie glow, revealing the innkeeper's figure disappearing into the same shadowy woods that conceal the secrets of the creatures from the tale.

The party is left to navigate the enigma surrounding the locked doors, the innkeeper's cryptic actions, and the mysterious occurrences in the forest. The night wears on, and the truth remains elusive, hidden behind locked doors and veiled by the darkness of the woodland beyond the inn's windows.

Stable:

As the night unfolds, the characters find themselves in a stable, surrounded by the soft rustling of leaves and the mysterious sounds of the nocturnal forest. The makeshift beds of hay and straw offer little comfort during a restless night.

In the quiet darkness, the characters are roused from their slumber by the subtle creaking of the stable door. Someone is moving nearby. If they choose to investigate, they'll catch sight of the innkeeper slipping out into the night, a large bag slung over his shoulder.

The party faces a critical decision: follow the innkeeper into the depths of the forest or remain in the stable. If curiosity compels them to trail the innkeeper, they tread silently through the moonlit woods until they arrive at a secluded clearing.

In the clearing, the innkeeper unpacks the mysterious bag, revealing raw meat. The characters watch in suspense as he arranges the meat on a weathered trunk. From the shadows emerges a humanoid figure covered in hair, mirroring the description from the innkeeper's tale. The creature devours the meat and retreats into the darkness.

If the characters choose to remain hidden, the night continues without incident. The mysterious scene unfolds, and they witness the creature's presence but avoid unnecessary confrontation.

However, if the characters disrupt the tranquility of the moment—by making noise, showing themselves, or spreading rumors—the peaceful tableau shatters. A massive creature, the Bear from the Deep, bursts forth, attacking the innkeeper before turning its attention to the characters. Chaos ensues as they grapple with the enraged beast under the moonlight. The innkeeper attacked by the bear's lost too much blood, leaving the characters to face the consequences of their actions.

If no one will act then the Bear from the Deep retreats into the shadows once more, leaving the party in a clearing filled with the echoes of the night's events, the truth hidden in the heart of the forest now laid bare.

GREY MOUNTAINS

This short side quest focuses on monster-hunting and exploration of the Kril culture. Adventures might discover that sometimes, an ambush isn't the worst thing that can happen.

Requirements:

Travel inside the Banewood forest eastern side, near Trunkatop Mountains. This quest might also be picked up at Bane's Glade, at the Wishing Tree.

Rewards:

The party can earn 1 positive or negative reputation point and some items or money.

If the characters help the Kril they gain one positive reputation point. If they somehow use the gained debt from the Krils in an unfair manner or steal from them they gain one negative reputation point. If they additionally kill the Kril they gain one more negative reputation point.

A group of Kril traveling from Woodhaven to Lake Froth, rather foolishly underestimated the harsh weather conditions of Trunkatop Mountains. Their caravan's horse broke its leg, and they're temporarily stranded. They shield their impromptu campsite with carefully woven illusions, but it might not be enough to keep the predators at bay.

The Kril might be a source of information and a foothold in Banewood Asylum, or they can be regarded as an easy target with much needed, expensive goods.

Illusion of Greatness

If your PCs are traipsing through the treacherous mountains, those with Wisdom modifier lower than +1, are the ones most likely to be ensnared by insidious illusions. Ask them discreetly to roll a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw. On a fail, read:

"Just as you're about to take another step, something tingles at the back of your head. You look around, trying to figure out what's happening. The world around you looks the same, the rocks underneath your boots are still treacherous and wet from the storm. The sky's still blue. And yet, something tells you not to take another step. That there's some unidentifiable but terrifying danger up ahead. Is that a footprint of a beast? Isn't this blood, there on the boulder? You feel lightheaded, perhaps it's the air here, that's dangerous? Can you smell poison? You feel like you're being watched. Before you know it, you turn around. Step by step, as far away from this place as you can."

Characters affected by the illusion tend towards paranoia. Something is out there and it wants to get all of you. The best course of action would be to turn around and find a different path through the mountains. A successful DC 14 Wisdom saving throw allows the PCs to regain their sharpness of mind and see through the illusions.

Three Kril have taken refuge amongst the mountain ledges, on a long and twisting path. A dead horse and an empty cart are obscured by another illusion—of a boulder. Yet another, hides an impromptu made trap of sharpened sticks (1d4 piercing damage).

If the party approaches the Kril peacefully:

- they are first treated with suspicion, but upon proving their relationship to the Elder Kril or showing honesty, they're tentatively welcomed
- Do, Re and Mi explain that they are merchants getting back to Lake Forth from Woodheaven. Their horse broke its leg and had to be put down. Fa, their eldest brother, went to get help, but hasn't returned yet.
- Do, Re and Mi refuse to get down from the ledges, afraid of monsters that hunt in these regions.

If the party wants to fight the Kril, use statistics from the bestiary. Additionally, they are carrying scrolls with one time use spells:

- Do, Re and Mi each have a Scroll of Expeditious Retreat, they'll flee at the first sign of violence, carrying as much of their goods as they can.
- Each of them has one scroll with a non-damaging spell of 1st level.

The Kril are proficient at using magic and the environment to their benefit. On their home turf, they have advantage on Dexterity checks and Perception checks.

Beware of monsters!

Attracted by the fresh scent of blood of the dead horse, a stray Troll and Basilisk came to this place. At first it seemed that they would jump on each other and start fighting... but they quickly turned again toward the dead horse. While sharpening their teeth, they are fully prepared to hunt everyone on the trail. Players can stay completely still and slow their heartbeat to remain undetected.

A successful DC 13 Perception check allows the adventurers to spot the monster before they attack. Players can loot a pair of Basilisk's eyes, a valuable potion ingredient, from dead Basilisk and then trade them at Bane's Glade.

If saved from the monsters, Do, Re and Mi are willing to share some of their wares with the adventurers. Each PC can choose one item they had in stock while traveling, below the 25 gp worth.*

If they steal or kill them, they gain items collectively worth 250 gp.

*Check Additional Materials for the list of potential items or use ones from used system according to your judgment.





CHAPTER 4: PUTTING THE HUMANS ON ICE

In this chapter our brave adventurers will end up in the middle of a delicate political conflict that sends them to the bowels of the mountain in a wild-goose chase. A tragic story is ready for them to uncover along the treasures buried deep underground. Queen's Talmani love story reveals itself to be a mere ruse with a bitter and deadly ending. As the adventurers use the Astral Crystals to arrive to Hyste Talma, they are met with a fractured alliance. It is as clear as a day that something needs to be done in order to gather necessary forces to fight against Chaos. When Tidor, a famous leader amongst the dwarves, succumbs to the corruption of the enemy, there's no more time left for arguing and politicking. The adventurers will have to, once again, risk their lives for the greater good. Will they succeed and stop Tidor from attaining one of the artifacts capable of changing the results of the incoming war? Or will they fail?

Arriving in Hyste Talma

Deep within the mountains of Hyste Talma lies a secret guarded diligently by time. A truth that, once uncovered, can shake the foundations of the oldest alliance in Kallonia. There, underneath the rubble and hidden by shadows, Queen Talmani buried her greatest shame. There, slowly, quietly, insidiously, Chaos begins to take root.

Hyste Talma is an isolated city, situated deep within the Herenyakal mountain range. While there are hidden outdoor entrances, they are traditionally used only by Din Huine—Vindu huntresses and assassins. The only way for an outsider to get in is either by using the Crystals, or by having already befriended a citizen of Hyste Talma.

When the adventurers feel ready, they can use the crystals given to them by the Elder Kril and teleport to Hyste Talma.

The Astral Crystals

Elder Kril has granted the adventurers rare Crystals used by his kinsmen in prayer. In his instruction, he described that they are magical items that allow their users to cast out their astral projection and travel long distances into predetermined destinations. Since reaching Hyste Talma is almost impossible for outsiders, and the journey alone can take months of struggling through frozen tundra, the adventurers might want to use the Crystals instead.

Upon placing the Crystals on their foreheads, the Kril fall into a trance that could pass for falling asleep or losing consciousness. Their souls, guided by the magic embedded in the items, are cast out to Hyste Talma, and placed in the pre-prepared 'temporary bodies'. If your players are into body-horror themes, you can lean into the description of the otherness or the uncanny valley feelings that inhabiting a different body might cause.

Though the 'temporary bodies' try to magically adjust to the character image of themselves in their head, there are bound to be discrepancies. The bodies are not identical copies and in fact, they once belonged to other members of Redoe Alliance who used them in similar ways—they can still bear some marks they left on them. The same goes for the equipment that the adventurers might wish to have with them.

RULES OF TRAVELING THROUGH ASTRAL CRYSTALS:

- You can eat and drink in your new bodies, but that nourishment will not translate to your real bodies. Therefore, the maximum amount of time one can spend in an astral form is around three to four days if the original bodies are well looked after.
- The longer one spends in astral projection, the more exhausted they are upon their return. For every day spent traveling, a character takes one point of exhaustion after waking up.
- If you are hurt in your 'temporary body', your very soul shares the burden of pain and injuries. If your new body dies, you die with it.
- Astral Crystals are extremely rare and only the Kril know how to enchant them. Though expensive and protected by Baneswood's inhabitants, those crystals have been used to communicate with the Redoe Alliance more and more in recent times.

Chaotic Entrance

When the adventurers use their crystals to get to Hyste Talma, read:

An unsettling feeling tugs at your stomach, as if an invisible force tried to squeeze your insides until your last breath. Magic surges around you and you have to close your eyes due to the intensity of the sudden light. The crystals on your foreheads' heats up, the temperature just on the side of bearable.

Your ears pop at the pressure change. Your feet touch the cold, obsidian floor. For three more seconds you can't catch a breath, but eventually the confusion clears and you hear raised voices.

The adventurers arrive in the middle of the city, in one of the guest rooms for the council members. In the room there is also a small selection of basic weapons to choose from. They can walk a bit in the city or go directly to the council meeting. When they arrive, they happen to show up in the middle of the Redoe Alliance council meeting, where a heated discussion between all of the factions threatens to topple the whole organization and render all PCs' efforts irrelevant. Representatives of the Knights of Tidor, the Knights of Ruth, Kril, Yv'anda, Kutauri and Din Huine, as well as unaffiliated politicians, are locked in a shouting match over the matter of Chaos resurfacing.

Paraphrase or read out the following text:

Your attention immediately moves to the source of the raised voices. The hall you landed in is big enough to house hundreds of people, but for now it's occupied by merely a dozen luxuriously dressed individuals. Each of them seated at a high table, each frustrated at the shouting match happening. As their voices echo throughout the otherwise empty chamber, you turn to the person you landed by—Elder Kril is there, out of his seat and sending you a knowing smile. Looking closely at his body, you recognize the puppet's joints on his arms and hands—he must have used the same way as you to get here.

THE COUNCIL MEETING

Make sure to introduce the Council in a chaotic, unfavorable light. These people, renowned for their knowledge and power, have reduced themselves to common idiots. They shout over each other and if the argument gets too heated, will not stop themselves from starting physical altercations. The adventurers untimely arrival doesn't register for most of the members of the council—only the Kril and those around him notice it.

Players are welcome to use the chaos as an advantage to gather intelligence, although the Elder Kril is willing to explain the basic concept of Redoe Alliance, its inner workings and their ideals if need be. A successful roll will allow your adventurers to gather the basic information about each participant. DC 14 Insight (Wisdom) check to figure out the allegiance and motives and DC 18 History (Intelligence) check to see if you have heard anything about a chosen person beforehand.

TIDOR'S OUTBURST

The adventures are welcome to try and persuade the Council to make a decision, however dealing with politicians is never straightforward. If your player's characters have any relevant background stories that you would love to explore, using the councilman of Redoe Alliance for extra quests and plotlines is an excellent occasion to sow even more chaos.

Council members

FACTION	REPRESENTATIVE	BELIEF	QUOTES
Din Huine	Ahnim, an older woman, yet still spry and deadly. Proudly wears a dress made out of Yeti's fur.	Dethroning Queen Anara is the most pressing issue. Chaos must not have time to tempt the Queen into its service.	"You all know our price! We'll gladly kill her if you agree to open the Tombs of Underdome!"
The Knights of Ruth	Fondrol Goldenjaw, a middle-aged knight with long, blonde beard. His armor shines in the pale light of the cave.	Will follow the lead of the Ruler of Hyste Talma—who is neutral on the matter and instead wants to focus on hunting down monsters lurking near Hyste Talma.	"The matters of others are not for us to weigh in on. First, we need to fix Hyste Talma, then we can venture to fix the world!"
The Knights of Tidor	Tidor the Mountain, a folk-hero, now diminished. Looks like death warmed up, with purple discoloration around his eyes and fingernails.	Immediate and absolute annihilation of the Fortress of Dragsa, through any means necessary.	"I WILL NOT STAND FOR THIS! I HAVE SWORN TO KILL DRAGSAN SCUM AND I SHALL DO IT!"
Kril	Elder Kril, ancient and wise. Friendly towards the adventurers, yet with not much hope to spare at the moment.	Stopping Chaos from wreaking havoc on the world is the most important thing. Nothing else can compare. Every faction should mobilize troops immediately. Battle plans need to be drawn and provisions prepared.	"It is in our humble opinion, my passionate friends, that we should focus on what the Order wants to tell us. Close your eyes and listen with your souls. The world is out of order. Chaos is approaching. We must prepare."
Yv'anda	Yv'tesarian, young apprentice to the ancient Yv'andas of Banewood Asylum. Inexperienced and lost in the chaos of the meeting.	Everyone should stop arguing and start working together, otherwise nothing will get done. Compromise is the name of the game!	"I—if I may—? I, uhm, yes thank you sir that is a very good point to make but... Ah. Uhm. I—"
Harrat Wing and Kutura	Waitiki the Earthquake, representative of both Bane's Glade and Harrat Wing. A mighty warrior with a clear goal in mind and a no-nonsense approach to life. Quickly losing patience with this farce.	Freeing beastkin is essential to facing both Anara and Chaos. The best course of action would be to set both of the enemies against each other and then kill the victor.	"You utter fools, you wouldn't see sense if it spit in your faces! Our enemies could be set against each other, do the leg work for us! Stop your childish squabbling at once!"
No affiliation	Thronwida Brewbender, an older merchant from the Middle Circle of Hyste Talma, tiefling. Impatient and infuriated by lack of professionalism. She twitches in her seat and is wary of Tidor.	She believes that the Redoe Alliance should come clean and inform citizens of Hyste Talma about the conflict with Chaos itself. The organization cannot work properly without complete transparency and trust.	"My Lords, as enlightening as listening to your arguments is, I believe we shouldn't be making this decision alone. People of Hyste Talma—people of Kallonia, have a right to know about the brewing conflict. They should be the ones to decide what to do and how to do it."

Regardless of any additional dealings between the PCs and NPCs, the council meeting ends with Tidor's sudden outburst. When you feel like the scene needs to move forward or—to the contrary—is just getting heated and the adventurers are about to get what they want or glimpse at some hidden knowledge, read:

You are interrupted by a loud bang, as Tidor suddenly stands up, his chair pushed to the ground. His eyes took on a slightly purplish hue, his hands are clenched at his sides and it seems like his anger is not merely an emotion, but a physical thing, a pain deep in his chest that twists his features into a fearsome caricature of a dwarf.

“You dare deem ME incompetent?! I have done more for this alliance than any single one of you! I have killed for you! I have freed beastkin for you!” Tidor shouts, splitting from his mouth”. “FINE! I will deal with Chaos the same way I’ve dealt with Dragsans. I don’t need your permission to do the right thing!”

Just as the various members of the council rise from their seats to oppose his words, Tidor whistles loudly—a beast you’ve never seen before, saddled but no less wild due to it, emerges from the shadows. No one dares to stop Tidor from leaving.

Tidor's outburst and subsequent departure puts a stop to the council's meeting. Though adjourning it doesn't sit well with some of the members and many leave unsatisfied, there's nothing to be done. No decision on what to do with Disciples of Chaos and Dragsa shall be reached that day.

Elder Kril is the one to take you under his wing. He leads you outside of the grandiose hall and into the streets of the Inner Circle. At this juncture, Kril informs the adventurers there's nothing much one can do but wait. A successful DC 14 Insight (Wisdom) check reveals how tense he is and that he definitely suspects that something major will happen, soon. He is, however, unwilling to part even with his speculations. Instead, he guides the adventurers out of the Inner Circle, up to the Middle Layer, where they can stay.

*As adventurers came here without their real bodies, they also do not possess any money. But the owner agrees to withhold paying till they will be leaving.

Elder Kril has taken temporary residence at Hilda's Boarding House in the Residential District, right next to the infamous Matchmaker's Market. The adventurers will be able to rent rooms at Hilda's for 9 sp per night per person, or 15 sp with meals. Of course, if they'd rather explore and stay somewhere else, they're welcome to do so. In this case Elder Kril will provide them with a small stone necklace that will heat up when the Elder wants to contact them or locate them.*

Elder Kril will provide the adventurers with the documentation needed to legalize their stay in Hyste Talma.

Exploring Hyste Talma

**Check the page 128, the chapter “The Kingdom of Hyste Talma” for descriptions of the city and its culture.

If your players decide to explore Hyste Talma**, there's plenty of wonders to occupy their time with. The Outer Layer is the easiest to explore and the most open to visitors from the outside. The Middle Layer is much more hermetic when it comes to its inhabitants, though it's not as inaccessible as the Inner Circle—to which only Elder Kril or other members of the council can take the PCs.

THE TEMPLE OF BROKEN TRUST

After two or three days spent in Hyste Talma, Elder Kril contacts the adventurers in the middle of the night, with an urgent matter. He seems shaken—and for the first time since

they've met him, torn between hope and fear. He explains that Tidor has gathered his troops and went to the Underdome—a sealed off section of Hyste Talma that stretches deep under the Inner Circle.

Elder Kril knows that:

- the only structure build in the Underdome is The Temple of Broken Trust and according to the legends it was sealed off right after its construction was finished.
- Tidor is certain that an artifact that could help him fight Disciples of Chaos and Dragsa lies at the Temple.
- Chaos Disciples have been spotted in the wilderness surrounding Hyste Talma.
- Hilda's husband, Hangred, is very passionate about the hidden history of Hyste Talma and has studied the Underdome and the Temple.

Whatever is happening, no member of the Redoe Alliance wants to get involved—at least not officially. Tidor is still a very strong political figure and even though he's breaking the law, his order of Knights is a force to be reckoned with. A civil war is the last thing that the council members need. Elder Kril volunteered the adventurers to go into the Underdome and get to the artifact before Tidor or Chaos Disciples gets it.



Hangred's Research

If the players decide to gather information before going after Tidor and his men, they can find Hangred in his office at Hilda's Boarding House. Hangred doesn't need to be asked twice to tell the adventurers the true story behind Hyste Talma^{***}. During his life he had treated the subject as a hobby and by chance, a true rarity has fallen into his hands. Hangred has a copy of Queen Talmani's diary.

Hangred shares that:

- Talmani has never learned to love her husband and kept appearances for the sake of the people of Hyste Talma. She had nothing kind to say about her dwarvish spouse and instead listed his flaws, most notable amongst them his possessiveness and ferocity in affection.
- The Queen has had three notable affairs, all of which ended poorly.
- After her last romance King Germund went on a quest to bring Talmani the most beautiful sculptured stone flower. The next half a century after his return was peaceful and prosperous, the couple amicable if not loving to the public eye.
- Talmani ordered the building of a Temple under the Inner Circle to commemorate her husband's extraordinary feats. Yet, according to her dairy, it was a monument to her lovers and a place where she would have her revenge.
- Upon the completion of the Temple, the Queen and the King of Hyste Talma ventured inside. The door has sealed itself shut behind them and remained so till this day.

Hangred also presents the adventurers with the excerpts from Talmani's dairy^{****}.

^{***}Check page 129, subchapter "Story of Prince Germund and Talmani"

^{****}Check Additional Materials for the handout "Excerpts from Talmani's dairy"

THE UNDERDOME

The only entrance to the Underdome is through the basement of the Black Castle. Elder Kril has organized for the party a passage, though they are warned to keep their discretion about moving around.

Elder Kril leads the characters near the Black Castle, where they meet with Tiffy, a halfling servant chosen by the Ruler for her unwavering loyalty. Her presence means that, at least unofficially, the party has the support of the authorities. Tiffy is a redhaired, stout no-nonsense woman, always willing to scold people for wasting time. She'll take the adventurers through the basement to the tunnels leading to the Underdome.

Tiffy can explain that:

- the Underdome is largely unexplored system of caves that is full of dangers and monsters lurking in the dark.
- the Underdome was sealed for as long as Hyste Talma exist; some say than the Black Castle was build as a gate to keep every undesirable elements trapped down there.
- to keep the entrance obscured and protected, a pantry and a kitchen were build around it. Inconspicuous, it has remained hidden behind a jam shelf for many centuries.
- Tidor and his men reached the Underdome by blowing up the floor in the main room of the basement. They didn't have the patience to look for the real entrance, so they made their own.

Read:

Tiffy looks proud of the wooden shelf filled to the brim with jars of well-made jam. They hid perfectly the faint lines carved in the wall, a seal placed on the tunnel that you want to reach. Tiffy pushes the shelf out of the way with relative ease and places both of her hands on the stone wall. She whispers a spell, and the seal releases, the change in air pressure releases dust with a soft hiss.

There, in the darkness, lies a path to the Temple of Broken Trust.

"In you go," Tiffy gestures to the tunnel. "Better hurry up. I'll cook something nice for you when you return."

FEATURES OF THE TEMPLE

One style of architecture was used to build the Temple. The walls, floors and ceilings are all made of obsidian. Unless stated otherwise the corridors are 9 ft. tall, while the chambers stretch out between 35–30 ft. The architects of this beautiful structure have ensured that visibility is low and navigating the temple is difficult without darkvision or a source of light.

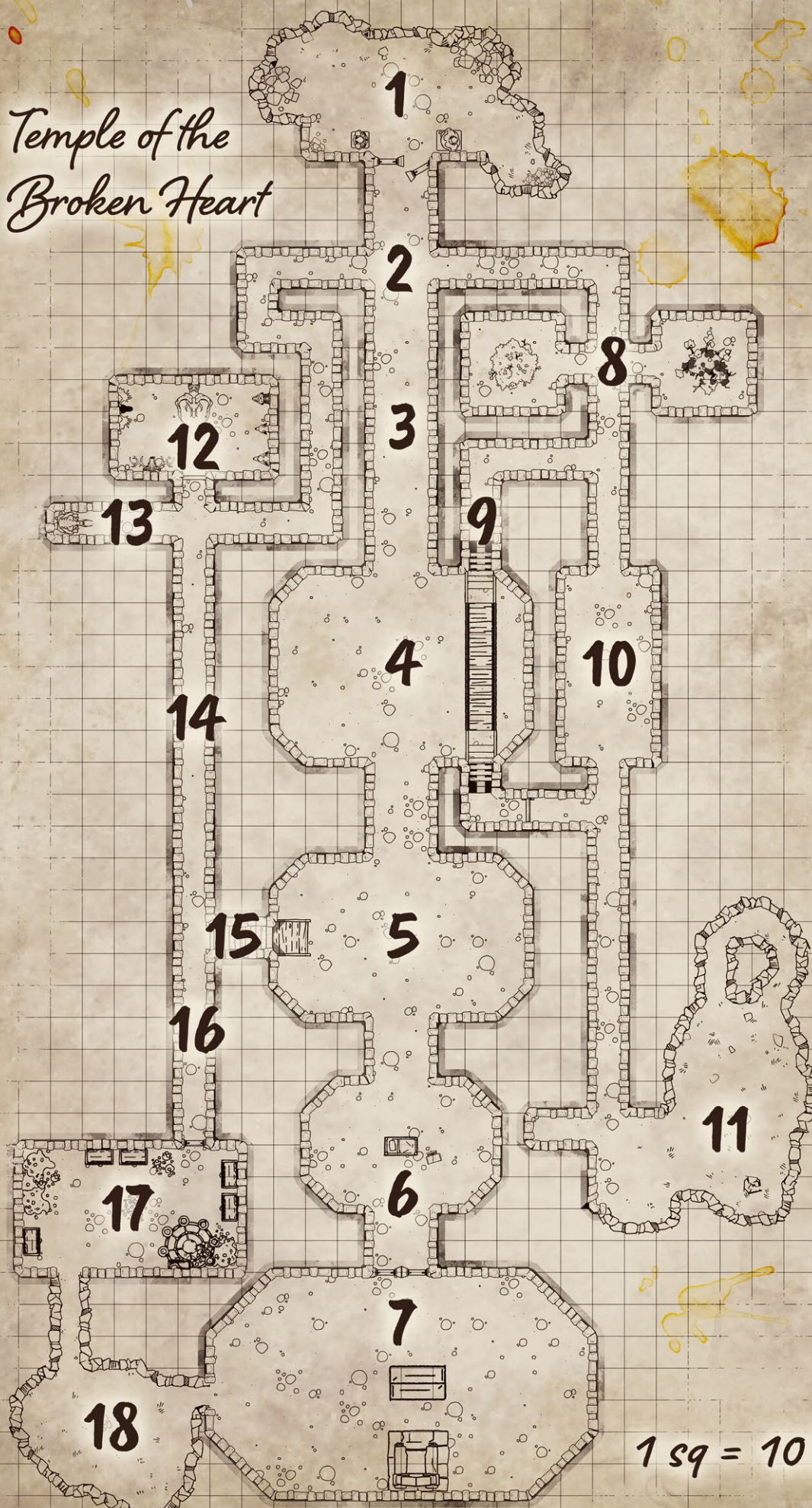
The decorative elements of the Temple are kept in a dwarvish style of symmetrical and geometrical design.

Entrance to the Temple of the Broken Heart (1)

The tunnel from the pantry of the Black Castle leads to a big cave, only partially touched by the chisels of stonemasons. Read:

The cave stretches ten feet forward, but almost thirty up. At first glance it looks like a ruin, with rubble and stone lying all around. As you look to the ceiling it's easy to spot the entrance that Tidor has made for himself. There are dozen lines hanging from the huge hole blown in the floor of the castle above. It is clear that the knights have used explosives to get in—through the ceiling and through the door. Only when

Temple of the Broken Heart



1 sq = 10 ft.

you take a closer look, can you recognize how majestic the now open door once was. Made out of stone, metals and obsidian, they were decorated by two statues—of elf and a dwarf. The elven woman is bent over the archway, reaching a hand to caress the dwarf's face. The other, shorter figure has been portrayed standing on top of his axe to gain more height.

A successful DC 13 History (Intelligence) check allows the characters to recognize Queen Talmani and King Germund in the statues around the door. If the party has discussed the Temple with Hangred, they do not need to make a roll to recognize the figures.

A successful DC 14 Arcana (Intelligence) check allows the characters to recognize that along with the explosives, there are faint traces of corrupted magic of Chaos.

Path of Love (2)

It's difficult to notice at first, but once your eyes catch the first glimpses of lines and shapes, a pattern of dark mosaic emerges on the floor of the corridor. Intricate in its design, it soon leads you to the true art piece. At the end of the corridor, when the path diverges into three, the mosaic turns into effigies of Queen Talmani, pointing to the left, her face sad and eyes longing. King Germund is pointing to the right with his sword, his eyes ablaze with determination. Yet, the most striking is the figure standing between them—a skeleton of a child, looking up, pointing towards the main corridor that cuts through the whole temple. You can already hear the sounds of battle, the shouts of Knights of Tidor and their leader.

From this point on the party might choose one path of the three to follow. As the time is of the essence, there will only be a chance to explore one option rather than all three.

Injured Knight: Before the adventurers can decide which route to take, an injured Knight of Tidor stumbles through the half-open door leading to the Main Corridor. He has been turned into a pincushion, with half a dozen arrows sticking out of him. His name is Murtah Banesbarrow and he is a soldier loyal to his master. He was unable to follow in Tidor's footsteps and begs the characters to spare him a potion of healing or a spell. He advises the party not to go after Tidor or seek alternative path, because ahead of them lies only hell.

Main Corridor (3)

The corridor stretches around fifty feet forward and though you can clearly see the archway leading to a bigger chamber, it is what lies in front of you that steals your breath. On the dark tiles of the floor lie the victims of the traps set to keep outsiders out. Knights of Tidor have shed their own blood to allow their leader a safe passage, but they were not the only ones. You can recognize, on the skeletons lying around, the armor of Knights of Ruth

On the dark walls of the corridor you recognize the depictions of myths and legends you've heard about Hyste Talma.

Tidor and his men have already passed through this area, however not without casualties. There are 3 dead Knights of Tidor on the ground, pierced by deadly arrows. As a Dungeon Master, **choose the numbers of active traps equal to the number of party members plus two and place them on random tiles.** A successful DC 14 Perception (Wisdom) check allows the characters to spot the traps that are still active. A successful DC 16 History (Intelligence) check allows the characters to recognize that the skeletons of Knights of Ruth are still wearing issued armor, though very much outdated. It is safe to deduce that those are the first knights of that order, who have entered this Temple alongside Talmani and Germund.

Arrow Traps

Arrow Traps are placed within the walls of the corridor, the holes nearly invisible against the dark obsidian. Each trap includes two arrows, one shooting at the height of 4 ft., the other at 2 ft. Each trap requires a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or risk 2d6 points of piercing damage.

Story of Hyste Talma

On the obsidian walls of the corridor a skilled artisan has etched the story of Hyste Talma. Characters who pay attention to details can notice the land of Kallonia, the banishment of Chaos and the death of Order. The first meeting between Talmani and Germund is there, too—forever immortalized in black stone.

First Chamber (4)

The first chamber of the Temple is full of chiseled splendor. There, recreated in a medium that never forgets, is the nuptial celebration of Talmani and Germund. The newlyweds embrace each other, frozen in eternal dance, along with their families and guests. Yet, amidst the sculpted pantheon of matrimonial grandeur, it is the gift bestowed by the benevolent Yv'anda that commands the gaze of all who enter. Two towering monoliths, fashioned from the very essence of stone, stand as formidable sentinels over the jubilant assembly.

A successful DC 13 Perception (Wisdom) check allows the characters to spot the expression on Talmani and Germund's faces. Whereas the Prince is utterly bestowed and happy, his new wife is crying, her face forever frozen in an expression of grief and pain. All the stone statues are placed on the rails in the flooring. Upon entering this chamber through the main entrance, the mechanism responsible for moving them activates. Beautiful music pours from the enchantments woven into the walls as the statues begin to move around in dance and two **stone wards** wake to protect the Temple from intruders.

Moving statues of the wedding-goers make it more difficult to fight. Any attack made within this chamber has a disadvantage to hit.

Second Chamber (5)

The next chamber follows the life of the newly married and crowned Queen and King. Though lesser in size, the room is even more luxurious than the first. The light of torches shines in thousands upon thousands of little diamonds, painstakingly embedded into the walls and the floor. Rose gold, red and white gems would have stole anyone's breath with their beauty alone, yet they pale in comparison to the history painted by the mosaic on the floor. There, stone by colored stone, an image of Germunds passionate fire clashes with Talmani's cold reservation. It is the Queen hard stare that is locked on the fire wyrms that her husband has slayed to show off his might.

A successful DC 18 Perception (Wisdom) check allows the character to spot the trap within this chamber. Carefully hidden pressure plates are scattered throughout the mosaic and if stepped on will surely trigger something terrible. To avoid activating the mechanism the characters need to succeed on DC 16 Dexterity saving throw.

Hidden under the mosaic are the Wyrms.

*To not confuse readers, we are using the name of the creature whose statistics and abilities you are meant to use in this chapter. But it is not the same creature, as its backstory is different here.

Enemy composition for the fight with the Fire Wyrms*

NAME OF CREATURE	LEVEL 6-7	LEVEL 8-9	LEVEL 10-11	LEVEL 12-13
Fire Wym	× 0	× 1	× 1	× 1
Young Fire Wym	× 3	× 1	× 2	× 4
REINFORCEMENT				
Additional Trap	In the middle of the fight it is easy to miss a hidden trap under one's feet. The target must succeed on a DC 17 Dexterity (Medium difficulty) saving throw, taking 14 (4d6) piercing damage or half as much damage on a successful one.			

Third Chamber (6)

Compared to the splendor of the previous chamber, this one seems almost empty. Black walls, floor and ceiling seem to devour all remaining light. The only shapes visible at first glance are furniture placed precariously in the middle of the room. A wardrobe, a desk, a clock and a small bed—all the size appropriate for a child. As you approach, it's easy to spot a still figure laying on the bed. A boy, looking as if he were merely sleeping, raises his head at the sound of your footsteps. His big eyes blink at you. "Father?"

The creature in the room is a Doppelganger, cursed to obey Queen Talmani's final wish: to remind all descendants of Germund of his sins. Unless there's a dwarf in the ranks of the party, the fake-boy remains docile and will share bits and pieces of his life. He'll talk about his first hunting trip with his mother and how much he enjoyed learning to craft weapons with his father. A successful DC 14 Insight (Wisdom) check allows characters to notice how glazed and absent his eyes look. He doesn't remember most of his life, only the chosen memories. He doesn't know anything beyond the mission given to him.

If there's a dwarf amongst the party members, the Doppelganger drops his disguise and attacks along with a **mimic-clock**. The Doppelganger will do anything in his power to place a Cursed Ring of Talmani** on the dwarf's finger.

If the characters want to offer assistance to the boy, he might be persuaded to part with the Cursed Ring of Talmani. If the party members know the boy's name, they can befriend him.

Last Chamber (7)

As soon as you step towards it, you feel the air getting colder and colder. Your breath turns to liquid droplets and form a fog each time you exhale. Just as the chamber behind you, this one too seems to be frozen—though in a much more literal sense. Icicles threaten to drop from the high ceiling and claim their victory in blood. The floor glistens with ice. There, in the middle of the room stands a single tomb, with a motionless figure looming over it. Her skin and hair are translucent blue, as if she too, was made of ice.

The Last Chamber of the Temple is the resting place of King Germund. It is there that Queen Talmani completed an ancient ritual that turned her into **the Queen of Winter*****, forever bound to keep Germund's soul from leaving the mortal plane. In her hand, a **Staff of Order****** shines bright with magic.

**Check Additional Materials for the list of Legendary Artifacts.

***To not confuse readers, we are using the name of the creature whose statistics and abilities you are meant to use in this chapter. But it is not the same creature, as her backstory is different here.

****Check Additional Materials for the list of Legendary Artifacts.

Enemy composition for the fight with the Queen of Winter

NAME OF CREATURE	LEVEL 6-7	LEVEL 8-9	LEVEL 10-11	LEVEL 12-13
Crystal Draconid	× 0	× 1	× 2	× 1
Bringer of Frost	× 0	× 0	× 0	× 1
Queen of Winter	× 1	× 1	× 1	× 1
REINFORCEMENT				
Falling Icicles	If the situation leads to a fight between the party and the Queen, pay attention to the more explosive spells. If the chamber is disturbed enough, the icicles will fall down. All creatures in the range of 10 feet to falling icicle must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity (Medium difficulty) saving throw, taking 17 (5d6) piercing damage or half as much damage on a successful one.			

If the adventuring party are familiar with Talmani's history, have read her journal or took a path through the rooms dedicated to her past lovers, they can use that knowledge to negotiate with the Queen and explain their need for the Artifact she wields. A successful DC 20 Persuasion (Charisma) check allows the characters to get out of immediate combat and give them a chance at peaceful resolution. The Queen might agree to lend them the Artifact if they promise to return it and to never seek to free Germund's soul from his eternal torment.

If the adventuring party isn't familiar with Talmani's history, they have disadvantage on all Persuasion checks against her.



King Germund's Soul

Talmani has tore Germund's heart out and while his discarded body rotted centuries ago, this one part remains intact and still beating. Those who have exceptional Passive Perception might hear the faint beat of his heart, trapped in the obsidian prison his wife created. Clerics or Paladins can detect, after a successful Religion check, that the soul of Germund remains tied to his heart and suffers greatly. Though it's hard to refuse Talmani her revenge, it is also hard to allow a soul to be in so much pain infinitely. The decision on what to do should be up to your player's characters.

Rooms of Passion and Kindness (8)

As you walk on, you can smell faint traces of spring in the air. For a brief second it feels as if you were on a meadow, a delicate breeze toying with your hair, sun gently caressing you. A blink later, you're back in the bowels of the Underdome, in a small, unobtrusive corridor that leads you to two identical rooms. In the one on the left you can see a cherry tree in full bloom; in the one on the right there's a maple tree. The magic keeping the trees alive taste sweet on your tongue.

The Room of Passion and Kindness is a testament of Talmani's love for Sigrid and Ukruni. Those who examine the rooms and trees carefully, will be able to spot a poem written on the wall of the cherry room.

*Let me tell you, my love
a whispered tale from an elven heart.
It is not the fleeting spark,
nor the gilded chain that binds us together.
It's the freedom of snow dancing in the night.
It's not the burden of duty,
nor the gems set in crowns.
It is the song of the mountain and a boundless dream.
It is **not** a treasure to be kept in a chest,
but a gift to share and a journey blessed.*

Some of the letters chiseled into stone look like they could be removed. Those letters are: u, s, i, k, g, r, i, u, n, i, d. If the characters have read Talmani's diary, they can deduce that the letters spell the names of her lovers: Sigrid and Ukruni.

The wall in the room on the right has twelve empty spaces, right next to each other. If the stones with letters are properly arranged, the maple tree will spring to life, revealing a treasure chest hidden in its roots.

If the characters attempt to harm the trees, a **shambling mound** will emerge from the roots of the cherry tree and attack them in retaliation.

Treasure: a ring of protection, two cloaks of shadows and necklace of endurance*.

The Balcony (9)

The door on both sides lead to a balcony overlooking the area 4—the First Chamber of the Temple. If the adventuring party doesn't directly follow in Tidor's path, they can use the opportunity to hinder his movements.

Tidor spends four rounds in the First Chamber, fighting with the stone wards. If the adventuring party intervenes on behalf of the Knights of Tidor, the dwarf will not succumb to the corruption within him. However, if the characters decide to attack or trap Tidor or his followers, he'll use the power granted to him by Chaos to get an advantage.

All attack rolls on creatures remaining within the boundary of the balcony are made with a disadvantage.

Room of Secret Love (10)

In an empty, cold chamber, the only visible shape is a crystal growing from the stone floor. White and shimmering with innate magic, it commands the attention of everyone. It lures you in, a promise of hands held, soft mouths and eyes full of love.

As soon as a living being enters the chamber, a magical barrier springs to life, trapping them inside. A successful DC 18 arcane skill check lets the adventurers realize how strong the magic is and that to destroy it, they would have to dig through stone to get to the runes carved in the foundation.

*Check Additional Materials for the list of potential items or use ones from used system according to your judgment.

The Room of Secret Love has been enchanted not to allow passage to anyone who doesn't know how to love. Talmani, heartbroken after losing her first lover, filled the crystal with her memories. The moment the barrier rises, the room grows colder and colder. If the characters don't know love, they are doomed to freeze to death.

If a party member gets trapped inside to escape a certain death they need to:

- Touch the crystal and share memories of their loved ones. If the emotions match the feelings Talmani has entrapped, the magical barrier lifts on the other end of the room. At least one person in the room needs to do that**.
- Destroy the magic casted on the crystal. It can be done with another DC 18 arcana skill test or other relevant skill. Then they need to spend one 3rd level or higher spell slot.
- Escape the room with brute force. They need to blow up the stone floor and get to the runes. There are three layers of stones, each with 30 HP and AC 10. This action is considered a failure only if they stop digging. But since this action takes more than an hour of work, during that time they need to **“fight with the cold”** one time. When they reach the runes, a simple hit can break them.

...or think of some other creative way to resolve this situation to which GM agrees. Any time they fail one of the actions on the list above, everyone in the room needs to **fight with the cold**—make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw. On a failed roll they take 21 (6d6) cold damage, or half as much on a successful one.

Caves of the Underdome (11)

The corridor ends abruptly. Beautifully crafted stone turns to rubble as the tunnel changes it's nature. Darkness seems to congest around you, as the wildness of the Underdome's caves beckons you forward. When your heart hesitates before taking another step forward, you hear it—a desperate call for help.

Within the cave hides a **bear from the deep**, who can't quite mimic a human voice but does it's best to lure unsuspecting victims into its clutches.

To find a way forward, a character needs to succeed on a DC 18 Perception (Wisdom) check to spot a secret passage leading to area 6.

Trophy Room (12)

The wooden door open with a screeching noise and you stand face to face with a green dragon. The light shines in its eyes, his enormous jaws ready to crush you—but it doesn't move. It takes you a moment to realize that is just a preserved trophy, and one of many at that. There, on the walls of this room, are the heads of monsters and creatures hunted by King Germund and gifted to his Queen.

There are several trophies in the room: a green dragon, a giant elk, a giant moose, a tiger, a fox and a wolf. In one corner of the room, on a wooden pedestal stands a stuffed adult Yeti. Next to each head is a plaque with details:

- The fox, the tiger and the wolf were engagement presents in accordance with Vindu's traditions. First, the fox to prove that the hunter can outsmart the most cunning of animals. Second, the tiger to prove that the hunter can overpower the strongest of creatures. Finally, the wolf proves that the hunter has patience and instincts to allow them to prosper and bring down a wolf.
- The giant elk and a giant moose were presents for the tenth anniversary of their marriage. The elk to represent stamina, and then moose to symbolize determination. A testimony to Germund's wish for an heir.
- The Yeti was another traditional gift, this time to celebrate the birth of the King's son, Sphilandrel. According to Din Huine's tradition, a child swaddled in Yeti's fur grows to be strong and independent.
- The Green Dragon was a failed attempt at winning back Talmani's favor.

**This is an opportunity for your players to enjoy roleplaying. However, if you feel more comfortable with rolling to check the result, you can choose to implement a simple Persuasion roll with an appropriate DC.

A successful DC 16 Perception (Wisdom) check allows the adventurers to spot a hidden pressure plate that triggers the awakening of a **yeti**. The creature, once disturbed, will attack.

Fool's Dream (13)

At the end of this corridor, on a pedestal made of gold, sits a rather ugly statue. Winged and horned it towers over a small chest placed between its long clawed arms. Whatever treasure it guards, seems precious. The plate on the gold pedestal reads: It is a fool's dream to reach for treasure beyond his station.

The chest contains 1000 gp, the pedestal is worth 500 gp and weighs approximately 200 pounds. If the chest is in any way disturbed, Animated Gargoyle springs to life to defend it.

Gallery of Sins (14)

Talmani has ordered the stonemasons to decorate this long corridor with images of Germund's faults. Some of them, like his hotheadedness and penchant for brutality, are stains on his honor. Some of them, though, picture Germund as an incompetent fool for simply not agreeing with his Queen. A story of a volatile relationship emerges, one carving after another.

The Hidden Balcony (15)

A successful DC 15 Perception (Wisdom) allows the characters to spot a part of the wall that can be pushed in and moved. That's the entrance to the hidden balcony overlooking area 5—the Second Chamber.

Adventurers can use this opportunity to spy on Tidor or try to hinder his progress. Tidor and his Knights spend three rounds of combat in his chamber, fighting against Wyrms.

All attack rolls on creatures remaining within the boundary of the balcony are made with a disadvantage. There's enough space for two characters to stand on the wooden structure. The balcony can support up to 350 pounds, after which adventurers who do not wish to fall, need to make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw.

Hallway (16)

The Hallway might seem suspiciously long and empty, making your skin crawl with anticipation of a trap. You would not be wrong about that. Stepping on a pressure plate hidden in the middle of the corridor triggers a mechanism that releases a **murderous cube** fifteen feet behind. The only way to escape it is either by fighting it off, or fleeing to the next room—the Treasury.

Treasury (17)

The doors to the Treasury are an ingenious work of art, designed to keep out unauthorized individuals. The outer surface seems to be coated with a layer of shimmering paint, and the lock mechanism itself is decorated with the heads of various monsters. Each head with open jaws and a chain ready to pull within their maws. There must be rhyme and reason to opening it—but it might take more time than you've got.

Treasury's Door

The door to the Treasury has an inbuilt locking mechanism connected with the four beasts' heads chiseled out of stone: dragon, tiger, wolf and fox. They represent the creatures that King Germund had killed for Talmani, in order to win her heart. If the characters are familiar with the Trophy Room, they can roll for an Intelligence check to remember the inscriptions there. A DC 14 check will allow them to remember

the order in which Germund hunted the creatures. However, if the characters are pressured by the murderous cube, they should roll with a disadvantage.

If the party member pulls on the wrong chain, the jaw closes dealing 2d6 piercing damage and trapping whatever was used to pull on it.

The correct order: fox, tiger, wolf, dragon.

There are other, less sophisticated ways to breach the door. Enough force—AC 14, HP 50—would suffice to break it open, if the fighters are determined enough. However, the shimmering paint coating the vault's door makes it immune to magical attacks.

A successful DC 20 Sleight of Hand (Dexterity) check would allow a character to deduce which chain to pull first, without triggering the mouths to close.

All the lost treasure from the long reign of Talmani and Germund seems to have been stored within these walls. Mountains of gems and coins, priceless works of art and enchanted weapons shine in the light of the torches of corrupted soldiers. The Disciples of Chaos are in the process of plundering this place, stealing the heritage of Hyste Talma.

Within the Treasury, Disciples of Chaos have begun to steal whatever they deemed useful in their pursuit. It is obvious that they have a particular item in mind and are still searching for it. As soon as the party opens the door, roll for initiative. Disciples of Chaos will do everything in their power to win.

Treasure: 10,000 gp in golden accessories and jewelry, another 10,000 gp worth of precious gems and 4,000 gp worth of coins.

Hidden Tunnel (18)

A hidden tunnel dug by the Disciples of Chaos, that spans miles throughout the mountain and leads outside the boundaries of Hyste Talma. The corrupted enemies, not knowing in which chamber of the Temple the Artifact is hidden, had dug in two directions—to the left, where they've robbed the Treasury, and to the right, where they're still trying to break the wall to the Last Chamber.

Aftermath of the Temple Events

At the end of this part, if the adventurers managed to either persuade the Queen to hand over the Staff of Order or killed her to gain it, they have an advantage in the upcoming conflict with Chaos.

If Tidor remains alive, the Staff can be utilized to cure him of the corruption at the cost of consuming the staff's power entirely. The ritual can be completed by Elder Kril and Tidor, once his senses come back, will be grateful enough to advocate for the adventurers to the Redoe Alliance. This will lead to them proposing truce to Dragsa till they deal with their common enemy.

If Tidor dies, the Redoe Alliance's internal power shifts as the Knights of Tidor are dissolved and absorbed by either Din Huine or the Knights of Ruth. The council doesn't require much persuasion to send aid after witnessing the power of Disciples. Yet talk about truce with Dragsa is another thing—the diminished support by the numbers of those still loyal to Tidor makes the talk harder. Some of his followers outwardly resent the adventurers—enough to try and end their lives; some embark on a quest to resurrect their fallen leader.



For both of this ending, if the characters haven't yet been to Banewood Asylum, during the council meeting the representative of Harrat Wing will demand further proof of the adventurer's extraordinary abilities. They will be then asked to assist with the problems plaguing Banewood.

If the Staff is lost to the Disciples of Chaos and the Underdome destroyed, the Redoe Alliance will banish the adventurers from Hyste Talma. In their arrogance, they are happy that their sworn enemy, Dragsa, will meet its end at the hands and blades of the Disciples of Chaos ruthless armies.

Since these are not their bodies and they cannot return with anything to their bodies, they need to find another solution. For all the money and treasures they gained, the party can go to one of the dwarves' banks where they can deposit them. In the bank they are told that in places belonging to the Redoe Alliance or the Republic of Misty Waters they will be able to draw money from friendly establishments. Though only up to 150 gp each week from one place—for bigger withdrawals they would need a special permission with signature from them, which is impossible since they cannot bring any physical objects with them.

For the Staff of Order and other items, banks offer transferring them to chosen cities or towns in Deuslair for a mere 250 gp for each item. It will take around one week for them to send it to Kallonia or one and a half to places in Misty Waters. Elder Kril also can take care of them and keep them in a safe place—outside of Disciples reach. Though he does not offer anything in return.

Side Missions

If the adventures are looking to keep themselves busy, there's a Quest Notice Board placed in front of the Guild Association's office. The requests posted there are the ones officially declined by the Guild—either because the person in need could not gather needed funds to pay for professionals or the plea was ridiculous.

THE GHOST IN THE MINES

Disturbing sounds prevent my workers from working. A group of brave and able men or women is needed to hunt down whatever monster has spawned within the tunnels.

Rewards:

25 gp per monster's head. Report to Gunthar at the Redbeard's Western Mine.

In recent days the workers of the Redbeard's Western Mine have refused to go to work. They claim that the tunnels of the mine are hunted and they are afraid of whatever lurks in the dark. No one has died or been hurt so far, which makes Redbeard—the owner—suspicious that this might be a trick to get more time off work. Redbeard suspect that one of his workers—Tigrin Hollowaxe—might be behind the scheme, but he has no proof. To catch the culprit red handed, he posted a quest on the Notice Board. As he doesn't believe that the monster is real, he did not authorize it at the Guild and instead counts on a cheaper help.

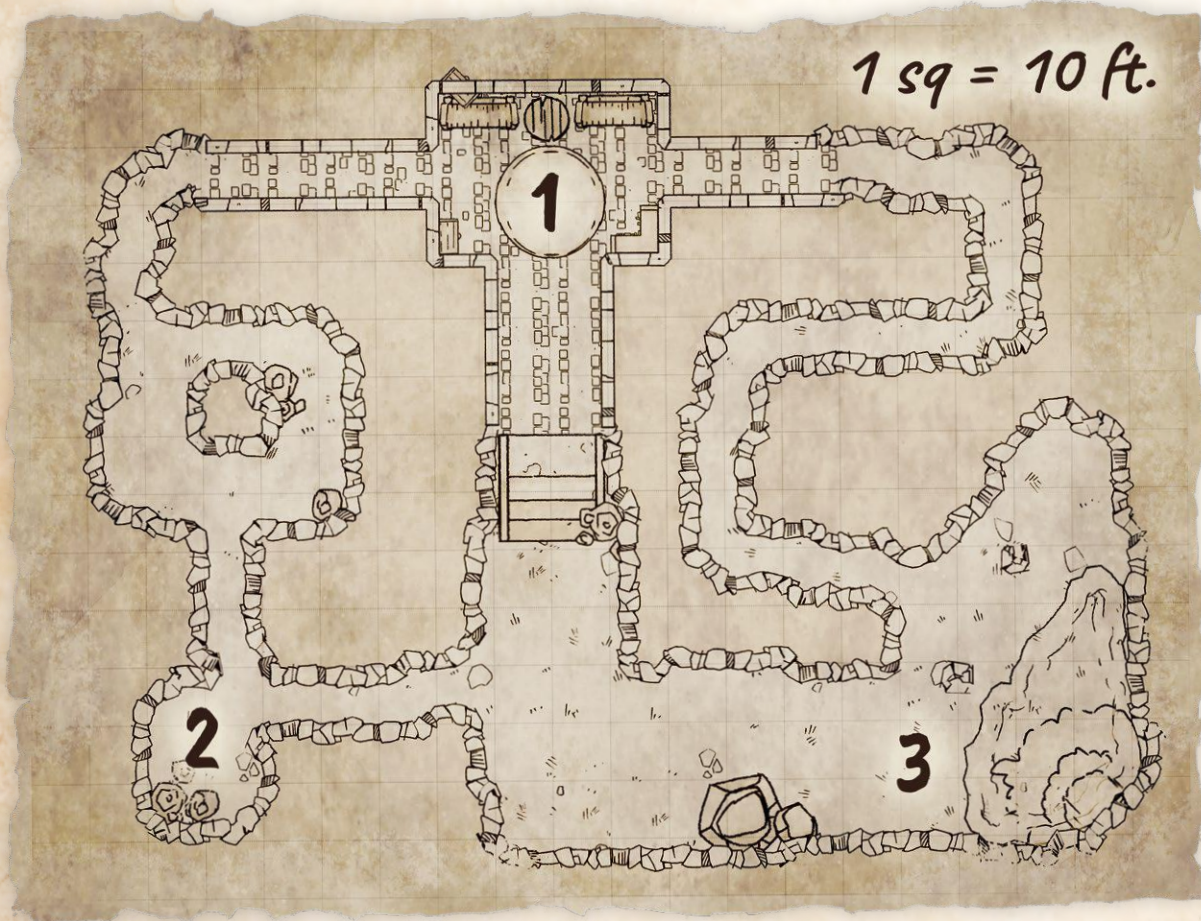
Upon arriving at the scene, the adventurers will find Tigrin arguing with Redbeard at the entrance to the mines. Tigrin is threatening to quit and take most of the workers with him if nothing is to be done. Redbeard, once he notices the adventurers, will gleefully agree to have the mines investigated, but if Tigrin's paranoia proves untrue, the dwarf will have to work overtime for free to cover the costs of the quest.

Features of the mine:

The only properly lit room in the mine is the entrance room where the lift deposits our adventurers. Otherwise, the tunnels are dimly lit by blue, fluorescent crystals. Moving through the tunnels might be difficult for any adventurers taller than 6ft., as the ceilings are uneven and fairly low.

1. Entrance to the mines
Miners enter the tunnels through an automatic lift to the small lobby. The lift can fit up to four dwarves and it takes it 3 minutes to properly ascend or descend. While waiting for transportation, the dwarves can sit and enjoy some peace and quiet at the end of their shift.
2. Monster's Nook
A bear from the deep has found its way to the tunnels of this mine. It took residence in this little nook and drags all of its victims there, to be eaten. It has suffered significant injuries though and when it recognizes that it's being outnumbered, it'll try to hide from the adventurers. A successful DC 15 Investigation/Perception (Wisdom) check will reveal sufficient clues about the whereabouts of the bear.
3. Main Mining Chamber
The main chamber is where the bulk of the work was being done. Adventurers can spot runes on the walls marking the space for three more tunnels to be dug. There's a small pond to the south-east that seems to be infinitely deep. At first glance it seems that the dwarves working here have abandoned all their equipment and ran at the first sign of trouble. A DC 18 Investigation (Wisdom) check reveals that there are scratches on the stones near the pond, where the small waterfall flows freely. It seems that something has gained access to the mines through the water-filled passage.

The Ghost in the Mines



MATCHMAKING CRISIS

Grandma Thitroda Cavebelly from the residential district's best candle shop "The Cavebelly" is looking for people who just have arrived to Hyste Talma. All to resolve a problem with matchmaking divination.

Rewards:

As a reward, Granny is willing to pay each adventurer 100 gp.

Grandma Thirona Cavebelly is an old dwarven lady who owns a quaint little candle shop. But her true passion seems to be finding great matches for her grandchildren—of which she has plenty. So far, she has managed to find reasonable candidates for all of them except Clarabella or Clara for short. Clara is a Halfling girl adopted by the Cavebelly family and treated as their kin, yet due to the racial differences, she hasn't been matched with anyone. To resolve that she went for a matchmakers' advice and they divined that a handsome stranger "will change the course of her fate in one wonderful night" so she stopped looking for anyone else if they are not that "perfect match for her."

This is going for too long in Grandma's opinion so she wants one of the adventurers to flirt with her and ask them out on a perfect date. When prophecy is "fulfilled", she should be able to move on. Of course, she cannot know that Granny is paying for it. She also gives the players tickets to Crystal Park, where a "Single's Night" is being organized. A meeting organized to help shy people find their love, where theatrical play is the main event. She proposes that they should take Clara to eat then go there.

One character will need to play the role while rest can support them from the shadows with their actions, magic etc. Unbeknownst to the adventurers, in the theater there is a half-elf performer who Clara likes but rejected because of the prophecy—Axen Feligo. Actor is playing a knight guarding Queen Talmani.

The story presented by the troupe is the official version of the romance found; adventurers will have a chance to learn the truth behind it later in the chapter, when they meet with Hangred.

Table of Clarabella preferences

WHAT SHE LIKES	WHAT SHE DISLIKES
Theatrical plays.	Flowers and especially being given one.
Ice magic, especially one involving forming objects from ice.	Loud noises and flashy things.
Mushrooms and meat. Any dishes with it are her favorite.	Candies and anything overly sweet.
Snakes and green color reminded her of it. She had a pet snake in childhood.	Blood and the color red, as it reminds her of the death of her parents before being adopted.

During the date mix in the following happenings:

- Being given by mistake a dish full of mushrooms rather than what she ordered.
- Escaped snake trying to climb Clara leg.
- A street performer making a fireworks display.
- A seller forcing very sweet candies to Clara for free.
- A kid tripping and starting to bleed from a kneecap.

The Crystal Park

Crystal Park is a perfect place to relax and learn more about Hyste Talma. During the Single's Night the main theme of the party is the eternal love between Queen Talmani and King Germund. A theatrical troupe has prepared a play based on the most famous love story and candies in the shape of hearts are being sold at the food stands. Young and shy dwarves and elves proposition each other, sometimes failing at interracial communication by offering the wrong crystals or not-quite-yeti's-fur.

Keep count of the number of liked or disliked things that happen during the date. If characters prevent something she dislikes from affecting her, it is counted as something good in her eyes, while preventing something she likes from happening or affecting her counts as something she dislikes. For anything in between GM needs to use their own judgment. Encountering two disliked things in a row, makes her want to drop the date and persuasion check with DC 16 is needed to convince her to stay.

The players can win this scenario if they either don't expose themselves and the date had more things she liked happening during it, or they convince her to give Axen a chance and arrange them talking to each other. Anything else makes them fail.



MISSING WIFE

A dear wife of mine ventured out of the city to hunt down a Yeti for our son's first birthday. It's been half a month and she hasn't returned and has stopped responding to my messages. Please, if you are able, help bring her back home.

Rewards:

Garthrund will offer the adventurers his aid in the smithy if they need their weapons sharpened or armor made.

Larrel, wife of a very worried smith, Garthrund, has gone missing during her hunt for Yeti. Her husband, unaccustomed to Din Huine's quirks, has grown anxious over her long departure. Even though the elven part of his family keeps reassuring him that the hunts sometimes drag longer, he becomes exceedingly worried. Taking care of his newborn son, Goren, isn't helping the matter, either.

Garthrund has one part of a set of a necklace with embedded Sending spell, that could be used to communicate with Larrel if she's within 100 miles of the caster. For days now, she has not responded to his messages.

Anything that the adventurers buy at Garthrund's smithy will be sent to wherever it needs to be at—within a reasonable time frame. If the characters have left visiting Hyste Talma till the end of their quest to defeat Disciples of Chaos, Garthrund's goods will travel with the Redoe Alliance's army towards Dragsa. If not, Elder Kril will be able to provide transport for the items to Banewood Asylum, though it might take a while to get there.

Finding Larrel is a difficult operation that might take most of the free time the characters have at Hyste Talma. However, Garthrund is willing to show the adventurers one of the hidden entrances Din Huine use to enter the city. After a successful DC 16 Survival (Wisdom) check the characters are able to find Larrel's track and follow her path towards nondescript caves north of Hyste Talma.

If the characters attempt to contact Larrel, she will not respond. She remains unconscious in the den of a **Yeti**. The creature has been toying with her in revenge for the kin the Din Huine has slayed. If the adventurers want to save her from certain death, they'll have to work fast and strike firm.

Larrel has one hit point left. If a Yeti lands a successful hit, she'll succumb to her injuries and die.

Missing Wife





CHAPTER 5: FORTRESS BREWING TROUBLES

Upon their arrival at the Fortress gates they notice some of their belongings have gone missing. As some cruel joke from fate, among the things they lost is the crucial letter from Princess Ker'ubo. Unable to prove their claims at the gate, the guards become suspicious of them being spies from the Redoe Alliance. With their plans in disarray, the party must find another way to reach the Queen. However, as they delve deeper into the Fortress, they discover some ominous truths about the city and the abominable treatment of the beastkin. The troubles within the Fortress run much deeper than they had anticipated, and an ominous aura lingers over their every move. To get inside they will find themselves with limited but not totally hopeless options. But on their way they might touch some of the darkest secrets of Dragsa that are being kept hidden from the rest of the populace. As if things on full display were not dark enough.

A Town of Wonders and Tragedies

The party arrives at the Fortress in the evening. As they cannot fly over the Fortress walls because of some protecting magical barrier, they need to leave their airship in the docks of the old part of the city, called Mossveil. There they learn that the city gates leading to Inner Fortress are already closed and they will better stay at one of the inns. After a peaceful night, they can go either to Grand Gate on the west of the Fortress or the City Gate, located just above the old town square. When they try to reach the passage using one of them, they are met with shocking numbers of people, merchant carts and plain old mercenaries, all waiting to enter while clogging the road. The looming walls of the Fortress of Dragsa stand before the adventurers, but they still need to spend hours pushing their way through all of the masses.

Yet, as they approach the gates with anticipation, they are struck with strange feelings that something is amiss. If any character wants to check it, let them make a relevant skill test on easy difficulty. If they succeed, describe that their bags feel strangely light and after checking them, characters find that their belongings have been pilfered. The thief, opportunistic and cunning, must have struck when they were at their most vulnerable, likely during their last stay at the inn.

Make every character lose half their money and up to two random items. As a cruel twist of fate, this event also leaves them bereft of one critical possession—the letter from Princess Ker'ubo. Their golden ticket to an audience with Queen Anara. Without it, their mission to warn of the impending threat posed by the Disciples of Chaos now hangs in the balance.

If they choose to go anyway, the guards at the fortress gate are unyielding in their duty—they demand proof of characters intentions. Because party members cannot present anything, they are viewed with suspicion. If they insist on going, guards will accuse them of espionage for the Redoe Alliance.

With their original path barred and the guards unwilling to entertain their warnings, the group is left with no choice but to explore alternative options. While they cannot access inner parts of the Fortress, the rest of the city sprawls before them. Mossveil, the old and neglected part, beckoning from beyond the Fortress walls. It is a district where the impoverished and beastkin seek refuge, and the slums cling to its fringes.*

The air in the Mossveil is thick with the scent of desperation and the echoes of distant struggles. And maybe not so distant unrest. Even on the first day when the group walk through its streets, they see two gatherings of beastkin, with a hooded figure in the center shouting a few striking phrases such as: “End to wall huggers!”, “Let them taste sludge!”, “We are not animals! We are not property!”, “The chains shall fall!” and so on. At some point, these gatherings are chased away by either guards or Paladins of Order. The atmosphere is clearly getting dangerous in the dark and shadowy alleys of Mossveil. Yet, the party will need to make these passages into their allies—at least if they want to reach the Queen. Driven by the urgency of their quest, they need to make some connections or survey the area themselves and find alternative solutions to their problem. This is a good moment for them to take on some of the side missions available in this region.

If they get back to their inn, they might check the room and ask around everyone for clues to what happened to their belongings. After performing relevant skill checks, which depends on their exact actions and GM judgment, they can learn that:

- In their room there are some traces of strange fur. It might be from one of the beastkin or similar species. Definitely not a member of the party or their pet.

*Check the page 22, the subchapter "The City Called the Fortress of Dragsa."

- The innkeeper, while pretending to not know anything, after some convincing shares that it is not a rare case and sometimes people complain about it. Still he has no idea who is the perpetrator.
- If they ask around, people will complain about City Rats and that it must be their doing, while others are angry at them for treating “these poor creatures” that way.
- If asked about City Rats and their crimes, tavern patrons point them to the direction of Duvak—an assassins’ guild they made. Officially they are not legal and seemingly almost everyone knows about their existence... but for some reason nobody is touching them. They must have some deep connection to high-ranking officials.

If the group decide to leave the inn, jump to the subchapter “Ratting your Way In.”

Alternatively, they can stake out the inn. On the 3rd night after their arrival, they can spot a shadowy figure emerging from one of the windows on the second floor and jumping into the street. If they catch it (you might consider giving them a relevant skill test to do that) a fight starts with the “Duvak’s Assassin.” After his Hit Points are reduced to zero, he falls unconscious. When characters bring him back to his senses, they can start interrogation, during which they will learn basically the same informations as they would from questioning people above. Additionally, he adds that he was not the one who stole from them, and even now he did not steal anything. He did kill one merchant though. As per request in his contract. He also mentions that while he is not sure who stole their belongings, checking with Duvak is not a bad idea—they have quite an impressive web of connections, including all the shady businesses. Even if they do not know who has their items, the Guild can ask around and track whoever tries to sell them.

The party can let him go and then visit the Duvak. If they do, jump to the subchapter “Ratting your Way In.”

They can also give him away to the guards. The latter way of dealing with the assassin blocks their option to go to the Guild, but the guards are much nicer this time around—lessening their burdens seems like a good way to get to their good side. They share with the group information that they can get the permit granting them access to Inner Fortress from one of the nobles. And while most nobles are disgusted with the poor living in Mossveil, there are few exceptions. Some frequently visit fighting arena near the City Gate or put request in the Dragon Huntress guild. The group also heard of one noble merchant having some trouble in the docks.

At the Dragon Huntress guild adventurers find a young noble with a bit too stylized blond hair, who is a representative of Saltspire Trade Company. He had some problems with the wild animal which his company was transporting—they ran amok and escaped. If the party deals with at least two of the cases, he will be willing to give them the permit.

At the arena called “Sinnalor Tu’ur” they met a rubenesque noble lady who is enjoying gladiators fights. After hearing them out, she is not really interested in whether what they are saying is true or not. Frankly speaking she clearly doesn’t believe the party nor care. But she adds that she has a keen eye for strong people—and they do seem quite strong. So she proposes that she will help them if they show her a good time. Like beating all of the gladiators in the arena. After the group manage to do it, she helps them without any questions, while if they fail to reach the top, she can be persuaded with—perform a relevant skill check with difficulty set between medium and hard, depending on how far they were from the top contenders.

At the Old Docks in Mossveil they can find a resolute noble lady who looks way too young to hold captain position on the ship... yet she does. Nobles are always acting on their own rules. At first it seems that she had some issues with getting her ship inside the Inner Fortress and got stuck with wares at Old Docks. But after a light persuasion

D10 RUMORS TABLE	
1	In his last sermon, the Harmony Bringer condemned all gatherings in Mossveil. According to him, they are “against the Order teaching” and are done by instigators from Redoe trying to divide us.
2	Someone spotted a centaur very close to the city gates. Is the Harrat Wing already here, waiting to slaughter us all?
3	Queen Anara hasn't been seen in the city for a while. Maybe she is ill?
4	Airships from the Misty Waters have not been coming recently. Is something going on over the sea?
5	Another wedding of nobles was postponed for some reasons. Tension is rising between their Houses, each blaming the other one for the situation. Strangely enough, last week there was a similar case.
6	Some wild dogs got lost near the Fairylight Library. During the night you can hear their howling.
7	A noble lady got stuck with her ship in the Old Dock after a trip to some exotic islands. All because of the paperwork. But it is taking an oddly long time to deal with them.
8	Saltspire Trading Company have lost quite a lot of money after some of their ships were sunk in the Scareguards. It seems they are getting desperate to earn quick money and were seen talking with some shady people.
9	The House of Bloodoak is hiring lots of people to search the city and nearby forests. They also put some requests in the Dragon Huntress guild. What are they looking for so frantically?
10	A torn apart body was found in the southern side of the Inner Fortress's market. The marks fit the beastkin.

she admits that in reality she is paying the guards to postpone her docking and make it seem like some paperwork issue. Her parents really love exotic treasure from around the Deuslair. And she already said that she carries some surprises for them. But... the deck got damaged soon after entering Southern Pass, flooding lower floors and washing away the cargo. She hired people at the Southern Keep to check the waters, but it doesn't look promising. So she has a different plan. If the party provides her with 100 gp worth of exotic items, she will enlist them as part of her ship crew and they will enter the place disguised as merchants. But only if they give her something to trick the parents. Things like parts of the Kraken, wings of Sea Harpies, Basilisk eyes, scales of the Dragon Turtle. The party can use items which are only found in Encura, Banewood or Scareguards—GM needs to judge whether they qualify as exotic. After giving her these items, she is thrilled but asks for one more, special touch. She wants a part from one of the dragons from Kallonia. Claw, fang or similar. As she describes “claw, fang, whatever is big and impressive... from one of these from a swampy place or was it a forest?” She clearly is not sure how to describe it but she is talking about either a Mimic Dragon or a Wolfrake. Only after providing body parts from one of these, she agrees to help the party.

All of the above options can also be accessed by normally going to these places without any prior information or because of the rumors going around in the city. After fulfilling the noble's demands, jump to the subchapter “The Lost Ones.”



Rating Your Way In

The party's arrival at the Duvak Guild is rather peculiar. The building gives off the appearance of a merchant company, and the front desk in the hallway only reinforces that impression. The only element disturbing that image is the presence of a humanoid rat on the other side of the counter. Well dressed and very clean, but still rat. After scheduling a meeting and waiting for around half an hour, they are escorted into a spacious office with a warmly crackling fireplace and numerous shelves stocked with books lining the sides. An elder rat, seated behind a desk that seems slightly too large for him, peers at them through thick glasses. The entire setting is almost nauseatingly cozy.

Then, without any introduction just ask: "So, who do you want to get killed?"

After characters explain their situation, he apologizes for his manners and introduces himself as Finneto, the XXVI head of the Duvak. He explains that finding their lost belongings might take some time, as even if it was one of the people under him, they are not reporting every single small thing. Then, most of his people don't deal with such petty pilfering. But he will be watching the market, if anything close to what they describe shows up, he will be sure to contact the characters. Then he says that he thinks he will have a solution for their other problem. But he will need to check a few things and prepare a lot more. So he will contact them again in 3 to 5 days.

If till that time the party does not resolve the situation of entering the Inner Fortress in a different way, Finneto contacts them again. He proposes to prepare them false documents if they agree to help with one small thing. Not murdering, that kind of thing is their speciality. Just a normal heist. In one of the mansions of Felix Saltspire, a noble living in the Inner Fortress, there is an artifact which should not be in his possession*. At least according to one of Duvak's clients. A wealthy skyfarer from Sidonia. Names are not important.

After that he describes to them the whole plan of operation. Tomorrow evening there is a ball in honor of some of the Order's holidays. While security should be higher at that time, they would also be all focused on the main event. Meaning that the rest of the mansion should be mostly empty. That is where the party comes.

First, they will sneak inside using sewers below the mansion.

Second, they need to pass the gardens and reach the wall with growing vines.

Third, they need to climb all the way to the second floor.

At the end they just need to open one lock and get the artifact.

The first part is pretty easy as after getting to the sewer entrance, they are met with one of Duvak people—a goblin named Roblin. While riding on his giant rat, named Ratasha, he guides the party through the sewers. On their way they need to stop at times as guards are checking the sewers—the party needs to pass a group test of relevant skill on easy difficulty. Each time they do not manage it, they are forced to knock out two guards. Use Royal Guards statistics.

The heist is going pretty much as Finneto expected. But there are two events triggered when people reach this points on the map:

On "1" a couple from the ball snuck out to make out. While they are not a danger to the party, they need to proceed cautiously to not alert them.

On "2" they hear screams from the lower floor. As it turns out later, someone killed Felix while they are in the middle of the heist.

*In place of an artifact, use the real item you want to give to the players. Check Additional Materials for the list of Legendary Artifacts or use ones from used system according to your judgment.

Gardens and the Second Floor

P — Passages, requiring an extra skill test to pass with medium difficulty (like unlocking doors).

T — Bear traps or pits with spikes. When triggered, they immobilize character (escape difficulty is easy) and deal 1d8 piercing damage.

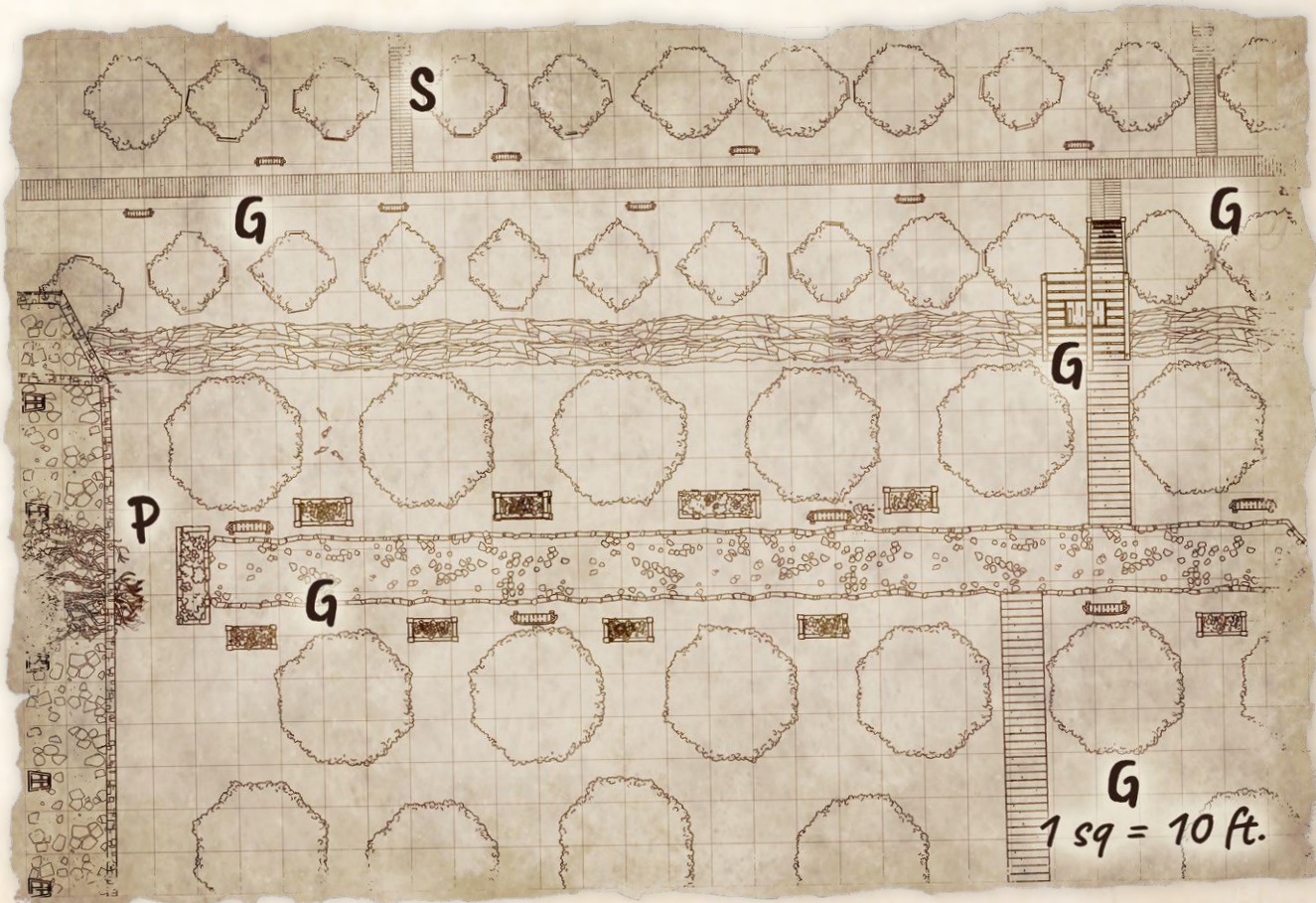
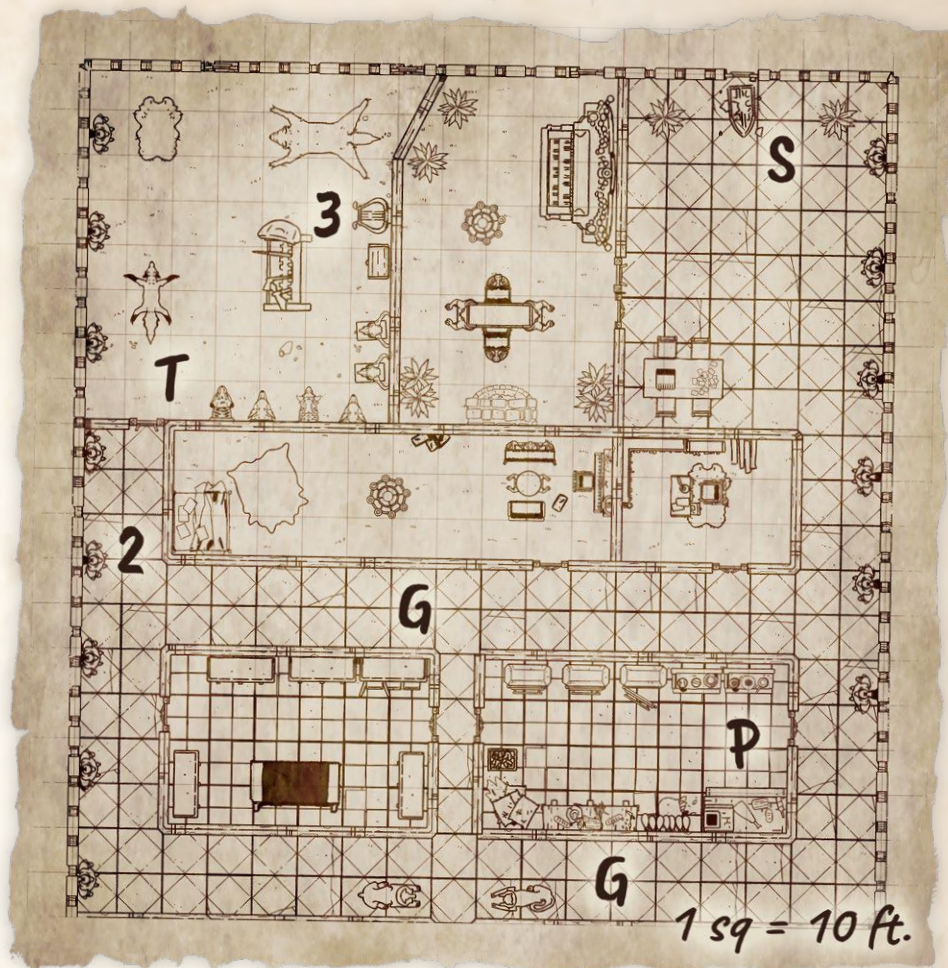
G — Locations with guards. Use Tidor's Guard.

S — Entrance where people start the mission.

1 — Location of the first special event.

2 — Location of the second special event.

3 — Location of the hidden artifact.



After that, when they are getting out of the building and start running in the garden as the whole place gets crowded with guards. They either need to heavily cover their presence with spells and additionally, if the GM sees it fit, pass some relevant skill test.

If they do not, they need to go the hard way—eliminate the guards outside to escape.

Enemy composition for the fight with the Guards in the Garden

NAME OF CREATURE	LEVEL 6-7	LEVEL 8-9	LEVEL 10-11	LEVEL 12-13
Tidor's Guard	× 0	× 1	× 1	× 2
Royal Guard	× 3	× 2	× 4	× 4

After they are outside, and there are no pursuers in sight, from a nearby alley a rat merchant suddenly appears and as if nothing happened, he lazily walks towards them. He introduces himself as Vesht and is just here for a small delivery. He presents the party with their permits for accessing the Inner Fortress. The permits look so authentic that characters might start doubting if they are actually falsified and not produced by the government for the Duvak. It's hard to say how deep their connections reach. If the party tries to give the artifact to the Vesht he refuses it and adds that they can keep it as a payment for their help. They were great decoys from what he heard. If the party gets aggressive, he just runs away while saying "I am just a messenger here."

After finishing this part, jump to the subchapter "What Stays in the Shadows."

The Lost Ones

Just when the noble the group was helping is about to give them a permit, they pause and ask for one more favor. Read or paraphrase following speech:

Seeing your potential and skills, I must beseech you to lend me a hand in one more matter. A great weight is burdening my heart.

My dearest friends got entangled in a web of dark intentions I believe. Their betrothed, the lights of their lives, have vanished without rhyme or reason. They left behind a void and it is uncertain if they were taken or was it their own intention. Though for the latter I do not believe. Yet there is no ransom. No note. No trace who did that. Only an echoing silence that chills the very marrow of our noble bones.

With trepidation, I turn to you, valiant adventurers. You, whose blades can carve through any obstacle you see on your path. In return for dealing with this issue, I shall give you that permit. And I swear that my House shall be in your debt.

While the noble seems truly concerned about the friends, the characters can also see that they do not seem very sorry for abusing their power over the whole situation. They assign you their assistant, a middle aged man with mannerism only slightly less stiff than his mustache. Finnegan Starkling. While they do not have the permit themselves, accompanying him gives them access to Inner Fortress. Yet, leaving his side is a bit risky since guards are constantly patrolling the area and asking suspicious people about permits. Not much chance to walk far without one.

The Finnegan takes them to three different mansions. In each of them characters can talk with the girls whose fiances disappeared. They are Izabel Saltspire, Freya Silverroot, Beatrice Florington—all but the last one are from the prominent Noble Houses. But all were close to the wedding ceremonies. When asked, they can tell that:*

*While the clues are not assigned to any of the places or girls, it is good to put not more than two in one place. Placing all the clues in first or last place, makes the investigation a bit lackluster.

They do not know what happened to their fiances.

- One of them recalls that someone approached her fiance during their walk in the park the last time she saw him. They had a strange conversation, but she doesn't remember the details. After that, they went to her house where he left. If any of the characters ask someone from the staff about their version of the story, they say that nobody saw lady's fiance when she returned.
- One of them does not remember when was the last time she saw her fiance, and she also admits that she was not ready for marriage. But did not want him to end like that. When asked "what do you mean by 'like that'?" she is confused for a moment and then replies "...gone."
- One of them recalls that last time they talked was in her room. They talked for quite a long time, then she asked him to come to the balcony for a moment. After a while he left. If asked why she wanted him to go to the balcony she replies "to see... stars? I think..." she says as if asking herself.

If the party tries to cast spells to force people to say the truth, the spell is immediately repelled. What's more, the girls are under the influence of some powerful magic. It appears to block spell effects. If they change their approach and test what girls are saying with a relevant skill test, they discover that those ladies are not particularly unhappy about canceling their marriages, but also they didn't lie at any point. Or at least, they believe in what they are saying.

If the characters check the mansions, either with magic or relevant skill tests on medium difficulty, they can find:**

- A comb of red hair is found in one of the girls' rooms. Even though two of them have black hair and one has blond hair.
- At the place where the girl described a situation on a balcony, there is a small fragment of torn fabric sticking from part of it—it looks like a fragment of a male shirt. After checking around, characters can also see a few droplets of blood directly under the balcony. Too small amount for injuries after falling... besides if they ask the staff, they will find out that the lady's fiance left the house alive the same night.

If the GM wants to play it out more like classical investigation, they can direct the party to gather more clues from witnesses in parks and their servants, which will lead the group to an abandoned building in the Crafters District. If not, when the party is finished with interrogating and checking the last mansion, just when they are about to leave, the girl from the previous one bursts into the place and starts saying that she remembered one more thing. A strange building she was with her fiance. When she starts describing it, the other girl who was still in the room, says that she also remembers that place.

The party can go to that building, along with two girls. Inside they are met with a desolate entrance and full of dust and webs rooms. When they arrive at what seems to be some sort of dance hall, they see the last of the three girls—all in the blood. She is standing over the body of some maid.

Then all party members are grabbed from behind. As they turn, they see the faces of two girls who were going with them and three men—going by the description, the lost fiances. Read or paraphrase following text:

"It was easy, just like you said. One simple spell to block my memories." The girl in the middle of the room turns. She slowly moves towards you with clouded eyes and fingers tightening on the knife's handle.

"Yes, my dear lamb," a much lower and colder voice followed. "You are so close. So close to the world where nobody will force you into anything. Where no men will cheat on you. Just a few more steps... few more stabs... it is good that you brought

**While the clues are not assigned to any of the places or girls, it is good to put not more than two in one place. Placing all the clues in first or last place, makes the investigation a bit lackluster.

more of them. You all will be hungry soon. So hungry..." Another woman steps out of the shadows. She is tall and pale with red hair.

Meanwhile the ones behind the party are muttering: "No more pain, no more chains, no more roles, no more men, no more pain..."

To escape the grasp of people behind them, party members need to pass a relevant skill test, on medium difficulty. When the first character escapes the grasp, the girls start to shake and transform—their limbs start twisting, skin behind to fall off and teeth grow, ready to chew on flesh. They become strigs.

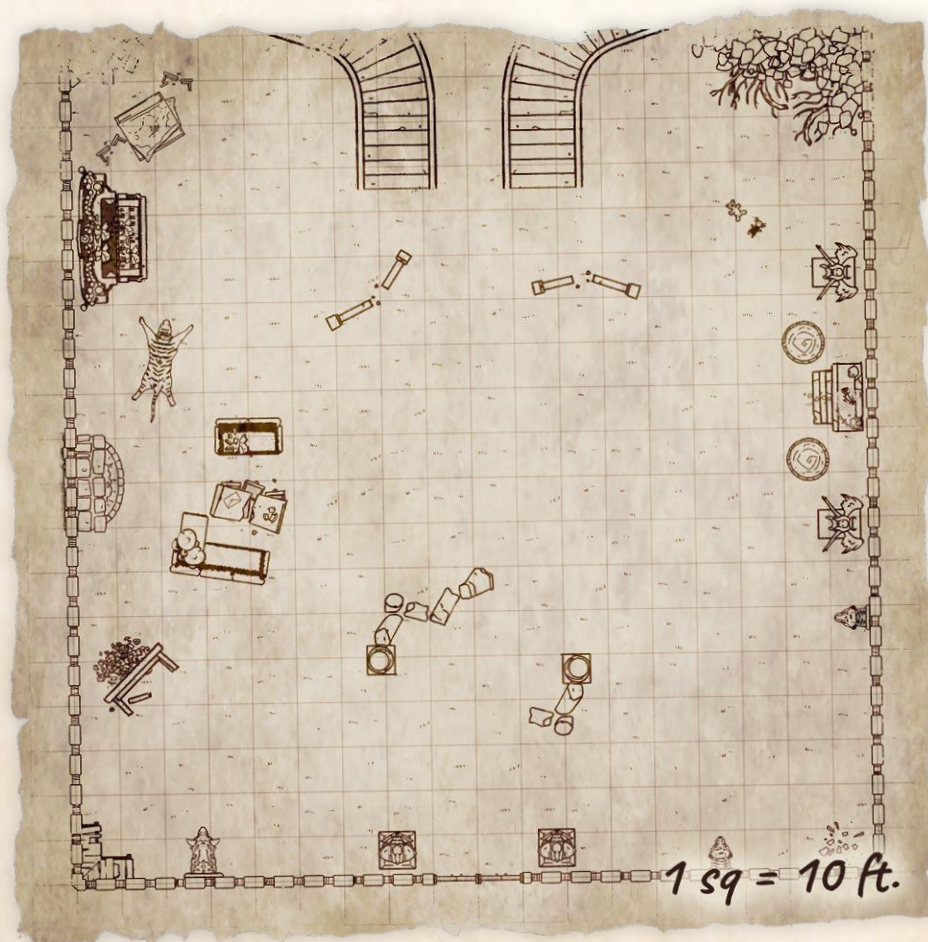
Enemy composition for the fight with the Esme

*If the characters are below level 10, Esme doesn't join the fight. She just laughs seeing her new pupils chew on meat and escapes when they start losing.

NAME OF CREATURE	LEVEL 6-7	LEVEL 8-9	LEVEL 10-11	LEVEL 12-13
Esme the Vampire	× 0*	× 0*	× 1	× 1
Strigs	× 3	× 4	× 1	× 2
REINFORCEMENT				
Blood fountain	Every living character who was under Esme influence, excluding the players' characters, grabs a nearby sharp object. Glass shards, knives etc. Then they slash their own throats. The blood floods the floor and starts moving into the direction of Stigs and Esme. They all gain 14 (4d6) Hit Points.			

When the fight ends, the Esme body transforms into a swarm of bats and flies in every direction. The characters are left at the scene, surrounded by bodies. Some time after, they meet with the noble who tasked them with the job. They are not happy about the outcome. But they keep their word and sign necessary documents. The party gains permits for accessing Inner Fortress.

Vampire Mansion





What Stays in the Shadows

After gaining access to the inner parts of the Fortress of Dragsa, the characters might try to reach Queen Anara's palace and seek an audience with her. But at the gate they are informed that she is currently outside of the city.

At this point in the story the GM needs to decide whether to continue with this chapter or jump to other events. Continuing from here on, will lead immediately into events of the sixth chapter. Meanwhile it is a good moment to explore a few side missions or finish any businesses in other regions. If players' characters did not explore main stories from other chapters they might do it right now. GM can also just decide to finish the story with what they have already accomplished—there is nothing forcing characters to visit every region and finish all the stories in this campaign.

Depending on how GM wants to proceed, they need to choose a valid reason for the Queen to leave the city along with a timeframe it gives the characters to deal with other issues:

- The Queen is undergoing her immortalization procedure.
- She cannot be contacted for the next three to four days.
- The Queen is visiting Aaheron to see progress on their current technologies.
- She will be outside of the city for at least one more week.
- The Queen is currently on the frontlines, commanding a naval armada on the east.
- She will be outside of the city for the next two weeks.
- The Queen is on a diplomatic mission in a neighboring country.
- She will be outside of the city for at least the next three weeks.

Additionally, at the next lodging, the group will find a bag with their stolen items and money. On top of the bags there is a note saying:

"Fates of the countries are too big for my small person. I don't want to be involved!"

...or if they spared the Duvak's Assassin or got involved with them in more friendly manner, change the note to:

"Don't lose it again. Don't ask for names. Always at your service"

After coming outside the group navigate the bustling Inner Fortress. This part of the city is different to Mossveil—everyone looks wealthy, full of energy and even optimism. Streets are filled with laughter and intense discussions. A stark contrast to the southern parts. Guards' equipment looks well maintained, the air smells better, and there are no poor or homeless people on the streets. To some, it might look like a perfect city. Others will call it fake.

After strolling for a bit, the characters spot a figure who doesn't seem to fit with the rest. After thinking for a moment, they recognize him as the instigator of a recent disturbance in Mossveil, where he incite unrest among the beastkin. Strangely, he now walks freely within the Fortress. His appearance has also changed, as his clothes are now of finer quality, and he walks with an air of confidence.

The group can decide to tail him discreetly. But he notice them fast, and try to lose them. To keep on his track, they need to succeed two relevant skill checks on hard difficulty. If characters fail even one of them, they lose a track.

Meanwhile in the city a strange string of events keeps occurring. People are saying that in the nights someone is breaking into their houses, totally demolishing all furniture but barely takes anything. Dead bodies are also showing on the streets of Inner Fortress.

It is good to remember the reason for her absence here to integrate or modify the events during the sixth chapter, with her audience. For example if she is just returning from frontlines with the forces of Hyste Talma, the information about wanting a truce might have arrived to her during the fights. And both sides stopped the ongoing battle because of that.



These things could be considered separate issues if not for one thing—in both cases there are traces on the claws and fangs. Houses are slashes with claws, while bodies are found as a blood mess of totally torn apart. As if attacked by feral beasts... or beastkin.

As people are becoming increasingly hostile toward beastkin in the Inner Fortress, many of them decide to leave the central parts of the city to live in poorer, but friendlier regions.

If the party wants to check closer the places where accidents happen or somehow gain access to the bodies found by the guards, they can find, with either magic or relevant skill test on medium difficulty, the following facts:

- All the accidents happen around Craft District—just next to the military quarter, where beastkin are stationed. But strangely enough, nothing happens north to the quarters.
- With skill check like arcana, the characters can learn that a faint magical aura remains wherever an attack occurred. If they have some way of detecting chaos energy they can find residual traces of Souls Ash—particles characteristic to all material that come from the Wurgar.
- All the attacks happened during the night. Beastkin are not nocturnal as they share most of their traits with humans, elves or dwarves.
- People attacked are all influential nobles or wealthy merchants. There is no poor person among the victims.
- While the bodies were torn to pieces, their hands were put on top of each other—as if in a praying gesture.
- There is a small piece of fabric with a wired symbol.

If they try to look for clues in the Fairylight Library, they can find information about one religious order from the Kingdom in the Herja, who placed the hands of corpses in a similar position during funerals. Meanwhile the symbol from pieces of fabric fit the symbol of their Paladins Order.

If they starts patrolling Craft District at night or put some kind of spell of similar tracking effect, they can find once again that mysterious man. This time, when they follow his movements, it becomes apparent that he is no ordinary troublemaker. Their pursuit leads them to an abandoned building north to the Fairylight Library. Inside it, the man goes straight to a secluded chamber dimly lit and hidden from prying eyes. Peering through a slightly ajar door, the adventurers witness an unsettling scene: the man is surrounded by werewolves and to their horror, it becomes evident that he is manipulating those beasts with some kind of dark magic.

But before they can see more, werewolves catch the smell of adventurers and start to growl in their direction. The fights starts.

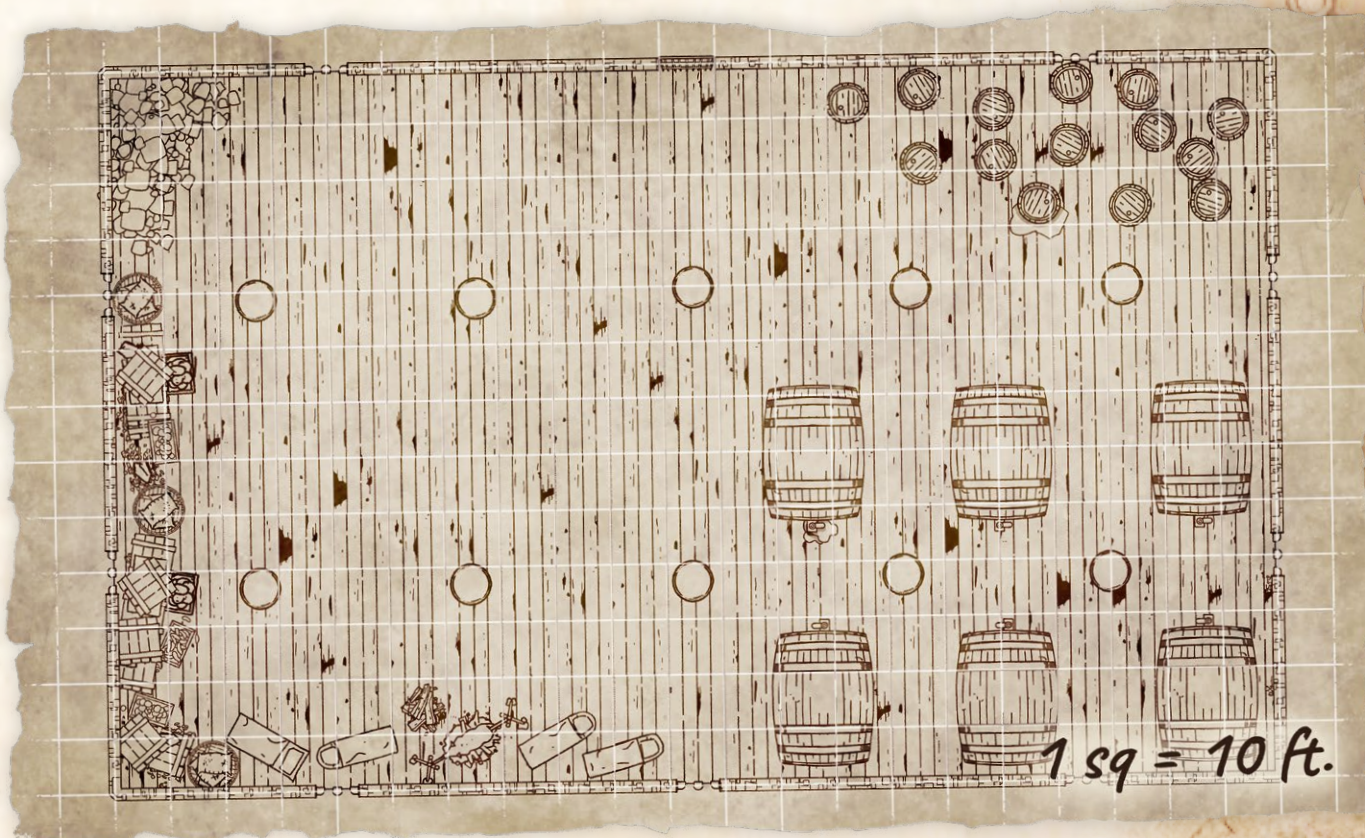


Composition of the enemies for the fight with Werewolves

NAME OF CREATURE	LEVEL 6-7	LEVEL 8-9	LEVEL 10-11	LEVEL 12-13
Dark Lupus	× 3	× 2	× 3	× 4
P'aqu	× 0	× 1	× 1	× 1
REINFORCEMENT				
Poisonous gas	A cloud of not visible toxin starts spreading from P'aqu mouth affecting all creature, except Dark Lupus, in 40 feet radius from his body. Seeing that they are losing he must have chewed on some poisonous bag hidden in his teeth. Everyone affected needs to roll a DC 16 Constitution saving throw, taking 18 (4d8) poison damage on a fail. All creatures which succeed, need to either move away from the affected area or disperse the cloud somehow, or they will need to repeat the saving throw. This effect can also be used when P'aqu is lying dead.			

After the fight, werewolves are slowly becoming humans again. It seems that their curse was lifted after the death—a small consultation for these poor souls. Then at the scene the Paladins of Order arrive, probably because of all the noise following the fight. Together with them they find letters to the Disciples followers and from the higher command. It revealed plans to spark a rebellion among the beastkin, creating chaos and discord within the Inner Fortress. A perfect opening for the Disciples of Chaos to launch an assault on the Fortress.

Paladins command the party to immediately go to Queen Anara and inform her about the situation. If the date from the lates had not been changed.



Werewolves Nest

Side Missions

DRAGON HUNTRESS REQUESTS

In addition to the money received from clients, you can also add an extra income from selling monsters' body parts. But be cautious with that approach when assigning values to these items; given that many magical items are provided to the players as part of the story, they may have fewer things to spend their money on by default. Meaning that that extra money might just end up filling their pockets and never being used.

A private adventures guild, specializing in hunting monsters. They offer a wide variety of subjugation tasks, guarding missions or retrievals, from many clients. While most are taken care of by the regulars, anyone "strong-looking" can take requests—if it will be their own death march toward the coffin, it doesn't concern the guild. Everyone is free to die however they want...

Requirements:

Walk into Dragon Huntress guild and either check the posters or ask at the counter.

Levels are stated for a party of four characters.

Retrieval of Exotic Animal

A hybrid of a lion and few other animals, very rare and very precious. We could not brand this one, but its magic is easy to track—look for time distortions.

Location: Forest near the road to Fortress of Dragsa

Reward: 1500 gp and connections

Saltspire Trading Company, Animal's Division

Level 7

Enemy composition: **Lamassu**

The party can track this "animal" by relevant arcana tests and asking around for strange occurrences.

Two Oversized Monkey

Two oversized, trained monkeys prepared caught for a circus in one of the south-west countries, escaped and need to be brought back. They are branded.

Location: Forest near the road to Fortress of Dragsa

Reward: 1500 gp and connections

Saltspire Trading Company, Animal's Division

Level 7

Enemy composition: **Ogre and Troll**

After being given special tools connected with the brands, the party can easily track the "Monkeys."

Brain Squid

A Brain Squid was spotted on the road from Woodhaven to Fortress. It seems to be moving toward the Fortress, going by eye-witnesses. We have no one to send at the moment, so anyone interested can try to take care of it.

Location: Road to Fortress of Dragsa

Reward: 2000 gp

Dragon Huntress

Level 7

Enemy composition: **Brain Squid**

Dangerous monster spotted in slums

I saw a hideous monster in the slums. It looked like ugly, blue Fey. As a concerned citizen, I want to reward anyone who kills it.

Location: Sewers in the slums of Mossveil

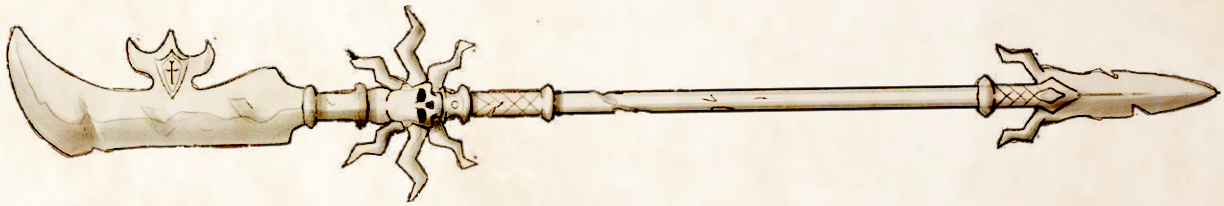
Reward: 4000 gp

Bloodoak Noble House

Level 8

Enemy composition: **Champion of Lay**

After being given special tools connected with the brands, the party can easily track the “Monkeys.”



Retrieval of Exotic Snakes

An exotic breed of six-armed snakes from Kartagis. They are branded which will make them easy to track.

Location: Forest near the road to Fortress of Dragsa

Reward: 2500 gp and connections

Saltspire Trading Company, Animal's Division

Level 9

Enemy composition: 3 × **Lamias**

After being given special tools connected with the brands, the party can easily track the “animals” which turn out to be a group of Kutauri 3 Lamias. After being attacked they shout at the party “We are not animals, you savages!”

Retrieval of Racing Horses

A rare breed of racing horses got loose on the way to the dock. They are branded which will make them easy to track. They need to be beat down, tied and transported to us.

Location: Forest near the road to Fortress of Dragsa

Reward: 2500 gp and connections

Saltspire Trading Company, Animal's Division

Level 9

Enemy composition: 4 × **Harrat Hunter / Warrior**

After being given special tools connected with the brands, the party can easily track the “animals” which turn out to be a group of Kutauri.

Breathing fire lizard spotted on the fields

My subjects are attacked by an unknown, fire breathing lizard. Please don't let it raze more fields.

Location: Fields north to the Fortress of Dragsa

Reward: 4000 gp

Bloodoak Noble House

Level 10

Enemy composition: **Wolfrake**

After finding burned down fields and huts, the party needs to track him down a bit.

This creature doesn't attack if not provoked.

Stabilize trade routes near Aaheron

A giant monster, possibly a dragon. It disrupts trading routes in surrounding areas making merchants use less efficient pathways. Needs to be taken care of.

Location: Swamps near Aaheron

Reward: 8000 gp and connections

Eli Ironsmith (temporary in Inner Fortress)

Level 12

Enemy composition: **Mimic Dragon**

Deep in the swamps, surrounded by murky water and foggy air, the group can find a Mimic Dragon. It always starts the fight with a surprise attack.

SINNALOR TU'UR

“Sinnalor Tu'ur” is a name for fighting arena created by the beastkin. A place where gladiators fight to prove their worth or earn money. Though some simply fight to find death in an honorable combat.

Requirements:

Walk into the arena and ask about the fight.

Rewards:

200 gp for their first win. Then 150 gp more for every next subsequent win. After losing a fight, their next win will give them 200 gp less, but not less than the initial 200 gp. Players cannot choose to fight against the same group. Additionally if they are not participating themselves they can take bids—up to 300 gp per fight. Alternatively one of them can stay to bid, while the rest of the characters participate. Winning a bet doubles the amount of money put into it. If characters throw a match on purpose, they are given back only what they initially bet and are banned from further bidding—gambling is a bit harder in a world where magic can reveal if you are lying.

Punishment:

Usage of healing spells, potions or anything similar is forbidden while in the fight. After each fight clerics heal up injuries—they bring up to half of missing Hit Points after the fight. Losing all Hit Points makes one lose consciousness and withdraw from the fight.

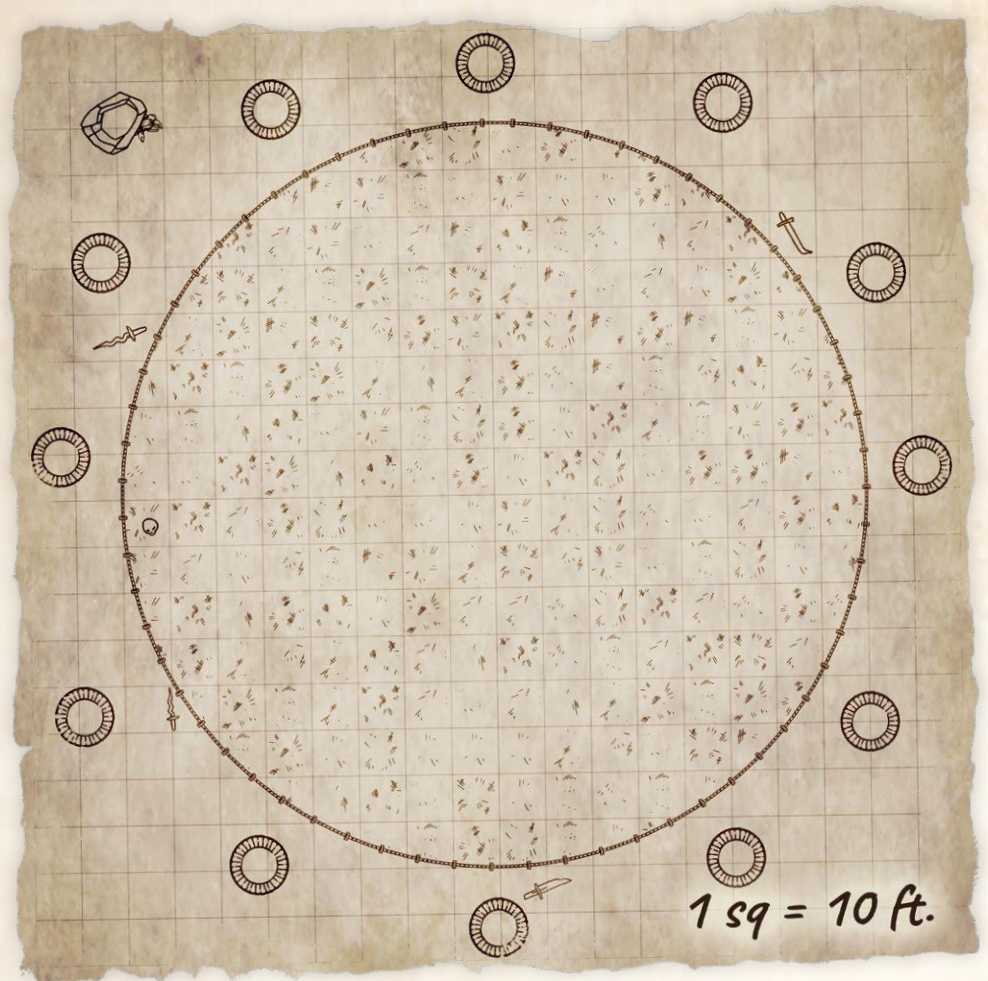
A fighting arena with bleachers so high and full of an enthusiastic audience that one can feel like a ruler of the world. All the while that their own sweat and blood sinks into sand under their feet.

Each day there are two fights, one of which players can join with their characters. People sing up as groups so the whole party can join the fight. The audience is protected with high-level magical barriers so almost everything is allowed while the fights are on.

For the first fight choose a group which should be weaker or comparable to the party—levels are stated for a party of four characters.. Then for each subsequent fight pick a stronger group making winning increasingly unlikely.

NAME	COMPOSITION	LEVEL
Sand Tricksters	2 × Jannah (<i>no lair actions</i>)	7
The Masked Rider	Death Knight	7
Challengers from the Truncatop	Kril Conscript, 3 × Kril	8
Rat Tamer	Duvak's Assassin, Ratasha	9
The Valiant Swords	2 × Knight of Ruth	10
Hammer and Wand	Paladin of Order, Magic Smith, 2 × Magic Smith Apprentice	10
Two Shot Lara	Sky Pirate Veteran Female, 3 × Sky Pirate Rookie	10
Mad Goblins Troupe	Mad Goblin Scientist, Tu'ur	11
Red Fangs	Ca'arak, Morgu, Tu'ur	11
Gungi and Nangi	Tidor's Champion, Tidor's Guard	12

Sinnalor Tu'ur



FARMERS IN NEED

Deal with a problem plaguing farmers near one of the villages in Kallonia.

Requirements:

Stay for a night in a tavern in Kallonia. Listen to rumors.

Rewards:

Random items from villagers possession with value around 350 gp—chosen by the GM.

As the party walks through the rural landscape, trying to find a place fitting the description a man with an old straw hat and simple clothes approaches, waving enthusiastically and proclaiming that something's scaring the folks. If they don't start harvesting soon, all crops will be lost. He doesn't have much, but he can offer the party some gold, food, and a place to rest in return for their help.

If the players refuse to help in polite words, the man in need is left without assistance, and his plight remains unsolved. The group can approach the villagers again later, but they will be less welcoming.

If the players decide to help immediately—the farmer is visibly relieved. He leads the characters on a short walk. "I almost lost hope that we could save this harvest season," he confides and points to the vast fields. "If you need anything, just ask. I'll leave you now; I need to prepare for harvesting."

While inspecting the field, the characters may feel a chill as night approaches. An indistinct voice floats through the air, initially incomprehensible. After a few repetitions, one of the characters discerns a single word: D—A—V—I—S. As night falls, there's a chance someone might catch a glimpse of a ghostly woman.

If the characters inquire about Davis, the farmer shares that he's one of the workers assisting with the fields. Davis, abandoned by his wife some time ago, can be easily identified by his eye patch.

A visit to Davis's dwelling prompts him to open up about his wife. If the characters reveal what they heard in the field, Davis becomes evasive and suspicious, refusing to engage further.

To resolve the issue, the characters have two options:

- **Confront Davis in the Field:** Davis will resist going to the fields. If the characters manage to drag him there, a ghostly woman will materialize, causing Davis to turn pale. The ghost utters, "Why did you do that to me?" before vanishing. In the eerie silence that follows, the possessed Scarecrow attacks Davis, nearly cutting him in half as he jumps away at last second. "I thought it would ease my pain, but it's not enough," the Scarecrow mumbled, turning its attention to the characters.
- **Search for the Ghost at Night:** If the characters choose to look for the ghost during the night, they'll hear a haunting query: "Where is Davis?" If they do not stop searching, they risk attracting the attention of the Scarecrow, which will attack them, its motives shrouded in mystery.

Enemy composition for the fight with the Queen of Winter

NAME OF CREATURE	LEVEL 6-7	LEVEL 8-9	LEVEL 10-11	LEVEL 12-13
Scarecrow	× 1	× 1	× 1	× 1
Banshee	× 0	× 0	× 1	× 1
REINFORCEMENT				
Spirits Gathering	The Scarecrow focuses and calls forth another vengeful spirit from the surrounding—a Banshee. If he starts a fight with one, he can use it only after the first Banshee is taken out by the characters.			

In the end, the characters may never fully understand why the ghost sought Davis, leaving them to grapple with the unsettling events that unfolded in the rural fields. Still after solving the issue they are given their reward.



PHANTOM THIEF

Catch a phantom thief who is pilfering the area.

Requirements:

Stay for a night in a tavern in Kallonia. Listen to rumors.

Rewards:

150 gp for each character in the party. Sadly, no letter from Princess Ker'ubo.

As your characters traverse the cobblestone streets of the city or town, they catch snippets of hushed conversations. "This happened again yesterday," says one of the people. "I wonder why the guards haven't captured him yet," adds another. "It looks like he's elusive, some even call him the 'Phantom Thief.'"

If your characters decide to linger and listen, they hear a troubling tale. "It happened again yesterday, just after dark, a young lady was robbed by a Phantom Thief. When she screamed, two guardians rushed in, chasing the robber into a dark alley. Yet, all they found was a trench coat lying on the ground, and nothing else. It seems no one is safe on the streets during the night."

A passerby mentions a reward for information or the capture of the Phantom Thief. "Will you try to catch him yourself?" another inquires. "No way, it's impossible for me, even the guards can't do anything about this."

Guardhouse Interaction: Gathering Information

Approaching the guardhouse, the group notice people outside, and the guards appear busy. One of them stops you, asking, "Are you new in town? How can I help you?" They explain the ongoing issue with the Phantom Thief and mention a reward for anyone with information or assistance in catching the elusive criminal.

Inquiring about the thief's description yields, "Rumors say he has an average height. He strikes only at night, particularly during fog or rain. His escape route involves dark alleys, and witnesses only find a trench coat left behind, devoid of any other trace."

Characters with sufficient knowledge about the town may proceed directly to "Catch a Thief 2."

Catch a Thief 1: Chasing Shadows

Choosing to catch the Phantom Thief leads the characters to patrol the streets at night. They notice others attempting the same for the promised reward. Suddenly, a cry rings out, "Hey, you! Stop, it's mine!" Following the sounds, the characters glimpse someone in a trenchcoat sprinting away. Pursuing, they enter a side alley only to find no sign of the thief—just a trench coat on the ground. Other townsfolk also run into the alley to see the situation. The thief victim also got in the alley. If someone from the group shares some gold with the victim he will hear that: "Thank you so much, you saved my life, I don't know if it will be of any help, but it felt like a thief has sharpened nails."

Catch a Thief 2: Baiting the Phantom

Deciding to use a party member as bait, you give them a bag of gold in a visible place. Walking alone without others in sight, they become a tempting target. Eventually, the cloaked figure tries to steal the bag. Pursuing is short. When the thief dives into an alley, a character catch his trench coat and land on the ground. Whatever was under that coat is gone. A successful Dexterity check allows your character to reclaim their bag, you also hear a metallic sound. Townsfolks rush in to investigate.

If someone mentions the metallic sound loudly, then the reward for information is gone. One of the townsfolk will hear that and redeem the reward for himself.

If someone decides to explore, the surroundings will reveal an underground hatch, a potential escape route for the Thief. Also, if there is a witness during reveals, then the reward for information is gone.

Reveal the Thief: Subterranean Pursuit

Opting to follow the underground trail reveals a narrow passage, unsuitable for someone of average size. Clues lead you through a labyrinth filled with traps, especially of the poison variety. You see items dropped on the ground. Following the path with stolen goods, the group find a hidden hideout guarded by three Kobolds.

A battle ensues in the confined space. Defeating the Kobolds reveals a stash of stolen goods, with a bag that might belong to a character. Retrieving it, the party prepares to return to the guards.

Reward Resolution: Half or Full Price

Returning to the guards, the group presents the information about the Thief. If other townsfolk overheard, they might claim the reward for information faster, leaving the party with nothing. If the characters successfully capture the Phantom Thief and resolve the issue, they gain another half reward.

The Phantom Thief mystery concludes, and the characters determine whether they prioritize the thrill of the chase or securing the maximum reward.



THE ABANDONED MANSION

Explore a mysterious mansion located in the rural area of Kallonia, and deal with the issue so that villagers will not need to be afraid anymore.

Requirements:

Stay for a night in a tavern in Kallonia. Listen to rumors.

Rewards:

500 gp in gems or items according to the GM judgment.

When the party arrive at the quaint village, a group of villagers approaches them. “Hey, you’re adventurers, right? Never seen you here before. Maybe you can help us. Not far from the village, there’s a noble’s residence. Normally, someone comes to the village to stock up on goods, but lately, no one has shown up. One of our villagers went to investigate but never returned. Additionally, a strange creature has been hunting in the forest; no one has seen it, but animal bodies are left behind.”

Inquiring about the lord of the mansion reveals that he had been searching for an unknown artifact recently. No one knows what it is or whether he found it.

Way to Mansion: Unearthly Silence

As the characters approach the location, a strange sound catches their attention, something heavy is hitting the ground. Moving closer, there's no sign of any creature, only a mansion that looks abandoned. It appears neglected, with overgrown trees and bushes. It gives the impression of being abandoned for a long time.

Mansion Area: Animated Gargoyle Ambush

Deciding to explore, the party enters the eerie silence surrounding the mansion. As they proceed toward the entrance, trees and bushes seem to grow before their eyes. Trails of old blood mark the way. Suddenly, one of the statues comes to life, revealing itself to be an animated gargoyle. After a battle, the party can finally proceed into the mansion.

Inside the Mansion: Illusions and Traps

As the characters enter the mansion, it becomes apparent that the rooms are trapped in a time-stopped illusion. Everything is set as if prepared for guests. In the dining room, a meal is laid out, but a wisdom check can discern that the food is rotten and the illusion conceals its true state.

Clocks in every room are potential threats. They are Mimics and will attack anyone who comes too close. From time to time something heavy seems to move beneath the characters, hinting at a concealed area.

Upper Floor: Unraveling the Mystery

Upon reaching the main room, the illusion dissipates. Bodies of the staff lie in pools of blood. Two figures are present—one in noble dress, another in corrupted armor. As the party confronts the noble in the main room, he utters, "You fools, do you think you can stop me w..." In that very moment, a man in armor abruptly pierces the noble's body with a sword, swiftly retrieving an orb from the desk before the noble collapses. Still holding the orb, the armored man speaks, "For many years, the lord sought an artifact with the magic power to control creatures. After obtaining it, he descended into madness, showing no mercy to his subordinates. I was turned into a bodyguard, but I couldn't endure it any longer. Thanks to you, I now have a chance to redeem at least some of their sins."

While cautioning about the danger that lies below, he directs the party to the treasures left beneath the estate. "Be careful; the guard may not be at his best state, but he is still dangerous. As for me, I will ensure that this artifact does not fall into the wrong hands."

With these words, a gargoyle pierces through the roof, landing in front of the armored man. He gracefully mounts the creature and takes flight, disappearing into the night sky.

Under the Mansion: Ruin Golem Guardian

Beneath the once-grand mansion, a scene of desolation unfolds. Dust hangs in the air, cobwebs drape over broken furnishings. Tattered tapestries and cracked marble floors tell a tale of abandonment and neglect.

Navigating through this forlorn maze, the characters find the guardian of the hidden chamber—an aged Ruin Golem, missing one arm. The air resonates with the footsteps of those who once lived here, now replaced by an unsettling stillness. As the characters approach, they are prepared to face both the passage of time and the guardian that protects what remains beneath the mansion.

Whether the characters leave with the treasure or not, the fate of the knight remains unknown. With the lord gone, the problems surrounding the village and the mysterious creature appear to be resolved.





CHAPTER 6: DRAGSA WILL NEVER FALL!

Depending on how they manage to get an audience with the Queen, she has a better or worse attitude toward our adventurers. However after gathering all the evidence of Disciples of Chaos extending their reach over the world, and negotiating truces with major powers in the Deuslair, Queen Anara is willing to consider their propositions. But just as she is about to make a decision, a messenger brings grave news: the city is under attack. The beastkin have revolted. Following that the whole city has been engulfed in fights. The characters are left with a harrowing choice: to side with the rebels in their fight or crush their uprising in the name of order. The right choice is not that simple since the timing could not be worse—Disciples could attack at any moment so thinning Dragsa forces is the last thing they want now. Either way, they are doomed to a future full of violence and despair. To make matters worse, a dark smoke rises from the far end of the sea to the south, signaling an ominous threat approaching. A hope to survive what comes next is becoming increasingly smaller... Did the characters' efforts make a difference or was it all for nothing? Multiple possible endings await the party and their impact on history of Deuslair will be determined by the choices they made along their arduous journey.



Audience with the Queen

The beginning of this chapter is a direct follow up of events ending chapter five. As the party is checking the documents, found by the Paladins of Order (alone or with their help) they can find that what they caught is just one of the several Disciples agents spread in the Fortress of Dragsa. What's worse, the forces of Disciples are already on their way here. From what they can find in their orders, it is just a matter of days.

When they are in the middle of all that, a messenger from the Palace arrives. The Queen is one day away from the capital and will be back around morning. For now the characters can prepare, or at least get some sleep...

The next morning they are met by a squad of Paladins and Royal Guards, who escort them to the Palace. The Undying Queen Anara is sitting on her throne, letting her wings rest on the side while she is eating a fruit plate—because of her enormous size, apples between her fingers seem like grapes. On both the right and left side of her throne Wardresses of Lay, her personal guards, are standing at attention. If any character looks up, they can also see several of them flying close to the ceiling, keenly observing everyone.*

When the party arrives together with their escort, the knights go first and kneel before her, asking for permission to report urgent matters concerning the city. Then they go to present documents which the characters had checked previously. If the party wishes so, the knight in front can also show the letter from Princess Ker'ubo or they can wait and talk about it themselves.

After that the Queen says that she grasped the general idea of the situation, but asks the party to say with their own words what the current situation with the Disciples of Chaos, and what is going on in the city. And whether they are in danger. She scrutinizes their every move, and judges every word. If any character lies about anything during their speech, they need to pass a relevant skill check on hard difficulty to hide it, otherwise she immediately points it out. If they pass her test, she asks what their propositions are.

If they ask her about the ceasing fire, she may agree. At least if they truly all band together to deal with Disciples of Chaos. Queen Anara's willingness to offer truce depends mainly on two regions—Hyste Talma and Banewood decisions. In a situation where both of them are agreeing to stop fighting and focus on a common enemy, she will be willing to offer them peace. If at least one of them is still hostile toward Dragsa, she will be thankful for whatever the adventurers did, but will not stop the fights in the middle as she is sure that it would just create an opening. One which they are waiting for. She needs to focus on the front where her people are dying right now and not worry about potential dangers.

No matter whether she agrees or not, following this decision the party can try to further negotiate with her, or ask about Fortress' reaction to matters happening in the city. In most cases she just replies that she needs to check it more thoroughly but when asked about Disciples presence in the city she gets angry and responds that this matter she will take into her own hands. Also if any character asks about Ker'ubo they can learn that she did not reach Queen Anara yet and this is something she needs to look into after dealing with current problems. This moment is also a perfect chance to ask about other things the characters want from the Queen.**

When all the matters are taken care of and Anara is close to either fully agreeing to the truce or issuing orders following her other decision, a messenger arrives with grim news. Beastkin started another uprising. They are already fighting on the streets and wreaking havoc in the Inner Fortress. Orders have been issued to close the main gates, to stop the flood of beastkin from Mossveil but if nothing is done, the guards are certain that they will reach the Palace...

*Check the page 26, subchapter "Anara Palace" for a more detailed description of the place.

Dealing with the situation in the Republic of Misty Waters and inside the Fortress itself, change course of some further events but do not affect her decision here.

**If one of the characters wanted to reach her for some reason connected with their backstory, it is a good opportunity to do so. If they actually helped her with the problems on one of the fronts, she is even more willing to agree with the characters' propositions.



As if to prove his point, a sudden explosion sends a wave of debris in the Queen and party direction. Few bigger chunks hit the Queen, knocking her down for a mere second. As she rises from the ground she screams angrily while droplets of blood fall to ground. Half of her face was damaged and she is bleeding profusely. On the other side, from the created hole a squad of beastkin storms the palace. Wardresses nosedive at them, striking with both blades and spells. Enraged, the Queen gathers in her hands green, magical energy and creates a few ethereal spears which she sends to the incoming enemies. Bodies fall to floor due to combined might of her and wardresses, and the invading beastkin are forced into a corner before the Queen even starts walking to them. Noticing that, she instead turns to the party and asks them to help subdue this uprising. From what she heard today, they are skilled enough to help with that.

*And if they will think of a unique solution, dear GM you need to decide which path is closer from the presented options.

The party can agree to help Queen Anara, disagree and side with beastkin or just decide to leave the matters to their own course, siding with noone and leaving the city*.

- If they decide on the first option, skip to the subchapter “Defending the Fortress.”
- If they decide on the second option, skip to the subchapter “Beastkin Revolution.”
- If they decide on the last option, skip to the subchapter “Battle of the Last Chance.”

Additionally, check if characters meet the following conditions: amassed at least 3 negative reputation points in Godless Lands, amassed at least 2 negative points in Banewood Asylum, did not stop the Disciples plans in either Encura, Hyste Talma or Misty Waters. If at least two of them are met, the party unlock an extra ending—a telepathic proposition by the Kaoz.

Just when they are about to give their answer, they find themselves in a white void—as if they were both in dense fog and surrounded by light. In this space there is only one being except for them—Kaoz. He tells them that he is not interested bloodshed. If the beastkin takes care of the Dragsa armies while the party kills Anara, he will not have problems with them joining the Disciples willingly. They would also need a few governors for Kallonia—their help would put them in a prime position for that role. After that they return to reality where merely a second passed.

Beastkin Revolution

If the party chooses to side with beastkin, Queen Anara is... not pleased.

She uses her telekinesis to blast them through the stained glass window. If anyone in the party tries to cast a counterspell or something to prevent it, they see that during their incantations, the Queen just smiles and snaps her fingers, which cancels the spell. After being ejected from the throne room, the party finds themselves in the middle of the air, way above the city. Way too high to survive. To not end their story here, they need to act fast—cast some spell or think of a way to prevent death while falling. Depending on their solution, GM might consider making them still roll for some skill or take a small amount of damage.

If they do not think of any solution to the situation, and they are just falling to their death, they can notice that the tattoos made on them by the Elder Kril lit up for a moment with blue light while they are in the air. If none of the characters have his tattoo, skip this information. Just at the last second, when life starts to flash before their eyes, they are saved. Husis the Wise stands near the place they would crash on and grabs them with ghostly, transparent hands created with magic. As the characters are touching the ground Elder Kril spell disperses.

If they save themselves, the meeting with Elder Kril is postponed a bit—first they witness some of the small skirmishes between guards and beastkin in the alleys. Bodies from

both sides are already piling up. The moment they meet Husis the Wise, he is chasing away two guards with illusions to let some small kid escape from the fights.

After seeing them he starts talking while slowly trodding in their direction. Read or paraphrase the following boxed text to the players:

“The negotiations did not go so well, I presume?” He starts with a bit amused tone. “I am deeply sorry for that. As well as putting a little spell on you without asking,” he adds while pointing at their direction. “It is just something to help me find you when needed. And as Fate led me here, my help was needed. This is not the future I wanted, but there is no stopping an avalanche. We just need to save who we can. What role do you see yourself next?”

If they had a talk with Kaoz, Husis seems hesitant before continuing his talk. As if he is feeling something. But he quickly brushes it off and continues.

After that the players can decide their next steps. If they leave the matters to their own course, they can just leave the city. Husis does not stop them but also does not comment on this decision. He just wishes them good luck and goes his own way. Then jump to the subchapter “Battle of the Last Chance.”

Deciding to help the beastkin makes Husis the Wise propose that they should deal with Queen Anara. While their first meeting did not go so well, he believes that they are still the only ones strong enough to deal with her. But getting to her will not be the easiest task. Now they will need to deal with all of the guards and some troops on their way. But it is not a lost cause.

Before they go to help with the upcoming battle against Anara, Husis shares with them a bit of knowledge about using power from Roots of Life Essences.

Alternative use of Roots of Life Essences

Using these effects cost reaction or bonus action and removes all Divinity Charges on the chosen artifact.	
Meditation of Rejuvenation Concentrate for 5 minutes without disruption to gain the benefit of long rest for one character.	Reality Adjusting After failing a saving throw, change reality and it succeeds instead.
Negation Barrier Create a 20 ft. long semi transparent wall, which absorbs all incoming attacks till the end of this round.	Breath of Life Revive a character within 40 ft. which fell in the last hour, and make them immediately regenerate 21 (6d6) Hit Points.

The party was blown all the way to the road north-west to the Fairylight Library. To reach Queen Anara, they will need to push through a couple of skirmishes with the human military present in the city. They can either try to sneak past these encounters or face them head on. The biggest battles are taking place between the Military Quarter and the Church of Order. At the moment beastkin have pushed paladins to the square in front of Church of Order temple. It is the shortest path to the Palace, but they will not escape fights—they will need to face two “human military squads” in a row. If they decide to sneak using narrow streets they will first need to go through Craft District, then south of the Market and at last the Upper Tenements—each time they need to pass a group skill test with difficulty set between medium and hard, depending on how well they prepared. Each time they fail, they fight with one “human military squad” or “Disciples controlling beastkin” if they didn’t make a pact with Kaoz.**

**Check the page 22, subchapter “The city called Fortress of Dragsa,” where you can find the map of the city. Reference their current position using it and possible routes to reach their destination. For enemy encounters use fitting ones from the subchapter “Enemies Compositions” and for tactical maps check the Additional Materials.

After arriving at the entrance they hear a loud explosion from the direction of one of the gates and see a black smoke. Above it, Misty Waters Airships are flying into the Inner Fortress. If the party resolved a problem in the Misty Waters, they would see skyfarer

shooting at something close to the walls. If they did not, they see Disciples reinforcements jumping from their ships. But before they can process that information, guards from the palace attack them from above.

Enemy composition for the battle with the Inner Palace Guards

NAME OF CREATURE	LEVEL 12-13	LEVEL 14-15	LEVEL 16-17
Magic Smith	× 1	× 1	× 1
Wardress of Lay	× 2	× 3	× 4
REINFORCEMENT			
Eldritch wave	Wardresses gather together magical power and send towards characters a wave of pure energy. Everyone needs to succeed DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 21 (6d6) force damage or half as much damage on a successful one.		
<i>or alternatively</i>			
Bringer of Harmony	× 1	× 1	× 1
Paladin of Order	× 2	× 3	× 3
Royal Guard	× 1	× 2	× 3
REINFORCEMENT			
Nullification	After his turn, Bringer of Harmony focuses and strengthens his nullification field—all effects of auras and usage of spells till the end of his next turn becomes impossible.		

When they finish dealing with the surprise attack, the party can finally run to the throne room. There they see Queen Anara, surrounded by a few dozens of beastkin bodies piling on the floor and a handful of guards who look to be exhausted. Upon seeing the party, she says “stupidity is often mistaken for bravery. I wonder which one you are showing. But for now... KNEEL,” she shouts at the end. The first action she uses in the fight is her ability “Crushing Presence.”

NAME OF CREATURE	LEVEL 12-13	LEVEL 14-15	LEVEL 16-17
The Undying Queen Anara	× 1	× 1	× 1
Paladins of Order	× 0	× 1	× 2
REINFORCEMENT			
It's Raining Blades	Queen Anara lifts with telekinesis all the weapons of fallen enemies around. Then she rains them on the characters. Everyone needs to succeed DC 16 Dexterity saving throw, taking 27 (6d8) slashing damage or half as much damage on a successful one.		

Upon delivering the final blow to Queen Anara, her powers unleash uncontrollably. Debris ascends into the air, and the entire Palace begins to quake and crumble. The party is forced to run, leaving Anara's lifeless corpse behind. After these events proceed to the subchapter “Epilogue.”

Battle of the Last Chance

After deciding to leave Fortress of Dragsa to its own fate, the characters need to sneak out of the city. The closest exit is the Grand Gate on the west. But to get there, they need to pass area with the heaviest battles so far—the road between Military Quarter and Church of Order. To pass it unnoticed they need to succeed two group skill tests with difficulty set between medium and hard, depending on how well they prepared. Each time they fail, they fight with one “human military squad” or “Disciples controlling beastkin”—since they are on neither side, both attack them equally. They also notice that among the beastkin, Disciples are mixed in. The party can only wonder if they use some spell to get unnoticed or beastkin don't know who is among them. As the sayings go “enemy of my enemy...” and so on.

As the characters are approaching the main gate to leave Fortress of Dragsa they see lines of people and their carts as everyone is trying to escape. The road is barely passable as everyone is waiting till guards pass them through. Rats are always leaving the sinking ships. Though maybe the party is not the ones who should say it. Just as the characters see the gate, an explosion rips through the air. It is followed by the smoke engulfing the bridge leading outside. The towers near the entrance were crushed by a powerful spell. And then from the smoke emerges a Disciples' army. As the forces of Dragsa focused on beastkin in the city, almost nobody was protecting this area. Now the helpless citizens are being slaughtered in front of the party. And enemies are quickly approaching their position...

Choose one of the enemy armies from the “Disciples' generals and their squads” as a final battle for our heroes.*

Just when the characters are dealing final blows to the enemies, in the gate shows up one of the factions which was the most indebted to the party. They are dealing with the rest of the Disciples armies in this area and lead the characters along with all the escaping people to the safety beyond the walls of Fortress. After this event proceed to the subchapter “Epilogue.”*

Defending the Fortress

If the party chooses to side with Queen Anara, she turns to one of her agents standing in the corner and requests the city plans along with a report from the tower in the Southern Keep. Then she starts discussing the defense strategy, all the while her elite guards shreds to pieces the invading beastkin. From time to time she uses her telekinesis to intercept incoming arrows and redirect them, or to repel an approaching attacker.

Stretching the map in the air with two of her hands, and writing some orders to the guards with other, she points out a few strange things. Timing of this uprising seems a bit too convenient for the Disciples. That means that they are either directly or indirectly orchestrating this situation. Beastkin are also pretty smart, so she doubts they would just storm this place with such small forces. Meaning that it is a diversion. Their enemies want to keep our eyes on the Palace and areas in the center. As she is explaining all of that, a messenger arrives with information from the Southern Keep. After contacting it with magic, they were told about sightings of incoming naval armada from the Herja continent. If the characters failed to deal with the situation in the Republic of Misty Waters, along with the regular ships, there are airships as well.

*For enemy encounters use fitting ones from the subchapter “Enemies Compositions” and for tactical maps check the Additional Materials.

*If the character literally did not help any group or faction during their journey... describe how the city is flooded by more and more Disciples armies with no hope to survive.

Upon hearing that the Queen is even more convinced about the situation. She proposes that the party will go to secure the City Gate as it would be a crucial point for evacuation—if the ships attack from the south, after the uprising will diminish, all the citizens will try to flood the Inner Fortress. If she was in their shoes, she would block that spot, cut off civilians escape routes and then perform pincer attacks. Whether they plan to hold the populace as hostages or just kill them off to cut the Fortress from supplies, she is not sure. Either way it should be stopped. Small groups like the party can quickly reach the gate and safeguard it. She also wants them to look for any groups of beastkin where someone from outside is mixed in. It wouldn't surprise her if some beastkin were also being controlled by magic. In the meantime she plans to fly to the Grand Gate as she is also concerned about this position. After that she asks if there are any questions and then dismisses them.

But before they go, seeing that some of them have artifacts with Roots of Life Essences, Anara shares with them a few techniques of using the power hidden in that ore. Use the table “Alternative use of Roots of Life Essences” from the subchapter Beastkin Revolution.

After this conversation, the party needs to reach the City Gate in one or other way. On their way there, ask them to perform a few relevant skill checks to spot any weird groups. Set the difficulty between medium and hard. Whenever someone succeeds, they spot one of the groups which the Queen was concerned about—beastkin being controlled by Disciples. Or maybe working together with them. Use one of the enemy groups from “Disciples controlling beastkin.” They need to find two of such a group before reaching the gate.*

As the characters get near the City Gate, an explosion rips through the air. It is followed by the smoke engulfing the whole entrance. Then some figures emerge from the smoke and quickly approach the characters' position...

Choose one of the enemy armies from the “Disciples' generals and their squads” as the ones who emerge from the smoke.

Upon resolving the situation, a guard arrives from the Inner Fortress, conveying one of two messages. If the party has successfully collected at least 4 positive reputation points in Banewood Forest, he reveals that during the uprising, Yv'anda and Kutauri arrived and offered their assistance. At the moment, they are tending to the beastkin who fell victim to the Disciples' mind control. But despite their aid, some beastkin still fights—it seems many choose to rebel of their own accord.

Meanwhile, if the Banewood remained unconvinced, the guard notifies the characters that the entire Inner Fortress is embroiled in conflict. Casualties are mounting on both sides, and if this continues, there will be no one left to confront the Disciples.

Just as he finishes, piercing screams rend the air, from the direction of Old Town Square—just south of the City Gate. Running towards the source, the party arrives to witness an unfolding nightmare—a pallid necromancer stands at the center, siphoning the life force from several hapless souls using ethereal chains. It appears that Kaoz, anticipating the arrival of his army, has taken it upon himself to ensure the gate has been captured and went here with a small force. Spotting the adventurers, he callously drops the withered bodies of his victims and begins a gruesome transformation. His form expands, seemingly pouring in every direction, creating a mass of flesh that shapes itself into hands, legs, and heads, all confined beneath a thin layer of his grotesque skin. Then Kaoz attacks.

*Check the page 22, subchapter “The city called Fortress of Dragsa,” where you can find the map of the city. Reference their current position using it and possible routes to reach their destination. For enemy encounters use fitting ones from the subchapter “Enemies Compositions” and for tactical maps check the Additional Materials.

Enemy composition for the battle with Kaoz, The Soul Harvester

NAME OF CREATURE	LEVEL 12-13	LEVEL 14-15	LEVEL 16-17
Kaoz, The Soul Harvester	× 1	× 1	× 1
Strigs	× 0	× 1	× 2
REINFORCEMENT			
Becoming one with Chaos	<p>One of the troopers from the Disciples army runs to Kaoz and gives him a few artifacts with Roots of Life Essences. He responds with “Chaos shall become whole” then the souls squirming around him devour them.</p> <p>Kaoz gains 6 Divinity Charges minus 1 for every 2 artifacts with Roots of Life Essences in the party possession.</p>		

As the last attack connects, Kaoz's corporeal form seems to have reached its limit. It changes into a formless mass of flesh that spills onto the ground. Witnessing this nauseating sight, the troops of Disciples, which managed to arrive, scatter in fear. Proceed to the subchapter “Epilogue.”



Epilogue

When the characters' fights are over, they can witness from afar how the armies clash in the last battle for the Fortress.

If the party has successfully collected at least 4 positive reputation points in Banewood Forest, Yv'anda and Kutauri arrive in the middle of all the happenings and offer their assistance—safeguarding the escaping civilians via Grand Gate and tending to the beastkin who fell victim to the Disciples' mind control. Thanks to their help, the number of casualties due to the uprising is much lower than everyone suspected, and they can properly organize before main forces of the Disciples arrive. Meanwhile if they did not collect enough points, neither of these two groups showed up, leading to huge loss of lives on both sides.

If the party successfully convinces the citizens of Hyste Talma to aid in the battle, several platoons arrive on the shore to confront the Disciples' armies alongside the forces of the Dragsa. If, in addition, the party managed to persuade them to propose a truce, their naval armada abandons their positions and executes a pincer attack on the Disciples' ships from the sea, effectively cutting off their escape routes. However, if the council of Hyste Talma is not convinced, none of these actions occur.

Depending on how the situation in the Republic of Misty Waters was resolved, they will either align with the Disciples or Fortress. If Guzmán Frederico was killed, Blackeye Drex revolts, rallying forces under his banner as the last heir of the Sky Conqueror. His forces join the Disciples and aid in swiftly delivering their armies over the walls of the Fortress. On the other hand, if Guzmán Frederico was saved, his father's influence in the Republic strengthens as the guardian of one of the heirs of their legendary founder. This weakens Drex's plans, and he is unable to lead substantial forces under his name. If, in addition, the party manages to gather at least 3 reputation points in that region, Martinez Guzmán decides to send his ship to transport the injured and rain down attacks on the Disciples of Chaos armada from the sky.



For the battle over Fortress of Dragsa to be won by joined forces of Deuslair inhabitants, at least two of the above mentioned changes needs to occur in the favor of Fortress. Then the Disciples of Chaos army is repelled. Though the Fortress itself ends in a really poor shape—half of the city is in ruins and walls have collapsed in several places. It makes quite a lot of people seek refuge in other cities of Kallona. If the joined forces from the Deuslair are not enough to repel Disciples, the city is almost entirely destroyed. Then they leave it alone.

Regardless of the above happenings, amid the chaos, a few peculiar incidents unfolded. Large quantities of Roots of Life stored in the warehouse near the docks were stolen. The Undying Queen Anara appeared to have fallen in battle, but later her body went missing, and no one could trace what happened to it. To make matters worse, the underground laboratories of Dragsa were emptied—all the specimens held captive there had escaped, or perhaps, were set free by someone.

The party was remembered as heroes who saved many lives. But just as many people praised their name, others lamented that they did not do enough. Blaming them for all the lost lives in the senseless battle. As history showed again, doing the right thing doesn't mean you will be rewarded.

Alternatively, if the party made a pact with Kaoz, the above story is modified somewhat. The Disciples' armies surrender and withdraw after the initial assault, leaving behind only a few deserters. Strangely enough, these deserters begin spreading the teachings of Chaos within the city. As the heroes who saved the city, the party is seen as potential leaders for Fortress in a new era, now that Anara is no more. However, those shouting praises in their name seem to have a peculiar gleam in their eyes, and their words carry a madness that slowly seeps into the Fortress...



Enemies Compositions

Disciples' generals and their squads

NAME OF CREATURE	LEVEL 12-13	LEVEL 14-15	LEVEL 16-17
Mahazeal	× 1	× 1	× 1
Wraith	× 1	× 1	× 2
Soulless	× 0	× 1	× 2
REINFORCEMENT			
No time to rest	Mahazeal recalls the soul of the last Wraith or Soulless which "died" in the battle. They return to fight with half of their HP.		
<i>or alternatively</i>			
Gourmet	× 1	× 1	× 1
Gorger	× 2	× 4	× 5
REINFORCEMENT			
Backup	Gourmet recalls one of the Gorgers who left behind to eat a corpse, back to fight.		
<i>or alternatively</i>			
Prophet of Chaos	× 1	× 1	× 1
Dark Lupus	× 1	× 2	× 4
REINFORCEMENT			
Spreading Chaos	The Prophet of Chaos spreads tentacles on the ground trying to grab everyone. Every creature hostile to him in 60 ft. radius needs to make DC 17 Strength or Dexterity saving throw, taking 14 (4d6) piercing damage and become restrained, or half as much damage and no condition on successful save.		
<i>or alternatively</i>			
Possessed Mass of Flesh	× 1	× 1	× 1
Corrupted Mage	× 2	× 4	× 5
Kala, The Fallen Queen	× 1	× 1	× 1
REINFORCEMENT			
Body Building	The Possessed Mass of Flesh tries to repair its falling body by taking nearby corpses into itself. It regenerates 33 (6d10) Hit Points.		

Human military squads

NAME OF CREATURE	LEVEL 12-13	LEVEL 14-15	LEVEL 16-17
Magic Smith	× 1	× 1	× 1
Hand of Steel	× 0	× 1	× 1
Paladins of Order	× 3	× 3	× 4
REINFORCEMENT			
Overcharge	Magic Smith gathers energy in his gauntlet and releases it in a 30-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 21 (6d6) lightning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.		

Disciples controlling beastkin

NAME OF CREATURE	LEVEL 12-13	LEVEL 14-15	LEVEL 16-17
Hand of Elishu	× 1	× 1	× 1
Devourer of Sanity	× 0	× 1	× 1
Tu'ur	× 1	× 1	× 1
Ca'arak	× 1	× 0	× 1
REINFORCEMENT			
Foresight	Hand of Elishu using the power of foresight makes all party members' attack rolls have a disadvantage this round.		
<i>or alternatively</i>			
Corrupted knight	× 1	× 1	× 1
Kril Conscript	× 0	× 1	× 1
Augumented demon	× 1	× 0	× 1
Morgu	× 1	× 1	× 1
REINFORCEMENT			
Toxins	Morgu shares with all of his allies vials of poison. All of his allies' attacks deal extra 7 (2d6) damage.		





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